In the two decades following the end of WW2 more than 2 million people (6.8 percent of the population) left Italy's south. Between 1958 and 1963 almost 1 million men and women moved to the north of the country, the number rising to 1,637,512 by the end of the 1960s. During the period 1955-1970, 25 million changes of residency between municipalities occurred, 10 million of which involved a movement between different regions. The principal sending regions with regard to total population numbers were Basilicata with 131,500 emigrants (12.8 percent of the population) and Calabria with 346,700 (10.6 percent). Piedmont was the prime receiving region (720,500 immigrants or an equivalent of plus 11 percent)\(^1\) (Galeotti 1972, 68). Internal emigrants were fundamental actors in the radical and rapid changes that transformed Italian society and its economy during the years of the so-called “economic miracle.” Peasants from all over Italy became either unskilled manual workers in the assembly lines of northern industries or southern peasants moved to central and northern Italy to work in the fields left empty by local families who had migrated to urban centers. In the same period, mountain and rural areas lost a large part of their population as agriculture was revolutionized by mechanization; salaries, though low in comparison with other capitalistic countries, increased (plus 1.2 percent in 1961, plus 5.3% percent in 1962, plus 14.5 percent in 1963) together with consumption (plus 8.5 percent in 1963) (Lanaro 1992, 224). Household appliances and cars became the symbol of Italian families’ participation in the joy of mass consumption (Crainz 1996, 132–42).

This article analyzes these south-to-north migrations from a specific angle, namely the hostility and rejection of southern workers that developed in the receiving areas. More specifically, it will analyze the representations of the “southerner immigrant” in Turin after 1955. Using two main Turinese newspapers — La Stampa, the biggest newspaper with an important national role and owned by the Agnelli family, and the Gazzetta del popolo (GDP), second in terms of copies sold, with a regional dimension, initially close to the Liberal Party and from the mid 1950s owned by a Christian Democrat senator — I will study how the local public sphere reacted to
immigration by reinforcing the definition of a hierarchical difference between natives of Turin and of the Piedmont region on one side and meridionali [southerners] on the other.

This classification of differences, articulated through the existence of two ‘Italies’, the northern and the southern, is based on a set of stereotypes that are the product of Italian and western European history. As Moe (2002) has argued, during the eighteenth century, within the multiple processes identified as European modernity, Italy and the Mediterranean developed into the peripheries of the continent, in precarious equilibrium between Europe and Africa, Europe and the Orient. In the reorganization of European space and internal borders, the south was constructed as a place that was both fascinating and threatening, the site of a glorious past and of backward present societies. During and after Italy’s unification, national élites reproduced the European discourse on the Mediterranean, identifying Italy’s south as the ultimate ‘other’ of the continent and the nation. Dickie (1999) has showed that the Mezzogiorno was a fundamental counter-image for the process of nation building; and the war against brigandage, which followed unification in 1861 and which pitted the Italian army against southern brigands and peasants, was a central moment for reinforcing and disseminating stereotypes and prejudices:

Banditry has the entire repertoire of ethnocentric imagery deployed against it by the officers of the Italian army: bandits are black, animal, feminine, primitive, deceitful, evil, perverse, irrational. [...] Brigandage becomes both horrific and fascinating, subjected to hard-headed sociological assessment and colorful, highly charged evocation. It is an empty stage on which to act out both the wildest of ethnocentric fantasies and the seemingly most rational investigations. (33)

Politicians and writers, anthropologists and criminologists, officers, and soldiers contributed to the representation of the south and of southerners as different, meaning inferior, in comparison with European and northern Italian societies and populations; whereas European civilization constituted the core on which the method of comparison was based, colonialism provided the analogies for narrating the Italian army’s war against a part of the same nation. And in the 1870s la questione meridionale [the Southern Question] was officially born, supported by the first enquiries that began to investigate, understand, and “scientifically” resolve the south’s underdevelopment (Petraccone 2000). The scientific approach also involved positivists and criminologists,
who racialized the language of difference referring to the existence of two races in Italy, to heredity, and degeneration (Teti 1993).
The “Southern Question” and *meridionalismo*, the current of thinking that deals with the analysis and resolution of the south’s economic and social problems, have been amply studied. In recent decades the authors already mentioned here as well as many others, based in British and American universities (Schneider 1998; Petrushewicz 1998; Lumley and Morris 1997) and in Italy (Donzelli 1990; Bevilacqua 1993, Nani 2006) have challenged the conceptual framework applied for the understanding of the south as a problem, questioning the image of a unitary and unchangeable south and deconstructing stereotypes as the product of ideological and political elaborations. Instead the *questione meridionale* emerges as a set of representations and practices created by different voices, inhabited by multiple references and concerns, shaped by contradictions and internal tensions, and subject to transformations and changes. The same stereotypes that were (and are) used to decipher the south’s peculiarities, and which seem unchangeable, could be based on the climate or socio-economic factors, economic organization or political authoritarianism, the population’s so-called character, or their racial belonging.

In the 1950s and 1960s, themes and images developed during one hundred years of the *questione meridionale* provided a complex repertoire in which internal migrations were placed and through which they were translated within the public sphere. Mobility was overwhelmingly south to north, and southerners and northerners had to learn to cohabit in the same physical space. Old images and prejudices were used, confirmed, and transformed within the historical conjunctures of the 1950s in order to make sense of identity and difference, inclusion, and exclusion.

