Chinatalian Choreographies of Rome

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines practices of belonging in contemporary Italy as a fluid process. I examine the Chinatalian experience in Rome, Italy. I am interested in the ways that a Chinatalian phenomenology creates a discursive space for myriad practices of being both Chinese and Italian. "Chinatalianess" is an elastic process and a way of life unique to the individual and the historic and geopolitical context of the moment; it is not definable by nationality, biological characteristics, or even shared cultural practices.

 "Chinatalian choreographies" are sets of literal and symbolic bodily operations that resist exclusion and generate material and symbolic support for Chinatalians. I would argue that "Chinatalian choreographies" also create the potential for a more just Italy. I analyze actual choreographed events —for example, a happy hour in Rome and a dance performance by a Sicilian dance company — and autobiographical texts written by Chinatalians. My theoretical and practical approach is interdisciplinary and intersectional; I use critical ethnography as a primary method, which builds on theories and practices in critical dance studies, feminist geographies, and postcolonial Italian studies to engage the ways that Chinatalians in Rome are contributing to new forms of "Italian" culture.

The recent resurgence of anti-Chinese sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic lends urgency to this project which asks: What are the lived conditions of Chinatalians in contemporary Italy? Who is allowed to contribute to "Italian" culture? This thesis demonstrates that the notion of Italianess and Chinatalianess, are cultural fictions. Not only is Chinatalian identity and culture an invention but its performance is situated in the specific historical and geopolitical context in question. Rome provides the backdrop to this project,

and it is against and alongside this history and contemporary context that my argument for a

more just Italy emerges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Chinatalian

This dissertation applies critical dance studies as a methodological approach to the study of Chinatalians in Rome, Italy. Critical dance studies prioritizes the body and movement; a critical dance studies approach is inherently intersectional[1] and considers the moving body at the center of social, political, and cultural practices of identity-making. Though I prioritize the body, I am not solely interested in the body as a site of analysis. Rather, the body is a spatial and mobile component of a broader choreographic approach to examining "Chinatalian" human experience across dynamic, symbolic, and literal geographies of territory, culture, and modes of belonging. Later in this chapter, I discuss and define my use of the term *choreography* and my research methodology of critical dance ethnography. For now, I turn my attention to describing the meaning of *Chinatalian*, which synthesizes the words *Chinese* and *Italian*. "Chinatalian" describes a person who is ethnically Chinese and lives and works in Italy. The term *Chinatalian* challenges sterile taxonomies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and culture. I would argue that this term is a rhetorical intervention that contests an archaic notion of a monolithic (white) Italian identity. This thesis examines the complications of what it means to generate identities that

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[1] According to sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, the term *Intersectionality* is a tool for understanding and analyzing the complexities in the world, in humans, and in human experiences." In a scholastic context, Hill insists that intersectionality is an analytic tool for engaging the challenges that people encounter, which are often related to the various divisions that impact human experience. These divisions simultaneously produce privileged and oppressed conditions based on race, class, gender, class, sexuality, and ableness, to name just a few. Many trace the theoretical origins of intersectionality to critical race and Latcrit scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw's, Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence, and Richard Delgado. For these scholars, who work in policy-oriented fields, intersectionality is an analytic tool that shapes policy and legislation. For more information, see: Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

reflect "contemporary Italy." Obviously, examining identity, being, and becoming in

Postcolonial Italy may trouble ontological claims of what it means to be Italian;

however, these are complex questions to which I do not have a clear solution.

Rather, my thesis gestures toward configurations of being and becoming. I am more

concerned with the phenomenological aspects of identity and belonging as fluid

designs (sometimes strategized, other times impromptu) of belonging; configurations

of meaning that point to potential alterations of what we understand as "Italian." I

do not propose to answer the questions about what it is to be Italian, but to examine

the ways that Italy and Italianess are being produced. I make no ontological claims but

prioritize the phenomenological. This project is an open-ended query into the

unconventional. The phenomenological aspect is at the center of this text, which attends to

how Chinatalians are generating new kinds of Italian culture through choreographies (both

metaphoric and literal human movement). This approach corresponds to dance as a

symbolic process of movement as well as a literal migration of bodies as Chinatalians

negotiate their place in contemporary Italy. As mentioned earlier, while I prioritize the body,

it is not the focal point; the body is a component in the larger scopic field of view as I take a

choreographic approach. My objective is to solicit a more ethically inclusive practice of

conceiving what it means to belong in Italian culture by grappling with the intersectionalities

of Chinatalian lived experiences.

Generally, I use "Chinatalian" to describe a person who is ethnically Chinese and

lives and/or works in Italy. A Chinatalian person is typically native-born in Italy, grows up

attending Italian schools, eating Italian foods, speaking Italian language (including its local

dialect), and to various degrees, participates in Italian cultural festivals, music, and fashion

trends. For all intents and purposes, a Chinatalian person *is* Italian with the distinction of also being ethnically Chinese and perhaps also growing up with the influence of Chinese culture. While debates on identity engender discussions of nationhood, citizenship, individual expression, and so on, the term *Chinatalian* does not curtail the variety of combinations of human existence in Italy. Rather, *Chinatalian* allows for the various creative expressions of being *both* Chinese *and* Italian. The word creates a space for the morphology of meaning as individual bodies enact dialogues, postures, gestures, and tastes that contribute to shifting cultural values and the ways that individuals identify and signify their belonging. This said, in addition to describing a person, Chinatalian also describes a space, place, or thing. For example, a "Chinatalian space" could be a kitchen, in a white Italian home in Rome, where the family is making Chinese friend rice. A "Chinatalian place" in Rome is Piazza Vittorio, a neoclassical public square in Rome's Chinatown that is home to businesses run by ethnic Chinese Italians. A "Chinatalian thing" could be a faux ivory paperweight molded in China, in the likeness of *Fontana dei Trevi.* The elision denotes a complex hybridity in the lived domain of Chinatalianess in Italy and I would further argue, within the broader domain of global capitalism. Upending the conventions of Chineseness and Italianess is a core operative of the word *Chinatalian;* "Chinatalian" holds together the possibility of being both Chinese and Italian, surpassing the neatness of binary notation to liberate our understandings of identity and belonging in contemporary Italy. Like the term *AfroItalian,*[2] which describes Italians of African descent and delineates a combined heritage that is Italian *and*

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[2] No author, "Afro-Italian," Treccani, Treccani Institute, 2016, https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/afroitaliano_res-4cd264c1-8991-11e8-a7cb-00271042e8d9_(Neologismi).

African, *Chinatalian* reclaims a rhetorical space that accommodates the heterogeneity of lived experiences among the Chinatalian community in Italy. Chinatalian (like the term *Whitalian*, which I will discuss in Chapter Three, when I explore a public dance choreography of *taiji* in Rome), is a term that refutes essentialist ideologies which govern and patrol the realities of the Other. By offering the term, I am illuminating possibilities for alternative renderings of the contemporary Italian experience. To clarify, I would contend that definitions of Italian culture and belonging are malleable and tensile; this unorthodox term challenges the archaic insistence of Italian nationhood as a fixed and static category; in reality, because of the nature of movement, Chinatalians are unconditionally, global citizens.

Additionally, Chinatalian can also describe a person who was born in Mainland China and now lives in Italy. Their lived experience in territories where ethnic Chinese diaspora inhabit include but are not limited to Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and so on. Chinatalian is an elastic term that explicitly acknowledges all the possibilities of being both Chinese and Italian. The liquid nature of the term lends itself to the fluidity of the choreographies that reinforce or subvert the inert definitions of identity and belonging.

While the term *Chinatalian* is flexible, it is not a catch-all term that petrifies any one body or community of bodies to a static definition of Other. I acknowledge that there is no way to avoid the dialectical trap of this thesis, which presents Chinatalian as a term flexible enough to accommodate the possibilities of being both Chinese and Italian. In its flexibility, this neologism is subject to rearticulations in different contexts. By bringing it into existence, the term affords discursive pliability and elasticity in debates about being and belonging. I also realize that this naming convention—and the focus of this dissertation itself—entangles

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Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Said writes, "Orientalism is a style of thought

that is based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between "the

Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident."[3] For Said, "the Orient" is a

production of Western thought, conjecture, and assumptions about countries,

cultures, and people of the East. He continues:

> "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot
> possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture
> was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically,
> militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-
> Enlightenment period…In brief, because of Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is
> not) a free subject, thought, or action."[4]

If I apply Said's theory of Orientalism to Chinatalian experience and being—as a discourse

so thoroughly and powerfully embedded within the Western imaginary—then it would be

true to suggest that Chinatalians do not have the ability to distinguish their individual being

in a process that is wholly separated or unfastened from Orientalism as a discursive

limitation. Though I agree with Said's critique that residues of 18th century imperialism

continue to permeate and impact the ways that Asian people, countries, customs, and

migrations manifest as objects of this discourse, I take the position in this dissertation that it

is also possible that processes of Chinatalian experience and becoming can be fastened and

unfastened to stereotypes of the East (or "Orient"). Said's theory is pertinent here only

insofar as it provides an entryway into an academic context for what I examine in this

dissertation while I am concerned with the ways that processes of Chinatalian experience

continue to evolve despite Orientalist discourse.

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[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014), 2.

[4] Idem, 3.

Discursive elasticity is important in regard to discussing belonging in Italy. Gaia Giuliani boldly points out that racism in contemporary Italy is a residue of Italy's colonial past. In her book, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture*,[5] Giuliani draws examples from popular television, music, and news media to demonstrate how Italy's history of colonization continues to sustain discourses of racialized and gendered exclusion. This discourse idealizes the white male as the standard of appropriate identity representation, upholding the myth of white Italy. Giuliani asserts that this myth of homogeneity sustains a cultural amnesia of Italy's colonial past. Framing her analysis within a historical context, she links Italy's colonial past to Italy's modern-day racism and gender debates.

Giuliani's work takes to task the issue of racism, sexism, and gender violence in Italy. Her argument addresses the pervasive, intersectional inequalities that marginals must face in contemporary Italy. Her work also provides a touchtone for my work, which undertakes the mission of identifying how Chinatalians are surviving *despite* conditions of abject exclusion. I believe there is hope for a more just Italy, and I argue that Chinese Italians are contributing to that hope right now through everyday "choreographies." The term *choreography* broadly describes a set of organized movements. Later in this Introduction, I will elaborate on choreography's multitude of meanings and practical functions. For the moment, though, I would note that some choreographies sustain networks of love, care, and interdependent survival; other choreographies reflect militaristic policies that breed dependence and harm amongst the economically vulnerable within the globalized landscape. Distinguishing these

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[5]Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy : Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

two kinds of choreographies will help to clarify the aim of this project. For example, Chapter

One will examine China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a Chinatalian choreography in

which Italy's involvement complicates democratic efforts of the G7 to maintain neutrality

with China. Regardless of the potential conditions that choreographies produce, all

choreographies are generative. In this dissertation, the term facilitates an engagement with

Italy's shifting cultural landscape. Choreography is a research pathway that offers an

alternative mode to arrive at and engage debates on notions of race, nationhood, and

belonging through the positionality of Chinatalians in Rome.

Choreography

The word *choreography* derives from the Greek *chorea*, (dance) and combines

with *graphia* (writing) to mean "bodily-writing."[6] The original definition of

choreography concerns the documentation of dance. In critical dance studies, the

term has a multitude of meanings, which I will complicate in further detail later in

the three chapters that comprise this document.

This project applies a broad definition of choreography, which refers to

actual patterns of human movement and metaphoric designs of movement in space.

Some practitioners make a distinction between conscious designs of bodily

movement; in this project, I do not. Dance scholar, Susan Foster's definition of

choreography describes all manner of human movement including operations that

reinforce identity markers of race, class, gender, and sexuality. From this view, social

constructs play a role in choreographing categories of belonging. For example,

human migration indicates patterns of movement that this document will treat as a

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[6] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "choreography." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 26, 2019.
https://www.britannica.com/art/choreography.

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"choreography." The enactment of political ideologies such as Italian fascism is a "choreography." Choreographies are moving paradigms. From this lens, the notion of a "postcolonial Italy" is a choreography that entails human migrations, negotiations of belonging, and discourses of human engagement that produce and deconstruct Italy as a contemporary space. Other examples of choreographies of race include Darwin's taxonomy of racial figures, a "scientific" solecism that justified the racial superiority of white males and females over indigenous, African, and Asian peoples.[7] Immigration laws that impact rates of citizenship of peoples from different countries is a kind of legislative choreography. Some college admission quotas are choreographies that determine access to education based on race. The Mellon Fellowship for students and faculty suggest that "underrepresented populations" are favored in selection processes. The Jim Crow laws of the 1960's reflect a choreography of racial segregation. Choreographies of state funds make available to the masses, affordable healthcare, public education, and accessible public transit. I offer these examples to show how choreographies are varied in their designs of human movement. Choreographies are both metaphoric and literal (as we will see in Chapter Three, when I discuss *Naufragio,* a dance duet by Roberto Zappalà, the director of Sicily's national modern dance company, Zappalà; the piece engages themes of migration,

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[7] In 1859, British naturalist, Charles Darwin's published his book, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin studies plant and animal species to determine that organisms change biologically over time to adapt to environmental and social conditions in a process he termed, "natural selection." While Darwin was an abolitionist and did not intend for his study to be applied to racial hierarchy among humans, British thinkers like Herbert Spencer appropriated Darwin's ideas of evolution. Spencer asserted that non-white humans like Indigenous, African, and Asian peoples are inferior to white Anglo-Saxons; through a process of "survival of the fittest," inferior races evolve biologically to become white, Anglo-Saxon. This line of thought accorded with the evolution of "social Darwinism," which is the application of Darwinist plant and animal theory to the human race and in particular, justification for colonial expansion, global capitalism, based on eugenics, race, and superiority of the white race. See: Janet Browne, "The Historical Background to Darwin's Descent of Man." *Illuminating Human Evolution: 150 Years after Darwin* (Springer, Singapore, 2022), 17-27; *Charles Darwin, Origin of Species,* 1900.

shipwreck, and identity). Whether a symbolic or literal choreography, all choreographies are productive. The outcomes of choreographies do not always produce acts of care for the community (as I will discuss in Chapter One, when I engage Italy's historical choreographies of fascism, and contemporary China's Belt and Road Initiative, which I would argue is a neocolonial pursuit), but choreographies are nonetheless generative. I also acknowledge that this thesis is a choreography—a mapping of histories, migrations, Chinatalian narratives, interview notes, and my own personal reflections and analyses that create a fluid configuration of "bodily" writing.

From a critical dance perspective, choreography is a design of movement that reflects cultural patterns. The choreographer works in dialectical tension with the dancer, as they collaborate in manifesting the design of movement. Since each dancer is unique, each dancer interprets the choreography differently, bringing to the dance, her own interpretation of the movement. The individual interpretations are based on her own lived experiences including previous training, travel opportunities, cultural upbringing, physical ability, and education. All these facets inform a dancer's phenomenological experience of the choreography as well as how the dancer manifests the movement design. Each body's unique archive of experience produces a kinesthetic perspective that impacts the translation of the design. The body brings all of this to the choreographic process. Therefore, while this project examines Chinatalian choreographies as designs of belonging in Italian culture, I acknowledge the ways that each manifestation is unique to the individual, the space it occupies. I acknowledge that conditions change as the patterns of movement iterate and

reiterate through time and space. I acknowledge that choreographies are kinesthetic

alliterations that generate and regenerate meaning that shifts and alters

phenomenological encounters with culture and the moving bodies that perpetuate

those cultural patterns. For example, a tourist map of Rome marks popular tourist

destinations — the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, *Fontana di Trevi*, *Piazza Novanna*, and so

on and so forth. The map is a figurative space that holds the possibility for an actual walk of

the city — a choreography of Rome. When a person embarks on a walk of Rome, s/he

performs a kinesthetic design of movement in space, one that is unique to that individual, in

that particular moment in time. Through phenomenological encounter with the monuments

and the people, sites, scents, sensations, and sounds, s/he generates new meanings of Rome.

In his essay, "Walking in the City," Michel de Certeau compares urban sites to language. He

describes the city as "a space of enunciation," where moving bodies kinesthetically

determine possibilities through their walking choices.[8] Through turns and detours, the

walking body produces a kinesthetic rhetoric of the city. That which is viewable to one body

remains obscured, undiscovered, or un-visible to another, who takes a different turn or

pursues an alternative pathway. Here, the "choreography" of Rome is both literal and

metaphorical; Rome reveals itself as a choreography; Rome is also a space for alternative

choices that produce new meaning—a Rome that appears to the body in motion. In this

way, choreography is a concept and practice of embodied language that not only explores

the meaning of Rome but creates Rome. de Certeau's approach gestures toward the organic

event of producing Rome through movement; this process of creating unfolds

phenomenologically through choices made by the walking body. The assertion is not that

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[8] Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated from French by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Rome IS (ontologically speaking) but that Rome corresponds to movement and gestures toward configurations of being and becoming as the body gestures toward, in, and through Rome.

To summarize, in this document, "choreography" refers to a set of movements in space (and time)—broadly defined. While choreographies are structural, they are not fixed, but rather fluid patterns that represent our engagement with cultural conventions. Choreographies are mobile, liquid, and always in flux; it is through a choreography approach that I consider how Chinatalian movements through space are constantly shaping, re-shaping, and producing contemporary Italy.

Chinatalian Choreographies

Chinatalian choreographies are organizations of human movement that provide material and metaphorical structures of support. The spectrum of Chinatalian choreographies is vast and situated in their localities based on the individual bodies including their regional and cultural differences. While these case studies establish a working definition of "Chinatalian choreographies," they are, by no means, an exhaustive list of what is possible. Chinatalians in contemporary Italy are actively generating literal and symbolic operations of support for one another *everyday* in relation to laws of order that are social, political, cultural, and legislative. In suggesting that Chinatalian choreographies are "everyday practices," I turn again to the French philosopher, Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*,[9] de Certeau asserts that the "body [exists] under the law of writing."[10] For de Certeau, the

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[9] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated from French by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[10] de Certeau, 139.

(social/individual) body is subject to laws which write upon it, articulations, definitions, and limitations. If the law "'takes hold of the body' in order to make them its text," then certainly the body can respond within that system. Chinatalian choreographies I examine are examples of what de Certeau would consider practices of "anti-discipline."[11] De Certeau argues that there are those who dominate, and those who are the subjects of that domination; he calls this power dynamic the "violence of order." He advocates for examining everyday practices—like walking in the city—to reveal the complex, creative interplays within this order, a process which produces culture. In regard to the generative nature of this interplay, de Certeau contends that bodies have the capacity to be reinforce mechanisms that uphold that violence; bodies are agentic actors in resistance to "the violence of order." Of course, de Certeau draws from Foucauldian notions of discipline and punishment when referring to the distinction between dominating systems and subjects of that domination. However, de Certeau is not interested in assigning labels of "oppressor" and "victim." Rather, he leads us to the productive importance of everyday practices as movements of resistance against domination. This is where de Certeau's theory lends credibility and clarity to this thesis.

For my purposes, de Certeau's argument reinforces my methodology to examine Chinatalian choreographies as everyday practices of Chinatalians, who are, according to de Certeau, "dominated elements" within the conventional context of an Italy that aims to delimit Italianess to geographical, racial, and gendered boundaries. However, applying de Certeau's theory allows for an analytical approach to examining Chinatalian tactics as "antidisciplines" that compose the everyday practices of Chinatalian cultural production (and

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[11] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated from French by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 145.

in some cases, liberation). de Certeau's theory of the everyday practice of life asserts that bodies have to some degree, the capacity to subvert the social, cultural, political, and legislative "violence of order" through choosing a different walking route to work. From de Certeau's perspective, the act of walking the city is a form of kinesthetic "enunciation" that can subvert systems of control, systems which intend to inscribe upon the body, a code of appropriate conduct to which the body responds through movement. I take from de Certeau this notion of the enunciating body as realizing an anti-discipline as the base from which I formulate my argument for Chinatalian choreographies as an everyday practice of resistance, potential, and liberation in dialogue with the laws which seek to act upon it, a "violence of order."

While I would argue that Chinatalian choreographies can represent de Certeau's notion of "anti-disciplines," I am careful to avoid suggesting that Chinatalian choreographies lead to absolute freedom from subjugation. Everyday practices are a part of the dialectic between domination and the struggle for more freedom. On the European colonization of Indigenous Americans, de Certeau suggests that the colonized Indigenous people consumed the imposed practices of the colonizer; in doing so, the Indigenous Americans assimilated those practices, remaining within the system but also escaping it. In other words, the Indigenous American consumption of imposed practices of the colonizer became an active, agentic move to "deflect" the systems the colonizers forced upon them; the colonized manipulated the practices to produce another kind of culture within the system.

My project is not the first example in which de Certeau's argument would apply to a dance and movement practice. An appropriate example exists in the dance scholarship of Jacqueline Shea Murphy, which examines the liberative choreographies of First Nation Tamanawas of Canada. The Indian Act of 1867 sought to "civilize" the Native body by banning Tamanawa dance rituals. The Tamanawa people choreographed "anti-disciplines" to evade the surveillance of their bodies and their space by taking to "tactical evasions."[12] They took their dancing elsewhere. In America, Indigenous peoples defied the laws that required them to carry passes that permitted them to leave the reservation. In other cases, Natives used the laws themselves as justification for dance practice by citing that they were celebrations of July Fourth. These everyday practices of circumventing legislation led to the creation of the term *Ghost Dance religion* to describe the ways that dancers controlled the conditions of their freedom through a careful rehearsal of visibility and invisibility as a means of resistance and cultural survival. From de Certeau's scopic view of "everyday practices," the laws that subject the body as a text, serve as a catalyst for the generation of new culture that moves in resistance to ethnic eradication through the assimilation of imposed standards by the government. While the law seeks to contain and inscribe meaning and value upon the body, through everyday practices, de Certeau points out that oppressed people who must live within a system also have the means to choreograph their escape. In this case, the Indigenous Americans consumed U.S. legislation and coopted it to move freely about the country, practicing their dance. These kinds of choreographies are generative of culture, creating layers of what it means to belong. By consuming the U.S. system, which

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[12] Jacqueline Shea Murphy, "Have they a right? Nineteenth-century Indian dance practices and federal policy." In *The Routledge dance studies reader*, ed. Jens Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong. (London: Routledge, 2019), 256.

sought to police and suppress their choreographies of ritual, the Indigenous people created a new form of honoring what it means to be American—by performing their Ghost Dance on Independence Day. Moreover, the Indigenous enunciations of self-determination created a new organized faith—the "Ghost Dance religion" as it became known—as a dancing congregation; this faith was a product of Indigenous encounters with government legislation that sought to seize the movement.

What does it mean to be driven by a conscious human desire for acceptance, visibility, and representation? What do those instances of response look like in the Chinatalian community, from the Chinatalian perspective in Rome? What conditions necessitate the creative act of generating an alternative Italian culture? How does a person hold together the possibility of being *both* Chinese *and* Italian? How are Chinatalians negotiating their identity and belonging? Who is allowed to contribute to "Italian" culture? To explore and begin to answer these questions, I spent time in Rome, collecting data in the form of ethnographic interviews and participant-observation. In my reflection and analysis of these data, I apply Patricia Hill's notion of intersectionality. This is reflected in a critical dance studies approach, which weaves together theories and analyses of movement and representation, particularly of the Asian body within the context of Italian postcolonial studies. Examining Chinatalian choreographies as contemporary narratives of identity production and belonging promises to reveal new ways of how marginal communities are generating agency and self-representation in Italy.

Why Rome?

Rome is a compelling site for my research for four reasons. Firstly, I worked and lived in Rome from 2008-2010. My familiarity with Rome and Roman culture lends an embodied, linguistic, and cultural familiarity to this project. Secondly, Rome—historically considered *caput mundi*, the "capital of the world"[13] —is the capital of Italy; its privilege as the political, religious, cultural, and aesthetic referent of "Italian" classical heritage[14] provides a dynamic backdrop for examining how Chinese bodies negotiate spatiality to produce new notions of "Italian" culture. Thirdly, Rome has one of the largest Chinatowns in Italy and one of the largest Chinese populations in the country;[15] yet no extended ethnographic studies exist on the Chinese in Rome.[16] Finally, most current ethnographic studies focus on the Chinese in Prato (Tuscany) and often concentrate on Chinese economic activities in the Italian fast fashion industry; these quantitative surveys overlook the everyday humanness of the Chinese in Italy. With the exception of recent scholarship[17] that examines race and space in the small municipality of Prato—which is an entirely different project from examining Rome, the historical capital of Italy—there are no extensive studies examining the everyday phenomenological experiences of Chinatalians in Rome. My research would address this gap by attending to Chinese corporeality and space; these reasons make Rome a compelling research site.

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[13] Filippo Carlà, " Caput mundi": Rome as Center in Roman Representation and Construction of Space." *Ancient society* 47 (2017): 119-157.

[14] Ralph Grillo and Jeff Pratt, *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian-style*. Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 31.

[15] Pierpaolo Mudu, "The People's Food: The Ingredients of "ethnic" Hierarchies and the Development of Chinese Restaurants in Rome," *GeoJournal* 68, no. 2 (2007): 196.

[16] Valentina Pedone, email communication with author, August 22, 2019.

[17] Elizabeth L. Krause, and Ying Li, "Out of place: everyday forms of marginalization, racism, and resistance among Chinese migrants in Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2020): 1-19.

Rome's Unique Chinatalian Population

Chinatalians in Rome (Lazio) are unique and distinguish themselves from the other concentrations of Chinatalians in Prato (Florence) and Milan (Lombardy). Marco Hu, an informant, explained that these regional differences relate to the kinds of economies (or the ways that Chinatalians choreograph their business and family networks as a practice of economic emplacement).[18]

Chinatalian Romans are integral to sustaining the city's economy in numerous ways. They own and manage residential and commercial buildings, restaurants, massage parlors, boutique hotels, and tour agencies. These businesses cater to both the local economy and international tourists and business travelers. Chinatalian retail stores also sell souvenirs to droves of international tourists who take home mini *Fontana di Trevi* paper weights and bags of penis-shaped pasta. Meanwhile, white Italian and South Asian (Bengali) shopkeepers depend on Chinatalian productions like leather goods and apparel made in Italy by Chinatalians in Prato. Mainland Chinese imports of clothing, sunglasses, seasonal coats, shoes, hair accessories, jewelry, electronics, furniture, and an array of practical home goods all end up in stores throughout Rome.

In an interview with a second-generation Chinatalian informant, he disclosed that the largest consumer of wholesale Chinese imports are Whitalians (white Italians). Whitalians make up the largest consumer base for imports because they hold rental agreements for storefronts, which have been passed down through the

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[18] Marco Hu (Chinatalian businessman and political figure) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

family.[19] These rental agreements allow Whitalians to open and operate *casalingha* shops (shops that sell homewares) in affluent white neighborhoods, selling made-in-China apparel, electronic, and hardware stores at a higher market rate. Thus, the Chinatalian choreographies of consumption in Rome are dynamic, intercultural entanglements. Another informant also shared that her black, African-born Italian husband works as a driver for Chinatalian businesses; he transports goods from the wholesale warehouses on the outskirts of Rome to the storefronts in the residential and historic center of the city. He remarks on the benefits of working with Chinatalians, versus Whitalians—Chinatalian employers provide him a regular work schedule and always pay him on time. In sum, Rome's globalized economy is unique, with divergent players who mobilize the Chinatalian choreographies of consumption that keep Rome liquid.

Such networks of globalized labor and economies have helped the ethnic Chinese to settle into niche markets in Italy, and thus to offer a bevy of products and services distinct to the needs and the local economy. For example, Milan is the finance and luxury fashion capital of Italy. Due to the early arrivals of Chinese from Wencheng in Zhejiang province in the 1920s, a robust Chinatown endures in a neatly designated enclave in the northeast center of Milan. Young Whitalian professionals rent and own property alongside Chinatalian Milanese families (who settled in Milan in the late 1800s and early 1900s). The older Whitalian residents, who have also for generations owned property in Chinatown, are intertwined with the "daily choreographies of Chinatalian Milanese" (although not all accept that they live in "Chinatown"). Employment opportunities for Chinatalians in Milan register in the financial sector, corporate fashion and product design, international law, and

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[19] L. Chao (Chinatalian student and son of warehouse proprietors) in discussion with the author, February 2020.

entrepreneurship. The businesses in Milan's Chinatown cater to young Whitalian working professionals, who pass through for boutique dining experiences. In one restaurant, a chef handmakes noodles to order in a spectacular display of manual dexterity—over 15 feet of pasta winding around the chef's arms and rotating effortlessly through the air as the weight of the dough dances and churns around and around, returning to rest onto his forearms, elongated and ready to meet its fate in the hot boiling water. I once watched this performance through a street window with a pair of Italian tourists from southern Italy. One marveled at the feat and with excitement, asked his friend, "Wow! What are they preparing?!?" To which his friend answered, "It's Chinese food—so it's probably dog." This anecdote suggests that even with Milan's Chinatown—an established neighborhood that facilitates capitalist production and consumption of Chinatalian culture, a space where Chinatalian contributions to the local economy are visible, along with the everyday choreographic practices of Chinatalian civic and cultural belonging—some Italians still cannot accept that Chinatalians are human beings that also make and eat pasta.

Despite the ongoing exclusion, second-generation Chinatalian Romans work as lawyers, accountants, fund managers, doctors, writers, and translators. Rome is a diverse landscape of culture that relies on intercultural and international collaborations and complicities to sustain a bustling, vibrant capital. Rome is unique and provides a compelling backdrop for contesting conventional definitions of belonging in Italy.

Ethnographic Studies in Italy

Italy has a complex relationship with ideologies of whiteness and an enduring protocol of white Italianess.[20] In their edited collection of essays, *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity,*[21] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo argue that in the last two decades, the idea of a homogenous, white Italy has replaced the internal debate; and with this shift, a widespread sense of cultural superiority over African culture persists. Of course, over the last ten years, the influx of migrants from Africa seeking asylum in Italy has fueled a growing nationalist attitude of Italian superiority. In many ways, the emphasis on the African other has allowed for the unification of a white Italy where before, the internal fissure of South-Central-North was the primary focus of debates on belonging. Now, there is new the Other. These new explorations on the experience of non-ethnic Italian people is a burgeoning field of interest that invites innovative ways of reconceiving what it means to be Italian. [22]The old ways of segregating South-Central-North

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[20] In a recent study from Orlando Paris, a Siena-based researcher in philosophy and theories of language, Paris discusses the notion of "Italianess" through examining internationalized media and communications branding of Italian-made food products and car commercials. Paris asserts that producing, performing, and asserting "Italianess" is a complex campaign that strategically deploys semiotics to reinforce Italian cultural hegemony at an international level. In his textual analyses, he concludes that Italianess is a "complex symbolic phenomenon" that involves a mix of value assertions, representations of euphoria, as well as the inexplicit exploitation of products which are not Italian to determine "Italianess." While Paris omits race from his discussion, his work supplies a baseline philosophical and linguistic theory which lends investigative credence to debates of Italianess. In this case, Paris' position contends that "Italianess" is an elaborate, moving apparatus which upholds conventional notions of Italian identity and belonging, to which everyone is subject. See: Orlando Paris, "Costruire un mito: marche, prodotti e la rappresentazione dell'italianità nel mondo." *Filosofi (e) Semiotiche* 7, no. 1 (2020): 142-153.

[21] Cristina. Lombardi-Diop, and Caterina Romeo. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[22] Again, Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo's work begins the discussion on reconceiving Italian identity in a Post-Cold War context. However, their work largely focuses on the African contingencies and neglects the Asian and South American diaspora, making this project a valuable contribution to the expanding field of debates on Italianess. Stéphane Mourlane, Céline Regnard, Manuela Martini, and Catherine Brice, in their edited collection, *Italianness and Migration from the Risorgimento to the 1960s* compile essays from various contemporary scholars of migration studies, who all approach Italianess from the perspective of native white Italian emigration, immigration, and cross global movement. The collection amplifies a discursive space for understanding "Italianess" as a function of moving beyond the geographical bounds of Italy proper to produce various definitions of Italian identity at odds with and abiding by the conventional definitions which Paris defines in his article *Costruire un mito: marche, prodotti e la rappresentazione dell'italianità nel mondo*. See: Stéphane

are outmoded; new vernaculars are necessary to understand contemporary Italy from the perspective of migrants, immigrants and their children.

Critical scholarship on the AfroItalian or Black Italian experience is well-established and continues to expand with the scholarship of Anglophone and Italophone authorship, who are gradually gaining the awareness that conventional assertions of Italianess no longer reflect the current landscape of the Italian peninsula nor the diasporic iterations of Italian identity internationally. However, the focus on Asian Italians is a new area of study that deserves closer attention. What generally distinguishes Asian experience from the AfroItalian experience is the residue of colonial pursuits in Africa, which have linked Italy with the countries of Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Under the rulership of Mussolini from 1925-1945, Italy underwent a shift in consciousness during which the idea of a pure-blood, white Italian race reigned alongside their dictator. The post-WWII era brought Southern migration to the North; this mass labor migration period has been a boon to scholarship, supplying material that continues to feed debates on internal racism, classism, gender, and nationalism. Italian emigration during the 1880s to the 1940s has also served scholars, generating material for studies on cultural assimilation of Italians in North America, South America, across Europe, and Africa.

Existing ethnographic accounts of the Chinatalian community mainly focus on the community in Prato, a municipality in Florence. Anthropologist Antonella Ceccagno applies a Marxist lens to investigating Chianatalian class and economic mobility. Anna Marsden examines the economic assimilation of the Chinese Italy,

Mourlane, Céline Regnard, Manuela Martini, and Catherine Brice, *Italianness and Migration from the Risorgimento to the 1960s* (London, Palgrave and Macmillan, 2022); and Orlando Paris. "Costruire un mito: marche, prodotti e la rappresentazione dell'italianità nel mondo." *Filosofi (e) Semiotiche* 7, no. 1 (2020): 142-153.

prioritizing their integration within a global context of capitalist mobility and accumulation.[23]

American anthropologist Elizabeth Krause examines, white Italian racism against Chinatalian

Pratese (Chinatalians in Prato); her work also registers the transnational shuttling of babies

born to Chinatalian migrants in Italy, who grown up in Mainland China with grandparents.

Other white European Italian scholars like Valentina Pedone, work within cultural studies,

applying their Chinese language skills to ethnography and examining "Sino-Italian" literary

productions that reflect the autobiographical and imaginary worlds of Chinatalians in

contemporary Italy. This group of cultural analysts also examines Chinatalian religious

practices, again placing primary interest on the Chinese community in Prato.[24] In the realm

of Anglophone literature on the Chinese in Italy, edited collections that examine the trends

of Chinese migration to Europe usually focus on Prato and the attendant issues of

economic, linguistic, and social integration.[25] The exception to a focus on Prato is the work

of Pierpaolo Mudu, who examines Chinatalian restaurants in Rome.[26]

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[23] See Antonella Ceccagno, *City making and global labor regimes: Chinese immigrants and Italy's fast fashion industry* (New York, NY, Springer, 2017); Anna Marsden, "Chinese descendants in Italy: Emergence, role and uncertain identity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 7 (2014): 1239-1252; Elizabeth L. Krause, and Ying Li. "Out of place: everyday forms of marginalization, racism, and resistance among Chinese migrants in Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 9 (2022): 2037-2055; Elizabeth L. Krause, *Tight knit: global families and the social life of fast fashion,* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[24] Daniele Parbuono, "6 Chinese Migrations and Pilgrimages around Prato (Italy) and Wenzhou (China)." *Local Identities and Transnational Cults within Europe* (2018): 45; Fabio Berti, and Valentina Pedone, "A Bridge between the Spiritual and the Worldly: The Puhuasi Buddhist Temple in Prato (Italy)." In *Chinese Religions Going Global*, pp. 37-57. Brill, 2020.

[25] For example, see Anna Marsden, "Second-Generation Chinese and New Processes of Social Integration in Italy." In *Chinese Migration to Europe*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015), pp. 101-118; Bianca Basciano and Antonella Ceccagno. "The Chinese language and some notions from Western linguistics." *Lingue e linguaggio* 8, no. 1 (2009): 105-136.

[26] Pierpaolo Mudu, "The new Romans: ethnic economic activities in Rome." *Kaplan, DH y Li, W., Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefied* (2006): 165-176.

This overwhelming emphasis on Chinatalian capitalism in Italy, while important, negates the embodied narratives of Chinatalians. Unique contributions to academic discourses of Chinatalian struggle come from Mainland-born Chinese scholars, who because of their travels to Italy as "outsiders," are able to amplify the complexities of Chinatalian exclusion and inclusion in Italy. While these studies typically account for Chinatalian business practices,[27] they also examine the challenges of integration in Italy,[28] with attention to Chinatalian motivations for migration and transnational survival. Still, because racism is not a conventional topic amongst Mainland Chinese-born scholars (even those working in North America), issues of racialization remain missing from the current terrain of scholarship. Additionally, while films, autobiographical accounts, and fiction writers provide further illustration of the Chinatalian experience, there are no significant academic case studies or popular accounts of Chinatalians in Rome.[29] This *tabula rasa* presents challenges as well as opportunities in my exploration of Chinatalian choreographies in Rome. However, since there are no current studies that apply a critical dance approach of choreography to Chinatalian experience, my project is the first; moreover, it is the only intersectional and interdisciplinary contribution to this discourse from an Asian American feminist viewpoint. This project prioritizes bodily engagements in research

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[27] Calvin Chen is an Asian American political scientist that recently wrote on the business politics of the Chinese in Italy. See: Calvin Chen, "Made in Italy (by the Chinese): migration and the rebirth of textiles and apparel," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 111-126.

[28] Grazia Ting Deng and Allen Hai Xiao. "Aspiring to Motility: Chinese Petty Entrepreneurs in Italy." *Transcending Borders* (2016): 3.

[29] Pierpaolo Mudu,"The people's food: the ingredients of "ethnic" hierarchies and the development of Chinese restaurants in Rome." *GeoJournal* 68, no. 2 (2007: 195-210.

and the ways that humans use bodily agency to generate a sense of identity, space, and place

that fall outside conventional notions of "Italian."

