

Transcultural flows and marginality: reggae and hip hop in Sardinia

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Hip hop, reggae/raggamuffin, and fusions between these genres, emerged in the Italian island of Sardinia in the 1980s and 1990s. In this article, we examine the ways in which these transnational music forms have found fertile terrain in post-colonial Sardinia across generations and cultures through the music of the historic hip hop crew, Sa Razza, the next generation ‘rappamuffin’ artist, Randagiu Sardu, and the Senegalese-Sardinian Afro-reggae musician, Momar Gaye. Through the analysis of selected tracks and video clips we explore how overlapping cultural, social, and political discourses of decolonisation are framed and narrated through language, music, and images as a means of expressing cultural and political agency, critiquing the impacts of exploitation and colonisation, and consciously and self-reflexively reinterpreting and celebrating marginality.

Keywords: hip hop; rap; reggae; ragamuffin; Sardinia; Senegal; language; marginality; transculturation; colonisation; decolonisation.

Introduction

The anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, and scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, Fernando Ortiz, coined the term ‘transculturation’ to describe the merging and converging of cultures and the consequent generation of new cultural phenomena, or *neoculturation* (Ortiz 1995, 97–103). The prefix *trans* can be understood to denote movement, or a process of moving across or beyond, but also a process of cultural *transferral* and *transformation*. Reflecting this process of transculturation, hip hop,¹ reggae/raggamuffin,² and fusions between these genres, emerged during the Italy-wide ‘posse era’³ of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a means of critiquing power structures and the legacy of colonisation while foregrounding marginal voices and languages (Scarparo and Stevenson 2018). Many of the groups and artists that emerged during this period composed their lyrics using local dialects and languages, which were often mixed with standard Italian and English to create new cultural and linguistic syntheses. In the peripheral Italian island of Sardinia, arguably the most influential group to emerge during this period was the hip hop collective, Sa Razza. This collective laid the foundations for a rich and diverse independent music scene, which continues to foreground Sardinian language and culture while harnessing global flows.⁴

In this article, we focus on selected examples of the music of Sa Razza and of contemporary transcultural artists – the ‘rappamuffin’ performer Randagiu Sardu and the Senegalese-Sardinian Afro-reggae musician Momar Gaye. Within the limited space of the article, we provide an analysis

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of ways in which overlapping cultural, social, and political discourses of decolonisation are framed and narrated through language, music, and images as a means of expressing cultural and political agency, critiquing the impacts of exploitation and colonisation, and self-reflexively reinterpreting and celebrating marginality.⁵

Well before reggae's global dissemination, which saw it take root locally in distant places like Sardinia, it had already developed through processes of cultural transplantation, exchange, and hybridisation. Indeed, as a product of the movement of people and cultural forms through the dynamics of slavery, colonisation and migration, Jamaican popular music was shaped through the combining of various African, Caribbean, and European elements. The evolution of ska, rocksteady and reggae in the 1960s was, in turn, tied to the cultural hegemony of African-American music, such as jazz and R&B, which dominated the Jamaican airwaves (Stevenson and Scarparo 2018). Reggae's synthesis of African-American styles within an already syncretic musical milieu, its emergence as a voice for Jamaica's black underclass and for decolonisation, its commercial exportation as a rebel music, and its spread through sound system culture and interpersonal exchange, have invested reggae with a globally translatable postcolonial politics that have resonated in Sardinia (Stevenson and Scarparo 2018).

Hip hop too evolved as a counterhegemonic transcultural force. Created by marginalised migrant and African-American youth in the peripheral 1970s context of the Bronx, where independent entrepreneurs like Jamaican-born DJ Clive 'Kool Herc' Campbell synthesised a range of musical influences, including Jamaican sound system culture and African-American soul and funk, to resist extreme socioeconomic deprivation. Through its subsequent incorporation and expression of themes of black nationalism, its opposition to institutional racism and disadvantage, and its global spread through multiple formal and informal channels and networks, hip hop has become a globally relevant vehicle for marginalised youth to express their voices and identities (Mitchell 2001; Malone and Martinez 2015). Importantly, the common roots, stylistic affinities, and politics shared by reggae/raggamuffin and hip hop have resulted in frequent fusions between these genres in the US, UK, and throughout the world. Such fusions were fundamental during Italy's posse era, which gave rise to Sa Razza, and have subsequently found clear voice in Randagiù Sardù's self-titled 'rappamuffin' genre.

It is no coincidence that reggae and ragamuffin from Jamaica and hip hop from the US have resonated in Sardinia, an island with a rich and distinctive musical tradition, as well as a long history of colonial oppression. Although beyond the scope of this article, in order to understand better why reggae/raggamuffin and hip hop have found a strong niche in Sardinia, we will first briefly outline key aspects of Sardinia's own historical and contemporary experience of colonisation, 'Othering', and marginalisation, which have served to inform and inspire the work of homegrown artists like Sa Razza and Randagiù Sardù. We will follow this with a brief discussion of some pertinent aspects relating to the colonial history of Senegal, and culture and music's role in its decolonisation process, so as to highlight parallels between the histories of Sardinia and Senegal, and to help understand Momar Gaye's musical practice both within the intersecting contexts of these colonial/post-colonial histories and as the product of local and global transcultural flows.