This article’s focus on the public debate in Turin has national significance and it is relevant for two principal reasons: firstly, anti-southerner prejudices were largely expressed locally and can therefore be studied now. In contrast to Italy today, national public and political spheres at the time were trying to contain the centripetal forces expressed by citizens at the local level in the north; secondly, between 1955 and 1970 Turin received 641,800 people, increasing its population by 21 percent (Milan registered a 16.1 percent increase and Genoa 7.8 percent). The decision made by Fiat, Turin’s main factory, to concentrate its development plans to the municipality of Turin (a new factory was open in Rivalta, about 15 kilometers from the regional centre first in
1966) set the framework for the fastest population growth in the city’s history, which turned out to be a space in which multiple tensions were experimented.

The topicality of the issues discussed in this article is evident to anyone familiar with current political and cultural trends in Italy. In the summer of 2009 we have witnessed an escalation of declarations challenging the recognition of a common national identity and solidarity. A proposal has been made to change the Italian Constitution in order to introduce regional hymns and flags; the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Italian unification in 2011 have been criticized for being too expensive; Zaia, Minister of Agriculture, has requested subtitles in dialects for Italian TV broadcasts; Calderoli, Minister for Simplification, has promised a new law for introducing regional dialects in school curricula. The state system of education, still dominant in Italy, has emerged as an important space in which to challenge ideas and acts of solidarity; last year Gelmini, Minister of Education, criticized southern teachers as being less competent than their northern colleagues, and more recently other politicians have suggested limiting the number of principals born in the south (“presidi meridionali”) in northern school as well as introducing an exam on “regional history and tradition” for teachers who leave their home regions to work in the north. With the exception of Gelmini, who belongs to Berlusconi’s party, the Polo delle libertà, ministers and politicians of the Lega Nord (LN) are the main designers of these proposals. These declarations can be interpreted as mere party propaganda; yet they are extremely interesting because they point to conflicts still articulated along the north-south axis.

The LN was founded in the 1980s to “protect” and represent the north’s interests against taxes, Roman bureaucracy and the centralized political system; anti-meridionalismo was central to building the party’s identity and agenda (Diamanti 1993, 16). Passivity and corruption were presented as the south’s main characteristics, and the north as victim was the logical consequence of such narrative construction. Global and national changes in the early 1990s — the fall of the Soviet bloc, the end of the Cold War and of all Italian mass parties — left space in which the LN grew, and it is now a national political force, though its electorate is mostly located in the north.

In this same period politicians and citizens were dealing with a rising number of foreign immigrants in Italy. The right-wing political spectrum, lead by the LN, has radically attacked the idea (and reality) of a multicultural Italy and contested most forms of foreigners’ integration into the political and social fabric. Thus, the arrival of non-native
workers helped Italians to reinforce their sense of national unity and identity. In the processes of identity construction, immigrants come to embody forms of diversity, backwardness, and alterity, providing a mirror in which Italians can finally see themselves as united, developed, and modern (Capussotti 2007). Anti-meridionalismo appeared to be softened due to the rising anti-immigrant discourses and acts. But the recent declarations by Lega Nord’s politicians demonstrates that anti-merdionalismo is still useful rhetoric and highly emotional. In fact the growing racism affecting Italy, at the political as well as the popular level, is overriding all forms of solidarity, whether toward immigrants or fellow citizens of the south. The stronghold that defends advantages and privileges keeps closing in around a region or city. The annoyance felt toward ‘gli insegnanti meridionali’ [southern teachers] in the north is a clear sign of, apart from the banal polemic against their accent, the desire to organize the labor market based on region (priority given to natives which for structural reasons inevitably favors those born in the north). In most discussions a homogenous and indistinct south with its equally homogenous population of meridionali is proposed, and prejudices and stereotypes are legitimated upon this naturalization.

I contend that to understand current conflicts, and how they are articulated around identity politics and policies, we must look at internal migrations of the 1950s and 1960s, and at the ways in which i meridionali were constructed, stigmatized, and excluded in northern cities. Firstly I will focus on the terms and categories used to make sense of southern immigration in Turin in the middle of the 1950s. Secondly, I will analyze the process of identity construction and how southern difference was organized around two main axes, that of class and gender. I will show how ‘southern immigrants’ were constructed as the ultimate other by their northern fellow citizens: to be a southerner meant to be materially miserable, culturally deprived, and “different.” In conclusion I will argue that this set of representations which regulated, or tried to regulate, practices of inclusion and exclusion and social hierarchies, belong to a specific form of racism that emerges historically in the north-south relation.

The grammar of internal migration

The statistics division of the municipality of Turin registered increasing immigration as early as 1951; immigrants arrived from the mountainous and rural areas of the Piedmont and from the Veneto; in the early 1950s the presence of Italian refugees from Istria and Dalmazia and from Africa was also consistent. Immigration from the south of
the Peninsula became predominant only in the 1960s (Levi 1999). Despite the reality evidenced by the official data, which was constantly published in newspapers, being an immigrant since the mid-1950s in the public sphere of Turin meant being a southerner; newspapers registered and reinforced this identification.