<h3 align="center">*A Critical Dance Ethnography*</h3>

This project is a critical dance ethnography that accounts for how

Chinatalians produce their belonging through choreographies, as a set of movement

operations that sustain a sense of love and care for their community. Previous dance

ethnographies include the work of Marlon Bailey, who accounts for the ways that

dancing bodies collectively perform "labor[s] of care" that sustain Black LGLBTQ+

communities.[30] For Bailey, dance communities perform the cultural labor of alternative

family units who nurture and redefine what it means to belong for racialized gender and

sexual marginals. Bailey writes:

> When members of Ballroom undertake performance labor, kin labor, and ultimately a labor of care, critique, service, and competition, they are effectively taking on the work of family and community that the larger Black society fails to do. Conditions of marginalization within and exclusion from Black communities and society necessitate an alternative terrain for members of the Ballroom community. In discursive terms at least, performance is a critical means through which gender and sexual minorities survive in an oppressive world; it is also tantamount to creating a new one.[31]

Here, Bailey discusses choreographies of care as collective practices that create a family unit

for those who have experienced ostracization from their biological family and societies writ

large. For my purposes, Bailey's work is important because it helps to define Chinatalian

choreographies as literal and metaphoric "alternative terrains" for Chinatalians in Italy who

are building a sense of home in an environment that does not offer unconditional belonging.

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[30] Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch queens up in pumps: Gender, performance, and ballroom culture in Detroit* (University of Michigan Press, 2013), 80.

[31] Bailey, 9.

Similarly, dance scholar, SanSan Kwan's dance ethnographies that explore intercultural collaborations amongst Asian diaspora dancers lend credibility to my project, which considers Chinatalian choreographies as an intercultural endeavor. In her book, *Love Dances: Loss and Mourning in Intercultural Collaborations*, Kwan defends dance as an object of research analysis by writing, "…I believe that the medium of dance offers a unique form of intercultural collaboration that can accomplish what other expressive mediums other words, Kwan's defense of dance reinforces de Certeau's concern for bodily enunciation; in regard to intercultural dance collaborations as a form of enunciation, Kwan writes that it "is a process of engagement that gives voice to the messiness of cultural difference."[33] Qualifying dance—in this case, Chinatalian choreographies— as enunciations of being opens up shared spaces for examining Italian communality as a global encounter. Though Kwan identifies intercultural dance as serving a "pedagogical" function to teach us about relationality across boundaries, "total comprehension of our cultural others is an impossibility".[34]As we keep reaching to connect with others, our inability to fully embody another person's phenomenological experience is what drives us to try and retry to see the other. Though "The practice of choreographic collaboration can be exemplary for how we might engage across the challenges of difference,"[35] total comprehension is impossible.

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[32] SanSan Kwan, *Love Dances: Loss and Mourning in Intercultural Collaboration* (London, Oxford University Press, 2021), 23.

[33] Kwan, 25

[34] Kwan, 31.

[35] Idem.

Likewise, total comprehension of the Chinatalian experience is unattainable. However, this project explores how Chinatalians co-create with one another and with members of the diverse Italian community, despite the failures and obstacles that abound. The challenges include the act of loving and caring for one another in Italy, a country that partially tolerates or wholly rejects Chinatalian people. To acknowledge these issues, I applied Soyini D. Madison's critical ethnographic method as a main mode of inquiry in my fieldwork. Her critical ethnography prioritizes marginalized positionalities and seeks to redress the injustices in a society. This approach emphasizes change and the possibilities of what could be. For my part, to reinforce the agency of research participants, I took steps to make their collaborative involvement possible. Prior to interviews, participants received an electronic copy of guiding questions in preparation for the conversation. The question set covered personal data and included open-ended questions on identity, race, and integration. The interviews evolved organically, in a semi-structured pattern based on these talking points. I recorded formal conversations using a digital recording device. Conversations lasted from forty-five minutes to three hours. Informal conversations were recorded in writing before, during, and after the exchange via email and private messenger. Participants were given the choice of speaking English, Italian, or Chinese. There was no translator present as I speak all three languages with varying (fine to fluent) facility. Native language interviews encourage participant agency, settling the participant into a deeper sense of comfort because they have the option of choosing their mother-tongue or their second or third language; this choice was instrumental to creating a sense of intimacy and free expression as participants discussed themes such as the body,

belonging, and identity. I took all of these steps to ensure that participants could actively engage in a research choreography of communal care and mutual respect.

Racial Geometries of Asian Abjection

Admittedly, it may seem naïve to the reader that this project emphasizes choreographies as animating the intangible labor of loving and caring for oneself and one's community. However, the extensive global history of persistent Chinese exclusion warrants an unorthodox approach to register the productive agency of contemporary Chinese bodies in Europe as they continue to create social, cultural, economic, and political support networks despite postcolonial conditions. Histories of Asian disavowal are lesser known in our contemporary world for two major reasons. Firstly, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade led to a later conceptualization of racial dynamics as Black and White [that still dominates scholarship]. Secondly, the Asian body has historically functioned as a kind of "invisible placeholder" to establish white European dominance over racial marginals. Claire Jean Kim traces this blindness to discourses of anti-Asian sentiment in her famous article, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans."[36] Kim examines the periods of 1850 through 1950, and the 1960s through the present day. She posits that the process of racializing Asian Americans is related to their interactions with and relative to Whites and Blacks. The racialization of Asian/Asian Americans takes place through two primary process: 1) "relative valorization"; and 2) "civic ostracism."[37] In the first process, a racial group A (Whites) valorizes group B (Asians) over group C (Blacks)

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[36] Claire Jean Kim, "The racial triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics & society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105-138, 107.

[37] Kim, 107.

on cultural or racial grounds in order to establish dominance over both. In the second process, dominant group A (Whites) subordinates group B (Asians) as culturally or racially foreign and unassimilable to Whites in order to exclude them from the body politic and civic belonging. Kim's theory of racial geometries thus nicely articulates the interweaving of transnational migrations and their impact on the racial assimilation of Asians as an invisible entity. For Kim, the Asian body is contingent on racialization processes, which involve the acknowledgement and dismissal of Asian people. Appearing and disappearing the Asian body has been a colonial and postcolonial project of artifice that has reinforced a dynamic choreography of white European dominance over marginal communities. Kim's triangulation of race informs my dance analysis of contemporary Chinatalian choreographies. If racialization is a spatial process of deception and disavowal, and choreographies are designs of movement in space, then exploring Chinatalian corporeality of movement relate to the project of understanding responses to the chicanery of abjection and human disavowal.

In line with Kim, Karen Shimakawa's work reinforces the dismissal and validation of Asian identity. In her book *National Abjection, the Asian American Body Onstage*, Shimakawa posits the theory of national abjection, a process in which Asian/Asian American identity is constructed in relationship to U.S. Americanness. As an "abject," Asians/Asian Americans occupy a contradictory, functionally indispensable role as constituent component and radical other.[38] Partial belonging and citizenship can be assigned to Asians/Asian Americans when their cultural and/or racial assimilation serves the purpose of conserving "real" Americanness. According to Shimakawa, from the eighteenth century onward, abjecting the

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[38] Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection*. (Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

Asian body has helped to sustain the idealization of whiteness or near-whiteness. Likewise, the histories of triangulation and abjection continue to impact the postcolonial conditions in which Chinatalians must labor to negotiate their embodied presence and political agency in contemporary Italy.

The Asian Body within A Colonial Context

Lisa Lowe registers the history of Asian "free labor" in her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Lowe's notion of "free labor" provides a historical timeline and global scope for understanding Kim's theory of racial triangulation and Shimakawa's theory of Asian abjection as a deeply-rooted, global phenomenon inextricably linked to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the eighteenth-century projects of European colonial domination. Lowe offers a specific example from British mercantile colonialism in the Caribbean, which at the turn of the 18ᵗʰ century gradually shifted from using enslaved African labor, to Chinese labor. The following excerpt explains how Chinese bodies were racially triangulated and abjected to serve the purposes of European domination in Trinidad. She writes:

> The "Trinidad experiment" imagined the Chinese as a "racial barrier between [the British] and the Negros," the addition of which would produce a new division of labor in which the Black slaves would continue to perform fieldwork, and imagined the Chinese as a "free race of cultivators" who would grind, refine, and crystallize the cane. The British described the Chinese workers as 'free,' yet the men would be shipped on vessels much like those that had brought the slaves they were designed to replace; some would fall to disease, die, suffer abuse, and mutiny; those who survived the three-month voyage would encounter coercive, confined conditions upon arrival. In this sense, the British political discourse announcing a decision to move form "primitive slavery" to "free labor" may have been a modern utilitarian move, in which abolition proved an expediently, and only coincidentally 'enlightened' solution. The representations of indentured labor as "freely" contracted buttressed liberal promises of freedom for former slaves, while enabling planters to derive benefits from the so-called transition from slavery to free labor, from rented slaves, sharecroppers, and convicts, to day laborers, debt peonage, workers paid by task, and indentureship. The Chinese were instrumentally in this political discourse as a *figure*, a

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fantasy of "free" yet racialized and coerced labor, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and indentured alike. In other words, in 1807, the category of "freedom" was central to the development of what we would call a modern racial governmentality in which a political, economic, and social hierarchy ranging from free and unfree was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of metropolitan and colonized peoples; this racial governmentality managed and divided through the liberal myth of inclusive freedom that simultaneously disavowed settler appropriation and symbolized freedom as the introduction of free labor and the abolition of slavery. [39]

According to Lowe, late eighteenth-century coerced Chinese labor was not unlike the slavery of Africans. The British imported Asian labor like a balm to alleviate a festering, British sense of immorality; the switch from slave labor to "free labor" reinforced Enlightenment values of freedom, individualism, and reason. This shift to reinforcing a "liberal myth" of inclusive freedom evolved alongside abolitionist campaigns and the waning lucrativeness of slavery; these conditions made the cessation of the slave trade an exigent matter. Importation of Asian bodies as a form of "free labor" was the solution to the British self-perception of immorality, abolitionist pressures to end slavery, and the impending loss of slave labor. Asian bodies as "free labor" replaced "slave labor." As a utilitarian political move, the British used Asian bodies to make them feel better about themselves, to manipulate enslaved Black bodies into believing they would eventually achieve inclusive freedom, and to produce a "modern racial governmentality" that reinforced White dominance through a divide and conquer approach. To manage political, social, and racial hierarchies, colonists artfully shifted the economic paradigm from a rhetoric of "unfree [African] labor" to "free [Chinese] labor." Within the British colonial archive, enslaved Black bodies worked the fields while Asian bodies were considered a "free race of cultivators" that tended to the refining of sugar cane. Lowe's work clarifies how Kim's racial triangulation

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[39] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 24.

theory extends beyond an American context and holds true in a globalized context. Moreover, Shimakawa's notion of national abjection reinforces Lowe's theory of abject Asian bodies in the eighteenth-century project of African and Asian slavery in Trinidad. These theories of Asian (partial) belonging as a contradictory practice of valorization and ostracization are also applicable to the task of examining Chinatalians in twenty-first-century Italy.

Chinatalians within the Italian Postcolonial

In the previous section, I situated this project within the local-national context in Rome, Italy. I established how Rome relies upon global flows of people and capital. Now I outline how Italian postcolonial criticism is important to situating this project in a historical context unique to Italy as a former colonial power. I acknowledge that using the term postcolonial produces the potential consequence of repositioning legacies of Italian colonialism at the center of debates. I realize that misinterpretations of decolonial or postcolonial discourses posit marginals as the "previously voiceless" and this can reinscribe hierarchies that relegate marginals into an inferior position of subalterity.[40] However, to read Chinatalian choreographies within a postcolonial framework is an unorthodox approach because the Italian postcolonial approach situates itself in the post-Cold War era. The Italian postcolonial condition differs from ideas of British and French empire, which often dominate discourses on the postcolonial. In the dominant postcolonial framework, the focus is often on the mobility of human and other forms of capital, which originate almost wholly from former British and French colonies. In contrast, the Italian postcolonial context is associated with the resultant influx of migration from countries that do not have a historical

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[40] Gayatri C. Spivak, G. C., Can the Subaltern Speak?. In *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory* (New York, Routledge, 2015), 66-111

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or cultural affiliation with Italy's previous colonial territories in North Africa, the Dodecanese Islands, Albania, and Tianjin, China. This reorientation to the post-Cold War era means that the Italian postcolonial lens extends beyond national borders and normative notions of the postcolonial that consider the inward passage and ongoing migrations of peoples from Italy's former colonies in Africa as well as China, the Philippines, and countries in Eastern Europe, South Asia, and South America.

An Italian postcolonial framework recenters Italian colonial legacies and sheds light on debates on cultural production and identity. From this positionality, the "post" in *postcolonial* does not signal the conclusion of a phase but rather, suggests continuity. Postcolonial as continuity is the notion that the cultural and economic effects of colonialism remain present in Italy today, particularly in the treatment of migrants from underdeveloped countries who are denied human rights and the right to citizenship. Relatedly, people of color with origins in underdeveloped or "other" countries undergo a racialization process that is fundamental to their experience and the generational exclusions that follow as they settle in Italy. Given this, using an Italian postcolonial framework allows for a process of redefining Italian culture and history which relies on contesting the idea of a white, homogenous *Italianità*. Dominant ideologies of *Italianità* —which is tacitly understood as a white or near-white identity—is tightly fastened to national, racialized, and gendered borders. Admittedly, while Lombardi-Diop and Romeo's definition of postcolonial asserts a rejection of racial and cultural homogeneity, the term postcolonial is highly problematic. On the one hand, this project problematizes the notion of whiteness or near-whiteness as authentic Italian identity. On the other hand, the monolithic white paradigm is inescapable, as this project examines Chinatalian phenomenology and the divergent mobilities and continuities

of resistance to exclusion. However, I would argue that the underlying tension in the term *postcolonial* allows opportunities for dynamic redefinitions of what it means to belong in contemporary Italy.

Re-membering the Present

Registering Chinatalian phenomenology within an Italian postcolonial framework means that disruption and continuity are intrinsic phenomena to an analysis of Chinatalian experience. Allen Chung suggests that the term *postcolonial* allows for a discourse of difference in a colonial context where difference has been neutralized.[41] The sentiment of neutralization is key here. Italy's first colonial pursuit in 1869 was to seize a strip of land in Assab, a port city in the Southern Region of the Red Sea in Eritrea. For the next 85 years, Italy invaded, occupied, and claimed territories of Eritrea (1885), Ethiopia (1890), Somalia (1890), Tianjin, China (1901-1943), and Libya (1911). During this period, Ethiopians fought back, engaging in the First and Second Italo-Ethiopian Wars (1895-1896 and 1935-1937). In 1939, Benito Mussolini, the Fascist dictator of Italy, entered a formal military alliance with Adolf Hitler. That same year, Italy annexes Albania. With the fall of Fascism and the failure of the Italy-German alliance in WWII, Italy lost all their colonial territory in Africa and ceded their Tainjin concession to China in 1947. This near 100-year history of Italian colonialism remains sepulchered in the collective subconscious of Italians. Atrocities of Italian colonialism include the 1911 massacre of civilians under Ottoman Rule in Tripoli (modern day Libya) and the genocide of Ethiopians in 1937. These stories are not taught in schools nor are they a part of mainstream dialogues about Italy's history. Despite the residues of colonialism that produced interracial marriages, new architectural designs, and

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[41] Allen Chun, *Forget Chineseness: On the geopolitics of cultural identification* (SUNY Press, 2017), 4.

international economies, mainstream Italy is still unable to recognize its colonial history as responsible for the contemporary racialization processes that exclude people of color from Italian cultural belonging. Italy's contemporary attitudes toward race and belonging are deeply intertwined with its failed colonial pursuits which are inextricably tied to the fall of Italian Fascism. Italian cultural amnesia bury these realities because the war crimes are associated with the fall of Mussolini's Fascist empire which coincided Italy's defeat in WWII. To acknowledge these atrocities would be to acknowledge the grave misdeeds and colossal failures of their own nation. The omission of these war crimes against Africans and Arabs leaves Italians and all those living in Italy with the task of reconciling the continuity of the past in the racialized present. What does it mean to be Italian and to produce belonging if *Italianità* is tied to the process of forgetting?

Moreover, Italy's history of colonial failures and the persistent amnesia of those acts shape contemporary governance in Italy. Italy makes naturalization and free movement nearly impossible for migrants and immigrants, who are viewed as "illegals" despite that their migrant labor contributes 9% to the Italian GDP. Over the last decade, people of color in Italy have campaigned against Italy's approach to nationality law which abides by the archaic concept of *jus sanguinis* (Latin meaning "right by blood"). Under this principle, only those who have "Italian blood" have the right to Italian citizenship. While *jus sanguinis* in other European countries consider nationality of one's parents as a transmissible right to citizenship, Italy does not. Children born to immigrants in Italy are not born with Italian citizenship. When they turn 18, they must apply for Italian citizenship within one year of their eighteenth birthday or their right to claim national belonging is indefinitely null and void. This stipulation makes citizenship conditional for those born in Italy to immigrant

parents. An informant told me that this condition breeds a sense of ambivalence to claiming Italian citizenship altogether. While children of immigrants and Italian movements continue to campaign for citizenship-by-birth, a principle, known as *jus soli* ("right by land"), Italian state government has yet to recognize it as a worthy cause.

Given Italian colonial history and the current Italian laws which govern the transmission, acquisition, and loss of Italian citizenship based on the concept of "Italian blood," it is necessary to understand that the past is linked to the present postcolonial Italian framework. Studies of the Italian postcolonial condition challenge standard categories of *Italianità* by investigating the processes of racialization, gendering, religion, class, and cultural transformations to develop a contemporary understanding of how Italian legacies of colonialism, emigration, and migration operate today. On a broader scale, comparatist scholar, Linda Hutcheon discusses the complexity of the colonial and postcolonial condition. Hutcheon points out that while theorists and activists have applied the term *postcolonial* to signal alliance with politicized and anti-imperial liberatory projects in response to colonialism, the term *postcolonial* has created complex challenges. Hutcheon reflects:

> The challenge [of postcolonial criticism] raises the implicit concern that postcolonial theory…represents yet another of the First World academy's covert colonizing strategies of domination over the cultural production of the Third World.[42]

In other words, academic projects that embrace resistance to colonialism, undertake the risk and danger of reiterating monolithic narratives that dismiss the everyday experiences of those living within the postcolonial. Offering further reflection, she writes:

> But like all labels, *postcolonial* has created complications of its own, complications that involve the historical and national contexts in which literature is produced and

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[42] Linda Hutcheon, "Introduction: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition: Complexities Abounding." *PMLA* 110, no. 1 (1995): 9. http://www.jstor.org/stable/463191.

received, as well as the gender, class, religious, and racial specificities of colonial (and imperial) experiences…[43]

Hutcheon speaks about the postcolonial as impacting both literature and embodied experiences of the "specificities" of gender, class, religion, and race. Likewise, she argues that these intersectional components impact "recolonial" and "neocolonial" accounts of contemporary postcolonial discourse, discourses "which defy any single binary construction of oppression: race, class, gender, and sexuality all participate in the complex politics of representation."[44] In other words, the Italian postcolonial is not a static category but a temporal and spatial negotiation; contemporary Italian identity is subject to the complications of the postcolonial as a mobile choreography.

The Southern Question

Italy's external history of colonialism, intercultural crossings with Africans, Arabs, post-Cold war immigrants and migrants sets it apart from the French and British postcolonial critiques. However, Italy's internal history of racism—which nineteenth-century Sardinian political writer, Antonio Gramsci coined, "The Southern Question"—also shapes the contemporary Italian postcolonial condition.[45] The Southern Question refers to Italy's north/south divide, a longstanding historical binary. This division is based on the industrial wealth of the north and the agrarian-based societies of southern Italy, from the regions south of Rome through Sicily. Gramsci offers a Marxist critique for engaging the issues of class inequality and the potential solutions for a more united and equalized Italy. Although a

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[43] Hutcheon, 9.

[44] Linda Hutcheon, "Introduction: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition: Complexities Abounding." *PMLA* 110, no. 1 (1995): 12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/463191.

[45] Antonio. Gramsci, *The southern question*. Vol. 46. Guernica Editions, 2005.

provocative theorization, The Southern Question remains a starting point for understanding the complexity of relations in postcolonial Italy. Iain Chambers, in his book, *Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorized Modernities*, suggests that Gramsci's "Southern Question" apparatus while useful in teaching us about how the marginalization of the South empowers the North, the postcolonial context presents challenges to Gramsci's simplistic argument. Chambers writes:

> …the souths of the world produced through geographies of power are not simply the extension of Antonio Gramsci's noted 'southern question' on an altogether more extensive map. To remain with such a perspective simply finds us drawing temporary comfort from an alternative subaltern mirror image that contests a modernity irradiating outwards from a presumed centre in the West. As a subordinated counter-image such optics inadvertently reaffirm the linearity of the historical time of Occidental "progress" and its unrelenting measurement of the rest of the globe. The singularity of that history is suspect…The critical challenge then becomes to consider the question in its planetary location as a moving constellation of different rhythms and conditions that overlap and intersect in an alternative understanding of multilateral modernity that is irreducible to a single source or authority.[46]

For Chambers, Gramsci's apparatus is too static, too focused on a linear narrative of power. The dynamics of a postcolonial world require a more capacious embrace of uncertainties that exist in the "moving constellation of different rhythms." I note that Chambers refers to movement and rhythm; I identify his resonance with choreographies of "the souths of the world" and a marked suspicion of the "singularity of history." Therefore, while the traditional divide between the north and south continues to exist today, the postcolonial Italian context demands an alternative understanding of contemporary processes of racialization. The ongoing divisions, of course, produce uneven distributions of state funding for healthcare, education, job development; political corruption continues to characterize the "southern question"; however the neat binary of North v. South is no longer. Despite this, a

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[46] Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorised Modernities* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 32. Accessed January 3, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

profound sense of regional pride coupled with a resistance to acknowledge the southern question from a "planetary location" perpetuates the internal north/south separation. Prideful regionality continues to characterize the ethos of division in Italy. Stereotypes further drive a wedge between the north and south. For example, the north and its inhabitants are often stereotyped as economically stable, fair-skinned, and "cold" social and fiscal conservationists. The south and its inhabitants are stereotyped as "sunny" extroverts, free-spending, poor, greasy, dark-skinned, uneducated farmers with no drive to contribute to the economic strength of Italy. Southerners typically express a deep bitterness for this stereotype and defend themselves with the argument that northerners profit from pillaging the south for its abundant production of fruits and vegetables and its natural geographic resources that draw millions of tourists each year—yet they continue to lack infrastructure for jobs, housing, education, and health care. Incidentally, informants in Sicily told me that most southerners have a disdain and distrust for Rome, often seeing it as a paternalistic, indulgent center of government corruption and gluttony.

While Gramsci does not provide a concrete solution to resolve the north/south divide, he posits the idea that the liberation of southern Italians is contingent upon their alliance with northern intellectuals. Gramsci builds this idea of the Southern Question on a theory of cultural hegemony, which he asserts is an institutional or cultural practice of domination that asserts standards of behavior, value, cultural norms, and belonging. He argues that the Southern agrarian block should partner with northern intellectuals to resist and subvert cultural hegemony and the bourgeoises and state sanctioned oppression. Regardless of whether Gramsci's idea manifested migration to the north or encouraged southern Italians to move north for education and job opportunities, the internal divide

continues. Aside from this long-standing internal tension, traditions of farming and generational cultivation of land continue to be a source of pride for southerners. With the ongoing exodus of young Italians to the north, and the desertion of farming for more industrial jobs, African, Bengali, and Eastern European migrant workers have taken over agricultural labor in the south. To consider the historical internal dynamics of racism helps to clarify the contemporary conditions of sociopolitical and cultural tensions to which Chinatalians are subject, particularly because the concentration of Chinatalians is in Italy's northern regions.

In sum, theorists generally apply the term *postcolonial* to describe a phase that begins with decolonialism and extends to the influx of human migration from former colonies post-Cold War in the 1990s. However, the emergent Italian postcolonial position explores the continuum of colonial legacies as shaping the lives and cultures of contemporary Italy. The notion of the "postcolonial" places specific emphasis on the reassessment of Italian identity, alternative readings of the past, and a focus on the cultural productions of marginalized communities including Afro-Italians, Arab-Italians, and the Roma people. While the existing Italian postcolonial framework addresses the residues of Italian colonialism in North Africa, the Dodecanese Islands, Albania, and Tianjin, the current discourse omits the dynamic cultural productions of ethnic Chinese, Filipino, and South American migrants, immigrants, and their native-born Italian children in contemporary Italy. This project, therefore, would contribute to postcolonial discourse attending to vital areas of cultural production that offer alternative narratives of *Italianità*.

This project accepts that racism in Italy is not a new phenomenon. Processes of racialization assign value to humans based on the color of their skin in

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conjunction with their class standing, ethnic affiliation, cultural practices, religion, levels of bodily ableness, gender, and sexuality. These processes reinforce spatial hierarchies that sustain the fictive notion of "Italian" culture, granting rights to symbolic and material spaces while precluding access to others. Thus, a critical ethnographic approach begins with the fact that racism exists in Italy. My research approach acknowledges first and foremost, that racialized process of exclusion and inclusion proliferate categorical disavowal and entry into the category of humanness in Italy. Alternatively, the Chinatalian choreographies I examine in this project do not, by any means, exonerate individuals —including ethnic Chinese people—from collusion in racism, sexism, classism, and other acts that produce inequality.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is comprised of three chapters. Each chapter presents at least one "choreography" for discussion. Chapter One will examine the historical choreographies of racialization in Italy and the contemporary choreography of China-Italy relations. Examining select periods of Italian racialization history provides context for understanding the Chinatalian experience in contemporary Italy. Analyzing a global Chinatalian choreography broadens the research aperture and helps contextualizes the international milieu of the local Chinatalian choreographies that I will discuss in subsequent chapters. Chapter One is unique because it complicates the notion of Chinatalian choreography as benign. The initial chapter will grapple with the ethics of choreographies of domination and control through engaging Italy's history of colonialism by foreign powers in Italy, internal racialization between north and south, and choreographies of fascism during the reign of Mussolini. Chapter one also engages the implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in which Italy has an active role. The BRI is an assertive foreign policy that engages over 160 countries in a

geopolitical alliance with the Chinese government. Italy is the only member of the

G7 alliance to sign onto the BRI initiative, with the rest of the G7 countries holding

a staunch anti-BRI stance, which regards the initiative as a form of militarized

coercion. From the perspective of global democracy, BRI is seen as a threat to

security, sovereignty, free speech, and human rights. In sum, Chapter One asks: How

does Italy's rejection of Chinatalians in the context of a China-Italy pact present a

dynamic contradiction to notions of Italian race and nationhood?

Chapter Two presents several case studies. The first is an international happy hour I

attended in Rome during which Italian and Chinese nationals met to sign a contract that

commits both countries to mutual economic investments in cross-tourism between Xian,

China and Rome. This event is significant because it represents a global Chinatalian

choreography localized to Rome, the focal research location for this project. The event is

also significant because it celebrates a symbolic renewal of the Old Silk Road as Xian and

Rome represent the ancient Eastern and Western boundaries. After I analyze the happy

hour, I present this data from on an interview I conducted with Marco Hu, a Chinatalian

politician, businessman, and Chinatalian advocate who is based in Rome. This case study

shows how Chinatalian choreographies can emerge as rhetorical moves in dialogue, to defy

practices of cultural exclusion. In contrast to Chapter One, which points out choreographies

as breeding harm and destruction, Marco's narrative is the first Chinatalian choreography

that I discuss which creates change through practical acts of diplomacy. Because Marco's

narrative is not enough to represent the myriad of Chinatalian experiences, I draw on

autobiographical narratives from Chinatalian women living through the pandemic in Rome.

Chapter Two asks: How are Chinatalians resisting pervasive stereotypes, exclusion, and invisibilization and producing new forms of Italian culture despite these conditions?

Chapter Three discusses dance choreography in its literal form by referencing *Naufragio con spettatore*, a dance piece choreographed by Roberto Zappalà, of *Compagnia Zappalà*, the national contemporary dance company of Sicily. I connect this discussion to the central case study— Chinatalian migrant women practicing *taiji* next to the Colosseum. Addressing issues of beauty and justice, the final chapter engages notions of "contemporary" as they apply to the dance that the women are generating as well as the issue of contemporary Italy as a postcolonial condition in flux. Drawing on dance scholarship from Ananya Chatterjea, who asserts that contemporary dance production reflects a feminism "of a new world order,"[47] Chapter Three negotiates new definitions of Italian beauty and aesthetic liberation. In it I raise the following questions: How do Chinatalian choreographies produce new modes of Italian belonging? Who benefits from these choreographies? Why is it important to consider Chinatalian choreographies as beautiful and just?

The Conclusion summarizes how Chinatalian choreographies give us hope. This final section explores how human movement engenders acts of resilience that potentiate change for the collective movement toward justice *despite* conditions of racialization and exclusion. I will consider the productive theoretical considerations of choreographies as producing Italian culture and the implication of human movement as bodies impact culture and vice versa. I will also consider the future implications of this project and the possibilities of extending the questions that resulted from this thesis.

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[47] Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (Springer Nature, 2020), 189.

While this project examines Chinatalians—ethnic Chinese people in Italy—the broader aim is to describe instances in which change is happening today, through everyday human choreographies—practical, purposeful, organized movements in public space—which are moving us collectively toward possibilities for unorthodox understandings. This project will not save the world, offer a cure for cancer, or end racism. But it identifies a few ways that people in Italy are working to bring about a little bit of justice to be shared with many actors.

CHAPTER ONE: Choreographies of Power, Old and New

This chapter provides an overview of Italy's history with choreographies of exclusion in order to illuminate the current conditions in which Chinatalians are assimilating in a country with an ongoing crisis of national identity. This chapter asks: What are the underlying historical tensions of Italy's choreographies of power? How is this discussion relevant for understanding contemporary Chinatalians in Rome? To answer these questions, I will track a series of Italy's historical choreographies to illuminate how modern Italy came to be a space that excludes Chinatalians and paradoxically. This chapter delineates seven choreographies: 1) Italy's choreographies of economy with China in ancient times; 2) Italy's choreographies of colonial oppression under foreign powers; 3) Italy's choreographies of nationalist uprising—the *Risorgimento*; 4) Mussolini's choreographies of dictatorship; 5) Post WWII Italian choreographies of human economies from 1970-1990; 6) China's global choreography of the BRI; 7) Italy's contemporary role in China's BRI—a *Chinatalian choreography*. Providing this history illuminates the contemporary milieu of exclusion in Italy, with which all non-white, migrants, and immigrants must contend.

Italy's Historical Choreographies

There is no justification for practices of human disavowal. However, it is important to understand how Italy came to be so far behind regarding democratic practices of equity and justice in relation to the integration of marginals. I am interested in how a choreographic approach to Italy's history might bring understanding to the contemporary conditions of exclusion and racialized nationalism. As mentioned earlier, not all choreographies generate love, care, and compassion for all of humanity. In his analysis of French seventeenth-century court dance, dance scholar, Mark Franko, argues that court ballet was a choreography that

reinforced the power of the King.[48] The heteronormative gender pairings along with the prescribed hand and head gestures of the body in movement were kinesthetic submissions to the power of the absolute. The costumes, setting, and conditions for performance of court ballet also spatially reinforced the rule of the King. The King watched the dance from on high while the dancers performed below; this spatial hierarchy served as a reminder of their lowly subservience to the monarchy. Choreographies of power, in this case, readily integrated dance as a form of spatialized and corporealized political representation of sovereignty. Consequently, Franko also argues that the representation of such politics were choreographies of trauma, reflecting the positionality of the subjugated bodies enacting the dynamics of sovereignty. Franko also claims that dance—as a form of kinesthetic enactment of politics and sovereignty—is intertwined with embodied representations of trauma from the position of the subaltern. Additionally, to witness these choreographies places the spectator in a position of subjecthood, as witnesses are subject to the representations of power and trauma. Franko's work on French court ballet exemplifies the ways that choreographies are more than designs of bodily writing in three-dimensional space that reinforce those in power; they are dynamic systems of political exploitation that represent a confluence of diametric positionalities, hidden and emerging digressions from dominance, and representations of trauma.

The project of assessing Italy's colonial, postcolonial, and racial trauma through the choreographies of the body politic throughout its entire history is a task beyond the scope of this document. However, this chapter will focus on explicating Italy's ongoing crisis of national identity by examining specific instances in order to shed light on the Postcolonial,

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[48] Mark Franko, "Dance and the Political: States of Exception." *Dance Research Journal* 38, no. 1-2 (2006): 3–18.

contemporary conditions of Chinatalian exclusion. Previously, I presented Gaia Giuliani's argument that today's Italian racism is a holdover from Italy's recent colonial past. To deepen that contention and make Giuliani's position further applicable to understanding the phenomenological struggles of contemporary Chinatalians, I connect Italy's modern-day racism and right-wing nationalism to an enduring history of colonial oppression by foreign powers. This chapter carries forward an expository narrative of Italy's development as a racialized space by outlining the nationalist movement of the 19th century and Mussolini's choreographies of fascism in the 20th century. I argue that the dire economic conditions of Post WWII Italy, along with the long holdover of a national identity crisis produced the circumstances for the influx of cheap, migrant labor. To show this, I discuss Italy's economic conditions from the 1970s-1990s. I reiterate that the migrant influx impacts choreographies of the Italian postcolonial condition. By highlighting the historical trajectory of Italy's struggles with national identity, I make apparent, the trauma of subjugation that impacts Italy's capacity to accept itself as a nation of many ethnicities, cultures, races, and political positionalities. Racial exclusion in Italy is related to a deep inferiority complex, symptomatic of an ongoing existential crisis of national identity. Italy's racism causes a phenomenological schism, a failure to recognize its inherent diversity and all the parts that comprise its postcolonial heterogeneity.

Chinatalian Choreographies with Ancient Roots

Of course, a project that examines contemporary Chinatalian choreographies should first acknowledge the connection between the Chinese Dynastic Empire and the Roman Empire as an ancient choreography of domination and divergence from authority. The Roman Empire endured roughly 1000 years (753 BCE-476 CE), with geopolitical

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domination in Western Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia. Historians speculate that during the Roman Empire, the Han Dynasty in China (206 BCE-220 CE) established the Silk Road. The Silk Road was a name for a series of organized land and maritime trade routes originating from China through India, Asia Minor, Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the African continent, Europe, and Britain. This colonial choreography of influence originated from the province of Xian and stretched 14,000 miles. While Silk Road trade stretched to Britain, common thought considers Rome the end point because of its identity as the seat of the Roman Empire. China sought precious metals, glass, and tapestries from the Western Roman Empire who in turn, sought items such as silks, spices, tea, and gunpowder from China. This Chinese facilitated-trade network stretched through the Mediterranean with tangible goods and services moving into Rome and back across the Caspian Sea. Exotic animals, slaves, silk, cotton, plant life, fruits, vegetables, spices, and ideas were among the thousands of items that passed between people at designated trade posts and ports. Rome was the furthest most western metropolis associated with Chinese imperial rule.[49] This history makes Italy's current day involvement with China's geopolitical and global commerce project — the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — significant; I will discuss this at the end of the chapter.

While it is easy to glorify the Roman and Chinese empires and their ancient convergence through economies of trade, the empires were nonetheless contingent upon the subjugation of bodies living within those territories. In other words, the mobilization of diversity and the circulation of its products in the form of trade are necessary to reinforce

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[49] Tim Winter, *The Silk Road: Connecting Histories and Futures* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

empire as a monolith.[50] The paradox of absolute power requires choreographies of

difference. While modes of subjugation exist in choreographies, the representations which

choreographies require to manifest their design(s) in space engage cultural multiplicity and

difference as forces which the dominant governing body desires to control. Dance scholar,

Randy Martin, suggests that:

> [T]he articulation of multicultural bodies is complicated by the acts of state and
> economy that seek to deny difference its context and convert, by means of what is
> recognized in rights or what circulates as commodity, an irreducible multiplicity into
> so many units of discrete, monocultural identities.[51]

Martin's quote above reflects a critical dance perspective, which considers how bodily

movements—both staged and quotidian—intersect, influence, and engage social, cultural,

and political dimensions of state and economy. Martin contends that difference is a

commodity, and the elaborations of those differences serve the authoritarian state (in this

case empire), in manipulations of the body politic into manageable units of control and

obedience. From this lens, the intercultural crossings between ancient Rome and ancient

China on the Silk Road can be regarded as Chinatalian choreographies that represent

absolute imperial power which inscribed and reinscribed political ideologies of dominance

and subjugation upon the bodies and the physical environments that facilitated those

representations. Martin would perhaps suggest that this ancient Chinatalian choreography

was one of domination; it created the conditions for elaborations of social resistance to the

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[50] True, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire* argues that empire anything but monolithic, instead arguing against class divisions for an alternative definition of the "multitudes." However, Italian sociologist, Giovanni Arrighi identifies major issues with Hardt and Negri's argument, which he argues, "heavily relies on metaphors and theories and systemic avoidance of empirical evidence." Hardt and Negri suggest that the wealth gap between the First and Third worlds has collapsed; Arrighi contends this line of argument reflects a "gross exaggeration" because the authors provide no empirical data to support these claims. See: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001); Giovanni Arrighi, "Lineages of empire." *Historical Materialism* 10, no. 3 (2002): 3-16.

[51] Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Duke University Press, 1998), 212.

subordination of social life to exploitation. This deviance from domination generates a politics specific to that time and space. In other words, moving bodies impact the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions in which the body is subject. Since the moving body is fluid, so are the specific conditions it acts upon. The kinesthetic dialogue between the state of the body and body within the state is a mobile one.

Choreographies of Colonial Oppression, Freedom, and Fascism

The Ancient Roman Empire is not the only example appropriate for discussing choreographic resonances between the body and the state. There are also more modern examples that serve my purposes. While the ancient Roman Empire included the territory of modern-day Italy, it was after the fall of Rome that foreign colonial powers overtook the boot-shaped peninsula. Resisting the imposition of French and Spanish colonialism, the agrarian community, peasants, and common people lead a revolutionary uprising to decolonize Italy. The *Risorgimento* (meaning "to rise again") was a populist, liberalist, nationalist revival that advocated for the expulsion of Spanish and French rulership. This movement lasted roughly from 1815-1871 and marked the development and spread of liberal ideologies that prioritized the unification of Italian people and a sense of shared Italian identity. The *Risorgimento* movement concerned three areas: economic and social modernization, national unification, and national identity.[52] Later, Italian Fascists would deploy *Risorgimento* discourse to justify Mussolini's dictatorship. (I will examine choreographies of fascism later in the chapter.) Thus, understanding the cultural ethos of the *Risorgimento* is key to apprehending the historical conditions of colonial oppression that has

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[52] Anthony L. Cardoza, "The Risorgimento" in Erik Jones, and Gianfranco Pasquino (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics* (2015; online edn, Oxford Academic, 11 Feb.2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669745.013.2, accessed 18 Oct. 2022.

left a residue of internal racism between the north and south, as well as non-white Italians in contemporary Italy.