Historical and contemporary colonisation and marginalisation in Sardinia

Archaeological evidence attests to the existence of a distinctive Sardinian civilisation that evolved during the Bronze Age and was part of a Mediterranean trading community (Dyson and Rowland 2007, 96). From 238 BC to the Middle Ages, the island was part of the Roman Empire. Following the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire, however, parts of the island were occupied by the

Vandals, became part of the Byzantine Empire, and were subjected to periodic raids by the North African Saracens. For a relatively brief period, from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, Sardinia was ruled by autonomous administrative organisations called the Sardinian *giudicati*. From 1409 until 1720, the island was ruled by the Crown of Aragon and the Spanish Empire before it was then assigned to Piedmont's House of Savoy, becoming part of the newly unified Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Following the unification of Italy, Sardinia, like other regions of the South, was 'reduced to the status of a semi-colonial market, a source of savings and taxes' and was kept 'disciplined' by 'pitiless repression of every mass movement, with periodical massacres of peasants' (Gramsci 1997, 94). Yet, according to Antonio Gramsci, not being able to understand how, even after being 'liberated', the South remained poor, the 'ordinary person from the North came to believe that it must have to do with biological inferiority' (1997, 71). In comparison to other southern Italian peoples, Sardinians experience an extra degree of marginalisation and 'Othering'. They are generally configured as belonging to the South, hence sharing with southern Italians the presumed 'Africanness' that many northern Italians have assigned to the South since unification (Pugliese 2008). However, due to their remote location relative to the mainland and their distinct cultural traditions and their language, which is not readily intelligible to fellow Italians, Sardinians are codified as doubly Other in relation to the rest of Italy. More significantly, Sardinians also see themselves as such: that is, *in* the South but not *of* the South, *in* Italy but not *of* Italy. The legacy of these multi-layered processes of colonisation, 'Othering', and assumptions of inferiority has determined the complex relationship of pride, on the one hand, but also shame, on the other hand, that characterises the ways in which Sardinians relate to the mainland. In particular, this has affected their attitudes towards their native Sardinian language.⁶

The choice to rap, toast or sing in Sardinian, therefore, is important, as the issue of linguistic choice in the social and political context of Sardinia is complex and inevitably bound up with the processes through which standard Italian was, and still is, institutionalised in civil society. It is well known that Italy has retained a 'form of widespread diglossia' (Ruzza 2000, 176). When compared to other European countries, however, it appears that diglossia is not common among the educated classes in Italy, indicating that standard Italian is the language of upward social mobility. As the linguist Carlo Ruzza argues, 'in a country where mass education is relatively recent, speakers are often keen to symbolize a decisive break with what could be perceived as a membership of a peasant subculture' (2000, 176). Consequently, the institutionalisation of standard Italian has contributed to promulgating the message that Sardinian is boorish, and this perception is reflected through the Sardinian language whereby the label, *su civili* (the civilised), refers to standard Italian, hence implying that Sardinian is the opposite, that it is the language of the savage. Hence, as we shall discuss in further detail below, within the context of this postcolonial linguistic dynamic, the choice of Sa Razza and Randagiu Sardu to perform in Sardinian becomes a political act of decolonising resistance.

The music of Dakar-born and Cagliari-based Afro-reggae singer-songwriter, Momar Gaye, provides another chapter to the postcolonial global narrative of reggae and its relevance within Italy's South, demonstrating the way in which Africa and Sardinia intersect to provide fertile territory for reggae's continuing transnational and transcultural expansion. Like Sardinia, Gaye's homeland, Senegal, has a complex colonial history, with the Portuguese arriving in the fifteenth century and the first French settlements being established in 1659. After a long period of French cultural and linguistic hegemony based on assimilation, the postwar period witnessed the rise of the pan-Africanist philosophy of 'negritude' which was led by the poet and cultural theorist, Leopold Sedar Senghor, who later became Senegal's first president, in 1960. The adoption

and promotion in Dakar of the Senegambian language, Wolof, was central to the establishing of a national postcolonial culture and identity. It was given a powerful platform through the self-conscious ‘Africanisation’ of Senegalese popular music in the 1970s, with the emergence of the style Mbalax, which was sung in Wolof by young stars like Youssou N’Dour, and fused indigenous Senegalese music with imported diasporic and Latin forms (Broughton, Ellingham and Trillo 1999, 619–621). The underlying Afrocentrism and anticolonialism of reggae made the African continent an accepted destination for the local growth of Africanised reggae,⁷ and by the early 1980s the Senegalese band Super Diamono was incorporating reggae rhythms and militancy into their music (Broughton, Ellingham and Trillo 1999, 623), paving the way for current artists like Momar Gaye, whose music we discuss in more detail below.