In 1956, the Gazzetta del Popolo launched an enquiry on immigration entitled “I torinesi e gli altri” [People from Turin and the others] in which the “others” signified only southerners, while immigrants from Veneto and Piedmont disappeared from the reconstruction (GDP. 1956. 24 October, p. 4). The journalist did not really justify a juxtaposition that, because it was considered a natural part of public debate, was rarely and ineffectually questioned. Instead the GDP presented itself as a mediator between the most extreme hostility against immigrants and the absolute freedom of mobility, ending the investigation with a call to central authorities to limit the arrivals from the south. Behind the newspaper’s agenda, the published letters narrate the main concepts, stereotypes, and tensions that shaped the debate of the 1950s. For instance, there was a persistent reference to southern dialects as a sign of otherness, often complemented with the denunciation of the hegemony of Neapolitan and Roman on Italian radio and incipient television; a more erratic use of phenotypic and bodily features to mark a difference between locals and southerners emerged. Moreover the enquiry indicated the existence of social practices which generated forms of exclusion that were extremely problematic from the point of view of national unity; the journalist in question wrote:

The housing and labor markets, as well as personal advertisements expressed preference based on place of origin. And although the most excessive signs of refusal were stigmatized, the advertisements were not interpreted as really problematical because read through the category of campanilismo. The GDP preferred to focus on the love for a city — the article subtitle was “l’amore per una città rivelato attraverso gli annunci economici” — without questioning how it built hierarchies in the social,

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1 In the newspaper we read: ‘scorriamo le pagine degli annunci economici pubblicati dai nostri giornali […] [e troviamo] dalla ‘trentenne’ che sposerebbe ‘settentrionale’, al proprietario che affitterebbe ‘camera e cucina’ in corso Novara a ‘piemontesi’; dai ‘coniugi piemontesi’ che cercano lavoro alla ‘affettuosa’ che
economic, and intimate spheres. This is a crucial point for understanding the patterns in which *antimeridionalismo* has been historically constructed. The “spirito di campanile,” its historical roots, its folkloric articulations, translated social acts within the discursive domain reassuring and mediating their symbolic and material implications. *Campanilismo* was a useful category to transform prejudices and discrimination in innocuous representation of common sense.

The letters that followed show that something other than *campanilismo* surfaced. They started with an “engineer,” who gave voice to the most radical hostility; immigration was called “invasione sudista” and had only negative consequences:

aumento della disoccupazione locale, dell’analfabetismo, della delinquenza, dell’accattonaggio molesto, dei sussidi, delle famiglie numerosissime, dell’indecoroso spettacolo di donne e mocciosi sporchi e disordinati. [...] Tutto questo mentre versiamo miliardi alla Cassa del Mezzogiorno che dovrebbe risolvere a casa loro i problemi dei meridionali. Diciamo una buona volta la verità: siamo stufi di questa invasione dal sud, e a pensarla così siamo in molti, più di quanto comunemente si creda. (*GDP*. 1956. 17 October, p. 4)

Social and cultural faults (violence, excessive fertility, illiteracy, laziness), which have negative consequences on local order, wealth, and style of life were listed together with the “Cassa per il Mezzogiorno,” the special institution managing the emergency measures allocated for the south’s development; for northerners the *Cassa* represented both the proof of the south’s passivity, demonstrated by its need for special funds to develop, and of the north’s generosity that could not be extended to southerner immigrants. Northerners expressed the feeling of a double burden: they had to pay the highest taxes for the south as well as extra money for the inclusion of southerners in “their” cities. Of course there were voices remembering the contributions of the south to national development, both in the past and in the present. But *meridionalismo*, influential at political and economic levels, was not able to deconstruct the image of a homogenous miserable and stationary south in the north’s public opinions. Thus immigration from the south became an expedient for expressing northerners’ sense of unfair treatment and betrayal, and for justifying claims for “regional

These processes reinforced the sense among the Piedmontese of victimization — a feature of regional identity since Turin lost the role of national capital (Castronovo 1988) — and gave original impetus to the development of a new political party — the Movimento per l’autonomia regionale piemontese (MARP) — which gained 5.6 percent of votes in the administrative election of 1956. The party called for regional autonomy, a tactic designed to keep in Piedmont the taxes sent to the central State, and it firmly stood against southern immigration. According to Baini, MARP’s slogan “Fuori Napoli da Torino” (Napoli standing for the whole south), a demand for the expulsion of citizens because of geographic origins, was one of the main reasons for the MARP’s electoral success among the local middle classes (Alberto Baini. *Il peso di tenaci avversioni sul terrone venuto in città*. 1959. *GDP*. 27 November, p. 3). Although MARP’s existence and political influence was short-lived and weak MARP’s course is significant for several reasons: it provides concrete evidence of both the spread of anti-southerner attitudes and of one of the first attempts at organizing those sentiments in the political domain of Republican Italy. The example of MARP also demonstrates that feelings of identification with the regional space, which were claimed in order to regulate social inclusion and exclusion, belonged to a significant part of the local society before and independent of attempts by political representatives. So, to understand the LN’s current hegemony in Italy’s north it is fundamental to look not only at MARP, but also to the ways in which local identities were expressed in the debate on internal migrations. As enlightened by the following quotations, the identification with the town and the region was used in order to legitimate economic and social practices. A reader of *GDP* asked for the precedence in the labor market of those born in Piedmont; another used the idea of southern cultural difference to justify inclusion and exclusion from the labor market:

*I sentimenti di italianità impongono ospitalità [...] [però] le differenze di mentalità, tradizione e costumi non sono facilmente superabili e un fenomeno immigratorio così imponente determina problemi economici, sociali e assistenziali. [Pertanto] a parità di condizioni, per i posti di lavoro al nord siano preferiti i settentrionali [e] la residenza sia garantita solo a chi lavora. (*GDP*. 1956. 31 October, p. 4)
Multiple signs tell us that there was a weak understanding of national solidarity, to the point that Piedmont was compared to the United States, and southerners to foreign immigrants:

chiedere di disciplinare l’immigrazione non significa andare contro l’unità nazionale [...] ricordo che gli Stati Uniti dosano con il contagocce l’arrivo dei forestieri [...] quando l’afflusso dei meridionali assume caratteristiche di un assalto sfacciato ai posti di lavoro disponibili per i lavoratori del nord [...] allora mi sembra giusto chiedere ai meridionali di rimanere nelle loro terre, che potranno migliorare. (GDP. 1956. 23 November, p. 4)

Other readers explicitly stated that to the north have to right to migrate only the honest, the hardworking and the skilful thus applying to internal migrations a rhetoric typical of the nation state towards foreign labor forces. This concept was corroborated by declarations saying that “l’avversione è per chi arriva senza mestiere, senza denaro” (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p. 4) consequently stressing the centrality of the class dimension in debates concerning migration as well as otherness.