To understand the colonial residues from a dance perspective, I draw on the work of dance scholar, Marta Savigliano, who writes about the "embrace" in Argentine tango, as a physical and symbolic manifestation that emerged during the civil wars that followed Argentinian independence from Spain. Tango dance existed first in poor, Black, and mestizo communities. These communities, she writes, "did not need to hold tight. Their color held them together."[53] Savigliano offers a way to understand decolonialism as a choreography of unified resistance. Because "[r]acism, classism, and sexism are integral parts of the technology of colonialism,"[54] there was a need to "hold tight" as the country negotiated its national identity. Similarly, the *Risorgimento* led to a declaration of Italian independence from foreign rule. However, even the declaration of the Italian Nation State in 1861 did not resolve the existential issue of national identity after centuries of foreign rule. Instead, the *Risorgimento* installed an Italian monarch as the nation processed its new identity. Embracing an "Italian" monarch seemed better than a French or Spanish one and thus, the negotiations of Italy nationhood "embraced" a new ruler who they felt was appropriate for embrace. The new ruler was acceptable to the people because he was an Italian. This marks a critical moment in Italian history because the people chose a leader that they considered Italian and this person satisfied their idea of what it means to be Italian, to be whole, and to be a "complete" nation. Prior to this, the (French) Neapolitan Kingdom of the Two Sicilies governed southern Italy and Sicily; with unification, the separate republics coalesced into a

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[53] Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion* (Routledge, 2018), 30.

[54] Savigliano, 21.

single sociopolitical entity—the Kingdom of Italy. The first emperor of the Kingdom of Italy was Victor Emmanuelle II, member of the House of Savoy, who ruled Italy for three generations from 1861-1946. The important point is that the people believed they were embracing one of their own; their newfound sense of national identity equated with that of the white Italian male monarch. Like the embrace that was necessary for the Argentinian people to establish a sense of unification after liberation from the Spanish, the Italians held tight to a monolithic notion of Italianess. Installing whiteness and the patriarchy became a national coping mechanism to move through the trauma of decolonialization.

Admittedly, some may argue that a discussion of *la tarantella—a* southern Italian folk music and dance genre— is necessary here, to establish a comparative relationship to the Argentinian tango, in regard to being a cultural articulation of coping with the trauma of civil war. Some may also argue that the comparison is apt because both dance forms originated among the subaltern demographic—tango from the slums of Argentina, and *tarantella* from Italy's rural, agricultural regions. It is also true that both dances enjoy global circulation and popularity. However, beyond that, these dances provide no generative comparison as an expression of coping with the trauma of civil war. In particular, there are no extant ethnographic, performance, or cultural studies that connect *tarantella* to the *Risorgimento*. Moreover, *tarantella* is an ancient dance form related to pre-Christian rituals that honor celestial cycles of heavenly bodies and the cycles of nature's seasons. This designation as a pagan ritual and rite further removes *tarantella* from a comparative discussion with Argentine tango. Nonetheless, what is productive to discuss is the role that *tarantella* folk music and dance plays in articulating the postcolonial Italian condition.

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Cultural literary scholar, Incoronata Inserra, suggests that *tarantella*—as a folk music and dance form—was most prevalent in southern Italian regions of Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, Campania, and Sardinia from the 15th-17th centuries, enjoying a global revival in the 1970s.[55] Inserra writes:

> *Tarantella* has been association with ancient orgiastic rites in honor of Dionysus and in particular, with the type of dress used during these rituals, called "*vello di Taranto*" or "Taranto's Wool" (Romanazzi, 2006, 142); others have associated it with the city of Taranto, where this music and dance form probably originated (Sigerist 2003, 27). In any case, the close affinity with the terms *taranta* and *tarantula* has led most scholars to link tarantella to tarantism or spider-bite syndrome and its music and dance ritual system. This complex ritual is connected to rural healing practices most prevalent in the Apulia region of southern Italy, especially in the city of Taranto, and most recently in Lecce, but also present in other parts of southern Italy, in Sardinia, and on the Mediterranean coasts at least until the 18th century.[56]

In the passage above, Inserra identifies tarantella's deep ties to Greek culture and its presence across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Inserra accounts for the decline of *tarantella* with the development of the Enlightenment period (17th-18th c.), "whose theories largely contributed to view tarantism as an object of medicine; as a result, tarantism's mythical and ritual qualities were dismissed as an irrational mania that reflected the tarantula-bite syndrome…"[57] In other words, its survival through the centuries as a "southern" rite which was suppressed by Enlightenment ideals of logic, rationalism, and colonialism, makes *tarantella* a complicated symbol of southern Italy. Additionally, the Post WWII suppression of the dance form was a key political campaign to industrialize the south; the *tarantella* was

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[55] Incoronata Inserra, *Global Tarantella: Reinventing Southern Italian Folk Music and Dances* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 8.

[56] Inserra, 7.

[57] Inserra, 8-9.

seen an emblem of southern backwardness, its practice deemed "unfit for modern society."[58] This history gestures to the *tarantella* as an entity of postcolonial Italy and the North-South divide; it is a national wonder and "relic" that carries within its practice, not only ancient history but contemporary complexities that come with the territory of postcolonial survival—that of cultural appropriation, reduction, and abjection. Ironically, the lore associated with the choreography of tarantella involves the narrative of a woman dancing to slow musical accompaniment, which crescendos as the dancer descends deeper into an excited trance state to expel the parasitic entity within her body. The notion of "expelling" or "driving out" an unwanted presence in the body registers for me, a likeness to the 17th and 18th century colonial project of domination, in which the body is not only that of the physical subject of colonial rule but the nation state as a political body capable of ejecting, rejecting, and abjecting unwanted kinds of bodies. In regard to the Southern Question, and the identity of the south, I suggest that *la tarantella* functions as an active commentary on postcolonial belonging. Though it does not factor into a clear paradigm of comparison to the tango, it nonetheless, provides a point of discussion to understand the body in movement alongside the larger arch of Italian colonial and postcolonial narratives.

The ethos of contemporary Italy prioritizes a unified sense of Italian identity, based on the long history of imposed foreign rule in the territory of Italy and Italy's history of resistance to that domination. The glory of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance were periods of achievement and power that Italians continue to look to with pride. Centuries of oppressive rule by foreign powers crippled morale, particularly amongst southerners, who for centuries endured poverty, serfdom, and derision within the north/south divide. The

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[58] Incoronata Inserra, *Global Tarantella: Reinventing Southern Italian Folk Music and Dances* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 9.

Risorgimento was a cultural, intellectual, political, and social movement that mobilized a nationalist sentiment to liberate Italy from centuries of colonial oppression.

Choreographies of Race, Nation, and the Body in Fascist Italy

The *Risorgimento's* association of whiteness and Italian national identity continued into the period of Benito Mussolini's rule. As the thunderbolt of fascism ripped through Italy, Mussolini's choreography of power doubled-down on iterations of whiteness as authentic *Italianità*. Meanwhile, in Nazi Germany, there was the work of Leni Riefenstahl, whose Nazi state-commissioned films like *Olympia*—which documented the 1936 Summer Olympics—helped to broadcast ideologies of Aryan supremacy. Art Historian Michael Mackenzie writes that Riefenstahl's films were controversial because they were "enormously groundbreaking and powerful accomplishments in the art of film"[59] but spread Hitler's propaganda of German supremacy using the Olympics to underscore ideals of power, virility, and dominance on a world stage. Likewise, Mussolini's choreography of fascism deployed dynamic designs in space to maintain his power. In collaboration together, both dictators, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini left their mark of terror like striated talons across the face of humankind, creating the scarring deep into the collective unconscious of multiple nations. Mussolini ruled Italy as Prime Minister from 1922-1925; then from 1925-1943, he ruled as a dictator. In 1943, he was deposed and installed as figure head during the last two years of the war, from 1943-1945 while Hitler's troops occupied Italy. His choreography of domination included oratorical performances, the violent occupation of public space via military parades, and of course, controlling the moving body. Later I will

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[59] Michael Mackenzie, "From Athens to Berlin: The 1936 Olympics and Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia." *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (2003): 302-336.

discuss the ways that the Social Republic policed dancing during WWII, outlawing social dances like the jitterbug and jazz music. The fascists constructed a racialized association between these expressive forms and "Blackness" as an epidemic originating from America and a "disease" of Black American soldiers stationed in Europe. The notion of Black mobile bodies transcending geographical boundaries was an idea that related to the fear that Blackness could spread through dance movement executed by white European bodies.

Like the epidemiology of racism against Black bodies, modes of fear mongering during the fascist regime mirror nineteenth-century campaigns of designating Asian bodies as diseased and Asian diaspora communities as requiring sterilization through bleach-washing. To reinforce whiteness, ridding Asian bodies from national space also required special sterilization through forced deportation. The threat of "Yellow Peril" became the name of a continental choreography to diagnose and treat the pandemic of Asian mobility. The U.S. government and the vast majority of colonizing countries (in Europe) effectively identified Asian as other through rhetorical and physical modes of epidemic rhetoric. In short, the "cleansing" tactics of segregation through racialized quarantine (of both whites and non-whites) were useful to Italian and German fascist choreographies. Moving the masses through public space reinforced nationalist ideals of a collective and wholesome Italian (white) race.

The totalitarian control of the individual corporeal body and of mass bodily activities served a primary function in fascist Italy. Michel Foucault's theory of "surplus power" articulates a binary imbalance of power in which one faction asserts and operates mechanized control over a group of bodies. This process creates "surplus" power and produces inequality. Activating this surplus power is a choreography of injustice that relies

on the organized movement of the disciplined body.[60] For example, historian Giulia

Albanese argues Mussolini's March on Rome in 1922 was a crucial event that established the

fascist regime. While some scholars regard the march as a farcical intervention to overturn

King Victor Emmanuelle, Albanese contends that the public performance helped to bring

Mussolini to power as the first Italian dictator. The collective mobilization of bodies through

the streets of Rome was a fascist choreography of violence that generated a sensorial terror

and threat upon the people marching as well as all those witnessing the spatial occupation.

Coincident with Franko's theory of dance as also holding within its event a performance of

trauma,[61] the March on Rome indicates the kinesthetic submission of the Italian body to

totalitarian discourses of a corporealized, mobile, national nightmare. For example,

enlistment in the military was mandatory. Eligible men were restricted corporeally from

choice; wearing the uniform of the fascist party mirrored the symbolic incarceration of their

psychology; their allegiance to the dictatorship was not one of choice; their physical

performance was one of forced coercion as they marched in formation through the streets.

Their marching was a metaphoric and literal mobilization of Mussolini's dictatorship, a show

of kinesthetic force that extended the psychic imprisonment of the masses who witnessed

the takeover. Stepping out of fascist rhythm and obstructing the metronomic tempo of mass

obedience led to opprobrium not only from the dictator himself but from peers, neighbors,

and possibly loved ones trapped in the kinesthetic rhetoric of the fascist national nightmare.

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[60] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Vintage, 2012), 223.

[61] Mark Franko, "Dance and the Political: States of Exception." *Dance research journal* 38, no. 1-2 (2006): 3–18.

Beyond disciplining bodily movement and generating a national hegemony capable of kinesthetic governmentality, Mussolini marked his territory through choreographies of propaganda, food shaming,[62] and social programs that busied and bruised women's bodies in the mechanics of farm work to reinforce fascism in rural areas.[63] Fascist policies emphasized nationalist pride and were fervently opportunistic in regard to deploying choreographies of control to centralize fascist power in urban centers. He controlled the media, squashed labor unions, and delivered speeches with camp and circumstance, lauding the Italian people as a "pure race." Mussolini cleansed his campaign of opposition through controlling time, space, and mobility. The myth that Mussolini is responsible for the punctuality of Italy's interregional train system endures (although the evidence of train punctuality, particularly in the south, does not prove true). This is a point of irony because the traditional northern claims to entitlement relate to stereotypes of industriousness, futuristic advancements in transportation, and urban development. However, these entitlements are tied historically to the residue of Mussolini's choreographies of discipline and totalitarian rule, which remains obscured in this myth. Though the north's inexorable advances in economic infrastructure and civic planning receive popular support, the south would argue that the northerners lack a particular consciousness of southern contributions to that industry; that trains in Southern Italy notoriously run on a "special" timetable would be connected to Northern Italy's lack of vision.

Choreographies of fascist control were body-specific and highly gendered, reinforcing autarky at the discretion of the dictator. For example, the fascist food campaign

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[62] Carol Helstosky, "Fascist food politics: Mussolini's policy of alimentary sovereignty." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 1-26.

[63] Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Facist Italy: The Massaie Rurali.* Routledge, 2014.

of "alimentary sovereignty" was Mussolini's attempt to install total self-sufficiency in the food supply. By barring imports, prioritizing nutrition, and encouraging a domestic diet of "bread, polenta, pasta, fresh produce, and wine,"[64] Mussolini sought to choreopolice food commerce and consumption.[65] I use dance scholar, Andre Lepecki's definition of "choreopolice" here, which describes state mandated, militarized control of bodies in protest.[66] Lepecki's theory applies here to Mussolini's control of the body (both public and private) and nation state through diet restrictions and food supply mobility. Food historian, Carol Helstosky argues that "the peculiar nature of fascist food policies" treated food and population as "strategic and expendable resources."[67] In other words, to control the kinesthetic and national body was to control nutrition and food consumption; to starve the kinesthetic body and the nation was to control access to nutrition and food production.

Again, choreographies of fascist control were highly gendered. Mussolini's regime created agrarian training programs for peasant women to emplace their bodily labor within the mechanisms of the fascist regime.[68] The *Massaie Rurali* ("rural farm women") was the name of a fascist organization of peasant farm women. They represented the largest occupational demographic during the regime.[69] The fascist party sought to arrest the

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[64] Carol Helstosky, "Fascist food politics: Mussolini's policy of alimentary sovereignty." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 1-26.

[65] See not 60 above.

[66] André Lepecki, "Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the task of the dancer." *TDR/The Drama Review* 57, no. 4 (2013): 13-27.

[67] Carol Helstosky, "Fascist food politics: Mussolini's policy of alimentary sovereignty." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 1-26.

[68] Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Facist Italy: The Massaie Rurali*. Routledge, 2014.

[69] See note 64 above.

hemorrhaging of agrarian migration into urban centers by converting peasant women into farmworkers. These choreographies of control included teaching peasant women gardening, beekeeping, housekeeping, and childcare to reinforce their gendered role as caretakers and mothers of the fascist revolution. Men could expect to inhabit the role of soldiers and women could expect to birth them.[70] Incidentally, these women helped to develop rural factions of fascism, operating autonomously until fascism (run from the urban centers) subsumed and neutralized their autonomy.

The March on Rome, control of the media, labor unions, food mobilities and consumption, and the activities of rural women were all choreographic mechanisms that controlled the body. Such fascist tactics assumed that Italy was a feeble country, and thus fascist rulership sought to dismantle and deconstruct the earlier ethos of a nation in order to convert, fortify, correct, and control its weaknesses. While women were equated to baby incubators and home keepers, choreographies of masculinity played on traditional attributes of manhood — physical strength, moral fiber, and kinesthetic obedience to the state. Much like the Hitler youth rallies that called to arms, the young, athletic, white male bodies necessary to reinforce Germany's ideological sense of Aryan elitism, Mussolini's rhetoric relied on the myth of *Italianità* as a white, masculine, athletic body. In his writings on the body, football, and fascism, sports historian Simon Martin points out that Mussolini's regime centered their domestic mission on eugenics in defense of (a white, Italian) race. The white supremacist propaganda relied on the image of the white, able-bodied male as ideological

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[70] Kevin Passmore *, "Fascism, women, and gender" Fascism: A Very Short Introduction, 2nd edn, Very Short Introductions (Oxford, 2014; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 May 2014), https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199685363.003.0008, accessed 18 Oct. 2022.*

representation of a healthy, modern nation.[71] Turning away from the androgyny of the

classical Roman body, the term *Italiano nuovo* ("new Italian") presented a futurist and fascist

corporeal manifesto, physicalized by the vim, vigor, brawn, and husk of a Herculean body,

ready to sacrifice flesh and bone for the Italian nation. In Mussolini's fascist imaginary, the

labor of the white body advanced Italy. Through the pulsating body of the State coursed a

delicate choreography of fascist ideological gore that penetrated national law, medical

research on eugenics, and the social territory of national sports and dance. White supremacy

lived like a ferocious parasite within the collective subconscious, taking its form as a fit,

white body. An emblem of *Italianità*, the white athletic body became a tool of infinite

efficacy, simultaneously reinforcing discipline, procreative potency, omnipresent surveillance,

and above all, the potential for violence. A trope *corporealized*, the *Italiano nuovo* propelled Italy

toward a promise of supremacy. Mussolini's propaganda deployed choreographies of

kinesthetic obedience that paralyzed the nation as Italy convulsed toward practices of

masochistic narcissism.

Mussolini's earliest intervention into the quotidian, social realm of movement was

through Italy's greatest national pastime—*futbol* (soccer). To reinforce whiteness as Italian,

he commissioned the founding of the Institute of Sport and Medicine in Bologna, where

physician researchers conducted studies on anthropometrics and eugenics.[72] In Rome,

Mussolini built the famous *Farnesina* stadium in 1928, a space in honor of Fascist manhood.

Party members hand-selected (male) fascist youth for training to become teachers meant to

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[71] Simon Martin, "Foreign Bodies on Foreign Fields." *In Corpore: Bodies in Post-Unification Italy* (2007): 80.

[72] Loredana Polezzi and Charlotte Ross, eds. *In corpore: bodies in post-unification Italy* (Associated University Press, 2007).

physically educate bodies on what it means to be *il Italiano nuovo*. The homo-eroticized

landscape of fascist masculinity is embodied in the stadium's architecture, which combined

elements of the Roman empire (with an amphitheater layout) and futurist modernity (with

clean, long, dynamic lines). Sixty-six male statues, nearly one-story high, stand naked, with

their manhood on full display. Posing with soccer balls, spears, and tennis rackets, their erect

posture marks territories of national belonging through a parade of gluteus maximus and

abdominus rectus muscles of steel. With the stench of patriotism emanating off their marble

bodies, their gaze pins those below into acceptable comportment beneath the weight of

individual and mass responsibility to the dictatorship and Italy's future. Having visited the

stadium myself, on my way to teaching students in northern Rome, I experienced the

foreboding, marbled eroticism. Like white chip-n-dale playmates, their figures represent

polluted ideologies of a "national" Italian body. These statues stood as instruments to

pervert a major national pastime—soccer. Reinforcing the image of Italy's nationhood relied

on the fighting fit, a physical condition that defined national purpose, moral constitution,

and a racial authenticity. In sum, it was upon such imaginaries of the "authentic" Italian body

that Mussolini built his army and rose to power. While fascism eventually fell due to

Mussolini's failed attempts to colonize Ethiopia and Eritrea in Africa and the signing of the

Paris Peace Treaties in 1947,[73] *il Italiano nuovo* successfully drilled its way into the Italian

subconscious like an ideogram, vibrating beneath the surface of the collective conscious.

At the time of this writing, Italy has just elected its first female Prime Minister,

Giorgia Meloni. Meloni is the first far-right Prime Minister since Mussolini's nationalist

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[73] True, while some may argue that the arrival of the Allied Troops —some of whom were people of color—contributed to the fall of Mussolini, most contemporary Italian postcolonial scholars writing on the topic of the fall of fascism do not acknowledge this key fact.

government installed themselves a dictatorship. Her victory also marks the centennial anniversary of Mussolini's installation of a fascist republic.[74] The temporal significance of her post is not lost on right-wing political parties like *La Lega* (the Northern League). These parties have staunchly supported neofascist ideologies that impute immigrants and migrant workers with bleeding the GDP, marginalize sexual and gender marginals, and support anti-immigration legislation. Meloni is also a Roman, woman, and mother. Arguably, her victory marks the momentous rebirth of *il Italiano nuovo*. Deeply conservative, she is anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage. Meloni's political agenda ran on uplifting the economy, support for Ukraine, and restoring Italy to pre-pandemic glory (or turmoil, depending on who you ask). She has called into question the legality of certified gay unions and argues for the review of those marriages. Meloni's rise is a part of an ominous surge of right-wing governments across Europe. While theorizing the causes for the shift toward fascism is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would point out that the history of racialization in Italy continues to repeat itself, affecting and emboldening a climate of exclusion and struggles for assimilation amongst non-white bodies contributing to Italian culture, GDP, and racial, ethnic, and gender diversity.

The internal racialization of Italy during the Italian Social Republic (Mussolini's fascist state), together with the internal colonization of the Italian body, reflected a trend across Europe. Hitler had amassed his army by defining national belonging as associated with whiteness. Notions of Aryan indigeneity helped Mussolini and Hitler forge an alliance during WWII. Mass marches and propaganda that reinforced fascist intervention in science

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[74] Guido Bartolini, "Past, Present, and Future of the Italian Memory of Fascism. Interviews with Luisa Passerini, Filippo Focardi, John Foot, Robert Gordon, and Philip Cooke." *Modern Italy*. Cambridge University Press 2022, 1–23. doi:10.1017/mit.2022.30.

and sports were also strategies to educate Italians on their superiority. As I mentioned in the

Introduction, the abjection of non-white bodies also played an important role in strategies of

uniting Italy behind a fascist leader. Performance scholarship helps us to further understand

the ways that abjection and mass choreographies of marching and dancing reinforced

nationalist movements like that of Italian fascism and German Nazism. On the

choreography of Nazism, Les Back, a music historian studying the abjection of U.S. jazz

music and jitterbug dance in Nazi Germany, argues that the Nazification of Germany

involved mass organizations of physical exercise in rows and circles to enforce a political

line.[75] Back writes:

> As the Nazification of German culture reached its height physical exercise took on a
> kind of messianic fervor. Nazi dance organized its participants within a geometric
> discipline…Within the starkly-gendered universe of Nazi aesthetics, women were
> given ballet and folk dancing and while men were assigned to the marching ground.
> The spectacular rituals of mass dancing and the display of storm-troopers marching
> in perfect cohorts through the Brandenburg Gate anchored Nazism in the rhythm of
> the body. *Through these choreographed rituals identities of race and gender were both embodied
> and publicly worshipped, producing a kind of racial narcissism.*[76] [emphasis added]

Back identifies Nazi choreography as a ritual, citing the rhythmic body as an "anchor" that

established Nazism in Germany. Jazz music and the jitterbug dance—lascivious exports

from America, which the Third Reich associated with sexual deviance and miscegenation

between Black U.S. military soldiers and white German women—were practices that stood

in contrast to the Aryan ideal. Therefore, totalitarian choreographies at that time in history

was an embodied practice that idealized *specific* kinds of group movement for *specific* members

of society. Dictatorship, as a dance of power, segregated and defined race and gender,

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[75] Les Back, "Nazism and the Call of the Jitterbug." In *Dance in the City*, pp. 175-197. Palgrave
Macmillan, London, 1997.

[76] Back, 182.

establishing an auto-iconization amongst the body politic. "We are as we move" was a kinesthetic choreography that reified the false glamour of Nazism as a symbol of racialized, gendered, physicalized, and heterosexualized national pride.

Choreographies of sociopolitical containment in Germany and Italy survived through totalitarian dictatorships. While these dictatorships emphasized panoptic state control of bodily mobility, scholarship that people still found ways to evade surveillance and move their social dances underground. Klaus Nathaus and James Notts argue that interwar dancing in Fascist Italy reflect a continual oscillation between authorization and prohibition.[77] Despite the fascist dictatorship to restrict social dancing through regular police surveillance of dance halls, the underground dance scene during Italian fascism was an active, and multidimensional affective practice that disrupted and dodged the efforts of fascist choreopolicing. I would argue that while Italy's historical choreographies of foreign colonial domination and internal colonization by the monarchy and fascism created oppressive conditions for the body, they also solicited what dance scholar, Susan Foster, defines as "kinesthetic responsiveness."[78] Foster claims the body's capacity for kinesthetic rebuttal can take on multiple forms that deviate from classic theories of the protesting body. For example, the protesting body as synonymous with rage and agitation is severely limiting. The body in resistance can take on choreographies of stillness, softness, and slackness. For example, during the 1960s, African-Americans brought food and books to segregated lunch counters designated for "Whites Only." In this way, Black kinesthetic rebuttal during the

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[77] Klaus Nathaus, and James Nott. "Dancing through dictatorship: Everyday practices and affective experiences of social dancing in Fascist Italy." In *Worlds of social dancing*, pp. 201-227. Manchester University Press, 2022.

[78] Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of protest." *Theatre Journal* (2003): 395-412.

Civil Rights Movement was one of unassuming, quotidian disruption. Eating and reading are quotidian acts which the protestors co-opted as a choreography of protest. Similarly, Foster profiles how AIDS protestors in the 1980s spread their bodies horizontally across city sidewalks in dissent to the invisibilization of a pandemic that was claiming the lives of people in sexually marginalized communities. Foster argues that the body in stillness, softness, and slack possesses a kinetic potential to create change. This theory complicates conceptions of choreography as a simplistic model of movement and behavioral submission to the state.

Likewise, during Fascist rule in Italy, minority groups rose against the tyrannous conditions of Mussolini's dictatorship, German occupation, and the complicit social elite. These tensions contributed to the development of the Italian Civil War, otherwise known as the *Resistenza italiana* (The Italian Resistance). This nationalist, liberation movement brought together anti-Nazis and anti-Fascists in Italy, who formed a partisan group called *i Partigiani* (Partisans). Both men and women engaged in resistance activities, using guerilla warfare in the countryside and terrorism in the urban centers to sabotage German occupation. Men fleeing Mussolini's conscription, deserters who still held military arms, escaped prisoners of war, urban evacuees, and even members of Catholic religious groups fought in the resistance. Peasants were the majority of support for resistance fighters; they provided food, shelter, and transport to *i Partigiani*.[79] Thus, Foster's claim of alternative protest through "softening" and "slackening" provides a gendered approach to understanding "kinesthetic responsiveness" as a feminist tactic of resistance. Peasants—as the submissive demographic of Italian society—may have abstained from the physicality of war but they provided crucial resources to shelter, nourish, and transport guerilla fighters in opposition to fascist

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[79] C. Lenti (informant) in discussion with author, January 2019.

patriarchy. These collective and subversive choreographies of kinesthetic rebuttal also redefined underground economies of wealth through collective disbursements of food, shelter, and human mobility.

Provisioning for the cause of the Republic, the peasants' kinesthetic rebuttals produced lateral mobilities within the chaos of their country. Like the horizontal bodies of AIDS protesters, the submission to the revolution was a choreography of bodily networks, quietly slackened against German and fascist occupation as a form of resistance. In other words, peasant choreographies were an integral part of reclaiming national identity from fascism. Peasants held peripheral space to foster a kinesthetic rebuttal to the Social Republic. As land workers and economic marginals, peasants had long suffered under foreign colonial rule and ostracization as a "southern" entity segregated from the "noble" and industrialized north; but in this case, they became the womb that birthed a new Italian nation. I argue that these choreographies of kinesthetic rebuttal to Mussolini's dictatorship and the fascist uprising was a subversive, feminist dance between military deserters, prisoners of war, clergy, and peasants. These "dancers" of the revolution were drastically different in terms of regionality, economics, social mobility, and politics; as such, these choreographies of improvised resistance were *intercultural* alliances that sustained the rebellion. Intercultural collaboration across the bricolage of Italian identities required yielding, receptivity, and responsiveness to the flux of war, which I contend, generates a dancing network of bodies. Seen from this angle, the ethics and politics of war reflect a practice of loving. SanSan Kwan's work, which examines cross-cultural dance partnerships as intercultural acts of love, is useful here to understand feminist theories of the ethical body in collaboration. Reflecting

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on her participation in a dance improvisation workshop lead by Vietnamese French contemporary dance choreographer, Emmanuelle Huynh, Kwan writes:

> We practiced the go-pause score that she and Otake [Eiko] performed in *Talking Duet*. Working with a partner, we remained in physical contact with each other and began by moving together and pausing when we felt our partner pause, starting again when we felt our partner start. We danced wordlessly and without designating a leader, feeling our pauses and starts collectively. Next, one of us transitioned into remaining still while our partner moved and moving when our partner came to stillness. We danced like this for over an hour, which enabled full emersion into an acute bodily attentiveness. As in Otake's workshop, I felt the borders of my body blur, I felt time and space become malleable.[80]

Kwan describes dance improvisation across cultures and language as a bodily negotiation of transitions through crescendo and deceleration, a "full emersion" into attentiveness that allows for the blurring of corporeal boundaries and the coalescence of time and space. Moreover, she argues that the ethics of collaboration emerge from vulnerability as a state of openness that allows for unseen possibilities. Considering vulnerability allows for a discussion of the subaltern, feminist deflections of fascism in WWII Italy. The guerilla mobilizations were ad hoc, peripheral insurgences; they were intercultural choreographies of kinesthetic resistance across intersections of abject identities. Italy's "nation body" had parts other than fascism. These "other" parts were building toward ethical corporeal engagements—priests took up arms, foreign prisoners entrenched themselves for a noble cause, women distracted the occupiers. In other words, the fascist state's choreographies of domination produced a corporeal, mobile response in the people; these choreographies—and their rhythms, dynamics, and tempo—danced outside of the dominant kinesthetic vernacular established by the fascist dictatorship. To return to Randy Martin's theory of multiplicitous cultural response, the fascist choreographies denied difference and from these

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[80] SanSan Kwan, *Love Dances: Loss and Mourning in Intercultural Collaboration* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 99.

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conditions, emerged counter choreographies to subvert, disrupt, and complicate the mechanism of that oppression. Paradoxically, *i Partigiani* represented a radically anti-monocultural society and in solidarity, they negotiated resources, dancing the "go-pause score" of improvising for their collective freedom. The dance of Italy's history has produced unseen conditions of devastation in Italy, with scarring that goes beyond the terrestrial reality and deep into the national unconscious. I would argue that so did the choreographies of liberation, loving, and the momentary blend across difference.

Choreographies of Call and Response

I have traced the choreographies of domination and rebuttal in Italy's history to identify the ways that Italy might be a place of hope for Chinatalians—the focal demographic of this dissertation. Earlier, I mentioned that the choreographies of war, destruction, and devastation contain within them, the act of loving. I drew on dance scholarship from Mark Franko, Randy Martin, Anton Lepecki, Susan Foster, Marta Savigliano, SanSan Kwan, and Randy Martin's work to justify this claim, which undergirds the pursuit of this project—to approach Chinatalian choreographies as kinesthetic rebuttals to exclusion and human disavowal. Careful consideration of Italy's history invokes an embodied, analytical, sensorial approach to investigating and understanding Chinatalian practices of loving in the face of ongoing destruction. Italy's history presents an archive of the dance between domination and liberation, with the Italian people at the core of mobilizations of resistance.

As mentioned earlier, the *Risorgimento* movement installed Victor Emmanuelle II, the first Italian monarch of the Kingdom of Italy. King Emmanuelle II ruled Italy for three generations from 1861-1946. The monarchy fell when a referendum by popular decree

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established the Italian Republic in 1946 following Mussolini's capture and death. Shortly thereafter, the people promulgated the Italian Constitution in 1948. Historically, then, holding together a myth of unity required that Italy reinforce the categorical denial of outliers whose existence threatened ideologies of whiteness and purity. However, counter-choreographies of kinesthetic resistance established corporeal dialectics that challenged monolithic claims of identity in processes of liberation and reunification. The practical efficacy of otherness served procedural choreographies that mobilized a sense of national identity throughout Italian history as a paradoxical dance seeking to locate itself amidst the chaos of colonization, decolonization, and postcolonization. As a nation, Italy has been and still is lacking in concern for the welfare and integration of non-white, migrants, and immigrants, and their native-born Italian children. This history sheds light on Italy's contemporary issues of integration and assimilation.

Beyond marking the arch of Italian history, choreographies of colonial oppression and rebellion inform contemporary Italian politics. The continued suppression of the south sustains a long-held and bitter animosity between north and south; this tension further weakens efforts for unification. While Italy's government is strongly centralized, many of the research informants (particularly from Rome southward) expressed distrust in the government and question the integrity of Italy's democratic process. Northward of Rome, populist sentiment typically expresses distrust of southerners, whom they argue do not contribute equally to the progress of the nation. Briefly put, the debates regarding the standards that constitute belonging in Italy continue to persist.

For example, the Chinatalians I spoke with in Sicily look to their Italian-born children to change the landscape of belonging through their acquisition of Italian language

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and citizenship. The metaphoric entailments of my phrase "landscape of belonging" suggests that choreographies of the body and linguistic enunciations have the power and practical capability to change spaces —how bodies move in them, and how bodies experience them. My informants spoke at length at how Chinatalians throughout Italy mobilize choreographies that allow their children in Sicily and provincial areas of Italy to live with Chinatalian families in Rome and Milan to attend the best universities. With geographical placement in the north, second-generation Chinatalians gain access to education, job training, and placement which advance their economic and social status among the white Italian and Chinatalian elite. In a direct manner, the history of Italian racialization and oppression produced the conditions of Chinatalian containment as well as the liberatory Chinatalian choreographies of freedom. Like the social dancers, who during the fascist era, sustained robust underground networks of support and care, the Chinatalians persist in living through and in-between the margins. Though I make an analogy that compares Chinatalian to the social dancers of the fascist era, I acknowledge that the body can fail. Networks of human support can fail to protect and preserve the body—institutional systems, cultural expectations, and populace thoughtforms of xenophobia can all constrain the body from persisting through and in-between the margins. At the same time, the body is constantly moving to iterate, reiterate, and co-opt those systems to manage encounters with inevitable obstacles to liberation.

Human Choreographies of Migration are Liquid Paradigms: 1970s-1990s

After Mussolini's reign came tumbling down, Italy saw a post WWI economic boom. These conditions primed the influx of post-Cold War migrations of people from ex-communist countries like China. To understand this surge of migration, it is necessary to

trace the trajectory of Italy's post WWII economic boom, which helped to drive inflation of oil prices in the 1970s. Labor union protests and the globalized outsourcing of labor contributed to Italy's recession in the 1980s. With workers on strike and the nation's inability to support welfare, compensate workers, and provide stimulus for education and job placement programs, Italy's economic situation fell into distress . Moreover, Italy's famously unstable government was engaged in corruption linked to mafia organizations operating from the Southern regions. Italy's deep recession produced in turn a desire for cheap labor. Employing cheap labor allowed for Italy to sustain a false sense of fiscal sovereignty and class distinction as people of color and other non-Italian domestic workers catered to their every need in white Italian homes. Italy's desire to sustain a sense of national identity coupled with government amnesties for migrant and immigrant laborers drew thousands of willing workers to Italy. [81]

During the 1980s-1990s, new Italians arrived from Africa, Eastern Europe, China, the Philippines, and South America. Many of these laborers settled in Italy to start families and still many others continued to travel back and forth between their native homeland and Italy. The recessed Italian economy and lax immigration laws encouraged chain migration, settlement, as well as the shuttling of human and material capital across national and international borders. For example, Bangladeshi laborers are usually college educated, married men with families to support in Bangladesh. They represent the Asian majority of laborers in Italy. However, Bangladeshi men typically return to Bangladesh once they have earned enough to

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[81] Angela Chang, "20th century Chinese migration to Italy: The Chinese diaspora presence within European international migration." *History Compass* 10, no. 2 (2012): 179-190.

build a house for their families and retire. This scenario was true for some of the Chinese who arrived in Italy in the 1980s; however, their exact number is not well-documented. Of those that arrived in the 1980-1990s many settled in the regions of Lombardy, Tuscany, and Lazio, in the respective cities of Milan, Prato, and Rome. While the Chinatalian community in Milan is the oldest and most established of all the Chinese diaspora enclaves in Italy, with immigration having begun as early as the 1920s, Chinese immigration to other regions in Italy is relatively new. Prato's population is the most concentrated population per capita of Chinatalians and the most intensively surveyed by ethnographers. Rome remains the city with the second largest community of Chinatalians after Milan. Still, no significant, longitudinal ethnographic studies on the Chinatalians exist. This project is the first to register the Roman Chinatalian experience contextualized within the history of Italy's crisis of nationhood.

More recent choreographies of human migration into Italy have also shaped national sentiments of self and other. In comparison to America—which established itself as the United States in 1776—Italy is a young country. Having established itself as a republic on June 2, 1946, democratic Italy is only 76 years old. Still, such juvenescence does not vindicate Italy from its historical atrocities, nor does it remove the contamination of its national practice of prejudicial exclusion of marginals. However, this history provides an entry point for understanding why Italy lags in regard to practices of inclusion. Discourses of belonging reflect a hermeneutics of love and care for all of humanity.[82] Presently, minoritarian groups such as migrants, immigrants, and their second-generation continue to encounter significant

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[82] For example, Chela Sandoval's work contends that loving is a hermeneutics of care for humanity and a decolonial choreography of resistance. See: Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Vol. 18. (U of Minnesota Press, 2013).

obstacles of integration even though they contribute to the production of Italian culture and new definitions of *Italianità*.

Postcolonial Choreographies of Amnesia, Denial, and Racial Melancholy

New definitions of *Italianità* challenge the myth of a "unified Italy," a whistling ghost that haunts the nation's delayed progress toward just accommodation of its diversity. I would argue that the persistence of this myth reflects of an existential crisis. Rather than rise again, Italy remains recumbent, lazy, yet effortlessly sustaining the fictive imaginary of a white Italy. Chinatalians are a component of the progress in Italy, as they produce choreographies of assimilation despite the stagnant conditions of reactionary narcissism. The dishonest narrative of a (non-existent) monolithic Italian identity relies on forgetting the past and abjecting immigrants, migrants, and marginals. Racism is a dynamic choreography that nurtures a fractured sense of Italian self, to uphold a fictive imaginary of a white or near-white Italy. This context will structure my later engagements with fieldwork data, in which I will analyze liberatory Chinatalian choreographies as kinesthetic contestations of Italian exclusion.

Writing on amnesia and racial melancholy, literary theorist Ann Anlin Cheng explains that a nation's denial of past transgressions impacts enduring processes of racialization. Cheng applies Freudian theories of grieving to articulate the production of racialization in America.[83] In her book, *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng, via Freud, categorizes the condition of grieving in two parts: 1) "mourning" is a proper and conclusive act of accepting loss and moving on; 2) "melancholy" describes a condition brought on by an individual's inability to reconcile the profound loss. Mourning turns pathological because the ego cannot redress

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[83] Anne A. Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race." *The Kenyon review* 19, no. 1 (1997): 49–61.

the loss; melancholy is therefore an incurable disease, an irresolvable condition of one's being.[84] Applied to understanding race in America, Cheng argues that racialized others experience a pathological mourning or "racial grief."[85] Racial grief is an inability to mourn the loss of self in a country that denies such events as Japanese internment, Chinese exclusion, and Black slavery. Cheng contends that "white melancholy" is equally profound, as the rejection of America's history produces a loss of an authentic American subjecthood for the racial majority. In other words, Cheng democratically diagnoses all Americans with racial grief.

While Cheng's theory may help me to explain Italy's ongoing denial of genocide on the horn of Africa, Chinese internment in Italy during WWII, and histories of overt fascism as a "pathological" condition that sustains racialization in Italy, I find Cheng's theory reductive and paralytic. True, Italy has cultural amnesia and the rejection of its history retards democratic progress. However, it is unproductive to suggest that melancholy is a life sentence. Cheng makes unorthodox use of Freudian theory to explain racialization, but her approach diminishes the human condition to two possibilities. Following Freud, Cheng suggests melancholy "designates an identity disorder." Put another way, for Cheng there is a right way to grieve and a wrong way to grieve and the latter is a disease of the mind. Setting aside the problems and misogynistic qualities of Freud's work, I find that his analytic schematic for diagnosing conditions of mourning as pathological simply do not do justice to human resilience.

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[84] Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*. Oxford (England: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[85] Cheng, 12.

Admittedly, Cheng's theory may be helpful in understanding Italy's crisis of irreconcilable loss, but I disagree with her pessimistic, totalizing approach to the human condition. Cheng brings us unproductively to grieving as a mental illness that dead-ends possibilities for wholeness. By contrast, continental philosopher Pleshette DeArmitt's book, *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Im-possible Self-love*, adapts Jacques Derrida's critique of Freud's paradigm of mourning and pathological mourning.[86] Derrida argues that Freud has completely missed the mark—the demarcation between mourning and pathological mourning is of little consequence. Rather, all mourning is a process of impossible loving. In Derrida's words:

> We can only live this experience in the form of aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopoeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where *success fails*. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a part of us, between us —and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, the *failure succeeds*: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a response for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us.
> Can we accept his schema? I do not think so, even though it is *in part* a hard and undeniable necessity, the very one that makes true *mourning* impossible.[87]

Derrida's suggests that the mourner is caught in an aporetic double bind of grieving. Grieving is a human condition that is by nature, circuitously irresolvable. The double-entanglement of mourning involves taking in the loved one's death as a righteous grieving of the loss of oneself and the person that symbolically dies with the loved one. Moreover, externalizing the loss is to respect the alterity of the lost loved one. In other words, the

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[86] Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Im-Possible Self-Love* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 107-116.

[87] Jacques Derrida and Paul De Man. *Memoires for Paul de Man: The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine* (Columbia University Press, 1989).

Derridian practice of grieving foregrounds mourning as a practice of ethical being through registering the other as constitutive of oneself. In contrast, the vantage point of Freud's psychology prioritizes the grieving patient as the "victim" while negating the otherness of the lost one. For Derrida, Freud's definition of irreconcilable grief is an outright betrayal of the lost loved one, a cancellation of the other. The Derridean interpretation posits that grieving is not only a natural human condition—it is *ethically productive*; through engaging loss, one recognizes ones being as a product of loving the other.

Derrida's notion of grief as productive loving is important to understanding the potential of Italy as a nation capable of progress and acceptance of Chinatalians as Italian. The loss is manifold and includes Italy's loss of a unified nation and the loss of marginalized people of full belonging. To grieve is to move through a profound acceptance of their past, to re-member and reattach the amputated histories allows for the potential acquisition of what the Italian nation truly desires—unification. If grieving produces the possibility of loving oneself through grieving the other, a *risorgimento nuovo* is possible in postcolonial Italy despite their neofascist government. The aesthetic process of grieving potentiates change. Moving through grief is a kinesthetic technology of loving, and Italy's preoccupation with mourning the loss of the self, preconditions the potential for a new Italy, one in which Chinatalians register as choreographing Italy and Italianess.

More specifically, the *Risorgimento* was Italy's democratic rebuttal to centuries of foreign rule; the national movement gained wide success by proselytizing the notion of a monolithic sociocultural and intellectual identity of the labor class. The mission to overturn foreign domination intertwined with the desire to become a self-sustaining territory. This sentiment ultimately constructed Article 1 of the Italian Constitution which states, "*L'Italia è*

una Repubblica democratica, fondata sul lavoro" [Italy is a democratic republic, founded on labor].

Article 1 commemorates the labor of the people who ousted foreign powers.[88] This moment

in history links Italianess to the worker, who toiled, strained, and eventually triumphed,

despite centuries of oppression. However, history does not stand still, as bodies continue

moving. The postcolonial influx of migrants and immigrants to Italy in the 1970s-1990s

challenged ideologies of the "white Italy" hard-won by the white worker. The fulvous and

terracotta lands of southern Italy took on different colors, marked by African, Asian, South

American, and Eastern European laboring bodies who contribute significant economic and

human capital to reinforce contemporary Italy. The labor force in Italy is multicultural,

multiethnic, and transnational. As Italy continues to envision itself as a self-sustaining (white)

nation, unemployment rates have for decades, registered higher than the global average for

social-democratic countries. Despite Italy's membership in the Organization for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD), an inter-government, economic conglomerate of

38 democracy-focused countries, Italy's unemployment rate is high, consistently hovering

within the range of 8-13% since 2010.[89] Even with socialized postsecondary education,

young graduates continue to fall into unemployment due to poor infrastructure that would

otherwise support their transition into the workforce with training and placement.

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[88] The rest of Article 1 reads, "Italy is a democratic Republic founded on labor. Sovereignty belongs to the people and is exercised by the people in the forms and within the limits of the Constitution. See: "Senato della Republica," Italian Government, access date : Jan 11, 2023, https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf

[89] For reference, the majority of economists consider a 5% unemployment rate stable. A stable unemployment rate of 5% designates a stable economy in which labor productivity is high enough to adequately cover the costs of running a country; but low enough to avoid creating an output gap and offsetting inflation which stems from the overuse of resources (the labor force). See: "Unemployment total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)-Italy OECD members," The World Bank IBRD-IDA, April 3, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=IT-OE.

Given the reality of white Italy's unemployment, the myth of a "unified Italy" continues to provoke an existential crisis, a fictive imaginary that relies on a non-existent monolithic Italian identity. Contemporary discourses on the state of Italy and what it means to belong must consider the ongoing migrations of people, culture, and shifting economic policies. The underlying anachronism of Italy's myth of unity lends irony to Italy's tango with foreign powers like China. These choreographies of foreign economic policy help sustain the illusion of sovereignty. Italy's sense of national pride relies on the notion of a self-sustaining country. Therefore, while it is logical for Italy to align with China, a major power broker in world commerce, a global choreography deflects and obscures focus from the homegrown dysfunctions caused by Italy's existential crisis. Even still, it is important to account for this "friendship," particularly given China's foreign policy rhetoric of rectitude and fiscal reciprocity. China's propaganda reinforces that they are a philanthropic partner in global affairs; however, China commits human rights violations through the censorship of their media and the continual persecution of tribal minorities in southwest China. Decades ago, under Mao Zedong's dictatorship, the regime's intolerance for difference produced the horrendous burning of temples that left Tibetan monks fleeing for their lives. Today, China currently houses the ethnic Uyghur people in prison camps, forcing labor upon bodies that do not fall into acceptable categories of Chineseness. I point out these realities to undermine any monolithic claims to altruism in the name of nationhood and alliance-building across geographic and political territories. The Chinatalians in contemporary Italy must negotiate their belonging amidst the actions and consequences of the shadow in the human collective unconscious. Locating the presence of the shadow in Italy and China does not insulate Chinatalians from complicity in crimes against humanity nor does it valorize Chinatalians as

infallible savors of Italy. However, it helps to illustrate the spatial, political, cultural dynamics in which Chinatalians are moving and negotiating their identity and assimilation in contemporary Italy, a country in perpetual mourning for an unfathomable loss of self.

BRI and Choreographies of Greater China

To better understand the contemporary space in which Chinatalians are negotiating their belonging in Italy, it is necessary to explore the significance of Italy's contemporary role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). I consider this a postcolonial Chinatalian choreography on a global scale which has local implications for how everyday Chinatalians mediate the tensions of exclusion in conjunction with Italy's dependence on China. China's BRI is a global choreography of economic trade, infrastructure development, and collateralized lending. Here, I am using the term *choreography* to also signify systems of oppression, suppression, and exploitation. Outlining the contours of the BRI choreography provides context for why many of the Chinatalian informants I spoke to, are aligning themselves with China, despite living, working, and schooling in Italy from birth. One informant, named Liliana, identified as a "global citizen."[90] Having been born in Italy and raised and educated in Rome, Lilliana describes with irritation the ways that white Italian people will often say to her: "Ah, these immigrants that don't understand Italian culture…but you, Liliana, you, of course are Italian. We accept you as one of us." The idea that acceptance into the prestigious category of Italian (i.e., whiteness) and "one of us" is a privilege that is given to an Italian person of color by a white Italian is a source of rage for Lilliana. She describes that the qualification of being human in Italy rests in the hands of white Italians. Because of these experiences, she prefers to think of herself as a "global

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[90] Lilliana, Chinatalian Roman, private conversation, Feb 2020.

citizen." When I ask her if she travels to China regularly, she explains that her father is an important figure in the Chinatalian community as well as his native Wenzhou, where he has built and runs a large apartment complex for the town. "When I told them I was marrying a white Italian, they were not happy. But when it came time for the wedding, I didn't have to lift a finger. My dad invited all of Rome's important dignitaries and socialites and all I had to do was put on my wedding dress." This exchange with Lilliana brings to mind anthropologist Aihwa Ong's writings on the notion of "Greater China." In her book *Flexible Citizenship, The Culture Logics of Transnationality*, the term "Greater China" refers to the complex choreographies of sociocultural, political, economic, and migratory flows between Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and communities in Southeast Asia.[91] Emerging from practices of cross-border trade, the choreography of "Greater China" influences patterns of localized assimilation that reflect larger currents of bodily, cultural, and monetary mobilities related to Mainland China. Ong also argues that the fluctuating condition of diasporan Chinese identity is historically linked with operations and globalizations of capital.[92] Ong's claims register that Mainland China's foreign economic policies impact Chinese diasporan identity. Lilliana's identification as a "global citizen" draws on transnational definitions of belonging that exist through choreographies of cross-border trade and elaborated mobilities as marginals move about the world seeking economic justice and/or advantage. In short, Liliana's Chinatalian choreography of self in Italy as a "global citizen" is a result of existing racial tensions and issues of national identity which have persisted through Italy's history. Working across Italy and China, her father has constructed

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[91] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as exception (*Duke University Press, 2006), 98.

[92] Aihwa Ong, *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality* (Duke University Press, 1999), 7.

Chinatalian spaces in Wenzhou, by building housing with resources he earned in Italy.

Liliana's affiliation with economies of "Greater China" earns her a kind of social prestige in spaces that are inarguably Roman Chinatalian. Extensions of belonging from white Italians may not suit Liliana's understanding of herself but connecting to "Greater China" allows for wiggle room in which she can resist white hegemonies of racialization in exchange for an intercultural hegemony on a global scale. Some may suggest that Liliana's condition of surviving and thriving within the delicate balance of being both Italian and Chinese is perhaps, an example of China's "racial grief"; however, Lilliana believes that the international and cultural mobility afforded to her is more than most Italians have access to.

But what are the implications of fastening Chinatalian identity to "Greater China" in contemporary Rome? How can we understand "global citizenship" as a measure of resistance against racism in Italy if China's BRI choreography is linked to entrapping vulnerable countries in collaterized debt schemes? In 2013, Xi Jingping assumed office as China's president, undertaking an assertive foreign policy called the "Silk Road Economic Belt." The initiative proposed to revitalize ancient terrestrial and maritime trade routes. Through extensive Chinese capital investments that would provision for new roads, repair existing highways, install high speed trains, and invest in key oceanic transport hubs, the proposal sought to support economic projects that interlinked with Chinese trade.[93] Eventually China gave the project official designation as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The metaphoric entailments of a BRI choreography suggest that China's project literally designs movement in space and directs, controls, and manipulates bodies that move, be they

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[93] For a list of countries across the globe currently holding Chinese debt, see Forbes.com, "The Countries Most in Debt to China" at https://www.forbes.com/sites/katharinabuchholz/2022/08/19/the-countries-most-in-debt-to-china-infographic/?sh=cd8354561d8c

human bodies in traffic, or the movement of capital goods and services. At first, the lending was targeted at historically unstable countries and later, economically wealthier, relatively politically stable European Union countries like Luxembourg and Austria. Nearly half of the countries bound to BRI are in sub-Saharan Africa. Some countries joined for development assistance and others joined unwillingly because of their dire economic circumstance, to control and protect their interests in what they deemed as an inevitable expansion of "Greater China."

At its inception, BRI proposed to connect China with Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia through the construction of transportation infrastructure that would facilitate intercultural exchange and stoke economic crosscurrents. Essentially, the BRI infrastructure that would support travel would create a river of commerce and trade between countries, with resources flowing back and forth between countries. Within this choreography, there are aspects that emulate neoliberal and neocolonial designs of production and expansion. In this context, the traditional element of neoliberalism—minimal investment, maximum profit—can be discerned in China's practical bundling of resources across geographical terrain. The well-organized monopoly over multiple nations allows China to drive production and harvest profit with minimal domestic output. These debates on neoliberalism include political theorist, Wendy Brown's argument that neoliberalism is a political rationale that justifies governmental oppression and deconstructs democracy.[94] However, anthropologist, Aihwa Ong, argues that traditional definitions of neoliberalism emerged from Western paradigms of viewing the world and do not apply to

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[94] Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. Columbia University Press, 2019.

analyses of the Pacific Rim, which deploys neoliberalism as practices of "exception." And while I will discuss neoliberalism as "exception" in Chapter Three, here the important points are that China's territory of operation exceeds the geographical bounds of Mainland China and the BRI choreography offers new considerations regarding its impact on Chinatalians in Italy.

In addition to neocolonial characteristics, China's BRI choreography also shows patterns of neocolonial domination. *The Oxford Dictionary of African Politics* defines neocolonial as, "the maintenance of colonial domination after formal political independence through the sustenance of a relationship of economic, political, or ideological dependence."[95] In other words, the *neo* in neocolonial describes an uninterrupted control of a colonial power over the colonial subject, who is subjected economically and ideologically by the oppressor. If we examine China from this lens as a neocolonial power, then we can consider the impact of its dominance over vulnerable countries within its project. I will argue that China's BRI is a choreography that exhibits neocolonial characteristics through sustaining economic, political, and ideological dependence of subsumed countries. The only deviance from Oxford's definition is that many of the susceptible countries which China incorporated had never formally achieved political independence. In other words, while some choreographies actively generate communal care and wellness— such as Chinatalians offering free *taiji* lessons in Rome to all who will come— not all

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[95] Nic Cheeseman, Eloïse Bertran, and Sa'eed Husaini, "Neocolonialism," *A Dictionary of African Politics* (Oxford: 2019). https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191828836.001.0001/acref-9780191828836-e-240

choreographies engender the same kind of transparency and concern for marginal struggles, the environment, or issues of corporeal justice.

Despite this, all choreographies are generative. For example, during fieldwork in Rome, I attended a public signing of an economic pact between the Italian national tourism organization and China's national tourism group. The officiating businessman from China stated to the audience that intercultural exchange in the form of tourism between the countries would be one of the benefits of such a joint venture. He explained: "Friendship is not a choice but founded on a mutual vision." These expressions of friendship cloak China's choreography of economic and political expansion in a sales pitch of diplomacy and promise of "mutual" profit. Such initiatives of intercultural exchange—even if disguised in benign terms of *travel* and *leisure*—take advantage of the BRI infrastructure. Such economic entanglements obscure the patterns of neocolonial consumption, as countries help China devour underdeveloped countries with histories of political upheaval, fractious governments, and economic instability. At-risk countries holding hidden debt to China at over 10% of GDP include Laos, Turkmenistan, Tonga, Kazakhstan, Brunei, Namibia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and the Republic of Congo. These countries already held massive Chinese debt prior to signing away their sovereignty. Moreover, with the new contractual obligations to China, BRI forced 42 lower income countries into deeper debt. Since these loans are built upon a collateralized system of lending, some countries are now holding from 10% to 35% of GDP in debt.[96]

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[96] For more info see: Helen Davidson "The Countries Most in Debt to China.," The Guardian, Sept 30, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/30/42-nations-owe-china-hidden-debts-exceeding-10-of-gdp-says-report.

To summarize, in the beginning, BRI contracted mostly developing countries in Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa who were already holding Chinese debt. Two years later, in 2015, select countries in Central and South America also joined BRI. In 2017, the Chinese Communist Party included the BRI initiative in their constitution. At the time of this writing, more than 160 countries are bound to the BRI partnership. But can these partnerships truly be "mutual"? The answer relies on adjusting definitions of "reciprocity." Perhaps it is more realistic to assume that BRI—like any country—vests its greatest interests in its own development. Later, in the conclusion of this chapter, I will discuss the ethical implications of reciprocity and seeing the Other. In this case, China has successfully renewed choreographies of collaterized debt on a global scale. BRI countries now owe China upwards of $365 billion for investment in railway projects in Laos, urban architecture of new cities in Egypt, and future Venezuelan oil exports. In 2018, after securing the BRI and engaging nearly all of Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, parts of Central and South America, in collaterized debt, the Chinese government motioned to make Xi Jingping a President-for-life. Incidentally, the traditionally "white" or "near-white" countries like Luxembourg, Austria, and Portugal, are partners because it is simply too lucrative to be excluded from potential profit as they align themselves with China's foreign economic policies.

Chinatalian Choreographies

Italy's entry into the BRI is geohistorically significant. Rome and Xian province in China are the land boundaries of the Old Silk Road, making this Chinatalian choreography one of mythic proportions, stimulating prodigious imaginaries of colonial glory and imperial

splendor. Despite this romanticization, the strategic contemporary "friendship" between China-Italy belies antagonistic anti-Chinatalian sentiment in Italy. However, for Italy, choreographing fiscal solvency is an operation of dependence upon China. Italy is the only member of the G7 alliance to sign onto the BRI initiative. The G7 is an inter-governmental political coalition that includes the United States, France, United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Germany, and Italy. These seven countries represent 50% of world wealth. Their economic and political influence on global affairs have given them advanced economies. They self-identify as democracies and maintain close political, financial, and military diplomacy. Their collective intention is to focus on issues of security, climate change, economics, and world trade.

Therefore, the implications of Italy's role in this Chinatalian choreography are severe. The rest of the G7 countries adamantly oppose China's initiative for various reasons. Speculations suggests that the fear of subjugation is the main reason for G7 opposition to BRI as a form of militarized coercion cloaked in economic diplomacy.[97] Further, I would point out that all G7 countries (with the exception of Italy) have histories of successful colonial rule. Considering this fact along with Italy's history of colonial oppression, fascism, and economic failure, it is easy to understand why Italy signed onto BRI. Furthermore, BRI extends economic and transport infrastructure to countries with a history of economic instability and political upheaval. Unfortunately, there is no reason to preclude Italy from this categorization. Italy—despite its fancy affiliation with the G7—is in dire straits financially. Along with the other BRI-subjugated countries with weak militaries, Italy will,

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[97] Thomas D. Lairson, "The global strategic environment of the BRI: Deep interdependence and structural power." In *China's Belt and Road Initiative*, pp. 35-53. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

over time, rely on China for protection. To drive this point home, Italian and Chinese

scholars recently published a text titled, *China's and Italy's Participation in Peacekeeping*

Operations: Existing Models, Emerging Challenges. This volume of collected essays publicizes the

China-Italy military partnership. The editors begin by advertising China's "peacekeeping"

virtues in relation to Africa:

> …China has deployed approximately 20,000 peacekeepers in various regions of the world…Not surprisingly, given the commercial ties with African states, Beijing has shown a great interest in peace operations in Africa, where its peacekeepers have enhanced the quality of African peacekeepers.[98]

This passage suggests to the reader that China's peacekeeping missions in Africa are due to

China's altruistic need to democratize peace keeping. The writer also connects China's

peacekeeping motive to China's economic interests in Africa. The passage neglects to inform

the reader that peacekeepers are armed Chinese soldiers in uniform. The cover of the book

displays two Chinese United Nation "peacekeeping" officers in turquoise blue helmets. The

photographer captures these two figures from behind. The perspective is an angled bird's

eye view, as they ride a military tank into some undetermined desert territory. The tank

travels on an unpaved dirt road with a lone tree in the distance. The soldiers are faceless, and

the territory is unpopulated. This depiction presents China's diplomacy as a choreography

that relies on the mobilization of military soldiers, in the name of the United Nations. The

faceless soldiers play an anonymous and subservient role, as the perspective of the

photographer remains above their heads as an omniscient observer. The unpopulated land

suggests an open territory, ripe for development and civilization. The omission of the

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[98] De Guttry, Andrea, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu. *China's and Italy's Participation in Peacekeeping Operations : Existing Models, Emerging Challenges.* Edited by Andrea De Guttry, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014),13.

indigenous bodies from the image suggest they do not exist. Seemingly, the presentation of China and Italy's "peacekeeping" agenda reflects a layered symbolism of domination and surveillance to engender fear and the threat of militant occupation in perceived third world countries.

The Chinatalian choreographies of interest in Africa reflect neocolonial agendas which hide behind a "peacekeeping" agenda. The investment of interest is a brilliant tag-team effort to civilize the Horn of Africa and fortify the region's ability to produce capital. Recall that Italy's century-long de/colonial history with East Africa make Italy an asset to China. Where China provides primarily "logistical and financial aid,"[99] Italy is involved in the hands-on training of African peacekeeping officers. Since the late 1980s, Italy has been involved in bilateral choreographies of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).[100] In 1996, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda petitioned to the United Nations to found IGAD as an intergovernmental body for development and to manage the effects of drought in those regions.[101] Italy's involvement as "friend" of IGAD has been in the area of civilian policing.[102] Italy's contemporary involvement in Africa reflects an active postcolonial occupation through choreopolicing its former colonial territories. Italian military "friends" in former colonial territories reflects the definition of

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[99] Andrea De Guttry, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu. *China's and Italy's Participation in Peacekeeping Operations : Existing Models, Emerging Challenges*. Edited by Andrea De Guttry, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 142.

[100] De Guttry et al,139.

[101] "About IGAD," Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), accessed Jan 11, 2023, https://igad.int/about/?tab=the-history.

[102] Andrea De Guttry, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu. *China's and Italy's Participation in Peacekeeping Operations : Existing Models, Emerging Challenges*. Edited by Andrea De Guttry, Emanuele Sommario, and Lijiang Zhu (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), 139.

neocolonial choreography, as IGAD receives and depends on the political and military aid of former colonizers.

Admittedly, it may seem unfair to write of Italy and China's foreign policy as a neocolonial, militaristic pursuit. Similarly, Italy's offer of friendship to African nations helps to build necessary infrastructure to confront natural disasters such as drought seems an environmentally progressive effort toward building agricultural sustainability. To conceive of BRI countries as land holdings suitable for Chinese military posts jumps to conclusions that China envisions a choreography of arms to rival American naval military domination. None of these positions take into consideration the complexity of Chinatalian choreographies, the potential of which, exceeds our ability to anticipate possible outcomes. Indeed multilateral, and bilateral choreographies of engagement between countries is a moving negotiation. Choreographies are generative, with the capacity to affect change in ways that are unpredictable. International Studies scholar, Jeremy Garlick, writes that the difficulty of understanding BRI and its perceived threat relies on the fact that the BRI remains elusive.[103] Due to its breadth and scope, interpretations of BRI include admonitions of the project as a threat to global security. While some laud China's initiative as providing for desperate countries. BRI's initiative's rapidly evolving nature makes it difficult for analysts to apprehend. The indeterminacy of outcomes makes tenuous conditions for Chinatalians in Rome as global flux and flow continue to impact Italy's inability to reconcile its psychotic break with itself. Meanwhile, Chinatalians persist and their bodily belonging in Italy is a mobile affair punctuated by struggle and the uniqueness of individual circumstances to continue to exist despite adversity.

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[103] Jeremy Garlick, *The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative: from Asia to Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020), 142.

Conclusion

Understanding Chinatalian phenomenology in Rome requires a historical contextualization of the struggles for Italian nationhood, a discussion of the contemporary relations between Italy and China, and consideration for the individual experiences of Chinatalians. Regarding commonalities, Italy and China both possess an ancient imperial past, with extensive histories of geopolitical dominance. Centuries of expansive governance over economies allowed them to acquire overwhelming levels of wealth and control imbricate global flows of maritime and terrestrial trade and cultural exchange. While Marco Polo's excursions into China remain in question,[104] the fact that this lore continues to exist as a composition of fantasia is reflective of a contemporary mythos of Italy-China relations. In 2018, Italy slipped into a near economic coma due to chronic unemployment, irreconcilable divisions in government, and a persistently weak economy. The recession, along with crippling national debt, placed Italy in financial precarity until March 2019, when Deputy Prime Minister, Luigi Di Miao, a representative of Italy's Five Star Movement, signed onto the join BRI, a controversial move that upset the harmony of the G7 countries. In a 2020 article in the Harvard Business Review, a researcher states that China is the world's largest creditor, having loaned approximately $1.5 trillion dollars to more than 160 countries.[105] Moreover, the actual number of loaned credit and the parties involved are unknown, as issues of transparency abound. Therefore, examining the China-Italy relationship is crucial to apprehending the making of contemporary Italian history, as

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[104] Frances Wood, "Did Marco Polo Go to China?." *Asian Affairs* 27, no. 3 (1996): 296-304.

[105] Sebastian Horn, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch, "How much money does the world owe China?" Harvard Business Review, Feb 26, 2020. https://hbr.org/2020/02/how-much-money-does-the-world-owe-china

Italy holds onto the myth of a unified Italy in the midst of China's BRI—a foreign policy which some consider to be a neocolonial form of militarized occupation in the guise of friendship. In other words, a paradox has emerged—in order to hold onto Article 1, the ethos of a monolithic Italian identity, and to secure a future of fiscal sovereignty, Italy must surrender to new definitions of belonging to the global community. Yet Italy's perpetual move toward the future has landed them once again, in the past, with Giorgia Meloni, the first female Prime Minister presiding on a platform of neofascist ideology. The gender of fascist iconography has changed, but the underlying characteristics of exclusion and intolerance for difference endures.

Acknowledging the current state of Italy and its feeble, hobbling toward a fascist futurity, I conclude this chapter with a discussion on Chinatalian subjecthood. The resurrection of the Italian nation relies on the new Italians because most of them have lost sight of what it means to be with the other, in solidarity. I argue that Chinatalians are the new Italians innovating corporeal responses to exclusion. This position concerns issues of ethical subjecthood and questions of privilege and right to inhabit space. Who gets to be Italian? How do we understand Chinatalian struggles for belonging in a country that has historically grappled with existential issues of self? In the case of colonizing African territories, Italy leavened its possibilities for empire through subjugation. Through internal colonization that relied on ideologies of white supremacy—both the installation of the fascist republic and the ongoing ostracization of "dark" southerners—Italy has continually self-aggrandized and rejected large parts of its people.

"Otherness" plays a significant role in addressing Chinatalian choreographies of belonging despite Italy's ongoing inner turmoil; I suggest that the crisis of what it means to

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be Italian is at a kinesthetic standstill, a drunken stupor of debauched gluttony amidst entropic meanderings of a country experiencing the ongoing terror of existential inertia. Nothingness is epidemic in Italy and this condition of illness plunges into the collective Italian subconscious, impacting the conditions in which Chinatalians continue to define themselves as human despite the lingering trauma of Italy's imagined heterogenous nationhood.

To complicate the contention that Chinatalians are Italian (and *human*), I draw on Emmanuel Levinas' theory of the other. While Levinas provides a phenomenological vernacular for understanding justice and equality through being with the face of the other,[106] I argue that ethical subjecthood in Italy is far more complex because of Italy's existential crisis of identity. For Levinas, care for the other is an inescapable condition of being, and thus it is *the* existential truth. He posits that ethical subjecthood moves against nature, forbidding the murderousness of an individual's neutral will to place one's existence first. In other words, for Levinas, to be human is to care for the other, to confront and accept the face of the other as the most fundamental mode of responsibility. From a Levinian perspective, contemporary Italy must confront and accept the face of the other in order to reconcile their crisis of identity. The lack of self-recognition challenges processes of registering Chinatalians as present. Since for Levinas, the epistemology of the face holds the key to lifting our consciousness above primordial chaos, Italians remain sight and sensory-blind to their country's overwhelming regional, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. The atrophy of consciousness in Italy prevents consistent progress toward a Levinian "seeing" of the other in order to unsettle Italy's predispositions to exclusion as the "natural" truth.

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[106] Richard A. Cohen, ed. *Face to face with Levinas* (SUNY Press, 2012).

Levinas' face-of-the-other should theoretically condition individuals to subordinate the ontological primacy of self to an orientation of caring for the other. But Italy's ongoing history of internal rejection emboldens the rejection of Chinatalians as the other. From Levinas' position, the orientation toward the face of the other is supposed to make truth possible. However, I contend that that the near paralysis of progress toward accountability, justice, and acknowledgement of Italy as a diverse nation relies on unorthodox choreographies of the un-Italians, or those who move in and through the periphery of everyday Italianess. Ethical being with others in Italy is a technology of love, representing practices and procedures of kinesthetic rebuttal. This mirrors Levinas' notion of being with the other as a practice of loving the self through caring for the other.

While Levinian theories mark the face as the point of departure for sensing justice, Judith Butler's approach to ethical subjecthood, is decisively rooted in the body. Butler argues that the body possesses a public dimension. This is a key distinction, since the second and third chapters of this thesis will deal with the role of the body in ethical events of kinesthetic resistance. In the public sphere, the body is constituted by its agency, vulnerability, and mortality. Moreover, as a physical being, the body is also open to tactile pleasure, violence, and the risk of being used as a political instrument of dispossession, punishment, and destruction. Still, Butler's paradox of the body mirrors that of Levinas' call for the ethical exigency of responsibility to the other. If our political being is constituted by our shared corporeal vulnerability, then the recognition of that precarity should make it possible for us to register one another as equally at risk and thus, equally human. However, Butler's argument for the precarity of the body as moving society toward righteousness

reduces the fate of the body to injury.[107] Fastening precarity as a damning precondition of the body, places the body at risk of perpetual extinction. The limitations of the body are irrefutably physical, but the matter of living resides both in and beyond the body. Chinatalian choreographies in Rome acknowledge the precarity of such insistence on the finitude of the body and resist the limits of such rhetoric through kinesthetic narratives that keep Italian culture moving. The body is paradoxical. Existing is a paradox of sameness and difference.

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[107] Judith Butler, *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. (verso, 2004).

CHAPTER TWO: Chinatalian Choreographies of Domination & Care in Rome

In this chapter, I will present two case studies of Chinatalian choreographies. Previously, I discussed specific periods in Italian history to illustrate the development of white supremacy as the status quo. Now I will present data which I gathered during my immersive research in the Roman Chinatalian community in the fall and winter of 2019-2020. The first object of analysis is a happy hour event which I attended at the St. Regis Hotel in Rome. I treat this happy hour as a global Chinatalian choreography localized to Rome which represents the global China-Italy economic and geopolitical alliance. (By this, I mean to draw on aspects of the previous chapter, in which I outlined the long-standing accommodations each country has made to the other to establish, strengthen, and develop ties of economic benefit across geographical territories). The second case study is a participant interview with Marco Hu, an Italian-born Chinatalian politician and entrepreneur based in Rome. I will present them here in chronological order. A local informant invited me to the happy hour and there, I introduced myself to Marco. Having made this connection, I was able to set up a virtual interview with Marco two weeks later.

After I discuss the happy hour event, I will present data and analysis of my interview with Marco in juxtaposition with Chinatalian biographical narratives, which I draw from Lanbo Hu's recent published collection of essays titled, "*Noi Restiamo Qui," Come La Communita Chinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia* (*We are not going anywhere: How the Chinese community survived the epidemic*).[108] Hu's collection presents a chorus of voices that depict the sociocultural conditions of Italy during the pandemic. By drawing on

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[108] Lanbo Hu, "Noi restiamo qui." *Come la comunità cinese ha vissuto l'epidemi, (*Cina in Italia: Rome 2020).

these narratives, I hope to offer a diversity of Chinatalian perspectives on what it means to belong in Italy. While my interview with Marco addresses Chinatalian choreographies of assimilation, race, and space at a global scale, the narratives add depth to my apparatus of analysis by contextualizing Chinatalian belonging to a local and national Italian framework during a global crisis. For example, Marco discusses the recent global progression toward "*sovreignismo.*" This term refers to an individual or nation's prevailing attitude of patriotism with a profound desire for and belief in self-governance with economic and political self-reliance. *Sovreignismo* or "sovereignty" often moves in concert with xenophobic sentiments, anti-immigrant legislation, and heteronormative ideologies.[109] In extreme cases, *sovreignismo* reflects neo-Nazi and far right-wing nationalism. In our discussion of "*i sovreignisti,*" Marco refers to governments and the rising trend of right-wing conservative initiatives across Europe and the United States. His talking points draw on recurrent themes that emerged from the happy hour, namely, the building of alliances in the name of forward progress, and the potential for self-sufficiency.

Because Marco's perspective does not represent the experiences of all Chinatalians in Rome, I draw on counterpoints from Lanbo's collection of biographical narratives. For example, Yang Zhenfei, a young Chinatalian woman in her early 30s, who owns a bed and breakfast in Rome. Yang offers an account of riding the underground during the pandemic. She reflects on the ridicule she endured for wearing a facemask in Italy before the majority of Italy was ready to accept that an epidemic was upon them.[110] In another example, I engage

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[109] Mark Damian, "Sovereignty. Ideology of the Populist Left?." *Social Theory Papers* 1, no. 2 (2022): 22-22.

[110] Zhenfei Yang, "Una nuova primavera italiana," in "Noi restiamo qui." *Come la comunità cinese ha vissuto l'epidemi, ed.* Lanbo Hu, *(*Cina in Italia: Rome 2020), 86-96.

the narrative of Lin Liangjie, a middle-aged Chinatalian woman, who owns a travel agency in Rome. As a devout Catholic, Lin discusses her volunteer work during the pandemic, as a calling from God; she organized the distribution of masks to people during the pandemic. These accounts from women in the international tourism industry in Rome help to broaden this discussion to consider the various ways that Chinatalians acknowledge race (or not, as in the case of Lin, the devout Catholic) and amplify the different modes of choreographing Chinatalian community that contribute to producing new forms of Italian culture. As I will discuss in this chapter, the accounts of these women trouble and reinforce Marco's diplomatic expressions of race relations in Italy.[111] Choreographing a structure of analysis using the happy hour, Marco's narrative, and several female voices from the Chinatalian community in Rome help to generate a chorus of voices that bring more clarity, depth, and dimension to understandings of Chinatalian being and belonging in contemporary Italy. They are examples of how Chinatalian choreographies are producing systems of both domination, diplomacy, kinesthetic rebuttal, and connectivity.

International Happy Hour at the St. Regis Hotel

On January 21, 2020, a Chinatalian informant named Liliana, invited me to this happy hour. I met Lilliana through a mutual friend, Valentina Pedone, an author and professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Florence. Lilliana is a native-born Italian. Her parents moved from Wenzhou to northern Italy as restauranters in the 1980s. Lilliana grew up in Rome and attend the prestigious

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[111] Ailian Gu, "Fratelli del mondo," in "Noi restiamo qui." *Come la comunità cinese ha vissuto l'epidemi, ed.* Lanbo Hu, *(*Cina in Italia: Rome 2020), 103-109.

Sapienza University. After evading her mother's attempt to betroth her to a Mainland-born Chinatalian man, she married her love, a white Italian. She is the mother of two Chinatalian boys and an active member of *Associna*, a national cultural organization founded and managed by second-generation Chinatalians.

The event was a meeting between white Italian business investors in Rome and Mainland Chinese businessmen from Xian, a town in the province of Shaanxi. The gathering was a public acknowledgement of Italy and China's pledge of "friendship" and commitment to invest in international tourism between the two countries. Essentially, it was a celebration of a Chinatalian choreography in Rome. Incidentally, that night was also the day America reported its first COVID-19 case in Washington state.[112] Unbeknownst to the world at the time, the Chinese government was involved in a coverup of the outbreak, as they attempted to confine the epidemic to Wuhan, the capital city in Hubei province, a major transportation hub in central China.[113] Aware of the risk of exposure, I attended the event anyway, reasoning that I would be leaving Rome soon due to the pandemic. The choreographies of circulation became apparent to me with the outbreak of the virus, a virus which began moving through the world like the billions of Chinese diaspora people who were getting ready to migrate to China for Lunar New Year celebrations, and the capital goods and services in global circulation between Italy and China. Except for the movement of the virus,

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[112] Michelle L. Holshue,, Chas DeBolt, Scott Lindquist, Kathy H. Lofy, John Wiesman, Hollianne Bruce, Christopher Spitters et al. "First case of 2019 novel coronavirus in the United States." *New England journal of medicine* (2020).

[113] Within one week, Italy declared a state of emergency, as the first country outside of China to declare an epidemic, with its discovery of the virus across three northern regions. As the month progressed, the Italian government shut down regional borders, hospitals reach capacity, and the death tolls rose as the rest of Europe and the world watched in horror. I eventually chose to evacuate, catching one of the last direct flights before air travel to America was suspended.

all choreographies would soon come to a halt except, including that of my fieldwork. Up until then, for the last several months, I had been working to gain entry into the Chinatalian community, which during the winter months, was not an easy task. With the cold weather, people were seeking cover from the chill and interaction was increasingly difficult as I navigated the bus strikes, public holidays, and the general chaos of the bustling city. My work had finally paid off as I had become known by the local Chinatalians as the "*La Cinese dall'America*" (the "Chinese from America").

The night began with aperitivo—the Italian custom of sharing cocktails and snacks to wind down the workday and whet the appetite for dinner—and moved into long speeches by the Mainland Chinese businessmen. The final act was a commemorative contract-signing. On the whole, the night's performance was to bridge cultural ties through announcing exchange tourism and mutual financial investments in Xian, China and Rome, Italy. Throughout the night, the main speaker repeated the geohistorical significance of this partnership lies in the fact that Rome and Xian are the land-boundaries of the Old Silk Road. As I discussed in Chapter 1, China initiated the Silk Road in 130 BCE until 1453 CE, when the Ottoman Empire closed its borders to Western trade. Until then, the Silk Road served as a land and maritime trade route that connected Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Europe. With the inception of China's New Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China would establish commerce and transport across 60 countries and 3 continents, revitalizing old trade ties and establishing new business initiatives. Given this, the happy hour can be regarded as a situated example of China-Italy relations that manifests aspects of BRI choreography in Rome. My analysis shows the

contradictions of neoliberal rhetorics of friendship, mutual benefit, and free movement. Though the event seemed to emphasize free-exchange and mutual profit share, the underlying agreement was to set aside discussion and acknowledge of national policies that inherently disregard free-exchange, friendship, and free movement. (China's human rights violations of democracy, with their installation of a President-for-life and Italy's ongoing rejection and detention of migrants and refugees that arrive in droves every year).