The fact that these requests were shared by many Turinese readers shows that southerners were perceived as and transformed into foreigners. The privileges historically determined by citizenship were reformulated locally and priorities in employment and welfare that traditionally belong to the nation state were also implemented locally. This understanding was used also for assistance and welfare, which in the 1950s were still organized according to regulations put into effect by Fascism and controlled for the most part by Church institutions. Criticizing the excessive size of southern families migrating to Turin, one reader wrote:

non cinque, ma dieci, venti figli, ne metta al mondo tanti. Quando dalle vostre parti non potrete più sostenere la situazione, come purtroppo si usa oggi, verrete da queste parti e così avrete risolto il vostro problema ai nostri danni. (Specchio dei tempi. La Stampa. 1957. 26 February, p. 2)

The identification of Piedmont with a state entity was reflected and reproduced by the language used to represent internal migrations. The debate was articulated around a traditional set of comparisons and supported by a naturalized and unquestioned idea of difference. For instance, in La Stampa the repertoire of the south’s proximity to Africa was renewed through the reference to southern immigrants as “mau mau” (the European name for the Kenyan population that fought against the British in the early 1950s) (Specchio dei tempi. La Stampa. 1957. 27 September, p. 2). Moreover the
otherness of southern immigrants was reinforced by references to the obscure, the threatening, the low. Southerners were described as “una massa di sottoproletariato [...] nero, affamato proletariato” (Giosè Rimanelli. Meridionali a Torino. 1956. Nord e Sud, 18, pp. 76-93) and as “una oscura truppa di manovali e contadini” (Alberto Baini. In attesa di entrare in fabbrica, la banda del mercante del lavoro. GDP. 1959. 11 December, p. 4). The separation north/south is seen as both geographic and social: southerners are foreigners because they belong to a cultural and geographical world whose otherness is reinforced by referring to their social condition as a dark and miserable mass of lumpenproletariat.

The idea of a border dividing north/south is emphasized by the description of how southerners migrate to Turin. Readers and journalists wrote of an “invasion,” echoing a military act. In repeating the traditional vocabulary on migration, they wrote of “immigrazione alluvionale,” “impossibilità di arginare questa marea,” “ondata.” Migration was transformed into a natural force outside of human control: migrants as well as “natives” were deprived of agency and subjected to nature. Following this pattern, men and women migrants were dispossessed of any subjectivity and presented as deceived people that would be deluded by the harsh reality of life in the north.

The association between immigration and war was reinforced by the labeling of two opposed groups of “nordisti” and “sudisti,” terms reminiscent of the American civil war. In addition, “colonia sudista” was used to reference southerners living in Italy’s north. Migration and colonization are entangled in this expression, confirming the historical contiguity of the two processes in Italy; but the term also evidence northerners’ perception of being an invaded foreign land. The language conveys above all negative consequences of south to north migration. The terms used are “problemi,” “oneri,” “ingenti spese,” “assistenza”: in the 1950s natives of Turin interpreted immigration exclusively as a cost and not as a contribution to the economic development of the city. The municipality claimed expenses of more than 1 million lire for each immigrant, including welfare, council houses, schools, hospitals, pharmacies, electricity, and water supplies that had to be built following the population growth. Consequently, local politicians, journalists, and readers asked for financial support from central authorities. Only in the early 1960s was this rhetoric “of cost” questioned by voices, which included the newspapers, that highlighted the contributions of immigrants to Turin’s economic development. Because immigrant workers were needed to support Fiat’s development
plans during the so-called economic miracle of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and both the GDP and La Stampa began to resist their readers’ recurrent complaints and regrets about the southerners’ presence.

I meridionali between emancipation and naturalization: the role of class and gender

The relational dimension of subjectivity emerges in the letters and articles posted in the newspapers. That is to say, multiple meanings of being a piemontese and a meridionale are debated, thus manifesting the resistance of old cultural representations as well as the changes embedded within the historical processes of the post World War II era. Whether the south belonged to the nation and how Italians were seen by foreigners were issues often debated. Rhetoric and features commonly produced within the nation state were used to identify and defend the regional space — Piedmont — and its citizens. Above I have presented a map of values and identities that was mostly shaped around the dichotomies pertinent to the establishment of European modernity: progress and development on one side, backwardness and underdevelopment on the other. Turin was the core of the superior identity, and it also stood for Piedmont and piemontesità; in contrast, the mezzogiorno was a single and homogeneous space at times identified by a single regional identity, Neapolitan or Sicilian.

Misery is historically a central feature of any discourse on Italy’s south; scholars have abundantly analyzed the birth and developments of the Southern Question as a discourse on underdevelopment, backwardness, and failures within a set of comparison and hierarchies (Schneider 1998). In the early 1950s Parliamentary enquiries on the south’s economic and social conditions both served to denounce widespread unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty and to reinforce the image of a homogeneous and static area, therefore failing to popularize internal differences and conflicts. In the context of south to north mobility, the topos of misery was entwined with three other main features: prolificacy, illiteracy, and need of assistance.