Though I point out the performative aspects of this business gathering, I was seduced by the happy hour elements which included private coat check, an open bar, and free food. Male servers glided like swans through the crowd in white coats, balancing on their hands, silver platters displaying slender prosecco flutes with golden dancing bubbles, tiny angular squares of bruschetta soaked with cherry-tomato juice and fragrant basil, and mini cups of spaghetti swirled into coned pyramids, gleaning with olive oil and freshly diced parsley. As the evening wore on, tiramisu was served. In typical Roman ostentation (for those who can afford it), the opulent choreography of hospitality was expressed through an open bar, a cornucopia of elegantly displayed aperitivo snacks, and the usual casual, yet animated conversation in Italian. As I looked closer, I noted that the attendees were a mix of white Italian businessmen and their white Italian affiliates in causal office attire; the Mainland Chinese businessmen were accompanied by several Chinese women, who were working as translators and providing secretarial support. A smattering of local Chinatalians roamed in and out of conversation with the white Italians; as they detached from them, they gathered into a group on one side of the room.

Against the hyper-social, friendly Italian chatter which filled the lavishly adorned eighteenth-century ornate room with gilded mirrors, a Mainland Chinese businessman in an

ill-fitting suit and traveled brown leather loafers held court. Speaking formally in Chinese Mandarin, he dominated the space by speaking, at great volume and length, into a microphone at the podium. He spoke long passages, each lasting six to ten minutes, before his interpreter would translate for him into English. English was the language that connected the people in the room. The English language is an overlay of British colonial imperialism and this residue of domination slipped in between the nation bodies like a slick oil film, greasing the wheels of a well-paced machinery of neoliberal choreography. During the forty-five-minute speech, the man praised the virtues of Xian as the hometown of China's President, Xi Jinping. He reminded everyone of Xian's historical position as marking the eastern end of the Old Silk Road, which bled southward in China and then extended itself eastward through the Arab countries, toward Rome. A Mainland Chinese woman stood to the side, hands wrapped around her own microphone, translating his words into English. "Friendship is not a choice but an agreement of a common vision." This quote is significant because one could interpret this "common vision" as a threat, that is, "let there be an agreement to a common vision or else friendship will no longer be a choice." That China and Italy share a "common vision" is a tenuous assumption; I read "agreement of a common vision" as a warning that alludes to the threat of a forced alliance; of course if we consider this a forced alliance, then the statement portends neoliberal complexities. Earlier in Chapter One, I suggested that elements of China's BRI choreography reflect neoliberalism and neocolonialism. The ethos of a "friendship not by choice" points back to forced coercion of colonial oppression and "an agreement of a common vision" suggests neoliberal tendencies that

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prioritize capital gain over humanitarian efforts to choreograph care. This China-Italy

economic narrative is compelling not only because of the shared history of empire

but also on account of the pretentions to neocolonial expansion in which China is

the dominant entity in a postcolonial Italy. BRI is a mobile, calculative, choreography that

pretends to optimize life across more than 160 countries. Thus, we were witnessing China's

declaration of power in a ceremony to consecrate an exciting economic venture that harkens

to historic days of empire for both countries. However, nested or barely concealed within

this undertaking is a mutual agreement of economic exploitation.

　　As he continued to talk about the roads, highways, hotels, and resorts that China

would build to host Italian businessman and tourists in Xian and throughout China, I

considered the human labor that would be necessary to cater to such a "friendship" between

these two countries. From where would the migrant workers come to build those roads?

What kind of pay would they garner for their efforts? How would China consider the

environment as they dig into the earth to lay pipes, pour concrete, and erect buildings against

the sky? I considered the ways that the happy hour was but a choreographic decoy to distract

from critical considerations for the local land and people who will experience upheavals due

to the projects of building infrastructure to facilitate Italian tourism throughout China.

　　Meanwhile, as I stood in the back, with a group of about ten people associated with

Associna, Lilliana introduced me to Marco Hu, the president of *Associna* and a city councilor

of Prato. Our entire party consisted of Liliana, Marco, Liliana's husband, a film student from

Mainland China, his white Italian female friend, and a few other Chinatalian friends. During

the presentation, I spoke in Italian to the white Italian woman from Abruzzo (an adjacent

region to Lazio) who had come with the film student. When I asked her what she thought of

China-Italy relations, she suggested, "China is a financial superpower, so it makes sense that people are afraid of them. China is powerful. Italians are afraid." Her commentary gave me pause to consider how Italy—as a country with a history of external rule upon its territories— might look to China as a potential oppressor. However, given Italy's history of negotiating sovereignty and nationalism, perhaps, I thought, we could also consider that Italy looks to China as an opportunity for advancement. Then, looking at my watch, I realized that the Chinese officials and their translators had been talking for nearly one hour. The clicking of flash bulbs, polite murmuring, servers collecting empty glasses, and high heels tick-tacking against the parquet floors as women shifted their weight from side to side to ease their aching arches; these were the sounds of gradual disbanding and exit. The Italian and Chinese businessmen gathered for a final photo at a small table next to the podium. They were performing the ceremonious contract-signing that officially launched tourist season and the year-long campaign for China-Italy tourism.

Potential

Within this global Chinatalian choreography, I met Marco Hu. Marco provides data for an individual Chinatalian choreography localized to Rome. Accordingly, in this next section, I ask: What identities are Chiantalians generating that contradict the myth of white Italy? I present a case study based on an interview I conducted with Marco, a local Chinatalian politician and businessman who deploys storytelling as a strategy to discuss the taboo of race in Italian culture. From these data, emerged recurrent themes such as "potential" and the need for alternative role "models" for second-generation Chinatalians. While my primary approach to analysis of these data is to consider the sociological

implications of his words, I acknowledge that a semantic-rhetorical analysis is also necessary to understand the power of his words within the context of the discourse. For example, on the one hand, "models" encourage second-generation Chinatalians to pursue happiness in "unconventional" employment vocations such as bakers, lawyers, actors, and wine producers. On the other hand, a semantic-rhetorical analysis would challenge the use of the term "model" as referring to a mechanism devoid of humanness. To make the leap between the theorization of being as a modular component that can readily slip into smooth mechanizations of a working society, to a quotidian practice of unconventional being in Italy remains a living challenge for most Chinatalians. Thus, I would suggest that Marco's storytelling is an example of a Chinatalian choreography that generates symbolic support for Chinatalians by identifying alternative forms of belonging that do not reinforce stereotypes of the Chinese sweatshop laborer, souvenir shopkeeper, or street peddler. As mentioned, in exploring this topic, I will also interpret Hu's interview data alongside biographies written by Chinatalian women, and media reports of anti-Chinese discrimination. This comparison will animate the discourse of "potential" within a dynamic value assessment for variant forms of belonging in Italy. Since this project explores case studies and the implications of their kinesthetic potential to incite change, I would also make explicit the agency of the body. From a critical dance lens, the body possesses the agency to produce, disrupt, and respond to culture. However, the body is also limited in its capacity to change and produce change. Carrie Noland's theory of the "agentic body" illustrates how Chinatalian choreographies are successful in producing Italian culture through kinesthetic acts that are meaningful and purposeful.[114] I would also engage Susan Foster's notion of "kinesthetic responsiveness" as a

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[114] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment Performing Gestures/producing Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 16.

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way to talk back, subvert, and potentialize change in the face of perpetual human disavowal in Italy.

Marco Hu

Marco Hu was born in Bologna in 1963 to immigrant parents who arrived in Italy from Qingtian country in Zhejiang province, China. He grew up in Florence and graduated with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Milan's Polytechnical University. With his specialization in telecommunications, he worked in the corporate sector, working in Beijing, China and Lima, Peru. In China, Marco says he achieved his childhood dream of returning to his country of origin, to learn Chinese and to bring technology and investments to China. In Peru, Marco learned Spanish and studied the history of the Chinese in South America. These experiences abroad informed him of society's misinformation about the Chinese community in Italy. As a result, Marco feels a personal obligation to educate those with little knowledge of Chinatalians. In other words, Marco feels a responsibility to produce identity discourses that expand what he believes is a limited worldview of the Chinese diaspora. On a local scale, he believes Chinatalian representation is important for building nationwide understanding of the heterogeneity of Italianess. On a global scale, Marco is interested in creating new definitions of what it means to be a member of the Chinese diaspora, an identity that is not constrained to stereotypes.

Eventually returning to Italy and dedicating himself to the project of articulating the Chinatalian experience as one of possibility, Marco became involved

in the social life of the ethnic Chinese community in Italy. His engagement led to his election as the President of *Associna*, a national cultural organization founded and sustained by second-generation Chinatalians for the purpose of establishing ties between Italy-China and providing a support network for Chinatalians in Italy. In addition to serving as President to *Associna*, Marco is also a council member for the city of Prato in Tuscany. This political appointment is significant, since Prato's Chinese population per density is the largest outside of Mainland China. While Marco serves in Prato, he lives in Rome, where he oversees his import business. As an advocate for the Chinatalian community, Marco is sought after by local and national television, radio, and print journalists for interviews that provide insight into the Chinatalian community. In my interview with Marco, he describes the need for Chinatalian representation in mainstream Italian society, which he terms "models of potential." To achieve this, he suggests that Chinatalians should strive to inhabit non-traditional professional roles such as chefs that bake Italian pastries or farmers that cultivate and produce wine. Marco argues that Chinatalians should become lawyers, engineers, actors, and politicians in Italy. These representations of Italian identity are traditionally reserved for native-born white Italians. Therefore, Marco's call to Chinatalians to inhabit these roles is a direct challenge to the myth of white Italy and a threat to national homogeneity.

For Marco, such modeling for the Chinatalian minority is paramount to changing notions of space and place in Italy. Modeling the *unorthodox* Chinatalian identity of a baker, an actor, a wine maker means choreographing one's life in accordance with one's lived experience in Italy. For Chinatalians, modeling the "unorthodox" is to break from the Italian stereotype of the ethnic Chinese person in restaurant catering, home goods retail shops, and production of *pronto moda* in Italy. But breaking with stereotypes also means breaking with

family traditions: many first generation Chinatalian parents expect their second-generation children to work in the family business. As Anne Marsden describes, second-generation Chinatalians often forego a college education in order to help out the family business.[115] Whether that is a personal choice or preordained by the family is dependent on the individual situation. However, more and more first, second, and third generation Chinatalians are pursuing careers that represent unconventional models as producers, purveyors, and stewards of conventional Italian culture. Personal accounts of these experiences have recently become widely-known through the work of Chinatalian writers.[116]

For example, as I mentioned earlier, I will draw on Lanbo Hu's recent published collection of essays titled, *"Noi Restiamo Qui," Come La Communità Chinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia* (*We are not going anywhere: How the Chinese community survived the epidemic*).[117] A celebrated fiction and non-fiction writer, Hu is a Mainland Chinese-born Chinatalian, based in Rome, who attended Sorbonne in Paris and the University of Firenze. "*Noi Restiamo Qui*" is a collection of twenty-three biographical accounts by Chinatalians throughout Italy during the pandemic. The title includes "epidemic" because the book was issued while Italy was still the only country outside of China to have a serious outbreak of COVID-19, the first country to report racist attacks against people of Asian descent during the pandemic, and the first country to issue a government-mandated lockdown of cross-regional and air travel. Hu's rapid

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[115] Anna Marsden, "Second-Generation Chinese and New Processes of Social Integration in Italy." In *Chinese Migration to Europe*, 101-118. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.

[116] For more authors, see: Luna Cecilia Kwok, Lilliana Liao, Yang Shi Yang, Alessandro Zhu,

[117] Lanbo Hu, "Noi restiamo qui." *Come la comunità cinese ha vissuto l'epidemi, (*Cina in Italia: Rome 2020).

publication in 2020 was necessary, due to the widespread racism and anti-Chinese sentiment throughout Italy and the pervasive critique of Chinatalians as insular. She writes:

> *La communità cinese non è affato chiusa, semplicemente non abbiamo molte occasioni di socializzare, il lavoro ci toglie moltissimo tempo. La speranza è che in future possiamo migliorare i nostri sforzi di integrazione. In questo momento, condividiamo con l'Italia una sfida commune, quindi dobbiamo facrci forza, dobbiamo combattere sullo stesso fronte.[118]*

> [The Chinese community is not insular, we simply have not had many opportunities to socialize because we are working. The hope is that in the future, we can improve our ability to integrate. In this moment, with Italy, we share a challenge, and therefore we must work together to fight on the same front.] (translation mine).

Interestingly, Hu explains that Chinatalians are busy working, and therefore do not have time to socialize with Italians. This passage suggests that—with Hu as the spokesperson for Chinatalians—that Chinatalians are in fact, a productive demographic, contributing to Italy's economy; for this reason, Chinatalians are not available for the very important Italian cultural practice of socializing. Perhaps also, within Hu's remarks, I could suggest that the current conditions of integration are not ideal for Chinatalians, beyond the fact that the country, at the time of the book's printing, was in lockdown from COVD-19. Though Hu's language is polite and persuasive, emphasizing that Chinatalians and Italians should work together to affront the shared challenge of the health crisis which the pandemic has brought on for all people in Italy, her message is nonetheless identifying the great divide between the "Chinese" and the "[white] Italians."

Given my analysis of the text above and the conditions of anti-Chinese violence at that time, Hu's collection of biographical accounts from Chinatalians across Italy, *Noi Restiamo Qui,* is an example of a textual Chinatalian choreography, a written protest to targeted acts of violence, boycott of Chinese businesses, and viscous portrayal of Asian

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[118] Lanbo Hu, "Noi restiamo qui." *Come la comunità cinese ha vissuto l'epidemi, (*Cina in Italia: Rome 2020), 8.

people in the media as infectious carriers of COVID-19. Later in this chapter, I draw examples from Hu's collection, which offers stories of hope, ideals of justice, and equal representation. However, I wish first to explain the exigency of the publication and the context in which such a Chinatalian choreography was necessary in the first place.

"Yellow peril" is a derogatory term invented by nineteenth-century European imperialists to justify the enslavement and colonization of Asian people and territories. The term pathologizes Asian bodies as an ideological threat to Western civilization, white domination, and white survival.[119] During the mid-nineteenth century, the term became popular in the United States as a way to denigrate male Chinese laborers whose work ethic and customs threatened ideals of white purity. During this time, Chinese people were lynched, physically assaulted, and eventually prohibited from entering the United States by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This nineteenth-century denigration of Asian bodies and people reiterates itself in contemporary Italy as a neocolonial rhetoric to justify white Italian choreographies that attempt to hold together the myth of white Italy.

During the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, white Italians perpetrated physical and symbolic acts of violence against Chinatalian people and people of Asian descent, including young people and senior citizens.[120] Overt acts of racial segregation included a gelateria in Rome, which posted a sign refusing to serve

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[119] Lin Wu, and Nhu Nguyen. "From Yellow Peril to Model Minority and Back to Yellow Peril." *AERA Open* 8 (2022): 23328584211067796.

[120] For scholarship examining anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism in Italy, see: Dipoppa, Gemma, Guy Grossman, and Stephanie Zonszein. "Locked Down, Lashing Out: COVID-19 Effects on Asian Hate Crimes in Italy." (2022). Lee, Eunjung, and Marjorie Johnstone. "Resisting the politics of the pandemic and racism to foster humanity." *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no. 1-2 (2021): 225-232. Miyake, Toshio. "'Cin ciun cian'(ching chong): Yellowness and neo-orientalism in Italy at the time of COVID-19." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 4 (2021): 486-511.

Asian tourists. Scholar Toshio Miyake, at *Ca' Foscari* University's Department of Asian and North African studies wrote an article in 2021 cataloguing such incidents as well as racist attacks upon people of Asian descent in Italy. Miyake's accounts of violence against Asian people identify both physical and discursive acts. These acts included a political cartoon showing white Italian men in masks with clubs *en route* to beating the "Chinese" virus out of Italy; the image appeared in *La Repubblica*, one of Italy's largest general-media newspapers.

The title caption reads, "The virus is arriving in Italy and we are ready…" and the word bubbles say (from left to right, "We have already assaulted and insulted every Chinese person we see"… "This is called, 'prevention!'"[121] This cartoon illustrates the painful irony of a national newspaper reinforcing the control of the circulation of the virus, through physical violence against Chinatalian people. This cartoon is an example of discursive violence blending with physical violence, and the image suggests how Italy lags behind in building discourses of racial equality. Miyake also includes a discussion of the major hate crimes that made national news including Valentina Wang, a young Chinatalian woman in Venice, who

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[121] Toshio Miyake, "'Cin ciun cian'(ching chong): Yellowness and neo-orientalism in Italy at the time of COVID-19." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 4 (2021): 486.

was spat on by white Italian youth. Other documentation is difficult to look at, including a young man also in the northern region of Veneto, who was beaten over the head with a glass bottle by white Italian youth. Dometrio Elida, a Filipino man in Sardegna (Italy's largest island, located south of Corsica) was attacked by white Sardinians as he was walking down the street. As they beat him, the attackers yelled, "because you are a Chinese who infects with the virus."[122] Mistaken for a Chinese person, Elida, a father of two and a waiter at a restaurant, suffered facial and cranial damage. These acts of violence are not random, but targeted attempts to punish and impute people of Asian descent with the crime of spreading COVID-19. The idea that all Asian people in Italy are responsible for the spread of COVID-19 is ludicrous, but such a belief resurrects colonial ideologies of the "Yellow Peril," thereby petrifying the Asian body as an undesirable, defective entity of disease and unregulated contagion.

In light of rampant racial injustices against Asian people in Italy, Lanbo Hu's publication functions as a method of textual rebuttal. Providing personal accounts of the pandemic, the Chinatalian authors express their concern both for Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak in China, as well as for Italy. Among the many different perspectives that the collection various narrators offer, many of them describe how they discovered the outbreak, how they attempted to help their local communities in Italy, and reflections on their safety as Asian in Italy. Besides humanizing Chinatalians, the accounts reinforce Marco's call for unconventional representations of Italianess, or what he called "*modeli*" [meaning "models"]. I point out that Marco's

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[122] Toshio Miyake, "'Cin ciun cian'(ching chong): Yellowness and neo-orientalism in Italy at the time of COVID-19." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 4 (2021): 486.

use of the term "model" differs from the meaning of "model minority," a prejudicial term that became popular in America during the 1960s and that racializes and essentializes Asian Americans as politically passive individuals who acquiesce to white domination in hopes of achieving privileges reserved only for whites.[123] The idea of the "model minority" upholds Asians as others and reinforces whiteness as the idealized citizen. In the U.S. context, "the model minority myth" is reductive, denying the merit of Asian American success by attributing that success to inherent cultural traits and work ethic. In contrast, Marco's use of "model" refers to examples of protest against white Italian conventions. For him, Chinatalians have the potential to step into roles beyond those designated to them by the myth of white Italy.

Similarly, Lanbo Hu's collection of Chinatalian narratives speaks directly to alternative models of representation that are helping to shift contemporary Italy out of the dark ages regarding racial awareness and acceptance of non-white people as contributing to and producing Italian culture. For example, Qu Hua is a first-generation Chinatalian based in Pescara, a province in Abruzzo, a region east of Rome, Lazio, known for its *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo* wine. Hua is a cultivator, producer, and exporter of Italian wine. She writes expressively about her first time realizing her love for Italy:

> *La aroma e la dolcezza erano travolgenti. Degli uccelli cinguettavano spensierati sul ramo di un fico mentre si godevano la bellezza della natura. Improvvisamente, realizzai che quigli uccelli erano più felici di me! Mi resi conto che fina a quell momento non ero stata che una macchina in corsa, lontana dal godersi la vita, così presi una decisione che sorprese tutti: quella di acquistare il vigneto![124]*

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[123] Karen Shimakawa, *National abjection: the Asian American body onstage* (Duke University Press, 2002), 12.

[124] Qu Hua, "Coltivando una in Italia" in Noi resitamo Qui! Come la communità Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia, (Roma, Cina in Italia), 80.

The aroma and sweetness were overwhelming. The birds chirped without a care in the world, on a fig branch while enjoying the beauty of nature. Suddenly, I became aware that the birds were happier than me! I realized that up until that moment, I was nothing but a racing car, far from enjoying my life, so I made a decision that surprised everyone: that of purchasing a vineyard! [translation mine].

Here Hua describes the moment she became conscious of her belonging to Italy, expressing it as a sensorial experience with nature. She connects with "*la aroma*" of the natural environment, describing the sound of the chirping birds, and her own sense of stillness. This phenomenological description of "*Ma*" is significant. *Ma* is an eastern philosophy pervasive throughout somatic practices such as marital arts that refers to the "gap" or the "in-between" space. In Japanese architecture, *Ma* is not empty space, but the space between columns that gestures to the aesthetic fullness of meaning as one experiences the totality of a structure. In Chapter Three, I further discuss *Ma* as a kinesthetic experience and dance tactic of resistance to Chinatalian exclusion in Italy. In the context of Hua's excerpt, *Ma* appears as a moment of pause that brings a sudden awareness of her own mobility as she realizes, "I was nothing but a racing car." As the birds chirp, and she takes in a breath of "aroma and sweetness," Hua is suddenly aware of the potential of her life in Italy. The possibility of her being in Italy and taking on the role of a farmer and owner of a vineyard is the kind of "model" that Marco describes as necessary for Italy to progress toward equality. Further, I would argue that Hua's awareness comes from a sense of bodily agency in which she is able to experience a kinesthetic and phenomenological decentering that awakens her to the possibilities of her future in Italy. She concludes her narrative with: "…*noi conosciamo questo Paese e ne siamo innamorati. Credo che il future del vino italiano e degli altri prodotti in Cina andrà sempre migliorando.*" (…we have come to know this Land, we are in love. I believe that the future of Italian wine and other products in China will continue improving). Hua emphatically declares

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her love for Italy, a love that is expressly devoted to the caretaking of the land and its fruits. She gestures to China's ability to produce as a way to hold together a potential relationship of the two countries that for her, is intertwined in a dream for improving relations through her stewardship of an Italian tradition of artisanal winemaking. This narrative is an example of how Chinatalian choreographies can be intentional and reverent instances of organized care. In this case, Hua expresses an intention to sustain the Italian tradition of caretaking of the land, in hopes that "*questo Paese*" [this Land] will recognize the transnational possibilities of Chinatalians as "models" of a new Italy.

For his part, Marco's advocacy for "models" of potential began with his work in the white Italian community. Returning from his work abroad, Marco re-entered Italy with a desire to educate white Italians. He claims that initially, he wanted to help white Italians understand that conventional Italian notions of belonging limit Italy's potential. As a result of this ongoing engagement, he has undertaken a secondary commitment, which involves working with the second generation Chinatalian community, encouraging them to take a more active role in social justice initiatives. His work artfully choreographs dialogues that encourage openness as opposed to focusing on language or words that would incite closure. For example, in Italy, common parlance does not recognize words like "race" and "racism." Speaking to informants—including local white Italian shopkeepers, AfroItalian, Eastern European, and Fillipina domestic workers, Italian scholars of SinoItalian literature and postcolonial studies—I continually found an evasion of the words "race" and "racism." These words remain taboo in conversation, though they often appear in academic publications and on protest placards during a demonstration. These words do not allow for open dialogue on the pervasive inequalities that marginals face in Italy. As Marco became

more involved socially, he also became involved politically and found strategies to discuss integration. In 2019, he became the first Chinatalian council member of Prato, Italy.

For Marco a Chinatalian who was born, raised, and currently living and working in Italy, the model minority refers to unorthodox roles which Chinatalian could create for themselves. The model minority elicits a connection to the futurity of Italy as a more just space, a place of becoming and forging alternative realities and possibilities for being. The potential of Italy as a just space is reliant on the representation of alternative modes of being human. Alternative modes of humanness produce place in Italy. For example, geographer Kathleen M. Kirby writes, "The world still runs on the idea that 'normal' ideal subjects are standardized (though individualized), self-enclosed, self-determining, mobile, and autonomous."[125] In other words, exceptions to the "ideal" create space for the reconceptualization of what it means to be subject in society, culture, in the country where one was born but does not fit the idea of what society considers "normal." Emplacement is successful only when humans are able to inhabit space with a society's full consideration of humanness. Modeling the minority produces, performs, and choreographs identity that is inherently Chinese-Italian; choreographies of the model minority overturn, subvert, and unfasten the imposed constraints of un-humanness which first generation Chinese in Italy were subject to or constraints that they accepted as a part of their assimilation. Chinatalian "models" provide representation of Chinatalians in conventionally "white" spaces. Therefore, to be an engineer like

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[125] Kathleen M. Kirby, *Indifferent boundaries: Spatial concepts of human subjectivity* (Guilford Press, 1996), 39.

Marco, with a degree from a prestigious university in Milan, to be elected to public office, and to be sought after for radio, journalism, and televised interviews are all breaks from convention. Marco represents an alternative model—alternative to the traditional tropes of Chineseness in Italy that are often reiterated as the monolithic way of being. Models are sources of inspiration.

To better understand cultural hegemony in Italy, which reinforces the myth of white Italy, Gaia Giuliani's work is helpful. Considering national homogeneity and the myth of white Italy, Giuliani writes that racism in Italy is easily concealed, commonly accepted, and widely reproduced. Italy's colonial history remains suppressed in a collective cultural amnesia and the reinforcement of a white Italy is reliant on a clearly constructed notion of race and racialized bodies.[126] Additionally, white hegemonic discourses of othering in Italy sustain injustice through the constitutive action of invisibilization and hypervisualization of racialized and gendered others. In other words, racialized others exist to reinforce white supremacy, and their very existence as a racialized Other precludes them from the category of human. Giuliani's work further substantiates the value of registering the lived experiences of Chinatalians as contributing to the diversity of Italy which the colonial archive strives to suppress. Furthermore, Giuliani's lens also allows us to consider the nuances of Marco's statement for more "models of potential." Does Marco mean that Chinatalians are responsible for producing these models of potential? What is the role of white Italians in generating these "models of potential"? Whose potential are we talking about? Can white Italy access their potential to concede acknowledgement of their cultural amnesia and the

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[126] Gaia Giuliani, *Race, nation and gender in modern Italy: Intersectional representations in visual culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5-7.

widespread, persistent racism? Who is in charge of granting access to Italian belonging? Do Chinatalians even want to belong?

The answers are more complex than assigning blame upon white Italy and loading the burden of belonging onto Chinatalian bodies. In theory, Chinatalians can strive for jobs, housing, and educational status beyond what Italian society deems appropriate for them as racialized bodies that exist in the margins of belonging. However, their pursuit of a temporal and spatial justice is not guaranteed, given Italy's resistance to accepting that racism is alive and well. *Potential* is the possibility for change; if we accept that there is a possibility for transformation, then it is *possible* that Italy will, to a degree, acknowledge racism. However, fostering full belonging for racialized others is perhaps impossible. The ethnic Chinese body may never experience full belonging in Italy. In fact, some scholars, like Heather Merrill, adopt a position of *Afro-pessimism*, which argues that Black people have suffered the most of all the subaltern demographics and thus, their freedom within the current conventional sociocultural, economic, and political systems will never grant Black people liberation or belonging; she argues that Italy is beyond rehabilitation from racism.[127] However, this does not foreclose on the possibility for change. Given Giuliani's constitutive link between erasure and hypervisibility of racialized others such as Chinatalians in Italy, we can understand Marco's argument for "models of potential." Both Chinatalians and Italy need models of potential, new images of positive representation that break the myth of white Italy and incite new definitions of cultural integration and what it means to be human in Italy. To be human is to be visible, acknowledged as an equal member of Italian society.

This point of view aligns with my theory of the *unvisible*, a term I draw from

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[127] Heather Merrill, *Black Spaces: African Diaspora in Italy* (Routledge, 2018).

Katherine McKittrick, who adapts the term *unvisible* from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* a novel that sets forth the theory of the black man as an imperceptible social, political, and geographic subject.[128] The term *unvisible* signifies the paradox of the black body in spatial terms. In this paradox, blackness embodies both possibility and impossibility. On the one hand, the black body is impossible when placed within what George Lipsitz terms the "white spatial imaginary";[129] he is black and thus he is *invisible*— an incomplete citizen. To put it another way, his blackness signals that he is categorically inadequate to be classified as human; thus, his *in*existence is contingent on his partial subjecthood. On the other hand, the black body is possible because his visible blackness produces his conceptual, metaphorical presence within the white spatial imaginary. The black body is an entity that exists to be partially erased, abjected, or completely expunged from the moral geographies of pure white space. The paradox of the *un*visible black body within the white spatial imaginary is the generative origin from which McKittrick evinces to disclose the possibility of different imaginaries— landscapes composed of people varied in gender, class, sexuality, ableness, and so forth—that reveal themselves as we recognize places of blackness as geographies of alternative, vital existence.

Therefore, Marco's call for Chinatalian "models of potential" is a challenge to both Chinatalians and white hegemonic Italy; it is a rhetorical strategy that reinforces and unsettles the status quo. From Marco's perspective, conventional Italian culture is limited. For example, first generation Chinatalians impose limits upon their second-generation children in

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[128] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle* (U of Minnesota Press 2006); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible man. 1952* (*New York: Vintage* 19 1995).

[129] George Lipsitz, "The racialization of space and the spatialization of race theorizing the hidden architecture of landscape." *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007), 13.

Italy. First-generation Chinatalian parents often expect that their second-generation children will take over the family business, thereby passing on the pursuit of their individual dreams, including a college education. Internal familial pressures and the external expectations of conformity to or exclusion from mainstream (white) Italian society produce the need for "models of potential" for second-generation Chinatalians. I would underscore the nuance of Marco's statement, which suggests that "models of potential" also serve first-generation Chinatalian parents, encouraging their re-imagining of possibilities for acceptable roles for their children in contemporary Italy. Gabriele Proglio argues that diasporic identities are elaborated through a process of addition and subtraction.[130] Therefore, belonging is a creative process and generating models for potential is an aesthetic process of choreographing one's futurity and the possibility for full-belonging.

Admittedly, categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality are all factors that impact one's mobility in any society.[131] However, in Italy, the convention is that white Italians retain the sole right to perform and produce Italian culture. Further, numerous scholars argue that racism in Italy is deeply tied to the rearticulation of the colonial archive.[132] In other words, if white Italians retain the sole right to produce Italian culture, then historical patterns of white privilege repeat themselves by undermining the progress of integration that contemporary Italy has achieved since

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[130] Proglio's oral history research examines the expressions of memory by African migrants that move between former Italian colonies on the Horn of Africa and Italy. See: Gabriele Proglio, *The Horn of Africa Diasporas in Italy: An Oral History* (Springer Nature, 2020).

[131] As I mentioned in the introduction, Patricia Hill's work on intersectionality thoroughly engages this topic as a theoretical approach to understanding the world and the unique experiences of individuals within it. See: Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

[132] See for example, the works of Lombardi Diop and Romeo and Gaia Giuliani, Gabriele Proglio.

the fall of fascism. Indeed, the complexities of the Italian cultural copyright have deep roots that tie back to an existential crisis of unified identity. As I previously described, this chapter focuses on the contemporary Chinatalian practices of identity and place-making in the face of existing sociocultural barriers that emerge from the intersection of issues like unemployment, racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. For marginals, such as people in the Chinatalian community, to inhabit the role of an Italian pastry chef, grape farmer, wine producer, or politician remains a rarity. Therefore, Marco's encouragement for Chinatalians to create new identities for themselves and challenge common stereotypes means that he identifies a scarcity of sociocultural mobility afforded to marginals in Italian society.

Marco's life experience working and living abroad informs his worldview. He expressed that most people do not consider the myriad ways that the Chinese diaspora exists in our contemporary world—there are ethnic Chinese people being born in Italy who are generating a culture and identity that is specific to their experience of Italy, and sometimes, as in the case of Marco, Chinatalians living and working abroad in China and South America. I ask Marco about hybridity, inhabiting the in-between spaces as a member of the Chinese diaspora. I ask if he thinks it is possible to be both Chinese and Italian. Marco's answer further complicates the discussion. He says: "Yes, here, it depends [on the individual] and also on the historical moment because this is a historical moment of Trump [at the time of this interview, Donald Trump was President of the United States], of Great Britain [which at the time, was initiating Brexit, removing itself from the European Union]." Marco goes on to say that *i sovreignisti* in Italy are experiencing a great political success. He compares this to China's political impetus in a similar nationalistic direction that pushes a rhetoric of a united China. He continues:

…questo qua è un momento storico in cui i sovranismi stanno un po' tornando di moda in un certo senso. Questo qui è il momento dell'America di Trump, della Gran Bretagna che è uscita dall'Unione Europea. I pariti sovranisti in Italia stanno avendo un grosso successo politico. Anche in Cina le politiche cinese vanno un po' in questa direzione diusare il nazionalismo come un collante per la Cina unite e quindi alla base di questo sovranismo c'è il pensiero che le identità siano esclusive, per cui uno è italiano, se insomma è di origine italiana ed è sempre stato in Italia, e cosí via. E si pensa quindi che non sia possibile essere sia italiani che cinesi. Questo qui per me è una limitazione del proprio potenziale. Io faccio sempre un esempio banale ma che aiuta un po.' Io per esempio sono un motociclista uso la moto e ho anche l'identitá del motociclista. Chi è un vero motociclista quando ci si incontra per strada ci si salute. Si capisce che uno è un motociclista dall'abbigliamento o per esempio vedi la scarpa un po' consumata sul lato sinistro perche un motociclista usa la moto e fa il cambio con il piede e questo qui fa un po di communita, pero il fatto di essere motociclista non mi impedisce di guidare anche la macchina. Quindi il discorso dei sovranisti adesso è obbligarti a essere o motociclista o automobilista o altro pero in realta la liberta di passare da una inedita all-altra ti da dei mezzi piu. Io ho a disposizione le due moto della motociclette e le quattro route dell'automobile quindi ho sei route invece di averne due or quattro. E in grossa parte lo trovo vero per quell oche riguarda le identita etniche o nazionali nel senso che se noi limitiamo noi stessi in una sola inedita ethnica perdiamo molto di quell oche possono essere molte opportunita. Diciamo cercare di rimanere cinesi qua in Italia ci preclude di imparae qualcosa di diverso e ci limia. Quindi il ruolo della sociata dovrebbe essere quello di far si c he una persona realizzi il cento per center del proprio potenziale della propria richezza, quella li' è il tipo di societa che ha il terreno per uno sviluppo umano. Quindi focalizzarsi su una sola identita e qualcosa di limitativo. In questo momento storico limitativo è piu semplice cadere in questa sorta…Questo qua viene un po' dal clima politico che c'è in Europa in Italia in occidente e un po' un po da quallo che viene dalla Cina in questo momento. Si fa mota enfasi sulla nazione. È una cos ache limita il pensiero critico.[133]

…this here is a historical moment in which the sovereigntists are returning to popularity in a certain sense. This here is the moment of Trump, of Great Britain, [a country that] is exiting the European Union. The sovereigntist parties in Italy are coming into great political success. Likewise in China the Chinese politicians are moving in a similar direction of using nationalism like a lasso [to hold together a sense of] Chinese unity. And therefore at the very foundation of this rise in sovereignty, there is somehow, this idea that identity is exclusive, [only] for the person who is Italian, who originated in Italy, and who has always been in Italy, and so forth. And so one thinks that it is not possible to be [both] Italian [and] Chinese. This for me is a limitation of potential.

I always give an example which is banal but helpful. I, for example am a motorcyclist. (The kind of real motorcyclist that you'd recognize as one passing on the street and you'd wave). One would recognize a motorcyclist from the clothing—or for example you would see the shoes are a bit scuffed on the left side because a motorcyclist uses the [kickstand] with his [left] foot and this [realization] produces a bit of communality. But the fact of being a motorcyclist does not impede me from

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[133] Marco Hu (politician, business owner) in conversation with author, Feb 2020.

also driving a car. And in a big way, I find this is true for those that regard ethnic or national identity… in the sense that we are limiting ourselves with one ethnic identity…we lose so much of what could be other opportunities. To try and remain Chinese in Italy precludes learning something different and that is a limitation. Therefore, the role of a society should be to make a person achieve one hundred percent of the potential, that there is the kind of society that provides a foundation for the development of human kind. Therefore to focus on one identity is a limitation. In this historical moment of limitations, it is easier to concede to one side or the other. This is the current political climate in Europe, in Italy, in the Western world, and also a bit in China. There is a great emphasis on nationhood. This is a limitation of critical thinking. (Translation mine)

Clearly, Marco's narrative offers his own lived perspective and a frustration with the current "political climate" that he believes is forcing a binary opposition of belonging and exclusion based on ethnicity or nationhood. Marco discusses the narrowness of nationalistic attitudes without ever mentioning the words racism or *appartenenza* ("belonging"). His story about being a motorcyclist, though "banal," I would suggest is an attempt to express his negotiation of belonging in Italy as struggle, pleasure, and an everyday reality. On first encounter, I misjudged his narrative, thinking that he was evading the conversation about race. But upon further reflection, I realize that he believes the issues of belonging (and exclusion) is not only a global phenomenon that has been trending (at the time of the interview), but very much a human phenomenon.

Throughout the conversation, I sensed that Marco and I were dancing around the taboo of race in Italy (because when we started the conversation, I told him that was a topic we might discuss). After he told his story about being a motorcyclist and renounced the nationalist movement in his diplomatic way, I ask him, more directly about racism in Italy, to which he replied:

> …*io penso che il razzismo esista ma bisgona fare anche attenzione a usare la parola perche crea una chiusura subito istantanea nell'interlocutore, no? È allora bisogna lanciare un allarme sul*

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razzismo (che) deve avere come obiettivo il fatto di evitarlo e di instaurare un dialogi di modo che non lo sia.[134]

…I think that racism exists one needs to be careful using the word because it creates a sudden, instantaneous close with the person you're speaking to, no? And therefore we need to raise an alarm on racism but the objective is to avoid [the word] as it is better establish a dialogue in a way that [is but is not a dialogue on racism]. (Translation mine)

As I ponder his words now, I experience them again here as when I heard them for the first time. I could not be sure then if he was talking to me or saying aloud a kind of mantra that helped him to keep the dialogue on race going. Whether his words of caution ("one needs to be careful") was a pedagogical gesture to teach me how to speak about race in Italy, or one that pacified me into thinking we actually *were* talking about race, I will never know. I also do not intend to impose meaning but it is possible to infer, at the very least, that we are talking about a particular kind of belonging, a kind that Marco himself has experienced in Italy as a Chinatalian. To this end, I acknowledge that Marco and I differ dramatically in our approaches to discussing belonging in Italy. I tend to focus on race in a literal way, and he tends to avoid the word, in order to broaden the discussion from "closure." The difference in our approaches, I would argue, is a result of our lived experiences—Marco grew up as a racial minority, among white Italians. He was educated alongside white Italians, played soccer with them, dated them, and socializes with white Italians and Chinatalians—both personally and through his work in the community. My perspective growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown offered an entirely different experience, where I grew up among peers that looked like me and spoke my native language. Though we may both look similar because we are both ethnically Chinese, belonging for Marco in Italy, as a Chinatalian, is an entirely different experience of negotiating his *appartenenza*.

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[134] Marco Hu (politician, business owner) in conversation with author, Feb 2020.

To Marco's credit, he is sought by multiple media outlets in local and national interviews and the Chinatalian community (particularly the second-generation) trust him, looking to him as a knowledgeable advocate; the first generation Chinatalians who know of him look to him as their cultural mediator. Still, as an American, I found his approach to discussing race relations in Italy on first encounter, frustrating, agitating, and at the same time, entirely "[Whit]alian." I also misjudged him during the conversation, as I thought about how his Chinese zodiac sign—the rabbit—factored into his expression—or rather, his passive circumvention of "race." Rabbits are congenial, always seeking harmony, and dislike social aggression. They have calm, amenable personalities and like to keep the peace. In further reflection, I realize that my own prejudices colored my view during the conversation. In other words, what I initially believed to be a politician's avoidance of [race] issues (in an effort to pacify the masses), I understand now as a well-crafted choreography that allows him full mobility in discourses that remain challenging for the majority of Italian society to discuss—belonging in regard to a sense of country, nationhood, sovereignty, culture, identity, *and* race.

Even still, in the context of postcolonial Italy, Marco's narrative suggests that race is still a difficult (if sometimes non-existence) subject. As I mentioned earlier, the word *race* itself never surfaced from within his vocabulary. I would suggest that the absence of the word *race*, gestures to how deeply divisive the topic remains; a (non-existent) discourse that through its non-existence, impacts the lived experiences of minorities in Italy. That racism is a topic that necessitates coding in colloquial language speaks volumes about race in Italy,

about the proper place of bodies, and the spaces they are allowed to inhabit.[135]

Marco's story about the motorcyclist and automobile driver centers around locomotion and mobility. If we accept the narrative of the body—the body that can move from riding a motorcycle to driving a car—then we can understand Marco's analogy as a reference to an "agentic" body. In the next section, I will discuss Marco's narrative by employing the lens of Carrie Noland's "agentic body."[136] However, it is also necessary to understand the cultural nuances of Marco's narrative and how it resonates with Italian ideologies of travel, pride, and nostalgia.

I understand Marco's choreography of what it means to be Chinatalian as an expression of public support for and critique of Italy and its capacity to renew itself as a nation. I suggest his choreography is analogous to "social work." Shannon Jackson's theory of "queer imagining of social work"[137] explores public performance as intrinsically related to producing social support for marginal communities. In Marco's case, *queer* would describe the marginalized Chinatalian as an entity that inhabits the periphery of Italian society. *Queer* qualifies the rhetorical method and mode that Marco uses to discuss race—he negates race to discuss race, evading the taboo in order to fixate on a concept that remains elusive to Italians. Marco's queering of race implicates futurity and more specifically, the potential of Chinatalian alterity to enter mainstream Italian culture. As Jackson states, "the impulse to

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[135] Heather Merrill has also written extensively and passionately about the cultural amnesia of Italy's colonial past and the residue of racism and the word race as a taboo in contemporary Italy. See: Heather Merrill, *Black spaces: African diaspora in Italy* (Routledge, 2018).

[136] Carrie Noland, *Agency and embodiment: Performing gestures/producing culture*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

[137] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 247.

reinvent the choreography of care has always been central to queer theory as many of us have imagined its promise and possibility."[138] I use Jackson's theory here to suggest the unorthodoxy of Marco's labor of recontextualizing contemporary Italian being as multifaceted without ever mentioning the term race. I recognize that the American use of the term "queer" is an obtuse expression; I appropriate the term here to identify the "queer" in Marco's public "social work" and the way in which he addresses difference without doing it outright.

Ironically, motorizing the image of race activates Italian kinesthetic impulses of travel, freedom, and mobility, ideals which are deeply entrenched in the Italian imaginary, and more problematically, connected to neofascist ideologies of speed and machines. The Italian poet, Fillipo Tommaso Marinetti's infamous *Manifesto of Futurism* declares:

> 2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry…3. Up until now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstacy, and slumber. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a fevered insomnia, a racer's stride, the mortal leap, a punch and slap.[139]

Marinetti romanticizes the violence of futurism's speed and "aggressive action" by comparing it to poetry. His choreography for the future is a movement directive to take a "moral leap" and usher Italy forward with a "punch and slap." Even still, the Fiat Lingotto factory in Turin, Italy stands as an emblem of working-class pride and a reminder of the economic boom that developed through the 1950's in Italy's car manufacturing industry that made Italy world-famous.[140] Fiat car production afforded Italians spatial mobility within Italy

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[138] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 247.

[139] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *The manifesto of Futurism* (Passerino Editore, 2016), 1.

[140] Francesca Fauri, "The Role of Fiat in the Development of the Italian Car Industry in the 1950's." *Business History Review* 70, no. 2 (1996): 167-206.

as well as economic mobility in global trade and commerce with the establishment of the

European Economic Community and financial investments in Fiat production and

distribution from the U.S. Marshall Plan. The Fiat entered the global market without much

foreign competition, securing Italy's success as a lead manufacturer of steel and automobiles

post WWII and into the golden age of Italian industrialization from the 1950's-1970's.

During this time, car production produced notoriety for Italy as well as a sense of pride for

the white working class that flooded from the south to the northern cities of Genoa, Milan,

and Turin, which for Italy, comprised the "Golden Industrial Triangle" of production.

Marco's gestural expression of cars appeals to the core of Italian memory, entraining

collective nostalgia for the bounty of the past, recollections of mass migration, and national

pride in the permanence of their role within the global community as producers of the Fiat,

Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, and Vespa scooters.

Conversely, while there are places for Chinatalians in mainstream Italian life,

these roles are often considered by white Italians as jobs which reinforce popular

stereotypes. On the assimilation of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco at the turn

of the twentieth century, Ronald Takaki writes that Chinese people worked as

launderers not because they are intellectually inferior and better suited to wash

clothes, but that there were not many jobs for Chinese immigrants.[141] Thus, the

reality of racism which precluded equal employment opportunities generated a

stereotype that all Chinese people are laundry shop keepers. This socioeconomic

isolation produced further containment; the distancing of unwanted Chinese bodies

in America reinforced stereotypes of Asians as secretive, insular, tax-evaders, and

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[141] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore: A history of Asian Americans (updated and revised)* (eBookIt. com, 2012).

progenitors of unethical business deals. Marco tells me that these same stereotypes exist in contemporary Italy. He adds that in reality, the variety of jobs that Chinatalians hold in Italy are various and dependent on the region. For example, in the Lazio region where Rome is located, Chinatalians are engaged primarily in the service industry as proprietors of hotels, tourism agencies, tour guides, souvenir shops, and restaurants. These businesses cater to an international clientele and feed the desire for local Romans who wish to experience Asian food and culture as a respite from Italian cuisine. Interestingly, Chinatalians in Rome also open restaurants with Japanese and Korean names to differentiate them from the many Chinese restaurants in Rome.

The Agentic Chinatalian Body

Comparative arts scholar, Carrie Noland's theory of the "agentic body" contends that culture is living and moving like the body. Marco's motorcyclist walks over to the car, opens the door, gets in his seat, turns the ignition, and becomes a driver. Noland's theory of the "agentic body"[142] allows us to reflect on the challenges and potentials of the body's power to affect change. That is, Marco's motorcyclist has the agency to move from the motorcycle to the car, but how culture shifts to perceive him as both motorcyclist and car driver is another process. Noland contextualizes her theory of the agentic body within a framework of cultural production, as she is concerned with the role of bodily movement in dialogic relation to culture. For Noland, culture is both embodied and contested through corporeal practice. The body both manifests and challenges culture through kinetic acts or

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[142] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment Performing Gestures/producing Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 16.

gestures,[143] which are learned bodily techniques. While gestures have the potential to rupture and resist culture, as kinetic acts, gestures also recapitulate learned, bodily behaviors. Therefore, if we assume that Italian culture cannot imagine the potential of a motorcyclist as *also* an automobile driver, then we can understand the importance of the agentic body in gesturing to the transition. However, where the agentic body fails here is to change culture single-handedly. As Noland states, culture is living and moving and the negotiation of a body's place in culture is a dialogic conversation that is constantly being negotiated between the body and space.[144]

Additionally, according to Noland, *agency* is related to a biologically and culturally informed use of the body. An informed use of the body imparts a kind of awareness that is "agentic" in the sense that it shapes what a subject does and feels. In other words, bodily movement produces kinesthetic feedback that informs the choices a subject makes. From this lens, we can understand that the agentic body is an entity that is keenly aware of her surroundings and environmental stimuli. For example, Marco's embodied experiences of being Chinatalian in Italy and his experiences abroad inform his agentic re-telling of this analogy to engage issues of racial belonging and the potential for integration in Italian society. Thus, Susan Foster's theory of kinesthetic responsiveness is also helpful here to understand Marco's analogy of bodily agency. Foster argues that an agentic body possesses the capacity for "kinesthetic responsiveness."[145] Bodily interventions are possible when

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[143] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment Performing Gestures/producing Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.

[144] Noland, 2.

[145] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 412.

protestors read other bodies in the space and make split-second choices for movement to self-protect or to improvise an alternative way forward. In other words, the agentic body's potential to make change in the world relies on her awareness of her subjecthood and thus, change making is reliant on an agentic body's awareness of personal routines and cultural habitus in the world they intend to change. In this way, the body and culture are locked in a dance that mediates the direction of agency, culture, and invariably, subjecthood. For my part, then, I read the agentic body in protest as a dancing body in flux; the agentic body is always negotiating an unfinished definition of space, place, and power. Marco's story is an invitation to perceive race through the body by gesturing to Italy's capacity to change. There is never an insistence on his part to assign blame or claim self-righteousness. The power of his Chinatalian choreography lies in his rhetorical use of mobility as a common theme (and a human right). Aesthetically, his approach is one of care and mindfulness of the conditions on which he is shedding light.

Because Marco's experience is not enough to represent that heterogeneity of Chinatalians in Rome, I now turn to excerpts of biographical narratives from Lanbo Hu's collection of short stories (which I referenced earlier in this chapter). I acknowledge that combining Marco's story, excerpts from Hu's collection, and my own reflections on what it means to belong (as a Chinese American researcher compiling data on the Chinatalians) is an act of choreographing a specific design of movement that maps a Chinatalian choreography particular to my experience as a woman in Rome. To that, I now move to interpreting the narratives of two Chinatalian Roman women. The first—Yang Zhenfei—illustrates the ways that anti-Chinese racism affected her as a passenger on Rome's underground metro; I include here as a way to provide a counterpoint to Marco's narrative (in which race is never

touched as an object of discussion); with Yang, it is central to her narrative of belonging in Rome during the start of the pandemic. The second—Lin Liangjie—provides another way to understand belonging in Rome as a religious duty to serve humanity. Lin's narrative shows how choreographies of community are both subject to and independent of race, ethnicity, or nationhood. These additions to my apparatus of analysis hopefully help to indicate the ways that belonging and identity, while sometimes fluid and slippery processes, exert a force that is viscerally felt as a signal to move, act, react, and respond.

Yang Zhengfei arrived in Italy in March of 2009 to study Italian language at the University of Roma Tre and eventually graduated with a degree in Media and Communications from the University of Tor Vergata (also in Rome). She earned her Masters in Organizational Analysis and Social Science from the prestigious University of La Sapienza (in Rome) and in 2018 (two years before the COVID-19 pandemic) she opened her own bed and breakfast. As I mentioned earlier, Rome is a tourist destination and has one of the largest Chinatalian communities in Italy. Those who move from China to Italy for study often return to China, though some remain in Italy to pursue business. Yang's profile not only offers a counterpoint to the earlier description of international tourism represented by the Whitalians and Chinese business men that appeared earlier in this chapter, but Yang represents the first-generation Chinatalian perspective of the tourism industry that is central to the Roman economy (though her birth year places her in the same age bracket as second-generation children native-born in Italy, to parents that arrived during the original wave of migration from China in the 1990's). In her early thirties, Yang

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provides a transnational perspective on the Chinatalian experience in Rome during the start

of the pandemic. She writes:

> *Quando non avevo ancora iniziato a portare la macherina, un giorno in metropolitan ho incontrato un gruppo di giovani che, dietro di me, deliberatamente enfatizzavano l'atto di indossare la stessa allo scopo di deridere la popolazione cinese. Il convolgio era pieno di gente ed io, che non volevo prestare loro attenzione, ho captato cosa stesse succedendo attarverso lo sguardo della maggior parte delle persone imbarazzate per la loro paggliacciata. Successivament ho iniziato ad usarla anche io. Un giorno mentre attendevo la metropolitana, un ragazzino accanto a me si è messo a schermirmi tossendomi addosso. Quella volta ho ricambiato il gesto. C'erano anche cinese che sentivano in imbarazzo e non indossavano la mascherina. In realtà avrebbero volute metterla poiché no sisentivano al sicuro. In particular modo chi lavorava a stretto contatto con il pubblico. Percepivanno che i client non si sarebbero sentiti a loro agio, or addirittura avrebber provate una sorta di disgust. È stato così che molti uonimi d'affari cinesi, consapevoli della gravità dell'espandersi dell-epidemia, hanno preso la decisione di sospendere le proprie attività in attesa che la situazione migliorasse sotto il forte controllo della Cina. Anche io ero molto preoccupata per la mia attività: alcuni client appena vedevano che il B&B era gestito da personale cinese, andavano via scuotendo la testa.[146]*

> When I had not yet begun to wear a face mask, one day on the metro, I encountered a group of young kids, who behind me, deliberately pretended to wear a face mask to make fun of Chinese. The crowd was full of people and because I didn't want to attract attention, caught what was happening through the faces of the people who were embarrassed for the youth's jeering. After that, I started using my mask. Another day, while riding the subway, a young boy next to cough on me. That time I returned the gesture. There were also Chinese that felt embarrassed to wear a face mask and for that reason, did not. In particular, those who worked in contact with the public. They perceived that clients would not feel at ease, or would perhaps, felt disgusted. Many Chinese business me, knowing the gravity of the [viral] spread, decides to suspend business activities in hopes that the situation would improve under the forceful control of the Chinese government. I was also very worried for my business.: some clients, upon seeing that the B&B was run by a Chinese, would run away, shaking their heads. (Translation mine)

Here we have an example of a "model" in every sense. Yang has a post-secondary education,

is a graduate of one of the most prestigious universities in Rome (having completed it in

Italian, her second-language), speaks and writes perfect Italian, and manages a B&B in

Rome. By Marco's standards, Yang has realized her "potential" as a cultural intermediary,

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[146] Yang Zhenfei, "Uno nuova primavera italiana," in *"Noi Restiamo Qui": Come La Communità Cinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia*, ed. Lanbo Hu (Roma: Cina in Italia), 89.

serving both clients from China and international tourists; she is a living example of someone who facilitated cross-cultural, transnational movement, the kind of "labor" and economy that the "happy hour" businessmen hope to amplify and profit from. Yang is a quintessential "model" of Marco's vision. Yet on the subway, she is an object of racist derision. Subject to the "embarrassment" of being a victim of [Whitalian] Roman youth, she enacts a kinesthetic rebuttal and coughs back at the young man who coughs on her in the subway car. Yang does not mention racism but describe the process of racialization. She does not discuss what it is to be Italian but presents a narrative of what it is like to live in Italy as a Chinatalian. While there is no formal discourse to discuss racism, alienation, and exclusion, there is a bodily vernacular of negotiating Italianess — you cough on me to say I am not Italian, I cough on you to say, Who are you to cough on me? Yang describes Chinatalians as having to deal with being an object of disgust during the pandemic, so much so that they close their businesses before the mandate is issued to do so for everyone in Italy. I suggest this move to closure is what Noland would identify as an agentic one, a choreography of self- preservation, perhaps also self-defense in response to everyday acts of alienation. Yang writes about powerlessness, "*Eventi analoghi sono accaduti in ogni ambito in cui I cinese erano coinvolti, non ci abbiamo potuto fare niente.*"[147] [Similar things happened everywhere the Chinese were and we could not do anything about it.] This is an instance in which the body fails. The model fails. The potential is non-existent. The virus rendered all Chinese a non-human entity that deserved to be coughed on. In fairness, my talk with Marco predated the pandemic, during which, he emerged as an ally to the Chinatalian community. At that time, I

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[147] Yang Zhenfei, "Uno nuova primavera italiana," in *"Noi Restiamo Qui": Come La Communità Cinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia*, ed. Lanbo Hu (Roma: Cina in Italia), 89.

could not get a word to or from him, as radio stations, newspapers, and journalists sought

him for comment. Despite Yang's description of these daily events of attack, she writes:

> *Ci cono stati anche atti di benevolenza e compresione da parte di vicini e conoscenti, così come i saluti quotidiano sono stati accompangati da frasi di support e incoraggiamento. Le semplice premura e la gentilezza sono come quando ti servono, in un giorno invernale di pioggia e vento una tazza calda e fumante di cappuccino. Io credo che questo sia il modo "italiano" di mostrare premura. È inevitabile per molti cinesi in Italia, nella vita di tutti i giorni, imbattersi in un rifiuto, in unpregiudizio o addirittura in una discriminazione; tuttavia si incontrano anche persone libere da preconcetti, tolleranti e di buon cuore.*

> There were also acts of goodwill and understanding from neighbors and acquaintances, daily phrases of support and encouragement. These simple acts of thoughtfulness and kindness when, on a cold, rainy, windy day, you need a cup of hot and steaming cappuccino. I believe this is the "Italian" way to show care. It is inevitable that many Chinese in Italy in all their days, will encounter alienation, prejudice, and discrimination. At the same time, you will meet people free of preconceptions, tolerance, and a good heart. [My translation.]

Yang's account is heartbreaking. Though she describes acts of kindness like "*una tazza calda e*

fumante di cappuccino" [being given a hot, steaming cappuccino], as I read it now, it seems more

like a consolation than an altruistic act of "*il buon cuore*" [a good heart]. How a hot

cappuccino on a cold and rainy day in Rome helps a Chinatalian (who is probably lactose

intolerant and) who must endure daily acts of discrimination, I cannot say. But the "Italian"

way to show care, as I have seen, is to extend a gesture of comfort. One evening just as news

of the pandemic in China was breaking and just as the first cases were reported in Italy, my

partner and I went out for dinner. Upon walking into a restaurant and being seated by the

Whitalian waiter (who immediately sought to make me feel welcomed on the account that I

am visibly Chinese), placed his hand on my forehead and said, "*Beh, non sei cinese, non hai la*

febbre… sei Nina Simon!." [But of course you are not Chinese—no fever here! You are Nina

Simone!] This is also an example of the "Italian way" —a Whitalian man, seemingly

"tolerant" of international tourists, holds his bare hand to my face (*a stranger's face*), denying

my ethnicity, and replacing it with that of a famous African American Civil Rights artist, composer, and singer…in order to make me feel welcome. Like Yang attests, the Chinese—particularly during the pandemic—cannot escape the experience of other people's prejudice, discrimination, and acts of ignorance. As an American, I found this interaction angering and embarrassing (for the waiter). Could he not see that I was a motorcyclist that could also drive a car, as I spoke Italian to him, standing next to my brawny American partner? His comment about me looking like Nina Simone, somehow did not spark what the happy hour men called "friendship" and was far from an indication that we shared a "common vision." His gesture echoed Yang's description of "the Italian way" of making guests feel comfortable. This kind of public ridicule in Italy (not unlike Lin being presented with a cappuccino), is a common daily consolation for "*stranieri*" [foreigners] in Italy.

From a very different perspective, I now draw from Lin Liangjie's narrative of the pandemic. At the time of writing, Lin has been in Italy for over 25 years, arriving in 1995 with her husband from Wenzhou in the province of Zhejiang; they eventually opened their own travel and tourism agency in Rome in 2015. Lin is a woman in her early 50's. She is a devout Christian and describes her efforts to provide aid as a call to duty from God. She helped the cause by volunteering to import face masks from China and personally deliver them to people in need throughout Rome. She writes:

> *L'Associazione Cristiana cinese in Italia e il Centro Missionario si impegnavano a reperire i materiali necessari, mentre le principali compagnie aeree li trasportavano gratuitamente in Cina. I membri della chiesa Cristiana viaggiavano avanti e indietro fino all'aeroporto, in una coras sontrol il tempo, in cerca di gruppi turistci diretti in Cina cui affidare le donazioni.*
>
> *Durante questo period, gli italiani ci hanno dimostrato quanto buona sia il lora cuore offrendoci aitui e sostegno…Abbiamo contattato telefonicamente un numero infinito di fornitori di materiali medici, nel tentativo di supportare Wuhan e di capire meglio la situatzione degli approvvigionamenti in Italia. Non essendo un Paese produttore di materiali per la prevenzione epidemic, avevamo già*

intuit che la distribuzione avrebbe più avuto risorse a sufficenza e che ci sarebbero state difficoltà anche per importale.[148]

The Association of Chinese Christians in Italy and the Center of Missionaries were working on locating the necessary materials, while the main airlines transported them free of charge to China. Members of the church traveled back and forth to the airport, racing against time, in search of groups of tourists bound for China, to whom we could trust with the donations.

During this time, the Italians have demonstrated such goodwill and offered their hearts and help and support…We were in contact via telephone with a various [Italian] medical material suppliers, in attempts to support Wuhan and better understand the supply situation in Italy. [Italy] not being a country that produces supplies for the prevention of an epidemic, we had already intuited that the [Chinese] distribution would have more resources and it would be difficult to import them [from China to Italy]. (Translation mine).

Lin describes the choreographies of movement among Chinatalian Christians working with Italians in Rome to organize a network of care and support. Somehow, they were able to traffic face masks from Italy to China, using chartered planes that flew them to China for free. While we know now that Italy would soon experience a breakout, at the time of writing, Lin describes the urgency of getting supplies from Italy to China. She writes, "*ho realizzato che l'amore che provavo per questo Paese era viscerale. Da dove arrivava altrimenti tutta quell'energia? Sono convinta che c'entri qualcosa anche l'aiuto di Dio.*"[149] [I realized that this kind of love for [my] Country was visceral. From where did this love come? I am convinced that God had something to do with it.] While it is not clear which country Lin is referring to (Italy? or China?) she describes how she is moved "viscerally" to do *something* and attributes the energy as coming from God. Her reflection offers another way to understand Chinatalian

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[148] Lin Liangjie, "Mi è bastato uno sguardo tra la folla," in *"Noi Restiamo Qui": Come La Communità Cinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia*, ed. Lanbo Hu (Roma: Cina in Italia), 39.

[149] Idem.

choreographies in Rome as acts of "*l'amore*" [love], as she describe it, a love for Country and a love of God, and humanity. She concludes her chapter with, "*Se la Cina è mia c]asa d'infanzia, l'Italia è la casa che ho scelto.*"[150] ["If China is my childhood home, Italy is my chosen home."] I would suggest that Lin's remarks mirror that of Marco's argument for an openness and fluidity of being both Italian and Chinese; Lin represents a "model" of Chinatalian identity (though conventional in the sense that she is devoutly religious) that gestures toward a different concept of community—one that is located somewhere beyond the confines of nationhood, sovereignty, ethnicity, or race. Lin's articulation of choice matters here; she demonstrates her agency in *choosing* Italy as her home. Lin goes to great lengths to describe how her bodily labor contributed to choreographies that built bridges between China and Italy and among people in Rome (regardless of racial distinction). I would suggest that her sense of place in Rome is related to her sense of duty to God, as well as how she intentionally helps to produce new Italian culture as an active member of her community.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a description and analysis of a global Chinatalian choreography localized to Rome. As I reflected on both the happy hour event and Marco's interview, I realized that both represent different styles of "soft" power diplomacy. The happy hour is a representation of Mainland China's initiatives of global domination, which surfaced as a formal performance of cultural elitism and economic confidence, concealed in public expressions of "friendship." That case study offered a segue to introduce the story of Marco Hu, an Italian-born Chinatalian, Rome-based businessman, and politician. In contrast to the discourse

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[150] Lin Liangjie, "Mi è bastato uno sguardo tra la folla," in *"Noi Restiamo Qui": Come La Communità Cinese Ha Vissuto L'Epidemia*, ed. Lanbo Hu (Roma: Cina in Italia), 43.

associated with the BRI and Chinese and Italian tourist interests, Marco's gently discussed equality, prejudice, and Italy's potential for change. These two case studies explored Chinatalian choreographies on a global and local scale. I also discussed the biographical narratives of two Chinatalian women in the tourism industry in Rome. Their voices gave texture and counterpoint to the male-dominated narratives that began this chapter. This chapter endeavored to illustrate the different kinds of Chinatalian choreographies that take place across local and global scales. I sought to show that individual Chianatalian narratives local to Rome hold together the possibility of being both Chinese *and* Italian. Foregrounding Chinatalian corporealities does not necessarily identify all Chinatalian choreographies as beneficial for all humankind; however it gestures toward the possibility of understanding the process of belonging from different viewpoints.

While I began by describing *potential* as a key theme that emerged in my conversation with Marco. The idea of "potential" took on new meaning when discussing the agency of Chinatalians to respond to acts of discrimination (as we saw in the case of Yang and the coughing dialogue on the subway in Rome). We also saw potential at work in Lin's transportation of masks to people in both China and Italy. Perhaps the true potential lies in the possibility for people around the world to accept a new version of Italy, whether it is one built on a sense of enduring nationalism or a new Italy that is a *chosen* Country by Chinatalians.

These narratives of Chinatalian belonging in Rome make it crucial to acknowledge the implications of the label *Chinatalian*. Although I know Marco would not object to the term to describe him, I cannot speak for the women whose stories I have interpreted here. The term *Chinatalian* is mine and serves a function in this project to facilitate a discourse

relevant to the issues of ethnic Chinese people in Italy. While the different choreographies I have analyzed in this chapter show how Italy lags behind in re-envisioning itself, I also acknowledge that Italy is home to women like Yang and Lin, and they are very much aware of their "place" in Italy. Still, Marco's narrative of the motorcycle and the driver is necessary! Italy is unable to recognize racism; to do so would undermine the project of sustaining the myth of a unified Italy, one that still equates whiteness or near-whiteness with Italian belonging. Therefore, I would argue, that racism in Italy is a phenomenological issue of self, of purpose, and a fear of not having a place in space or time. By pointing out that the issue of race in Italy is a phenomenological issue, I am sustaining the potential for open dialogues and bodily actions that could bring about new ideals of what it means to be Italian. To realize that exclusion is a phenomenological issue recalls my argument from the previous chapter, in which I discussed Levinas' ethical being in the world and Butler's call to care for our shared precarity of life. Marco's story of the motorcycle and the car influences the imagination to create cognitive pliability through using a kinesthetic metaphor. In identifying racism as a phenomenological issue, I do not intend to dismiss the individual acts of physical violence upon the body or the many institutional forms of carceral crimes upon the body—those are real tortures that marginals incur every day. However, to articulate race and racism in Italy as a phenomenological issue is to place a focus on hope for humanity and individual accountability to change. Afterall, people compose institutions. Chinatalians—and a representative of Italy—are an important contribution to Italy's move toward a more integrated society.

As mentioned previously, Foster's notion of a "choreography of protest" contends that the body is capable of kinesthetic rebuttal in response to injustice. These articulations of resistance are bodily moves that Foster designates as a "kinesthetic responsiveness."[151] In this sense, Marco's call for Chinatalians to reach their potential is a battle cry for a kinesthetic rebuttal to the status quo. Yang's coughing back is a choreography of protest. Lin's travel to and from the airport "against time" is as she called it, a "visceral" response to those in need. They provide examples of new Italians. As Chinatalians they are generating identities that represent a new Italy which has historically been reserved for white bodies. Foster theorizes that kinesthetic rebuttals are grounded in the body's capacity to be kinesthetically responsive to its environment. In other words, being Italian as a Chinatalian is positive and inspiring for all marginals in contemporary Italy. However, the struggle to be considered as an equal member of Italian culture is an obstacle which Chinatalians must face and therefore, the conditions of their liberation rely not only on battling stereotypes but affronting the challenge of being considered human in Italy. I understand that the underpinnings of Marco's agenda for reaching one's potential is an anti-racist critique on outmoded definitions of "acceptable" representations of *Italianità* and *Chinatalianità*. The potential of kinesthetic responsiveness is that it changes both material and metaphorical spaces, reorienting a sense of place for Chinatalians in Italy. Such responsiveness will be further examined in Chapter Three in my final case study which examines a group of Chinatalian women dancing in public space.

While the act of choreographing is generative, it is important to recognize that potential is a latent capacity to become, an unrealized quality which may develop into being.

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[151] Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of protest." *Theatre Journal* (2003): 396.

The German phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger offers a perspective on being and

becoming that is helpful to the argument for potential:

> In being ahead of oneself as the being toward one's ownmost potentiality-of-being lies the existential and ontological condition of the possibility of *being free for* authentic existential possibilities. It is the potentiality-of-being for the sake of Dasein always is as it factically is. But since this being toward the potentiality-of-being is itself determined as freedom, Dasein *can* also be related to its possibilities *unwillingly*, it *can* be inauthentic and factically it is this initially and for the most part.[152]

Heidegger suggests that within the "potentiality-of-being"—which is a condition of being

thrown into the world—we have the ability to have "authentic existential possibilities." By

being here (*Dasein*), we are a potentiality-of -being. However, he argues that for the most

part, we are initially inauthentic until we discover our beingness is limited by time, until we

can realize our authentic being (or self). In regard to choreography, as provisioning for

change, choreography, as a design of movement in space, makes potential, the possibility for

change through discoveries of self in the world. Marco's narrative points to a choreography

of potential change, and the absence of emotional charge in his demeanor on all things *race*,

reflects his knowledge of the race problem and particularly, the challenge of race dialogues in

Italy. Marco acknowledges the taboo of race in Italy, the exclusion of the ethnic Chinese

from mainstream definitions of Italian, yet he performs his Chinatalian citizenry with the

hope that the creativity of the human spirit can be persuaded to expand their perspectives by

engaging the lived experiences of the Other. Clearly, Marco's work in the Chinatalian and

white Italian communities as a native-born Italian has allowed him to apply his lived

experiences abroad to local activities, and this engagement is a bodily choreography of care

for both communities.

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[152] Martin Heidegger and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time : a Translation of Sien Und Zeit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 186.

Ultimately, "potential" challenges conventional notions of what it means to be Italian. Actuating one's potential in Italy as a Chinatalian means grappling with cultural barriers that suggest there is only one way to produce Italian culture. The general consensus among my informants—which include Chinatalian working women, white Italian language and literary scholars, Chinatalian students, and a blend of local Roman acquaintances, expatriate Americans living in Italy, and Italian multi-nationals from Africa and across Europe— is that Chinatalians struggle in the face of sociocultural constraints. Common obstacles that Chinatalians face include subjugation in roles that preclude their freedom of mobility. These constraints can be a product of familial expectations, or harsh living situations due to inequality in housing, and few employment opportunities that offer advancement. These are just some of the metaphorical and literal barriers to assimilation in Italy for marginals like woman, people of color, migrants, and both newly arrived and settled immigrants. Often the challenges to actuating one's potential are intertwined with racism, gender, class, and sexual marginalization. One's individual circumstances in conjunction with societal circumstances can make it nearly impossible to enter metaphorical spaces of belonging while making everyday survival a series of coping mechanisms and acts of resilience.

While Marco, Yang, and Lin's stories offer hope and encouragement, I adopt a more critical approach and argue that Chinatalian accountability is only a part of the journey toward a more unified Italy. True, by resisting convention, Chinatalians reinvent new imaginaries for what is possible.[153] Marco's creative strategy of storytelling identifies hope

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[153] Gramsci would probably suggest that this reimagined world of racial, social, and cultural integration would require the masses to overturn the current cultural hegemony. In his *Prison Notebook*, a collection of writings he made during a 20-year prison sentence for his involvement as a political agitator, he writes about cultural hegemony and describes it as the idea of a culturally diverse society that is dominated by

and potential for everyday resistance; his language of hope reflects a politician's narrative that carefully navigates the race issue in Italy. Still, his discursive choreography helps us to understand the contemporary landscape of race, space, and place in Italy from the Chinatalian embodied perspective.

CHAPTER 3: Chinatalian choreographies as a Neoliberal Politics of Liberation

Dec. 12, 2019. Thursday. 7:30am

     It rained for nearly ten days straight. When the weather finally let up, I headed out to meet the ladies at the Colosseo. Rome in December in the early morning is dark and ghostly. I waited at the bus stop

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an elite class that rules that society. For more, see: Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks Volume 2*. Vol. 2. (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011).

at Via del Corso near our apartment. A Bengali man was unearthing his hat stall, a large wooden cart on wheels adorned with straw hats for the tourists and leather bags for sale made by Chinatalians in Tuscany. There were no cars. Everyone was bundled up. Open streets. Clean Air—except for the smell of cologne wafting behind a man on his way to his office. I boarded the bus and got off at the Colosseo stop. There was a park that I was to enter, only there was construction barring entry at the main steps. I finally (after a bit of a hike) found the ladies at an opening with san piedrini. I counted six Chinatalian women, one Chintalian man, two white Italian ladies (one joined much later) and one white Italian man.

I set my backpack down with a pile of other bags on top of some newspaper and stepped in, wrecking the flow. I was a stranger, skipping the record with my presence. The movement circuit broke. I tried to blend in. Wasn't so easy. I was in the wrong clothing. Choreography establishes a group sense. The Chinatalian ladies, in their bright red, pink, and magenta puff jackets formed two dance rows ahead of me, one behind. In the last row were the white Italians an elderly Chinatalian man.

After a few passes of the hand and hip movements, someone called me out. I looked to see that all the Chinatalian women from behind me fell into a line with the ladies in front of me, each one standing behind the other, fanning out just slightly so that the last person could see me. They choreographed themselves into a huddle that created a human defilade, shielding themselves for safety from me as if I were a monster.

"Are you Chinese?," one of the women demanded, lobbing the phrase toward me from the center of their huddle like a dart. I froze in what I knew to be Yang-style form's "Playing the Piba," with my right knee bent in a deep first position plié, left foot flexed in front of me, toes pointing up toward the sky, my hands open, palms facing each other as if strumming the ancient piba strings. I tried not to look petrified as I sweat through the reverberation of her question.

This final chapter argues that Chinatalian mobility reflects a neoliberal politics of location and freedom that produces new forms of Italian culture and belonging. My intersectional approach brings together debates on human mobility, neoliberalism, critical dance studies, and a culturally multiplicitous approach to phenomenology. The phenomenological framework I apply includes considerations for Western ethical being, Eastern embodied practices of being in-between, and Latinx feminist practices of being in worlds and in-between worlds. My research pursuit is the exploration of the various ways that unorthodox modes of theoretical analysis, sensing, knowing, and moving together provide a more holistic understanding of what it means for Chinatalians to produce contemporary Italian culture through moving their bodies in space. I engage these topics through examining instances of dance in contemporary Rome. The Chinatalian women and the movements they produce in space are the focal point. I argue that this Chinatalian

choreography of group *taiji* generates contemporary Italian identity, culture, and belonging that benefits the project of recognizing Chinatalians as *present* in an Italy that has the capacity to accommodate a new vision of itself.

The significance of this work lies in its consideration of Chinatalians as choreographing Italian culture. As I mentioned in the Introduction, and the previous chapter, this chapter also uses the term *Whitalian*. "Whitalians" are white Italians. The term describes Caucasian, native born Italians or describes Caucasian migrants or immigrants in Italy. *Whitalian* is a useful term because it designates Italy as a space for all kinds of Italians. While I acknowledge the ontological constraints of the term, which some may argue reifies racial hierarchies in Italy, my intention is to identify the "ideal" category of Italianess by conventional definition as way to call attention to the taboo of race and underlying sociocultural and political tensions that reinforce the very hierarchy that some would argue the term reinforces. In other words, the term *Whitalian* refers to white people in Italy; Chinatalians are Chinese Italians. AfroItalians are Italians with African heritage, and so on. "Whitalian" is shorthand for the reader to understand that I am referring to white people in Italy. Also of importance, this project acknowledges Gaia Giuliani's "white Italy," a space that systematically excludes racial, gender, class, and sexual marginals from the privilege of desirability and full Italian belonging.[154] Another novelty of this work is in the inquiry of Italian cultural production as experienced phenomenologically through practicing dance in public space. In the face of this reality, this project efforts to make room for Italy's capacity to accommodate alternative forms of beauty that perpetuate the eternity of Rome. In perpetuating the eternity of Rome, I intend to hold space of the beauty of Rome, which I

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[154] Gaia Giuliani, *Race, nation and gender in modern Italy: Intersectional representations in visual culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

have experienced as someone who has lived, worked, and conducted research in Rome, a place of infinite possibility, pleasure, as well as pain. Nothing that lasts forever is without its complexities; it is the complexities that give it weight in our memories of Rome. I challenge the fixity of the status quo, which reinforces monolithic definitions of beauty, space, and justice in Italy. Since the global definition of "Italian" often signifies an affiliation with whiteness or near whiteness,[155] this chapter showcases contemporary Italy as a space where Chinatalians are creating a sense of place for themselves. By drawing attention to the ways that Chinatalian choreographies animate alternative forms of beauty, space, and mobility, this chapter radically decenters convention and asks: What can public choreographies of Chinatalian communal dance offer us regarding understanding emplacement and cultural assimilation in Italy? How do such choreographies reflect a politics of location? How do they form a practice of agency for Chinatalian migrant women? Who benefits from this communal dance practice of *taiji* in the park? When do these choreographies reflect a postcolonial Italy and why is it important to acknowledge the ways that these women decolonialize space as they generate new forms of Italian culture? What is the ultimate significance of apprehending these choreographies via the issues of ethics, equity, freedom, and justice? How does a phenomenological description of Chinatalian movement press us toward an acknowledgement of the presence of Chinatalians as contributing members of contemporary Italian culture?

To engage these questions, I will present findings which I gathered from participant observation of a women's dance group which practiced *taiji* in a public park next to the

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[155] See for example, Gaia Giuliani, *Race, nation and gender in modern Italy: Intersectional representations in visual culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Heather Merrill, *Black spaces: African diaspora in Italy* (Routledge, 2018).