The structural situation of a country in which contraception was illegal was rarely noted; more often the high number of children was seen as a sign of southern backwardness mirrored in demographic behaviors. According to natives of Turin, the suitcases of the southern immigrants were metaphorically filled with an overabundance of children, ignorance, and the inertia that generated disorder and immorality. These were considered strong reasons for demanding an immediate stop to southern immigration. The background to this representation is provided by the image of an
unhistorical peasant society, entrapped in traditional mentalities and behaviors. Interestingly, this negative view of southerners comes into even clearer view when similar topoi were used by supporters of immigration, when they described the new arrivals as

folte schiere di umili lavoratori in tristi, disastrose condizioni economiche, gente a volte viziata dall’ozio forzato e dalla disoccupazione, a volte tarata e indebolita per la miseria di generazioni, per malaria, scarsa alimentazione e altri flagella [...] è umano, è spiegabile che i reietti del sud procurino di trovare pane e lavoro al nord. (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p. 4)

Immigrants and their children were a problem because of their illiteracy; but when they entered educational systems, schools became overburdened. In letters to La Stampa immigrants confirmed their cultural poverty — “mio padre mi ha detto: io non so leggere; se vai a scuola poi ti insegnano a scrivere, poi tu scrivi all’innamorato e io non ti posso sorvegliare.” (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p. 4) For their part, school principals designed a relationship in which piety and a sense of superiority, a civilizing mission and otherness reinforced one another: “ognuno di loro rappresenta un problema per la scuola; quasi tutti sono da assistere con la refezione e con il padronato. Hanno bisogno del mangiare, e dei libri, quaderni e vestiti.” (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p. 4) In the final analysis, this dichotomic system effectively transformed Turin into a civilizing place: “lentamente, sotto la spinta di questa miseria che viene a poco a poco incorporata e livellata, Torino sta mutando il suo volto [...]. abbiamo con noi un piccolo calabrese che non aveva mai visto i piatti sulla tavola [...]. É qui da tre mesi, ha imparato a servirsi della forchetta, non usa più il tovagliolo come se fosse un fazzoletto....”. (Un allievo su sei alle elementari appartiene a famiglie bisognose. 1958. La Stampa. 7 February, p. 2)

From this quotation the awareness of the relational aspect of the encounter emerges; moreover, it is probably the natives’ fear for the “changing face of Turin” that justified the placement of southern children into classi differenziali — special classes established in the early twentieth-century in which children with learning problems were placed. The number of classi differenziali rose consistently during the 1960s, when the age of mass education began in Italy. De Michele argues that although separate grades were not formally based on class or on geographic origins, in northern cities children born in economically disadvantaged southern families represented the majority of students in these grades. In turn, this demonstrates the discriminatory practices of an institution
whose pedagogical effectiveness was unquestionably less important than its normative role (De Michele 2010).

In the representation of southern immigrants, misery and underdevelopment oscillated between historical and social explanations and references to “character” and culture. Geographical origin motivated the classification of behaviors and personality [il carattere] while class and gender were the two main axes that organized and legitimated the interplay between similarity and difference. For example, class belonging at times was used to challenge the identification of a homogeneous southerner identity by one reader whose perspective was paradigmatic of a vaster understanding:

la polemica non è contro i meridionali commercianti, artigiani, professionisti, qualificati (…) ad essi riconosciamo pieno diritto di cittadinanza. La polemica è contro l’irrazionale e indiscriminata immigrazione di elementi non qualificati. (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p.4)

“Rights of citizenship” depended not only on territorial belongings but on class as well; and class alliance with northerners was also one of the strategies employed by southerners who wanted to differentiate between the civilized meridionali — economically well-off and educated — and their poor and ignorant counterparts.

Despite the importance of class similarities, the perception of diversity could be stronger than any shared economic condition, as was the case with the father who wrote to the GDP of his opposition to his daughter’s marriage with a meridionale:

[nonostante la discreta posizione, l’ottima famiglia] gli ho chiuso la porta in faccia… si devo confessarlo sono stato sgarbato e dentro di me mi sono sentito razzista [italics in the text], mi sono vergognato ma è stato più forte di me, rifarei lo stesso gesto […] così diverso da noi, irruento, passionale… (GDP. 1956. 11 November, p. 4)

The letter contains relevant and interconnected analytical elements centering on the naturalization of difference that arises when gender is brought into the narrative. Voices claiming the unchangeable nature of “southern-ness” disagreed with those that supported the idea of improvement and progress thanks to the civilizing role of Turin’s urban and industrial culture:

Dobbiamo voler bene a tutti, anche ai meridionali; perché un giorno, con il nostro buon esempio, e con la nostra educazione, anche loro potranno diventare simili a noi e
This statement points to a partial break with the past and the hereditary tradition: although postponed to an indefinite future, the meridionali could undergo “una elevazione civile e materiale,” meaning the opportunity of overcoming their material and spiritual inferiority. But at the level of gender roles and behaviors l’essere meridionali was disconnected from historical processes and reasoning, as described by the self-proclaimed “racist” father. He was aware of radicalizing the debate; in fact he was the only one labeling himself a racist, recognizing the implications of his rejection. He not only broke the class alliance but projected behaviors onto the son-in-law to be — “irruento, passionale” — which have a permanent character. But there was also a space of legitimization for the father’s conduct: marriages between ‘natives’ and ‘southerners’ were called “misti,” and were controversial due to the purported irreconcilable differences within the couple. The idea that marriages between southerners and northerners were “mixed” lasted in the popular imagination well into the 1960s. In fact, the Fall of 1969, a row arose after a young worker from Puglia denounced the failure of his planned marriage because of the father of his fiancé contended “meglio zittella piuttosto che sposata ad un meridionale.” (Ma noi siamo forse dei malati contagiosi? La Stampa. 1969. 10 October, p. 5) However, many letters stigmatized this father’s conduct, and the journalist who commented the case labeled it “out of date.” The editorial position of La Stampa was in favor of the couple testifying to a transformation of what was presented as by this time legitimate in the local public sphere. Nevertheless, this case signaled the persistence of what was perceived as a hierarchical difference between northerners and southerners, a difference that today is utilized to distinguish Italians from foreigners.

Thus, gender and the private sphere were also fundamental elements in drawing boundaries and for constructing the image of il meridionale. In the early 1960s, a period of great south to north mobility, the local public sphere was dominated by an intense debate on the crime of passion and on southern women’s necessary emancipation. Although there were critiques concerning the survival of Article 587 ? instituted under fascism, which considered a reduction in penalty if the murderer had acted in defense of his and his family honor — readers tended to focus on honor killing to reinforce their image of southerners as a people inclined to violence and crime. There were several
letters denouncing the importation of such barbaric customs to Turin. One practice cited as demonstration of the backwardness of the southerners was the *fuitina* (the elopement of a young heterosexual couple, or the kidnapping of a young girl by a man, in order to force families to accept an unapproved marriage). Others decried and blamed the southerners for the rise of violence in general. Newspapers participated in this alarm by replicating an established and always effective strategy: the pages dedicated to local events were dominated by big titles underlining the southern regional origin of offenders. The following letter, written by a southern worker, helps to summarize the implications that were defining the debate on “delitto d’onore”:

Pare impossibile che certi nostri corregionali debbano sempre riuscire a danneggiare quelli che si sono trasferiti nel nord a lavorare [...] Soprattutto non è vero che tutti i meridionali la pensino così sulla questione: io come cittadino proclamo alto e forte che il legislatore farebbe opera meritoria e civile abolendo le attenuanti [del delitto d’onore]

(Specchio dei tempi. *La Stampa*. 1960. 9 October, p. 2)

The many who asked for the abolition of Article 587 had to wait until 1981, and it is hard to believe that it survived only because of southerners’ will. *Delitto d’onore* was part of legal and political cultures and interests dominated by aged élites, by a misogynist and reactionary Catholic Church, by a Communist Party which rarely disagreed with the Christian Democrats on issues regarding the family and sexuality. Moreover the inferior position of Italian women within the family, which was even sanctioned by the new Republican Constitution¹⁰, cannot be overlooked as a central factor on this issue. Anna Rossi Doria (1994) has pointed to a significant contradiction within the Italian Constitution, which supported women’s equality in the public sphere (on matters of labor rights) and inferiority in the private one. This outcome was the result of the alliance between catholic and communist women on labor issues, whereas women’s rights within the family were limited by the imposition of the Catholicism’s belief system, which deprived women of individual rights. As a consequence of the inferiority of women’s rights in the private sphere, the Articles of the Rocco Code and of the Civil Code of the 1942 that established women’s subordination to male figures were not abolished; what is more, the Articles that were themselves in open contradiction with the provisions of the Constitution stayed and survived for long time (Rossi Doria 1994, 844). It was only in the 1970s that the feminist and civil rights movements
managed to win the right to divorce (1969 and 1974), abortion (1978), and the reform of the family code (1975). Thus delitto d'onore was part of complex negotiations inhabited by several actors, institutions, and ideologies simplified in the stereotype of southerners’ fervor and violence in a modern Italy.

Women’s emancipation was another issue used to prove the existence of a hierarchical difference between north and south. Southern women were described as passive, subjugated to male authority and tradition, and confined within the family. The experiences of paid industrial immigrant women workers, recently studied by Badino (2008), were never represented in newspapers articles and letters. In the debate over women’s emancipation Sicily emerged as the paradigm of difference, simultaneously representing the whole south and breaking its unitary dimension. It is worth noting that the image of women’s inferiority was mostly based on comparisons between Sicilian and Muslim women. One of the few female voices published in either of the two newspapers wrote about the existence of a Sicily that was “feudale e mussulmana [...] Signori siciliani, fino a quando terrete le donne chiuse in casa? siamo all’epoca della bomba atomica, non sarebbe l’ora di svegliarsi e abbandonare le barbarie usanze del medioevo?” (Specchio dei tempi. La Stampa. 1960. 14 February, p. 2)

Francesco Rosso, an established journalist, reported on a congress of Sicilian women held in Palermo in 1959. Although the article’s subtitle highlighted the contrast between young women wearing makeup and peasant women dressed in traditional, dark clothes, he decided to narrate the condition of oppressed, separated, and excluded women. He described “volti nascosti dal velo” and “una rassegnata passività delle donne a consentire che costumi quasi medioevali sopravvivano.” Significantly, the examples he published were that of young men, according to whom dancing was allowed only between married or engaged (heterosexual) couples, and of una ragazza negra Africana [che] sposò un siciliano, certa che sua condizione di schiava familiare sarebbe finita diventando cittadina italiana. Dal ferreo controllo paterno passò a quello non meno rigido del marito, il cerchio di gelosia e sospetto la sofocava. ‘Faccio la valigia e me ne ritorno a casa’ disse. [...] Questo è un caso limite ma la condizione di molte donne siciliane non è molto diversa da quella della giovane africana. Qualcosa sta mutando, è vero, ma molto lentamente e il merito è della TV [...]11

The article proved to be very controversial; many Sicilians wrote letters arguing against the description of women’s condition while others, mostly Piedmonteses,
confirmed the portrayal mentioning their experiences; none questioned the racist thinking which is at the core of the comparative logic between Italy, Sicily and Africa. In any case, southern women soon learned they were like “Muslims” in the eyes of their fellow Turinese citizens. They said during several interviews: “[I piemontesi] criticano se la sera non esci, perché dicono incivili e terroni, e siete peggio delle musulmane; criticano se esci perché dicono che le la fai con quello e con l’altro...”. (Fofi 1962, 164).