Colosseum. I am interested in exploring how this group choreography produces new forms of Italian culture as well as belonging for migrant women from China, who are living and working in Italy. I begin by outlining human mobility as a central theme. Indeed, mobility studies is significant to an analysis of Chinatalian choreographies.[156] I will discuss how the field of mobility studies encompasses transnational migration as well as a quotidian dance practice. Afterwards, I will discuss the ethnographic field methods I applied to gain entry to the research group. To better understand the context, I will also describe the Chinatalian public dance scene in Rome. Following this, I will discuss the limitations and delimitations that emerged in this case study. Throughout, I will present data from my engagement with these women, analyzing the data using intersectional and interdisciplinary methods that weave together postcolonial Italian studies, dance studies, geography, migration, neoliberalism, Western and eastern philosophy, and phenomenology.

Human Mobility

The project of recognizing Chinatalians as *present* in Italy is one that may invoke ideas of surveillance and state control. However, this is not case here. In this chapter, I will treat the term *choreography* more literally, that is, as an organization of human movement that supports the survival of the Chinatalian community. I am interested in how Chinatalians negotiate their everyday presence through bodily movement. This approach emphasizes an interest in Chinatalian states of being through an analysis of public group dance, in which I engaged as a participant-observer. To account for Chinatalians as present in Italy is a project of registering, tracing, and identifying Chinatalian kinesthetic activities, exploring its cultural and symbolic meanings and impacts. Chinatalians engage in practices of emplacement that

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[156] Salazar, Noel B. "Mobility." (2013), 552.

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engender connectivity, relationality, and a sense of safety and belonging in a country that partially tolerates or wholly rejects their presence.

Human mobility studies offers a useful entry point into discussing Chinatalian presence in Rome. Sociocultural anthropologist, Noel Salazar, describes human mobility as "a complex assemblage of movement, representation, and practice."[157] Salazar suggests that this definition of human mobility is key to understanding globalization processes. I take Salazar's description of human mobility as synonymous to my working definition of choreography. *Choreography,* in this chapter, continues to describe an organization of practices that represents the ways that Chinatalians in Italy assemble community, practice self-care, and sustain mobile networks of survival. Within the last decade, the subject of "human mobilities" has generated discourses regarding transnational human migrations, data mining, human mobilities changing climates, as well as the project which examines human mobilities as local, day-to-day interactions between people, places, and things.[158] Likewise, choreography as a research method relates to studies of human mobility with a specific regard for the kinesthetic body. While the area of human mobility includes the works of geographers and sociologists, mobility studies grew out of anthropology; thus, ethnographic surveys endure as an original mode of investigating human mobility. In other words, the critical questions concerning mobilities do not concern the rise and decline of mobilities, but

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[157] Salazar, Noel B. "Mobility." (2013), 552.

[158] See for example: Recchi, Ettore, Emanuel Deutschmann, and Michele Vespe. "Estimating transnational human mobility on a global scale." *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper No. RSCAS* 30 (2019); Zhao, Kai, Sasu Tarkoma, Siyuan Liu, and Huy Vo. "Urban human mobility data mining: An overview." In *2016 IEEE International Conference on Big Data (Big Data)*, pp. 1911-1920. IEEE, 2016; Boas, Ingrid, Hanne Wiegel, Carol Farbotko, Jeroen Warner, and Mimi Sheller. "Climate mobilities: migration, im/mobilities and mobility regimes in a changing climate." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 14 (2022): 3365-3379.

rather the contours of human mobility as an ongoing condition of flux that connects to the ways that bodies and cultures move, intersect, and influence one another. Viewed through a dance lens, these choreographies of movement produce patterns that are observable and then can be useful in determining how communities are patterning practices of living, working, and dancing together.

Salazar also argues that human mobility is a process of formation, dispersion, and governance.[159] The various patterns and textures of human mobility intersect with sociocultural, political, and economic contexts, both locally and across the globe. Again, this intersection is (largely) synonymous with the term *choreography*. Choreography concerns these intersections of bodily movement and its situated contexts. Like previous works that have blended ethnography and studies of choreography,[160] this ethnographic work prioritizes the human perspective within the shifting nexus of worlds that Chinatalians must live through and in-between. Of course, the bricolage of human mobility is constitutively linked to the creation of freedom for some and immobility for others. For example, Italian cultural exports of culinary pasta traditions, film noir, and high fashion help mobilize and sustain a national sentiment of Italian pride and collective identity. However, these exports also create global paradigms that associate pasta, film noir, and high fashion with Italian culture writ large, obstructing the reality that Chinatalians, AfroItalians, and new migrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, and South America contribute to generating Italian artisanal products,

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[159] Salazar, Noel B. "Mobility." (2013), 552.

[160] See for example: Dena Davida,, ed. *Fields in motion: Ethnography in the worlds of dance* (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2011); Deidre Sklar, "Reprise: On dance ethnography." *Dance Research Journal* 32, no. 1 (2000): 70-77; Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula circuits through the US empire*. Duke University Press, 2012; Naomi M. Jackson, *Converging Movements: Modern Dance and Jewish Culture at the 92nd Street Y*. Wesleyan University Press, 2000; SanSan Kwan, *Love Dances: Loss and Mourning in Intercultural Collaboration* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

agriculture, the construction sector, the tourism industry, as well as to economies of import/export goods and services. For example, to better understand the contribution of migrants and immigrants who contribute to the economy and overall fiscal health of Italy, I turn to data gathered by Italy's leading non-profit news agency, *Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata.* they recently reported migrant laborers contribute taxes and social security dues that totaled nearly 18 billion euro in 2019, which accounted for 9.5% of the Italian GDP.[161] In other words, choreographies of migrant labor produce economic mobility for Italy. However, migrants do not constitute Italianess nor does conventional Italian culture accept them as contributing members of society. Therefore, the mobility of migrants and immigrants and the capital flows they bring into and throughout Italy is a movement that serves the country, yet their contributions do not afford them a sense of belonging. This points to how Italian conventions of identity production and belonging remain anachronistically static, despite the reality that migrant and immigrant mobility and the social, cultural, and economic patterns they generate are dynamic.

True, existing mobility studies bring to light the ways Chinatalians produce emplacement through their quotidian life and how their labor practices impact Italy. However, these studies examine the Chinatalian community in Prato, a municipality of Florence, and they often reflect two main perspectives in the realm of ethnography. On the one hand, Whitalian scholars like Antonella Ceccagno (working in tandem with Mainland Chinese researchers) present Chinatalian migrant workers as shrewd business people who advance in class status by "exploit[ing] the transnationally embedded opportunities to access

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[161] InfoMigrants, "Migrants in Italy paid €18 billion in taxes and social security dues last year," Oct 15, 2020. Accessed on https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27937/migrants-in-italy-paid-%E2%82%AC18-billion-in-taxes-and-social-security-dues-last-year

training courses in China."[162] Ceccagno applies a Marxist approach that attends to Chinatalian subjecthood as a struggle against capitalism; she indicates that Chinatalians wield mobility as a power to benefit their own economic development. As Chinatalians acquire labor skills, they improve their conditions as migrants in Prato. This approach fastens Chinatalian being to a discourse of capitalist economics and market politics. While Ceccagno's observations are not entirely incorrect, they do not address the human experience of mobility from the Chinatalian perspective.

On the other hand, North American perspectives like that of Elizabeth Krause (working with Mainland Chinese researchers) pursue migration studies to understand how Chinatalians experience racism and exclusion in Italy.[163] Krause's research exposes acts of Whitalian racism from the perspective of Chinatalians. Like Ceccagno, Krause's project profiles the labor and cultural economies specific to Prato. Unlike Ceccagno's work, Krause undertakes the task of offering prescriptive descriptions that could ameliorate unjust conditions, such as encouraging alliances between Chinatalians and institutions in Prato.

Indeed, such alliances are needed to redress issues of racial exclusion and to improve the living and work conditions of Chinatalians in Prato. Both Ceccagno and Krause make valid contributions to the field of ethnographic studies on the Chinatalians in Prato. However, in contrast to these studies, my project's intersectional approach broadens the field of discourse to consider bodily movement. Prioritizing the body and the embodied experiences of Chinatalians in Rome is important because it gives voice to a lesser-known

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[162] Antonella Ceccagno, and Ru Gao. "The making of a skilled worker: the transnational mixed embeddedness of migrant workers." *Mobilities* (2022), 1.

[163] Elizabeth L. Krause, and Ying Li. "Out of place: everyday forms of marginalization, racism, and resistance among Chinese migrants in Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 9 (2022): 2037-2055.

community of ethnic Chinese in Italy. By examining Chinatalian choreographies of bodily movement in Rome, I foreground a significant site in Italy— Rome is the capital and a central hub of international art, travel, commerce, as well as Italy's centralized government. Additionally, as a visibly ethnic Chinese body, I provide a different perspective, given that I was able to approach the research community directly via a shared mother-tongue. Moreover, as a dancer with experience in *taiji* and public group movement with the Chinese diaspora in San Francisco, California and Taipei, Taiwan, I was able to gain entry into the group with my previous movement training. All of these differences allowed me to examine the ways that Chinatalian dance in Rome—as a form of human mobility—co-opts public space as a neoliberal project of place-making, or a practice of individuals and groups creating operational events in everyday society that produce a sense of belonging, identity, and contribution. Of course, as an ethnographer, I acknowledge my own positionality presents the risk of bias as I present my findings and think through the connections between what I found, and what I theorize to be true. The nature of ethnography and dance is interpretation, and the work of interpreting, transmitting, and translating my findings is a choreography that pulls together the parallel, divergent, convergent strands that are constantly moving. I may not understand Italy or Chinatalian experience because I am not a "native-born" Italian; however my positionality offers the advantage of fresh eyes that can see and perceive that which is everyday to those who are "native" to Italy.

To further distinguish this project from existing studies, I would point out that my approach unlinks Chinatalian subjecthood from the conventional association with labor roles in Italian industry. I am not concerned with Chinatalian tangible contributions to Italian GDP or in analyzing Chinatalians through a capitalist framework of production. Rather, my

goal is to register Chinatalians and their intangible "labor" as public citizens in public space. The case study examines the value Chinatalians bring to Italy as a result of their "labor" which they exert as dancers, in a leisure activity. Furthermore, Ceccagno and Krause often underscore the ongoing shuttling of ethnic Chinese migrations between Mainland China and Italy—of workers and babies. This is not to dismiss the merit of their work, but simply that a focus on mobilities between China and Italy reinforces (perhaps inadvertently) the non-belonging of Chinatalians to Italy. In contrast, my project examines the ways that Chinatalian human mobilities are producing Italian culture and belonging in Rome proper. This project prioritizes how Chinatalians move their bodies in space *right now*—independent of Italian institutional aid and independent of Mainland China— as an aesthetic practice of being present, a concept I discussed in the precious chapter in my engagement with Heideggar's *Dasein*. There is an immediacy to my choreography approach that signals the potential for new definitions of kinesthetic movement and Chinatalian resistance through simply being present in space.

Given the obstructions within the dominant discourse that dismisses the reality that Chinatalians phenomenologically exist in Italy, along with the lack of attention to Chinatalian embodiments of being in current mobility studies, this chapter envisions a different dialogue—one that prioritizes the present moment. Chinatalians are building practices of inclusion in Italy through dance movement despite their exclusion from conventional definitions of Italianess. The primary research pursuit is to focus on what is working—in lieu of all that is not— through recognizing the complexity of Chinatalian human mobilities as a politics of location and a practice of agency. Noland contends that the kinesthetic body possesses "agentic" faculties that engage, co-opt, reinforce, and subvert cultural norms

through movement—bodily movement. In other words, culture governs the mobilities of the body, just as the body simultaneously shapes culture.[164] Noland's "agentic body" describes a fluid interplay between movement and culture. Reinforcing this dialectic of the body and governance, Andre Lepecki argues that human mobilities—in the form of public protest—reflect a tension between the constraints of the state and the body politic. Lepecki defines "choreopolitics" as a dialectical process in instances of public protest, in which the state polices bodies-in-motion, and bodies resist state control. To resist choreopolicing, protestors strategize alternative routes to circumnavigate state-initiated designs of spatial containment. For Lepecki, to be political is to move freely and the dancer exemplifies the ideal political subject, kinesthetically partaking in tactics of liberation. From this lens, people activate their kinesthetic sovereignty through movement as a tactic of political liberation.

From this critical dance perspective, "dance"—in the form of concert dance and quotidian choreographies of bodily movement—has the potential to produce change in society. Strategies of protest are inarguably active forms of choreographed resistance that produce spatial change and affect relational dynamics amongst the dancers and passersby. But what about symbolic expressions of gesture? In dance performance, gestures create possibilities for myriad interpretations of meaning that shift, modify, and vary the particular lexicon of a dance. Alonzo King Lines Ballet school defines *gesture* as a movement, typically of the head or hands that expresses an emotional condition or intention.[165] Social scientists argue that gesture is neither a goal-oriented action (such as opening a jar) nor movement for

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[164] Carrie Noland, *Agency and embodiment: Performing gestures/producing culture*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

[165] Alonzo King Lines Ballet. "Gesture," *Alonzo King Lines Ballet, Heart with Lines*. Access date September 12, 2022. https://linesballet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Gesture.pdf

movement's sake (like exercise).[166] Gesture is a movement that represents other movements, objects, and abstract ideas. The powerful abstraction of gesture potentiates social change and phenomenological shifts because of the way that humans interpret the nuances of gesture. Put another way, social scientists reinforce what dancers inherently sense, know, and apply — gestures convey expressive qualities that are open to interpretation; and this openness augments the possibilities for relationality in communication. Using an intersectional dance approach that considers human mobility as a subject of interest in multiple fields. A dance approach examines the significance of literal and symbolic bodily movement, gestures, and the potential orientations of its meaning across space.

Neoliberalism

In my introduction, I proposed to discuss Chinatalian choreographies as a practice of neoliberalism. Anthropologist, Aihwa Ong connects human mobility to neoliberalism; this connection is important to my case study that examines Chinatalian migrant women in Rome, who practice *taiji* movement together at the Colosseum because Ong's logic helps to clarify how taiji in a public space affords the women a level of liberation. While convention defines neoliberalism as an ideology of a free-market system that equates human progress with sustained economic growth with the least amount of capital investment, Ong offers an unorthodox counterview. For Ong, neoliberal practice has exceptions to conventional analysis and practice, particularly in Asia and amongst Asian diasporic groups, where she argues neoliberalism is a technology of governing "free subjects" that co-exist in relation to

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[166] Miriam A. Novack,, Elizabeth M. Wakefield, and Susan Goldin-Meadow. "What makes a movement a gesture?." *Cognition* 146 (2016): 339-348.

other political rationalities.[167] Thus, Ong defines *neoliberalism* as a mobile technique that applies "two kinds of optimizing technologies."[168] First, Ong states neoliberalism applies "technologies of subjectivity" which represent "self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices efficiency, and competitiveness…"[169] In other words, the first application of neoliberalism from Ong's view relates to Carrie Noland's theory of the agentic body as iterating and reiterating responses to the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions in which the body mobilizes itself. Examples of technologies of subjectivity include how Chinatalian women adhere to a health regime of group exercise, how Italian acquire new skills such as learning *taiji* practice, or the process of capital accumulation. The second application of neoliberalism is "technologies of subjection," which "differently regulate populations for optimal productivity, increasingly through spatial practices that engage market forces."[170] Examples of neoliberal subjection include, for instance, Italy granting amnesty to migrant laborers in the 1980s and 1990s to stimulate the Italian economy and provide cheap labor to existing Italian industries. Another example that Ong cites is the control of travel, or I would add, a country's control of immigration based on country of origin.

Ong's theory represents the unconventional approach to neoliberalism. Dominant theories of neoliberalism derive from studies of North Atlantic contexts where it is often understood as a political rationale confined to advanced liberal democracies. However,

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[167] Aihwa Ong, "Neoliberalism as a Mobile Technology." *Transactions - Institute of British Geographers (1965)* 32, no. 1 (2007): 3–8.

[168] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as exception* (Duke University Press, 2006), 6.

[169] See note 168 above.

[170] Idem.

global exceptions abound. Through investigating instances of neoliberalism in the Pacific Rim, Ong argues that neoliberalism is a calculative art of governance. In other words, considerations for neoliberalism within a purely "Western" framework suggest a false closure of the inherent cross-border flows of our globalized world. Neoliberal practices in China, for example, reflect the ways that entities can deconstruct neoliberalism from its original source and reconstruct a nexus of mutually constitutive relationships that simultaneously liberate and oppress the invested contingencies.[171] In other words, neoliberalism is a choreography— a set of practices, which through its various mutations and adaptative iterations, migrates from site to site. For example, an emancipatory neoliberal choreography would be the city of Rome, allowing for street buskers to "work" in public squares; the live music, mime performances, or spray paint demonstrations offer leisure and entertainment for tourists, who crowd around the spectacle as they make their way through the winding, cobblestone roads in the historical center. However, that same neoliberal choreography of spectacle and tourists creates oppressive congestion in the small streets of Rome. Another example is the large groups of Chinese tourists, who, while partaking in their neoliberal choreography of a guided tour of Rome, create bottlenecks as locals struggle to get home from work, or run errands in the sweltering summer heat. Of course, Ong's examples of neoliberalism are less quotidian and focus on the interconnected agendas of government and corporations, which an argument for the way the neoliberalism as exception "refines the study of state sovereignty, long conceptualized as a political singularity."[172] She continues:

> For instance, in Southeast and East Asia, zoning technologies have carved out special spaces in order to achieve strategic goals of regulating groups in relation to market

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[171] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as exception* (Duke University Press, 2006), 13-14.

[172] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as exception* (Duke University Press, 2006), 7.

forces. The spatial concentration of strategic political, economic, and social conditions attracts foreign investment, technology transfer, and international expertise to particular zones of high growth.[173]

Ong underscores the ways that neoliberal policy and politics are intertwined with global flows that are influenced by and affect "strategic political, economic, and social conditions" at work in the market. These fluid interactions with various assemblages means that choreographies of neoliberalism are irreducible to any uniform global condition. The investigation of neoliberal governmentality is reliant on the situated context in which the choreography performs itself. At the same time, the global forces at work, which affect the people living at the local scale makes Ong's theory applicable to investigating Chinatalian choreographies as both a local and global strategy.

Ong's unconventional yet practical approach to neoliberalism as a global phenomenon decidedly counters traditional (Western-centric) approaches. Alternatively, Wendy Brown treats neoliberalism as antidemocratic[174] and refers to a neoliberal individual as an "aggrieved, reactive creature who embraces freedom without the social contract, authority without democratic legitimacy, and vengeance without values or futurity."[175] Brown's definition leaves little room for the possibility of imagining exceptions to neoliberalism in Asian contexts. Brown writes, "white, uneducated and evangelical Christian population, animated by discontent, rage, woundedness, or all three, brought

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[173] Idem.

[174] Wendy Brown, *In the ruins of neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the West*. Columbia University Press, 2019 and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. MIT Press, 2015.

[175] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein: Authoritarian freedom in twenty-first century "democracies"." *Critical Times* 1, no. 1 (2018): 79.

Donald Trump to power."[176] However, Brown's ideologies of the wounded white Evangelical does not transfer to an Asian context. For Brown, neoliberalism is all that is wrong with society. Relatedly, David Harvey fervently argues that neoliberalism is "a political project carried out by the corporate capitalist class as they felt intensely threatened both politically and economically towards the end of the 1960s into the 1970s. They desperately wanted to launch a political project that would curb the power of labor."[177] For Harvey, neoliberalism is a fixed political project meant to sabotage progressive social movements toward equality. Both of Brown and Harvey offer generative debate on the U.S. and European context. However, their arguments do not account for Asia. In drastic contrast, Ong departs from Western-centric analytic models that fix discourses of neoliberalism as a militaristic or industrial wrecking machine with predetermined outcomes. Instead, she offers a more elastic definition to account for Asian contexts. Ong examines neoliberalism as a form of human mobility. This approach allows for novel considerations of neoliberalism as a transversal motion toward freedom, a dynamic process of negotiating mobile networks and entanglements in diverse political conditions. For Ong, neoliberalism is migratory. As a logic of governance that seeks to administer free subjects for maximum profit and gain, neoliberalism—as a form of human mobility—is a process that assembles individual uncertainties with "situated constellations" in agentic motion, to gain an unknown, *potential* outcome. In other words, there are exceptions to neoliberalism that lie beyond the Western framework of consideration.

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[176] Brown, 79.

[177] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism is a political project." *Jacobin magazine* (2016).

Admittedly, the French economist Thomas Piketty's work highlights the abject income inequality in contemporary China and provides statistical analysis to illustrate the growing disparity across geographical scale.[178] Picketty's contribution is a critique of China's practices of reporting income and wealth distribution, which lack transparency. Even still, his perspective is from the Western European viewpoint. Ong's argument for "neoliberalism as exception and exceptions to neoliberalism"[179] is significant for this project for two main reasons. Her wildly unorthodox approach to neoliberalism contextualizes the term and practice within a non-Western framework. Because neoliberalism has traditionally been understood from the Western perspective, Ong makes a case for denying the Western approach to understand the situated context of neoliberal practice as a kind of "exception" to the normative (Western) rule. By stating that neoliberal exceptions exist, Ong is offering a schematic analysis that problematizes the conventional stigma of neoliberalism; in doing so, she detaches neoliberalism from a purely Western framework in order to present neoliberalism as a practice of liberation and dignity by way of human migration and mobility. Ong's approach to neoliberalism decolonializes paradigms of analysis that have historically relied on Western approaches to understanding human mobility. By unfastening from Western-centric assumptions, neoliberalism signals *possibility*—outcomes are not fixed to predetermined structures or conjectures based on historic occurrences or Western assumptions about Asia and Asian diaspora counterparts.

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[178] Thomas Piketty, Li Yang, and Gabriel Zucman. "Capital accumulation, private property, and rising inequality in China, 1978–2015." *American Economic Review* 109, no. 7 (2019): 269-96.

[179] Aihwa Ong, "Neoliberalism as a mobile technology." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 1 (2007): 3.

My theoretical approach to understanding Chinatalian mobility posits that movement—like that of the Chinatalian women practicing their *taiji*— engages the potential for more freedom. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, potential represents possibilities for new ways of understanding what it means to be Italian and the myriad ways to generate new Italian culture. In the context of Italy—a country that does not recognize Chinatalians as belonging to Italian culture—Chinatalian women are generating a culture of communal dance in Rome. Their kinesthetic practices of self-care and shared pleasure in movement emplace them in Italy. The women in the case study I examine are Chinese migrant laborers who integrate their daily dance rituals into the landscape of everyday Rome. While I cannot presume to "know" their politics, I suggest that the nature of their movement represents a neoliberal politics of location and practice is twofold. Firstly, their roles as emplaced migrant laborers point to Ong's definition of neoliberal exception as they track across nodes of economic viability from China to Italy. Secondly, from the perspective of Chatterjea, the Chinatalian dancers generate a "heat" that is traceable, offering an unorthodox visual and kinesthetic mapping of the process of relationality and connectivity. In other words, the women moved out of China to Italy for work; they also work to move as a form of resistance to stagnant economic and sociocultural and sociopolitical conditions in Italy. From a decolonialized, neoliberal context that considers human mobility as both producing more freedom as well as an involuntary response to adverse conditions, we can understand these public choreographies of "heat" and agency as a gesture toward freedom in a country that does not readily accept Chinatalians as belonging to Italian culture.

Phenomenologies of Being-at-Ease

Beyond considerations of neoliberalism—a topic that ties together considerations of capital, market-economies, the politics of privatization, as well as freedom and dignity in response to socioeconomic limitations, this case study explores the intangible profit of phenomenological "being at ease" that Chinatalian choreographies offer. Here I have in mind Mariana Ortega's work on "being-at-ease," which expands Heideggerian concepts of Being to include a Latinx perspective that considers the realities of marginals who must negotiate their right to be and belong. Ortega contends that the phenomenological pursuit of being-at-ease is a constant practice.[180] In this case, marginals overcome the challenges of living perpetually in-between worlds by being flexible, and by accepting varying levels of wellness that often register below that of Whitalians. As mobile subjects, Chinatalian women negotiated the classism and economic challenges of Wenzhou in China only to arrive in Italy where they must juggle the moving apparatus of belonging in Italy, and where their "being at ease" is subject to the sociocultural paradigms of an Italy that does not accept them.

While Lepecki argues that dancers are the ideal political subjects because they are constantly improvising ways to circumvent surveillance, and I effort to chart the choreographies of neoliberalism as a phenomenological practice of liberation, I do not dismiss the risk these women assume as ideal political subjects (dancers). Intrinsic to the concept of mobility is "speed, risk, and status"[181]—all attributes of dance movement production, reproduction, and analysis. As I mentioned earlier, my primary focus is to attend to the ways that Chinatalian public dance—as an expressive form of human mobility—offers hope for Chinatalian emplacement, agentic assimilation, and identity production.

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[180] Mariana Ortega, *In-between: Latina feminist phenomenology, multiplicity, and the self* (SUNY press, 2016), 10.

[181] Noel B. Salazar, "Mobility" (2013), 553.

Admittedly, *taiji* practice by Chinatalian women in bright colored puff jackets and sneakers does not immediately sound an alarm of civil disobedience. But within the context of Rome, at the base of the Colosseum, there is a significant amount of risk involved. While I did not have an opportunity to ask the women what they thought about the risk of dancing in their new space, as a participant, I interpreted their gathering in a large group and their initial suspicion of me as reflecting an affect of self-preservation and protection. Butler points out that the precarity of life is a shared reality that as humans, we are all subject to the same potential of harm, pain, and execution by way of inhabiting a body. She writes, "To live is to always live a life that is at risk from the outset and that can be put at risk or expunged quite suddenly from the outside and for reasons that are not always under one's control."[182] In other words, to be human is to be at risk and therefore the body politics of human mobility as a choreography of emplacement and liberation—even in the form of a *taiji*, a slow-moving meditation—places these Chinatalian women at potential risk of harm as improvise their survival and sense of comfort and belonging in Rome. The Chinatalian appropriation of the Colosseum as a scenic setting for choreographies of self-care, communal relationality, and expressions of reciprocity

To extend the theoretical terrain of radical decentering beyond EuroAmerican and Eastern approaches, I would draw again on Ortega's concept of "multiplicitous selfhood" in order to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Chinatalian lived experience in Italy as existentially plural.[183] In other words, Chinatalian phenomenology is specific to the individual

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[182] Judith Butler, "Precarious life, grievable life." *Frames of War* (2009), 14.

[183] Mariana Ortega, *In-between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (SUNY Press, 2016), 12.

(*I*) and the particular conditions of that individual's experience moving through time and space (living in-between worlds). Moving through timespace is what Ortega calls "world-traveling"—the necessary shape-shifting and code-switching that a marginal undertakes in order to survive and obtain a sense of being-at-ease through worlds. World-traveling involves changing one's vocabulary, dress, gestures, and mannerisms as one moves through space. This calls upon Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*—a set of enculturated patterns of behavior that one reiterates to sustain their position in society.[184] Whereas privileged members easily move through space, marginals must submit to inhabiting multiple selves as they negotiate their place, or as Bourdieu would argue, *habitus*. The actions—or choreographies— that one practices in order to attain a sense of being-at-ease is what Ortega calls "hometactics."[185] Hometactics refer to a "politics of location" in which one decisively mobilizes a set of activities in order to create a sense of home, usually under conditions of partial or total exclusion. It is, in short, the art of making do. For Ortega, marginals will never achieve belonging; but partial belonging is possible through world-traveling and applying hometactics. I offer two examples of hometactics. To create a traditional Chinese stir-fry, three ingredients are necessary: ginger, green onions, and garlic. But in Rome, green scallions and ginger are not always available if one lives outside of Chinatown or outside of a multicultural district. Therefore, a hometactic would be to substitute the scallions with regular onions. The taste is similar, but not identical. The Chinatalian women were unable to practice their *taiji* in Chinatown because of Rome's civic remodeling of Piazza Vittorio. They instead opted to move their gathering to the Colosseum.

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[184] Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus." In *Habitus: A Sense of Place* (Routledge, 2017), 59-66.

[185] Mariana Ortega, *In-between: Latina feminist phenomenology, multiplicity, and the self* (SUNY press, 2016), 201.

In this case, their homing tactic was an actual relocation of "home" from one space to another to sustain the continuity of their "being-at-ease." The displacement and alienation the women encountered was a result of the civic remodeling. This became an important factor as the project of modernizing urban spaces produced the conditions which influenced their migration to the ancient Colosseum. Moving from the multicultural hub of Piazza Vittorio to the Colosseum, which is a tourist attraction, the women transmuted the condition of alienation to a condition of performance and choreographed display.

Sicilian Choreographies of Neoliberal Freedom

Up until this point, I have not discussed a dance choreography by a professional dance company in Italy. To anchor this chapter, which examines an actual movement choreography (in the form of Chinatalians and Whitalians practicing *taiji* together in Rome), I refer to *Naufragio con Spettatore* ["Shipwreck with audience"], a dance duet choreographed by Roberto Zappalá, the founder and artistic director of *Compagnia Zappalá*, Sicily's national modern dance company. Zappalá's choreography is known for its carnal tension, raw freneticism, and frantic, hungry, homoerotic undertones.[186] I describe Zappalà's style as a mix of contact improvisation, contemporary, and release technique.[187] *Naufragio con Spettatore*

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[186] To view an excerpt of the dance piece, visit: "*Compagnia Zappalà danza—naufragio con spettatore,*" Teatro PIMoff Milano, 2010, Accessed Jan 21, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6uggrJ58uw.

[187] "Contact improvisation" is a technique of dance in which movement organically evolves through weight sharing. "Release technique" is an approach to movement that considers momentum in the form of potential gathered and released. "Contemporary dance" —though a fraught term—usually refers to a kind of movement that evolved out of the movement research by artists in the 1960s, during which "modern" technicians like Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, José Limon, and Lester Horton pushed against the formalism of ballet. These pioneers drew madly from Eastern practices like martial arts, aikido, and butoh to develop aesthetics that have since been embedded through global circulation (and evolved) into contemporary dance (for which I have no definition). For more on contemporary dance see: SanSan Kwan, "When is contemporary dance? *Dance Research Journal* 49, no .3 (2017): 38-52.

is a 55 minute duet between two men (2010); the movement is set to J.S. Bach[188] and

explores themes of migration and journey. The original program reads:

> [Naufragio: Shipwreck with spectator], which focuses on the theme of migration and the relation between us Westerners and the migrants. Similarly to Odysseus's journeys, many of today's tragic odysseys are set across the Mediterranean Sea, with Sicily at its very centre. Throughout much of its history since the 1800s, Sicily has experienced major waves of emigration.

> Starting from the idea of the shipwreck the choreographer will deal with concepts like journey, hunger/thirst, death/salvation, lack of space, and with references to Ulysses as a shipwrecked and only survivor in the Alcinoo's island. Treating last but not least the today chronicles, with the continuous migrants' crossings in the Mediterranean Sea and the consequent and tragic shipwrecks; from the one of Porto Palo (the biggest shipwreck in Mediterranean's history after the Second World War) to the one of march 2009, with 3 boats with more than 350 migrants sinked off Lebanon.[189]

The excerpt above was released as a part of an announcement for a dance festival in Catania,

Sicily, at Zappalà's theater space, called *Scenario Pubblico* ("public theater/performance

space"). The title of their festival was "*uva* grapes Catania contemporary dance network" [*uva*

meaning "grapes"]. I draw on this dance piece because of its themes of migration and the

neoliberal undertones. Zappalà's dance company is a Sicilian national treasure, receiving

generous funding from Italy and Sicily's various government agencies including the *Minestro*

della Cultura (the Minister of Culture, a national organization) and the *Regione di Sicilia* (an

agency associated and funded by the *Turismo dello Sport e dello Spettacolo* [Association of

Sporting Tourism and Performance].[190] When speaking to one of Zappalà's dancers, I

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[188] Selections from Bach's Prelude No. 1, BWV 846, including "Ave Maria" sung live by Marianna Capellani.

[189] "Naufragio con spettatore", Scenario Pubblico, 2010. Acces date Jan 20 2013, https://www.scenariopubblico.com/en/creazioni/naufragio-con-spettatore/.

[190] "Naufragio con spettatore", Scenario Pubblico, 2010. Acces date Jan 20 2013, https://www.scenariopubblico.com/en/creazioni/naufragio-con-spettatore/.

learned that nearly all of the company's funding comes from national and regional resources; in other words, Zappalà is for the most part, funded by the Italian state and the region of Sicily. Given this, Roberto Zappalà works with a level of artistic freedom; though he also works within the constraints that come with national patronage, this kind of financial support is not granted to most choreographers, whether professional, local, amateur. I would argue that Zappalà privilege is due of course, to the creative talents of the artistic director, but it is also on account of Sicily's strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea; the island has for centuries, been an important node between the Italian peninsula, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In recent history, Sicily has become famous as an arrival point for migrants and refugees from the continents I mentioned above. In particular, the island of Lampadusa (roughly 200 kilometers south of Sicily and 100 km north of Tunisia, Africa)[191] is a focal point in media and journalism as a primary landing zone for refugees from North Africa. With the spotlight on Sicily as a hot zone for human migration (and nationalistic debates on what to do with migrants), *Naufragio* is a kind of social commentary that gestures toward themes of migration and journey. However, I suggest that though the dance claims to emphasize themes of migration and journey, it is also a successful negotiation of place—the place of an immensely gifted, native Sicilian-born artist creating dance works *related* to national and world issues of migration but not *about* them. In other words, the neoliberal undertones of exception point to Zappalà's adaption of themes from the *real* crisis of human

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[191] See: "Migrants and Refugees in Italy," EuroMed Rights, Accessed Jan 21 2023, https://euromedrights.org/migrants-and-refugees-in-italy-2/; Wladimir Pantelone "Hundreds dead, missing, as migrant boat sinks off Italy," Reuters, Oct 3 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-migrants/hundreds-dead-missing-as-migrant-boat-sinks-off-italy-idUSBRE9920AX20131003; Mauro Buccarelo, "Hundreds of migrants dock in Sicily in biggest arrival in years," Los Angeles Times, Sep 28, 2021, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-09-28/hundreds-of-migrants-dock-in-sicily-in-biggest-arrival-in-years.

migration (and death because narratives of arrival in Sicily are often expressed with images of Black bodies queuing for military officials, washing ashore, or floating at sea) however none of the actual choreography or dramaturgy explicitly surrenders itself to the issue of refugees. I am careful not to assign the burden of political message to the dance (or Zappalà, for that matter); but the notion that *Naufragio's* becoming is due to national and regional funds and loosely gestures to migration (without overtly indicating a relationship to the Black bodies at sea) is a nuance that appreciates both the undertones of neoliberalism as exception and exceptions to neoliberalism. To put it another way, *Naufragio* exists because Zappalà has negotiated a place for himself through positioning his dance company and his choreographies as a national treasure, one with which the majority of Sicilian people are proud to identify;[192] but as an exception to the neoliberal pursuit of (personal, regional, sexual, artistic identity) expression, he takes artistic license to practice a freedom from locating himself directly to the refugee crisis, a crisis of human mobility. Noland's theory of the agentic body's choice to mobilize in concert with cultural trends is at work here, in Zappalà's choreography of liberation from the historic "subaltern" identity of southern Italy which often comes with a lack of infrastructure and state funding. Zappalà remains an exception to the North-South divide in that he is lauded as a cultural representative, though I would argue, because his works align with classical dance and classical music traditions, his negotiation of freedom from the tension of North-South relations is one that involved neoliberal choreographies of mobility.

Contextualizing the Chinatalian Dance Scene in Rome

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[192] A.M (Sicilian scholar from Palermo) in email communication with author, 2019.

Though the Chinatalian women I discuss in this chapter are not refugees nor are they assuming any national rights to funding for their dancing in Rome, they are in a sense, new arrivals with spectators because they have chosen (with license) to move together in a public space. In my fieldwork in Rome, I identified three major Chinatalian dance groups. My engagement with this Chinatalian community spanned three months. In my role as a researcher, I spent time with these women. I danced regularly with them in the mornings and thereby I established casual friendship ties with the dancers. I also became good friends with an informant with whom I grocery-shopped regularly in Chinatown. Because the city was remodeling *Piazza Vittorio*—the primary square in *Esquilino* where the women usually met—the women moved their gatherings to two main locations: 1) the space in front of *Teatro Ambra Jiovenelli*—a small art nouveau theater and; 2) *Parco del Colle Oppio*, a public park on the Oppian Hill, beside the Colosseum. The three groups varied widely and distinguished themselves by age, gender, dress, dance genre, labor roles, economic and citizenship status, method of reproducing dance movements, and social formalities that established or resisted hierarchies in which the roles of leader and followers were visible.

The first group consisted of nine, thirty-something Chinatalian women, who dressed in classical Chinese dance costumes and rehearsed a set choreography to Communist-era Chinese folk music. The second group of dancing women consisted of three to four women who were regular participants, ranging in age from their 30s to 70s. This group was more casual and participant attendance depended on individual obligations related to personal matters and job schedules. The third group of dancing women represents the principal case study for this chapter. This group consisted of nine Chinatalian women in their early thirties to late forties, one Chinatalian man in his 60s, and three white Italians—a middle-aged white

man and two middle aged white women. The three white Italian participants were dressed in traditional silk martial arts shirt and pant sets, matching the Chinatalian woman leader of the group. The rest of the group wore loose-fitting, casual street clothes—polyester black elastic-waisted pants and cotton tops with tennis shoes. Many of them wore vibrant red, pink, and magenta puff jackets. I was dressed in black corduroy slacks, a big navy puff jacket, and tennis shoes.

Limitations and Delimitations

This case study reflects one instance of engagement with the women at the Colosseum because there were obstructions within this fieldwork which precluded repeated and longitudinal engagement. The obstructions included: 1) the observance of Italian national holidays, which affected public transport; 2) inclement weather; and 3) the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prematurely concluded my fellowship in Rome, as Italy became the first country outside of China to have a major outbreak that shut down borders and made travel impossible. Despite these challenges, this third group was a productive case study based on several criteria. Firstly, the juxtaposition of *taiji*, which is a trademark of Chinese movement tradition, against the Colosseum, which is an enduring emblem of Roman eternity presented a unique opportunity to consider contemporary productions of Italian culture. Secondly, *taiji* is a kinesthetic meditation that seeks stillness through movement. Stillness-through-movement cultivates a sense of infinitude that accentuates the present moment. This infinitude or possibility is related to an Eastern concept of *Ma*, which I discuss in the previous chapter. Thirdly, both the beauty of *taiji* movement and the eternity of the Colosseum are living entities because our experience of them allows their beauty to persist. Some may argue that the Colosseum as a crumbling ruin is subject to time; however,

that would be too literal of an understanding as I am making a comparison of a movement

practice and its ephemerality in conversation with what the Colosseum stands for—beauty,

conquest, and the permanence of those ideals *despite* the structure's physical condition. Even

as convention aims to fix *taiji* as a prescribed choreography, and the mythology of the

Colosseum fixes itself as an immobile and monolithic ruin, their eternity relies on the

condition of constant flux, as people experience their beauty again and again.