This last quotation points to the problem of a relationship in which being southerner was always derogatory. The discursive representation was based on a comparative strategy in which, as far as gender was concerned, “Muslims” provided the closest model and stood for gender relations outside of the European civilized world. At stake here is not the negation of the multiple forms that patriarchy and sexism assumed in the south of Italy, but the manner in which representations of genders were used to build normative identities, internal hierarchies and rights of belonging to the nation.

**Conclusion**

The juxtaposition between being an immigrant and being a *meridionale* entered unquestioned into the public discourse and was based on the negative understanding of both conditions. Moreover the hostility toward the *meridionali* in the mid-1950s, when they were not part of the majority in Turin, confirms that the animosity was grounded in a repertoire of stereotypes and prejudices entrenched in Italian history. The antagonism also attests to the fact that otherness is above all a construction of the dominant self and not necessarily connected with the presence, values, or character of the other. This point helps to throw critical light on the current understanding of racism, which in Western societies, is still presented as a reaction to the actual sharing of a space with other migrants, ethnicities, or religions.

Thus, this article has discussed the main *topoi* employed for constructing difference. Misery and a complex set of behaviors — prolificacy, violence, male supremacy, female passivity — codified the otherness of southerners and the superiority of northerners, which was sanctioned by a Eurocentric conceptual grid built around categories of development and backwardness, progress, and underdevelopment. Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, (2000) we can argue that the justifications used by Europeans regarding non-Europeans — who were considered underdeveloped and uncivilized — peoples in the nineteenth-century was still being applied in the north-south Italian relations. This conceptualization was reformulated by a specific historical conjuncture and a non-
colonial relation, by northerners to sanction and measure their superiority and position of power. This is why it is possible to assert that in Italy, at least until the 1950s and 1960s, the other — functional for the identification of hegemonic gender, class and national models — was still placed within the Italian border. There were obviously tensions within this discursive construction, with different voices criticizing anti-southern feelings in the name of national unity or progress. Northerners’ hostility toward southerners was presented as belonging to the past and as an obstacle to the historical evolution towards better forms of political organization like the European Union. Therefore, an evolutionary theory of history sustained both the definition of southern difference and inferiority, and its critique. In any case, the critical voices were in the minority during the 1950s and when, during the 1960s, the newspapers adopted a new agenda that publicly claimed the need for immigrant labor forces, the dualistic vision of north-south relations embedded in the Eurocentric conceptual grid survived. The welcoming of the southern labor force cohabited with the representation of ‘one’ cultural difference inscribed in sexual behaviours, gender roles, and proclivity to violent reactions.

My focus on the reconstruction of anti-southern attitudes has cast into relief the nature and characteristics of those positions. As for the question of whether “anti-southernism” should be considered racism or not, scholars interpret north-south relations using categories like “orientalism” (Schneider 1998) and “ethnocentrism” (Dickie 1999). With the exception of Michele Nani (2006), who explicitly addresses the presence of racist features in the Turinese press of the late nineteenth-century, racism is confined mostly in the work of those anthropologists and criminologists who applied the whole spectrum of racial classification to women and men in the south (Teti 1993; Petraccone 2000). For this reason we also can identify forms of racism in the anti-southern attitudes developed in Turin in the 1950s and early 1960s. This obviously presupposes a transformation of the category of racism, which cannot be interpreted only as the naturalization and biologization of racial features embedded in phenotypic traits or heritable characters. This revision of the category is also motivated by the historical features of racism in Italy, which as in the anti-Semitic version and in the relationship with Slavs, has always renegotiated the traditional model known as scientific racism. Balibar (1988) has stated that racism without races is not a revolutionary novelty. His reflections on differential racism — that racism produced in
the epoch of decolonization, in which the category of immigration takes the place of that of race and the theme of the irreducibility of cultural differences lays at the core of ideas of the other and of intercultural relations — provides important suggestions for our analysis. The centrality of culture and the persistence of stereotypes in labeling and understanding Italy's south, help to explain the multiple discursive borders constructed with regard to southerners' presence in Turin, perceived as a fundamental threat to the survival of that city's civilization.

Furthermore the antimeridionalismo analyzed herein was a peculiar form of racism in which the ethnocentrism of Piedmonteses was interconnected with social and institutional dynamics producing forms of exclusion and discrimination. An examination of the letters and articles of the period show that the naturalization of the other's difference and cultural inferiority was stronger when gender and the private sphere were brought into the picture. That the emancipation of southern immigrants was both predicted and postponed to an indefinite future, in this way reinforcing cultural and social hierarchies of the present. Moreover the fundamental identification of readers of the local dailies with the local space, translated in requests for citizens’ rights organized at a regional level, delineating the existence of xenophobic feelings directed against subjects who also happened to be fellow national citizens.

The issue of privilege also emerges as a fundamental category for understanding representations of identity and difference within asymmetrical power relations (Perilli 2007). Even when a shared national citizenship guaranteed forms of equality and rights, social hierarchies were legitimated by legislative, institutional, and social domains and were shaped around geographical belonging. Prior to the period in question, the 1950s, a fascist law against urbanization transformed southern immigrants into clandestini in their own country. Before 1961, when this law was abolished, it had not had not stifled internal mobility. For instance, the municipality of Turin provided temporary permissions that were later transformed into permanent residence; this shows that mediations between migrants, employers and institutional needs and powers were elaborated locally. But it is also makes evident how that law blackmailed migrants through residency rights, and contributed to the precariousness of their condition and sense of self (Signorelli 1995). The law's most devastating consequences were on migrants' labor rights: many of them where formally “illegals” and thus pushed into the informal labor market. Until 1961, in the main cities cooperative established by many
southerners functioned as parallel job agencies [uffici di collocamento] that provided factories and construction companies cheap, non-unionized, unskilled workers. Employers saved on health insurances and salaries, and cooperatives took from 30 to 50 percent of their associated salaries (Lanaro 1992, 232). According to Ramella (2003), whereas this specific form of exploitation ended in 1961, the various social mechanisms remaining in force determined a close relationship between professional careers and geographic origins for the period extending from 1959 to 1973. Still, scholars have verified, in the Turin of the 1990s the lower social mobility of southern workers and their children as compared to the families of immigrant workers from Piedmont, thereby marking the persistence of a differentiation in which geographic origins, cultural resources and economics are interwoven (Ceravolo, Eve and Meraviglia 2001).

This arrangement of the labor market, and its long-term effects, recall the domestic, job and personal classified advertisements mentioned at the beginning of this article which were conditional on place of birth, obviously referring to shared cultural characteristics and behaviors. If we add classi differenziali where many southern children ended up due to their diverse competencies, language and “culture,” a picture emerges in which southerners in the north were subjected to discriminatory treatment based on the intertwining of geographic and class belonging. This system was obviously subject to many twists: we have already recalled the role of citizenship, which guaranteed formal equality between northerners and southerners, access to the political and social system, and to the privileges of “national choice;” additionally, the hiring by Fiat, the main reason for migration to Turin, guaranteed mutual contracts and salaries regardless of places of origin. The workers struggles of the 1960s and 1970s were a vital moment of inclusion for the workers from the south in the social and political fabric of Turin, and by extension, in rights at a national level.

From all the above, it would seem that antimeridionalismo, based on enduring stereotypes and naturalizations, above all in northern public opinion, is an undercurrent within Italian history which assumes different faces and roles at specific conjunctures. In the 1950s and 1960s, when institutions, laws, economic and social patterns played an important role in the translation of cultural crystallization into concrete forms of exclusion and discrimination, we can explicitly talk about anti-southerner racism. And it is to these processes and images that we have to look in order
to better understand contemporary articulations of racism in Italy. In the 1980s-90s the massive arrival in Italy of women and men workers from the many souths of the globe has contributed to the transformation of the social and cultural landscape as well as to the mechanism of identification and identity construction. The persistent otherness of the national south is now negotiated with the presence of foreign “others” that populate the emergences constructed by the political and media discourses. While the subjects have changed, and I remain critical of flattening the condition of internal emigrants of the 1950s with that of present immigrants, representations of gender and sexuality, of cultures, of behaviors are still operating to mark inclusion and exclusion, rights and discriminations, recognition and refusal.

1 According to Galeotti, the data concerns internal mobility in the period 1955-70. After Basilicata and Calabria, 409.100 people left Puglia (7.4 percent of the population), 174.300 Abruzzi and Molise (7.0%), 134.400 Sardinia (6.7%), 461.500 Sicily (6.1%) and 343.800 Campania (4.5%); for the receiving regions, Liguria registered the arrival of 226.300 immigrants (more than 8 percent of the population ) and Lombardy of 938.000 (plus 7.7%).

2 More jobs are available in education in northern Italy yet today. Consequently many teachers move there to start their career and then after few years return to their native regions. It is also worth mentioning that the same political actors have suggested the establishment of so called “classi ponte” (separate classes) for “foreign children”.

3 In the last (2009) European elections Lega Nord’s anti-immigration programme was prized by Italian voters. In 2009 the Italian Parliament has approved two laws strongly supported by LN: firstly federalismo fiscale, that is a new system of taxation run directly by regions. Although still to be implemented at practical level, it is presented as the first step towards a more complete transformation of Italy in a federal system of government. Secondly, the transformation of clandestinità (the condition of un-documented migrants) into a criminal offence.

4 Before 1961, when the fascist legislation of 1939 against urbanisation was abrogated, official data on migration were not fully reliable because the change of residence was possible only after the obtainment of a work contract. On the negative consequence of this law on emigrants’ lives see Signorelli 1995; Lanaro 1992, 232.

5 The enquiry lasted until early December and resulted in the publication of thousands of letters (more than 100 were sent according to the newspaper itself). The GP gave space mostly to middle class men, who identified with Turinese and Piedmontese descendants; they constituted the bulk of letters expressing the desire to control and limit immigration from the south. Letters claiming for a stronger national unity and solidarity were inferior in number. “Southerners” voices were divided: established former immigrants split between attacking behaviours of recent immigrants or denouncing the hostility of natives; the voices of current immigrants were absent.


8 Important figures of post-war liberal meridionalismo were Francesco Compagna and people of the journal “Nord e Sud”; Pasquale Saraceno and the *Associazione per lo sviluppo dell’industria nel mezzogiorno* (Svimez), Guido Dorso, and Manlio Rossi Doria (Petraccone 2005).

9 Article 553 of the Penal Code, which prohibited use of any propaganda and contraception, punishable by up to one year in prison, was abolished in 1971 by the Constitutional Court.

10 Articles 3, 29, 31, 37 and 51 of the Constitution approved on 1948 establish the principle of gender equality.

* da Italian Culture, Settembre 2010

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