I wish, then, to delimit the two objects of analysis in this case study: the dance

choreography of *taiji* and the Colosseum. I treat these as living objects of beauty. I will first

engage the Colosseum as a mobile entity in this Chinatalian choreography. I will frame my

analysis within a critical dance studies approach that also considers surveys in anthropology

and philosophy. Integrating existing theories of space, structures, and how they both assist

moving bodies in creating a sense of belonging helps to animate a dynamic methodology

that mirrors an interdisciplinary approach. This approach identifies the ways that the

Colosseum dances with the women as living bodies of moving beauty. True, by animating

the Colosseum as a dancing partner in an urban, Chinatalian choreography, I am assuming a

great deal of agency; I acknowledge my part as a participant and dancer in this choreography.

Ultimately, animating the Colosseum allows for an unorthodox interpretation of this

Chinatalian choreography, which I would argue elicits unconventional notions of beauty,

belonging, and presence in Rome.

The Colosseum Dances

Roxana Waterson's anthropological studies of indigenous architecture throughout

Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Madagascar[193] contend that built-structures are living entities of

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[193] Roxana Waterson, *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia.* Singapore ;: Oxford University Press, 1990.

potent vitality. While Waterson examines "vernacular buildings" in the form of home dwellings, her survey nonetheless identifies the ways that buildings play an active role in shaping everyday social interactions. From this positionality, the Colosseum animates social interactions of migrant Chinatalian women by providing a scenic backdrop for the group *taiji*. While the dancers do not dance *in* or *on* the Colosseum per say, they structure, nonetheless is a prominent fixture with which the dancers engage as an aesthetic element of the choreography. Additionally, it serves as a crucial reference point that locates these women as present in Rome. For example, when instructing me to find this *taiji* group, an informant in Chinatown told me to, "go to the Colosseum. You will find them there." In reality, they practiced in the park *next* to the Colosseum. Logistically, this posed a greater effort to locate the group because my journey involved catching a bus, crossing a labyrinth of construction tape, mounds of un-landscaped dirt, as I climbed the backside of the Oppian hill, in order to reach the top of the park, where they practiced. Relatedly, though Waterson's work is on domestic buildings, she remarks that structures shape hierarchies of gender and rank. In a similar way, the Colosseum maintains an active involvement in designating the women as physically enthroned atop one of Rome's ancient seven hills. There is also the notoriety of associating with a major international tourist attraction. Removed from Piazza Vittorio (Rome's Chinatown), the location means that the women have extra leisure time to make the journey on foot to the park and back in time to begin their workday in the restaurants and shops of Piazza Vittorio. Such a migration from Chinatown to the Colosseo indicates a mobility that affords them spatial distance from their location of wage-earning labor. As a publicly-funded environment that sees consistent foot-traffic by tourists making their way to the actual Colosseum, *Parco del Colle Oppio* has a cultural capital that lends

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kinesthetic buoyancy to the women's morning practice; there are lots of witnesses and passersby that provide an "audience," with many of them snapping photos with the women in them; the foot traffic creates a bustling scene that challenges the body's ability to stay focused and in meditation.

The actual dance space is not large, measuring roughly six by ten yards. I note that the political implications of asserting that Chinatalian women dancing *taiji* is something beautiful is an entirely subjective claim, one that problematizes the notion of eternity and the political implications of what it means to suggest that alterity is "beautiful." What I can offer is that my use of the term *eternity*, as it relates to beauty, responds to the popular references to Rome as the eternal city; however, my response to that popular take on Rome as eternal is to borrow from the Eastern philosophy of *ma*, which understands eternity as the present moment. In considering the political implications of designating Chinatalian women as beautiful, I point out that taking their space next to a monument that formerly served as a sports arena for gladiator games is significant. One could read into this and suggest that the women are using *taiji*, as a martial art, to fight for and win their space in Italian society. The struggle for recognition as bodies worthy of occupying pubic space is perhaps a contentious claim for me to make. I cannot speak for the women in saying that their *taiji* practice is an act of war, resisting their isolation within Italian culture, or that they are, like the gladiators, enslaved members of Italian society. However, what is fact is that this *taiji* group occupies prime ambulatory real estate which tourists traverse. In this way, I would argue that the Chinatalian women become moving fixtures of the Roman spectacle. Though, the Colosseum is a living, moving body in this Chinatalian choreography that animates an eternal beauty in a politics of location and liberation through dance in Rome.

Beauty

Elaine Scarry's notion of beauty is another appropriate point of entry for discussing the Colosseum as a living object of beauty that activates and receives activation from the women practicing their group *taiji*.[194] For Scarry, beauty is a phenomenological experience that leads to a condition of "radical decentering," which describes the sudden state of awesome awareness one feels when in the presence of something beautiful.[195] "[R]adical decentering" is a phenomenon that occurs when one beholds something beautiful, derives an acute pleasure from being in the presence of that beauty, and shifts from an individual world view to an awareness of "lateralness" or the condition of being beside.[196] The Chinatalian women who choose to dance together at the base of the Colosseum are placing themselves adjacent to a thing of beauty. True, while the Colosseum may not necessarily be an object of beauty to all of the women, it is certainly a monument that some behold as aesthetically noteworthy. For some international tourists, the Colosseum is an architectural wonder encountered on a guided tour, which afterwards perhaps becomes neutralized, its beauty receding into the expansive visual landscape of Rome. For some people who see the Colosseum daily, it is no longer a novelty because it becomes a familiar sight/site. For other locals or visitors, the Colosseum—with its soot-powdered, snaggle-toothed, jagged edges—is an urban *bête noire*, embedded amidst the noxious fumes of diesel-shrouded traffic. Still, for those who remain enamored by Rome, and open to its unfolding magic and nostalgia, the Colosseum represents a romantic view of the eternal city, where anything is possible. These

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[194] Elaine Scarry, "On beauty and being just." In *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

[195] Scarry, 114.

[196] Idem.

are common responses to the Colosseum. Pertinent to this analysis, however, is yet another, more nuanced response to the Colosseum in juxtaposition to the Chinatalian women practicing *taiji*. This fourth response is one of disruption—the Chinatalian women—who in conventional terms, represent Mainland China, or the migrant working class in Rome—are a curious, unusual, out-of-place spectacle for tourists and locals alike, to behold against the Colosseum, which remains an object of beguiling pulchritude. The aesthetic arrest creates a phenomenological shift to what Scarry terms as "fairness."[197] To be in the presence of something beautiful decenters us from the primacy of the Self, to experience "unselfing." To conceive of these two seemingly opposite or irreconcilable objects of beauty—the group of women in their *taiji* practice and the Colosseum—disrupts orthodoxy. To the keen perceiver, the pairing of these "moving" objects causes a double take. The dancing bodies of the Chinatalian women dancing in concert with the Colosseum does not undermine the value of the Colosseum but increases the possibilities of engagement with Rome (and Chinatalians) from unconventional angles. One assumes a position of aesthetic arrest as the mind and body attempt to reconcile the duet. In the process, Rome becomes, perhaps, something else, not what it seems. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*,[198] I would suggest that a freeplay of meanings arises from the moving text of the Colosseum in duet with the women's *taiji*. The Chinatalian women's practice of *taiji* tousles and disrupts a direct experience of the Colosseum. As one gains proximity to the Colosseum, arrival is deferred by the Chinatalian women. Their moving meditation of *taiji* flows into the Colosseum,

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[197] Elaine Scarry, "On beauty and being just." In *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton University Press, 2013), 91.

[198] Derrida, Jacques. *L'écriture et la différence*. Média Diffusion, 2019.

brushing back again to unearth versions of the Colosseum that advance an intimacy with Rome that is not at first apparent. I suggest this entanglement between the women's dance and the Colosseum produces a contemporary choreography of Rome that lends itself to sensing Italy as Chinatalian and intrinsically Roman.

Admittedly, some may argue that there is nothing innovative or exciting about Chinatalian bodies in duet with the Colosseum. However, my point is to underscore that this contemporary assemblage of material space and moving bodies in Rome has the capacity to bend us toward what Saidiya Hartman calls "the position of the unthought."[199] The unthought position describes both material and symbolic spaces in Western imaginaries, in which formerly enslaved or colonized Black people locate themselves, living along color lines that sustain their persistent social erasure.[200] While the Chinese diaspora have a different history of migration, racialization, and colonization, they nonetheless, live on a color line in Italy that is not interested in supporting Chinatalian visibility or their integration as desirable members of Italian citizenry. In other words, suggesting that Chinatalians belong in Rome, may not sit well with those who fail to see the value of migrant bodies, occupying public space. Scarry's argument for beauty is helpful here as I shed light on the ways that Chinatalian dancing bodies reciprocate the beauty of their environment and augment Rome's existing grandeur. For Scarry, beauty's potential is in its ability to arrest and unsettle our self-centeredness; this process moves us toward sensing "ethical fairness."[201] Beauty does not

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[199] Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson. "The position of the unthought." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183-201.

[200] Hartman and Wilderson, 183-201.

[201] Elaine Scarry, "On beauty and being just." In *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton University Press, 2013), 95.

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make us just; but beholding an object of beauty has the potential to move us toward

considerations of equity. Alternately, Judith Butler, in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of*

Violence and Morning, links the politics of being human to the inescapable potential of

corporeal pain, emotional suffering, and the finitude of this physical life.[202] By reading Scarry

alongside Butler, I would argue that beauty—in the way that I discussed it this chapter— not

only conditions human sensorial awareness of risk and injustice, but is constitutively linked

to a *felt* sense of justice, legitimating sensorial feelings of fairness and symmetry as we

negotiate dwelling with the other. For both Scarry and Butler, the aesthetic experience

precipitates ethical subjecthood as a sensuous process.

A Right to Beauty

Scarry's theory uses justice to uphold the importance of beauty. Likewise, I am

interested in the potential transformative power of beauty. According to Scarry, beauty

presses us toward the *possibility* of justice in two ways. First, the phenomenological

experience of "opiated adjacency" allows us to take pleasure in being beside beauty. Second,

beauty is a catalyst for "lateral distribution,"[203] a creative action that moves the beholder to

protect that which is beautiful, to reiterate the horizontal symmetry of beauty, and ultimately,

to create ethical fairness in the form of justice.[204] Scarry writes:

> A beautiful thing is not the only thing that can make us feel adjacent; nor is it the
> only thing in the world that brings a state of acute pleasure. But it appears to be one
> of the few phenomena in the world that brings about both simultaneously: it permits
> us to be adjacent while also permitting us to experience extreme pleasure, thereby
> creating the sense that it is our own adjacency that is pleasure-bearing. This seems a

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[202] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (*Verso, 200).

[203] Elaine Scarry, "On beauty and being just." In *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 114.

[204] Scarry, 114.

gift in its own right, and a gift of prelude to our precondition of enjoying fair relations with others.[205]

In other words, to experience beauty is to experience the gift of being proximate, as opposed to be being the center. Seeing, sensing, smelling, and tasting beauty is an affective pleasure that radically decenters us to a lateral position—a precondition of ethical fairness. To experience the phenomenological disruption of the women's *taiji* and the visuality of the Colosseum radically decenters the centering of the Colosseum as the focal object of beauty. The juxtaposition also radically decenters the viewer from associating the Chinatalian women with their roles as laborers in restaurants and retail shops. Their emplacement at the base of the Colosseum also disrupts those just-passing-through. The everyday jogger, tourist, or dogwalker is more than a viewer, they are bodies bearing both somatic proximity and witness to Chinatalian assimilation. Henri Lefebvre coined the term "a right to the city,"[206] which has in the last twenty years, become a slogan of activists and political progressives. "[A] right to the city" entails a libertarian practice of reclaiming city space through creative acts that divest the actors from the commodification and capitalization of their roles as members of society. In other words, through their *taiji* practice, the Chinatalian women are creating new ways of belonging in Rome while simultaneously creating Roman space. Their roles as laborers in the sectors of international tourism and the local economy as shopkeepers shift to the periphery as the women take center stage, with the Colosseum as a collaborative entity in their practice of belonging. Thus, David Harvey credits Marxist geographers with the contemporary

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[205] Elaine Scarry, "On beauty and being just." In *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 114.

[206] Lefebvre, Henri. "Le droit à la ville." *L'Homme et la société* 6, no. 1 (1967): 29-35.

adaption of Lefebvre's notion of "a right to the city." Harvey contends that the primary agents of this anarchist practice involves "the young, the poor, and individuals and groups all around the world who feel they have been excluded from aspects of city life."[207] While I take issue with Harvey's totalizing approach, which places a Marxist schematic upon marginals "all around the world," it is useful to consider the ways that these Chinatalian women are working to create an experience of the city that is wholly their own despite the exclusions they experience as outsiders in the context of a white Italy. I imagine that if asked, they would not discuss the political entailments of their practice; I did not have a chance to ask them; but I believe they would not discuss it; group movement in public spaces is common practice among Chinese diaspora women regardless of location. The interplay between the Chinatalian dance and an architectural object that represents the eternity of Rome allows for multiple entries into a discourse on how Chinatalians are creating space, identity, belonging, and culture in Italy.

While beauty radically decenters our experience by augmenting our sense of the world, Scarry concedes that beauty is not the only phenomena that generates opiated adjacency and a profound desire to look again and again. She contemplates how grieving also produces a state of adjacency. For her part, Butler describes grieving as a phenomenological state of being "beside" oneself. To behold one's own grief is to be bound as a witness to the immeasurable depth of one's own despair. I would also point out that scenes of tragedy and horror—like traffic accidents—have the power to place most people into a sense of adjacency—while these scenes are not beautiful, they are arresting and cause one to look

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[207] David Harvey, ""The Right to the City": New Left Review (2008)." In *The City Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 281.

again and again. Whether the catalyst is beauty, tragedy, or horror, the fundamental merit of

Scarry's theory of adjacency and lateralness is the possibility of radical decentering.

Ma

Another way to think of decentering and its potential to move us toward the

unexpected is through the Eastern concept of *Ma*. Japanese design researcher, Yoko Akama,

defines *Ma* as "[in] between-ness."[208] Brazilian performance artists Cristina Elias and Priscila

Arantes write:

> *Ma* means emptiness, space, time or pause and its origin is correlated to the ideas of
> transience and incompleteness characteristic of Zen-Buddhist aesthetics. However,
> more than a concept, *Ma* is a *modus operandi* in Japanese daily life, which illustrates a
> place available for the materialization of potential events. It is an inter-space of
> connection through which people, actions, objects can pass and that, precisely for
> this reason, is the place of the present time.[209]

 Ma refers to the present, pregnant with possibility. Scholar of Japanese religion, Richard B.

Pilgrim, writes, "the word *ma* basically means 'interval' between two (or more) spatial or

temporal things or events. Thus it is not only used in compounds to suggest measure but

carries meanings such as gap, opening, space between, time between, and so forth. "[210]

Pilgrim explains that the Japanese written word for *ma* is composed of two Chinese radicals

for "gate" and the radical for "sun." The visual is of light shining through an opening that is

gate or door.[211] The opening suggests the concept of *Ma*, or the collapse of (time)space. Ma

[208] Yoko Akama, "Being Awake to Ma: Designing in Between-Ness as a Way of Becoming
With." *CoDesign* 11, no. 3-4 (2015): 262–274.

[209] Cristina Elias and Priscila Arantes. "Suspending Space and Time: The Body Under the Lens of the
Japanese Concept of Ma." In *Cross-Cultural Design. Methods, Tools and User Experience*, 11576:127–143. Cham:
Springer International Publishing, 2019.

[210] Richard B. Pilgrim, "Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic
Paradigm in Japan." *History of religions* 25, no. 3 (1986): 255.

[211] Richard B. Pilgrim, "Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic
Paradigm in Japan." *History of religions* 25, no. 3 (1986): 258.

refers to the in-between space, the "opening" and appears as a design element in Japanese architecture, music, dance, and poetry.[212] We often experience *Ma* as visual silence in the negative space of a painting, as aural silence in the pauses between musical notes, or a kinesthetically-felt pause in dance when the body punctuates movement with stillness or comparatively slower movement dynamics. For example, in Japanese architecture, *Ma* is the "gap" or visual pause created between two pillars of a building. Kabuki theater applies *Ma* as an aesthetic device, creating pauses in-between movements on stage. *Ma* is an affective, embodied state—Japanese Jungian psychoanalyst, Kawai Hayao connected *ma* to the Buddhist and Daoist concept of *mushin* in Japanese or *wuxin* in Chinese, meaning "no-mind."[213] Ma describes a state of inner peace, an internal sense of dynamic stillness which practitioners of martial arts, visual arts, poetry, and spiritual meditation seek to attain.

As a taiko drum performer, I experience *ma* in multiple ways. *Ma* is an aural experience of as the musical pause between drum strokes. I feel myself in the space in-between beats, as the residual vibrations move into my body and outward into the distance, taking me with it to the boundary of my perception. Without having moved my physical body, I am in a new space time, traveling in stillness. In this space of *Ma*, I have a heightened awareness of each heartbeat. I sense the new color of the present moment. The space between my joints eases and expands, filling with synovial fluid, my body broadens laterally, sagittally, and lengthens vertically. My muscles relax in anticipation of the past as it circulates from the point of the future. I am present. In *taiko*, the musical pause between drum strokes

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[212] Chikami, Kanako. "Utilizing Japanese Concepts of 間(Ma) in Japanese Percussion Repertoire." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021.

[213] Koji Sato, Kataoka Hitoshi, Richard Demartino, Masao Abe, and Kawai Hayao "What is the true self?"—A Discussion—". *Psychologia* 4, no. 3 (1961): 126-131.

may be "silent"; but *Ma* holds the potential of the unexpected. *Ma* is a sensorial experience—inhabiting *Ma* places me outside of linear timespace—*ma* is not the past nor the future, but an embodied condition of being present, in the moment. However, to perceive the absence of sound requires first that the ear register sound. In other words, perceiving difference allows for the human perception of potential. This is akin to Scarry's notion of beholding beauty because to experience *Ma* is to submit to the shift from the common to the uncommon. To reorient one's perception to the interval space foregrounds the potentiality of unexpected possibility. I would further argue that *Ma* is not only a radical decentering, but a radical *uncentering* as we inhabit the openness.

Ethnographic Choreographies of Gaining Entry

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Soyini D. Madison's framework of critical ethnography is the primary method that used. Critical ethnography is a qualitative research approach that endeavors to unveil systems and dynamics of power that produce inequality in society with the hope of offering a mode of re-dressing those injustices. This method of inquiry prioritizes underrepresented voices and the embodied experiences of those who occupy the periphery as cultural, social, political, or economic marginals. In this case study, as a participant observer, I applied these ideals by using the Spradley method of native language engagement.[214] Native-language engagement serves the purpose of a symbolic (and pragmatic) gesture that assures the research community that the researcher is interested in learning from and with them. I approached the group speaking Mandarin Chinese to establish cultural familiarity.

"I'm Chinese from America," I said, slowly inhaling to relax so the next Mandarin sounds could tumble out of my mouth fluidly. I drew extra air in my lungs, the lungs across my back, into my shoulders. "San Francisco." I offered, as I continued, holding onto what felt like a thin thread of diaspora connection.

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[214] James P. Spradley, *The ethnographic interview* (Waveland Press, 2016).

Nervous chatter in Wenzhou dialect emerges as they convened amongst each other. I sensed their caution and uncertainty. I knew what I must do— the diaspora emplacement spiel, a kind of elevator pitch that introduces my parents and their birthplaces. In my travels, I learned that this introduction help people to place me, through a tracking of my Chinese lineage and the migrations of my parents and their parents. But before I could begin, the women in the fanned line fired off questions, one after the other like ammunition, interjecting into my speech about my parents' birthplace. I had to soften my energy further and ride their tempo if I wanted to stay in sync with them. I drew in another deep breath and exhaled slowly, ready to float like fog against the oncoming rush of dialogue. I softened my knees, released into the space between my bones, relaxed my sternum to melt the muscles in my chest.

"Where were you born?"

"San Francisco," I answered, "student." I revert to short answers as I know this was going to be a long inquisition. I knew what they wanted to know. They had a checklist in their head. Ticking the boxes would help determine their level of comfort with me.

"What are you doing here?" asked another woman. At this point, they had begun rapidly switching from speaking their Wenzhou dialect into Chinese Mandarin as they processed aloud to each other, the answers in their dialect. The switch from Wenzhou dialect to Mandarin was a gestural concession, one that opened a tiny gap of entry for me.

"Student." I said again. Waiting for the next question, I did my best to smile.

"But where are your parents from?" they pressed.

"Taiwan," I answered.

They threw their heads back as if to slowly watch a bird move across the sky. "Aaaaaahh!" they said in unison. With this information they calculated that my family was Kuo Ming Dang (KMT)— supporters of the Chinese Nationalist party who were ousted by Mao's Communist party in 1949. I could not know what they were thinking. I am a descendent of refugees? I am a descendent of colonial oppressors that subjugated the native Taiwanese people to martial law? I am a descendent of anti-Communist? I am a descendent of anti-Mainland Chinese everything?

Not certain if that information would help or hurt me, I took advantage of the gap, left by the time they were taking to process the information and my lineage. Hoping to humanize myself to the group, I said "My dad was born in Guanxi," I started, and continued cautiously, "My mother was born in Hunan…" I continued to read the space. The whites were still in the back, unsure of what was happening (as all of this was taking place in Chinese). I stood in the very middle of the group, in front of me, all the Chinatalian ladies, behind me, the Chinatalian man, scurrying back and forth between the group of women and the white Italians. He listened to the Chinese and then politely explained in Italian to the whites, what was happening.

To move things along, I asked, "Can I do taiji with you? I am practicing also, just so I can know you better," this was a line I rehearsed the night before with my mother, who said it would work. It did. They let me in.

Approaching the group through Chinese language and *taiji* movement vocabulary gained me entry into their group. Once they accepted me, the actual group movement lasted another forty-five minutes or so. Reflecting on the women's questioning (of my heritage, my origins, my intentions), I think of the ways that the heated dialogue was both a kinesthetic and symbolic choreography that generated connectivity and relationality but also brought

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everyone into the present moment. I argue that the heated discussion produced a form of contemporary Italian dance. While the *taiji* movement itself produced a sense of group communality (as we all sought to behold stillness through practicing traditional *taiji* movement), so did the act of questioning bring us into the contemporary dance moment. Grappling with the definition of "contemporary dance," dance scholar and Odissi dancer, Ananya Chatterjea, contends that conventional terms like "traditional" and "contemporary" are often "periodizing structures" that seek to concretize understandings of dance as fixed to a particular time period, country, and body. Ironically, while "contemporary" denotes a relation to time, Chatterjea's inspires us to think of time as only one component of contemporary dance. In other words, human mobilities intersect with time, space, politics, economics, and cultures. These intersections produce specific environmental and phenomenological conditions that are constantly impacting and redefining the meaning of the "contemporary" moment. This approach momentarily decolonializes the relationship between bodies in motion and the conditions that emerge as a product of human movement. To push back against the cold, structural immobility of categorizations that colonize dancing bodies-in-motion, Chatterjea identifies heat as a physicality that resists alterity. Like Noland's theory of the agentic body and Lapecki's dancer as the ideal political subject, Chatterjea regards the body's ability to generate heat as a form of kinesthetic resistance to uninvited place-making. Chatterjea talks about heat in relation to anger, "With a commitment to transform the heat of anger into a generative heat, emerging from centering alterity, I jump into the landscape of contemporary dance.[215] Here, heat is for Chatterjea, response to being invisibilized, dismissed, and relegated to the margins of alterity. She continues:

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[215] Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (Springer Nature, 2020), xiii.

> Heat: An. Entropic. Practice. of. Contemporary. Dancing. To arrive might be to
> return, or to start again. Or to hook into the cyclical processes of time where
> beginnings and endings merge to experience the rising heat from the ground…[216]

Body heat, for Chatterjea is related to producing, defying, defining, and reclaiming,

contemporary dance as moving target, a labyrinth, a mobile battleground. For Chatterjea,

generating heat is a sound recourse for responding to adversity. When considering the

positionality of the subaltern, "contemporary" takes on new meaning.[217] In a postcolonial

Italian context, I consider the questioning my presence as a "contemporary" act that

generated connectively, which brought us into the moment. Our dialogue became a

kinesthetic practice of defying, challenging, testing, and recuperating conventional paradigms

that produce "belonging" in Italy and cultural imaginaries of China, Chinatalia, and wherever

it seemed to the women that I came from.

In the scene above, the women faced a stranger (me) and generated symbolic and

literal heat through their rapid-fire succession of questions. Because my presence disrupted

the group choreography, the questioning took place during an intermission—we were not

dancing, per se, but we were traversing symbolic space as they demanded an explanation of

who I was and what I was doing there. Ultimately, they became satisfied when they could

track my lineage—firstly, the choreographies of human migration that my parents and

grandparents undertook; and secondly, the choreography of my own movement as a

Chinese-Taiwanese-American student researcher from America to Rome. The group labor of

emplacement—my emplacement within the group and the women's understanding of how

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[216] Chatterjea, 225.

[217] Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (Springer Nature, 2020).

we would relate to each other—relied on the moving dialogue between our bodies and tongues, which gestured to the movements we had taken to get there. By mapping my migration, I was able to make myself visible to the women. Mapping my diasporic past was a requirement that gained me initial entry, with my ability to move with them, a secondary reinforcement. Through the women's questioning, we revealed the historical trajectories of our movement. This discovery made it possible to return to the *taiji* practice. These motions represented an interlude of intercultural dance labor—a nuanced and intangible effort—that Chatterjea would relate to the act of bodies-in-motion generating heat as an energy that sustains continuity in the making of "contemporary" dance.

Another salient point in regard to traces of heat is the older Chinatalian gentleman who shuffled back and forth. He moved close to listen to the inquisition and back again toward the "Whitalians" in the back row so that he could translate for them. His body-in-motion performed the labor of integrating the Whitalians. For her part, Chatterjea suggests that body heat patterns are traceable and register postcolonial performances of feminism "of a new world order."[218] From this lens, it is possible to consider that he—as the only Chinatalian man in the group was contributing his bodily labor to the project of feminism. Shuttling back and forth, he was generating body heat, connecting the inquisition with the symbolic choreography of moving between the Chinatalian community and the Whitalian community. Perhaps it is also possible to consider the white Italians as representing an augmented definition of Chinatalian, as they occupied the Chinatalian choreography. The man's intangible labor of translation served the multiple intercultural encounters—that of my conversation with the Chinatalian women, and the relationality between the whites and

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[218] Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (Springer Nature, 2020), 189.

the Chinatalian women. His bodily labor produced tracks of heat, designing pathways that registered the energy patterns of contemporary relationalities and continuities; his *unvisible* footprints, marking and remarking the ground, treading and re-treading over the territory of Rome made palimpsest with the labor of his feminist choreography. As our dialogue registered the constellation of migration nodes—the migrations of my parents, the women's migrations from Wenzhou, my own migration from America to Rome, we connected in an alternate timespace. All the while, the Chinatalian man reiterated our choreographies by relaying it to the Whitalians. Here, I further contemplate the iteration and translation as forms of choreography. The man produced another iteration of what he witnessed, and from his own perspective, translated the choreography from Chinese language into Italian to the Whitalians, who were so eager to understand the disruption. In his translation of the event into another language, the man produced another interpretation of what happened, engendering new meaning in the transference.

Chatterjea's point on body heat as reflecting a feminism of a new world order is significant because it identifies transnational migration and everyday dance gathering as a form of decolonialization through group kinesthetic resistance. This feminist resistance does not preclude the involvement of Chinatalian men nor white Italians who are present in the space. Put another way, bodies—regardless of race, sex, gender, class, or age—have the agency to generate body heat that serves to prompt and sustain connectivity and relationality. His bodily shuttling is a form of kinesthetic resistance to isolation that emerged as visible within this fieldwork that successfully tracked the ways that Chinatalians are producing Italian culture, identity, and belonging. The bodily labor he undertook to render seamless, this quotidian engagement between Chinatalians, a Chinese-American researcher, and white

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Italians reflects how human mobility can be a tactic to decolonialize choreographies of containment which often relegate people into sociocultural categories of frigid isolation.

Suggesting that concert, ritual, and quotidian forms of dance generate the energy necessary for change does not suggest that the body acts alone in shaping the contours of culture. Indeed, Noland's agentic body must contend with the choreographies of containment which structure the cultural lexicon of the kinesthetic body. Obviously, the Chinatalian man understood the terrain of inquisition was closed to him and remained the work of the women in the group. To interrogate the stranger in order to identify a potential threat to the survival or conviviality of the group was the main goal of the interaction. While it is possible to read this social labor as reflecting gender hierarchy it is more likely that the man served as interpreter because he had Italian language skills which the women did not. The most recent wave of immigration to Italy from China—to which the man likely attributes his arrival— began in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s. During that time, Chinese men were the largest demographic of incoming migrants. Men arrived first to secure business ties, housing, and residency permits in order to initiate chain migration that would later bring over wives and children.[219]

Conclusion

Ortega's praxis of existential pluralism informs my theoretical apparatus to analyze the bodily mobility of Chinatalian women dancing *taiji* together. And while Scarry's theory of lateralness and the Eastern philosophy of *Ma* provide a theoretical foundation, they do not account for the interpersonal and institutional impact of race, gender, class, sexuality, or

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[219] Patrizia Battilani, and Francesca Fauri. "Chinese Migration to Italy: Features and Issues." In *Labour Migration in Europe Volume I*, pp. 11-42. Palgrave Pivot, Cham, 2018.

ableness upon the human body in motion. In fairness, lateralness and *Ma* are not projects that seek resolution of such tensions; therefore Ortega's praxis of multiplicity better identifies the mobility of Chinatalians in their world-traveling—their phenomenological experiences are unique to the individual who is perpetually negotiating the practical realities of life as a marginal in Italy. If lateralness and *Ma* describe embodied states of being, then multiplicity is the embodied praxis of those states that register the mobile, substantive everyday lived experiences of Chinatalians. Through engaging Ortega's vision of "multiplicitous selfhood," I consider the political aspects of this group dance as an embodied practice that fosters the potential for political resistance—as the dancers shape-shift through the choreography, they negotiate their social identities and positionalities through the in-between spaces of Italian society. These three primary theories—beauty, interval space, and multiplicity—anchor the intersectional aesthetic approach I take to analyze Chinatalian mobility in this chapter. Investigating how Chinatalians are living in the margins, unsettling conventions, and generating new forms of Italian identity and belonging provide a novel approach to understanding ways that human movement—individual and collective—help to shape the world in which we all live.

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with questions about how Chinatalians are producing a new Italy, and how they are contributing to generating new forms of Italian culture in Rome. My approach contextualized this exploration within a historical framework that considered the term *choreographies* as an operational set of behaviors, laws, and forms of control, response, and resistance. Applying this notion of choreography to understanding Italian histories of domination and subjugation by foreign forces, I suggested that choreographies have the power to impact the ways that a society relates to one another and in particular, impacts the ways that an individual (or nation) recognizes itself. Throughout, I made it clear that though issues of identity and belonging are related to this thesis, my aim is not toward exploring an ontology of being Italian. Rather, my interest remains in the processes, practices, and the responses of Chinatalians in Rome and *how* they belong. Of course a concern for the phenomenological realities of how Chinatalians are producing their belonging will always necessitate engagement with meanings of identity and belonging, but the impossibility of grasping a fixed definition of what that is, provides the fluidity that undergirds my query into the process of that generation of belonging.

In trying to locate practices of belonging, I found myself generating a choreography of my own, placing into conversation my findings, analysis, and reflection on the materials and experiences that I gathered from my fieldwork within the Chinatalian community in Rome. Dance and human mobility are not only central to this thesis, but were central as an embodied approach to fieldwork. As I mentioned in the opening sentences of this dissertation, though the body and movement figure prominently in this work, I do not centralize the body as site of exploration. I have made that choice consciously; in earlier

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iterations of this project, I prioritized the body via the theory of kinesthesia, which describes an awareness of the body's anatomical parts through its sensory organs in the muscles and the joints. Of course, the theory of kinesthesia is well-known (and well-articulated as an ethnographic approach to dance in the city, by SanSan Kwan in her book, *Kinesthetic City*[220]), however, through the unfolding of this research process, I abandoned the kinesthetic body. The body became too difficult to defend on paper. The body with all its baggage and sensorial power became in some ways, too alive to feature in this academic work; I believe that kinesthesia is both too capacious and too contested a theory to hold space for an analysis that aims to examine Italian culture and the people who produce that culture, which also remains capacious and contested. The body as a site, then, became marginal to the central approach of choreography, which gave me more room to move around. Though I do not articulate the body as a site in this project, it no doubt, served as a research tool (and one that is often overlooked in all research, and for the good reason, including the one that I mention above—it is wildly unwieldly, too porous, and yielding to too many interpretations). Examining human movement through the framework of choreography allowed me to align my research methodology with critical dance studies without abandoning the body.

Another point that I need to address is the significance of the Asian body and the implications of the Asian body in this work. In Chapter One, I first discussed the Asian body in a contemporary American context drawing upon Claire Jean Kim's "Racial Geometries" and Karen Shimakawa's work of National Abjection. Then, borrowing from Lisa Lowe's work, I discussed the Asian body in a historical colonial context during 18th-century European expansion into the Caribbean. Afterwards, I situated the Asian body within a

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[220] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces*, (Oxford University Press, 201).

postcolonial context in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. This argument articulated that the Asian body's historical subjection to discrimination, abjection, and exclusion impact the contemporary Asian body's methods, ways, limitations, and opportunities for belonging and mobility; the possibilities and impossibilities of the Asian body are deeply tied to residues of colonialism yet the experiences of individuals are varied and myriad, unfastened from any monolithic claim to what an Asian body should be (as I tried to show in the case studies of Marco, the biographical accounts of Hu, Yang, Lin, and the women dancing at the Colosseum).

In trying to broaden and reshape new ways of understanding productions of Italian culture and Chinatalian belonging, this dissertation focused on mobility studies; movement has been a fixture throughout this textual choreography. In the Introduction, I gestured to the fluidity of identity and offered the term Chinatalian as an offering to help relocate the reader to an alternative approach to understanding processes of belonging in postcolonial Italy. I outlined the ways that scholars have recently been emboldened to contest Italian national homogeneity and how that new framework has made this choreography possible and significant for the emerging field of New Italian Studies. In that first chapter, I also introduced choreographies of domination and liberation within Italy, offering a discussion of Italian fascism in relation to the body and to the Risorgimento, a national uprising that I suggested was a bodily struggle for national identity and freedom. In Chapter Two, I examined multiple ways in which human mobility brought Chinese men and women to Italy—in the first case, it was businessmen from China in Rome mingling with Whitalian businessmen, as they contracted their "friendship" in an official agreement to promote tourism between Italy and China. In the following cases, I drew upon interview data with

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Marco Hu and placed his narrative in relationship to that of other Chinatalian women in Rome, who are entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. The theme of human mobility emerged again as these narratives were set within a context of a global nationalist movement and the circulation of the corona virus, which was aided by the movement of human bodies across space. In Chapter Three, I engaged choreographies in an entirely different way, as I connected neoliberalism to kinesthetic responses of freedom. I examined the relationship between Sicilian dance and neoliberalism and motioned to the neoliberal practices of Chinatalian women practicing *taiji* at the Colosseum as a form of belonging that is unique to Rome. The phenomenological components of this intersectional and interdisciplinary approach that brings together critical dance studies, New Italian and Postcolonial Italian Studies, and studies in human geography have been explicit throughout as I engaged the questions of how belonging and identity is produced by Chinatalians in Rome, and the multiple contexts that the individual encounters in the journey of arriving at a sense of "being-at-ease." Though I have drawn from studies in geography, I am not a geographer. However, as a researcher with a dance and choreography background, I use aspects of spatial thinking to engage questions about how mobility shapes culture and human experience. Also, my dissertation program is housed in Comparative Cultural Studies, so the path that the dissertation has taken reflects my training in comparative language and cultures and the requirements thereof.

This project has multiple implications for future iterations. Expanding this project beyond the page, a dance piece exists—a choreography in which Chinatalians (both dancers and non-dancers) express their narratives through spoken text and movement generated from that text. The possibility of using the genre of filmdance (an expressive medium that

combines film and dance) to broadcast Chinatalian narratives was a project that I was starting in parallel to fieldwork; however, when the pandemic arrived in Italy, I exited to avoid the lockdown. A filmdance would be accessible to those outside of academia, helping to animate the data from this research into a format suitable for audiences of all ages. Dance is medium that goes beyond language and it is through this mode that I imagine the content of this page and all the material I gathered, to be shared with the public both local and global. In addition to modes of sharing this work beyond academia, the question always remains: How is this work translatable to a classroom? How will students be able to adapt these methods and these approaches to their work in the humanities? My answer is that ethnography—in theory, anyway—is simple; however, the task of creating an ethical framework with which to engage the research participants, to construct the bridges necessary to gain their trust, and the rendering of a textual document that mirrors yet summarizes the messy process of fieldwork is a tremendous task! To that, I would say that such a project would translate very well in a classroom context if broken down into components, which students can grapple with for a semester (usually 15 weeks) in order to produce the project's framework. A follow-up would be another semester of fieldwork. My understanding of the structure of preparation and execution, of course, has been to some extent (but very much so) dictated by unexpected events that emerged, which were entirely out of my control.

I want to also attend to the questions that emerged for me in the process of theorizing, gathering, analyzing, and reflecting upon and within this project. I have less clarity about what it means to belong in Italy and I believe, with great conviction, that this is a success of the project. What does it mean to belong in Italy? What is Italian? How many ways are there to belong in Italy? The greatest failure of any pursuit of such questions is to

inhabit a place of immobility. Admittedly, when I began this work, I believed that Italy was a place with no hope for change. Throughout the course of my exploration and interaction with the Chinatalian people and others who impacted this work, I have come to believe that change is both a function of and result of human mobility as a metaphorical and literal process. In other words, as I choreographed the movement of theoretical concepts and my internal reflections from this piece to that piece of "evidence," I came to the realization that there can be no end for hope so long as people are choreographing. In the same vein, there can be no end to domination so long as people are moving, as the global flows of capitalism and the resultant responses of neoliberalism continue choreographing huma movement, goods, and services. When I began this journey, I believed that I was interested in looking at what it means to be human in contemporary Italy; however, what I found was the value in asking how it is to belong in Italy. The latter approach allowed for a broader, more opened-ended exploration into *possibilities* of reconceiving Italianess through the experiences of individuals living those realities. In other words, I cannot offer any prescriptive solutions to the problems of assimilation, integration, and discrimination in postcolonial Italy; I only suggest a way to describe them so that new avenues emerge as an invitation into moving with (and alongside) the people that are choreographing new ways to belong in an Italy that is always just emerging.

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