Globalising and reclaiming Sardianness: Sa Razza and Quilo

Releasing their first 12in vinyl, ‘In Sa Ia/Castia In Fundu’, in 1991 for the independent label Century Vox, Sa Razza went on to produce a total of six official releases under several formations, including their two most famous albums, *Wessisla* (1996, Undafunk) and *E.Y.A.A.* (2001, Cinevox/Cinenova). The group disbanded in 2003 after the release of the EP *Grandu Festa (Big Party)*, Nootempo Records). Founding member Alessandro Sanna (aka Quilo) is still active today with his solo projects and as MC/Selector⁸ and producer with Randaggiu Sardu. In 2008, he founded the production company Nootempo, which he defines as an ‘independent factory’ rather than a label, where artists collaborate to develop and produce art projects, events, and video productions (www.nootempo.net).

A peculiarity of the Sardinian hip hop scene within the global context is that it originated in provincial and rural villages (Sa Razza, for instance, came from the small town of Iglesias) rather than the ghettos of large urban centres. Nonetheless, like youth all over the world who, according to Tony Mitchell, use hip hop as a vehicle for ‘global youth affiliations’ and as a tool for ‘reworking local identity’ (Mitchell 2001, 1–2), Sardinian artists also used hip hop, rap music, and raggamuffin as a means to create communities. As Quilo explains, ‘I fell in love with a music genre but also with a community made up of DJs, graffiti artists, breakers, and rappers’ (Quilo 2016). Drawing strength from the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation that Arjun Appadurai has defined as ‘the central problem of today’s global interactions’ (1990, 5), Sardinian rappers such as Quilo were able to construct a reference community that, in turn, allowed them to claim a sense of collective agency. As Micio P from Sa Razza explains, rap has been instrumental for many in that it provided a means through which they could voice, and thus make sense of, their experience of violence, drugs, trauma, and marginalisation (Pili n.d.).

Sa Razza also, for the most part, follow global hip hop conventions in terms of the musical backing and structure of their tracks, while also adding some elements of Sardinian traditional music to evoke a symbolic local resonance (Lutzu 2012, 357), in the same manner as other marginalised communities around the world have done. Moreover, the choice to rap in the Sardinian language underscores their conscious desire to claim and celebrate ‘Sardinianess’ as a source of strength, thus subverting its negative associations, and also as a means to foster unique engagement with their hip hop community. To this end, Sa Razza replace the obsession with stories of violence, drugs, and brutal lifestyles typical of North American rap music (Pennycook 2006, 103) with a focus on Sardinian issues, such as emigration, loss of linguistic and cultural patrimony, Italy’s North/South divide, and NATO’s military occupation of the island.⁹

Sa Razza’s final release, the EP *Grandu Festa (Big Party)*, exemplifies these local preoccupations. With its self-reflexive reference to hip hop’s roots, transcultural impact, and links to local and

global power dynamics, the video clip of 'Grandu Festa', the EP's title track, has multiple layers of meaning. Foregrounding the controversial issue of the disproportionate number of NATO military bases on the island, the video starts with the crew's DJ, DJ Nike, driving a car inside a NATO military base. Largely created for missile and weapon testing, these military bases comprise 60 per cent of all Italian NATO and non-NATO military installations and occupy more than one-third of the island's land and sea territory (Beeley 2016). Controversially, the media and public opinion are increasingly of the view that the immediate surroundings of many of the military bases are afflicted by above-normal levels of illnesses such as cancers of the lymphatic systems and natal genetic malformations (Zucchetti 2006, 83; Camillo 2018). Accordingly, local opposition to the bases has grown increasingly strong.¹⁰

Evoking this controversy, the video clip of 'Grandu Festa' casts DJ Nike as a sort of secret agent involved in a classified mission to a 'secret NATO military zone'. Accompanied by a burly bodyguard, DJ Nike, dressed in a dark suit and cap, imperiously passes security checkpoints with two briefcases. In a climate of suspense reminiscent of the cinematic genres of thriller and espionage, he opens his briefcases to reveal a turntable and a mixer. He sets these iconic hip hop tools on an empty table and tweaks a dial on the mixer to initiate the sending of a transmission through the digital satellite control system, which is, in fact, a computer monitor. Through the computer screen we see that the transmission is sent through 'vinilic sound control software' by the 'Selector', in a reference to hip hop's Jamaican roots. As the DJ/Selector begins to scratch the vinyl, the monitor displays that this transmission forms part of the mission 'Grandu Festa', and is being beamed from Sardinia to 'the Rest of the World'. As the camera zooms into a satellite image of the map of Sardinia on the computer screen, thus identifying the island as the source of the signal, the soundtrack introduces a folk rhythm.

Subsequently, the camera cuts to a frontal close-up shot of an accordion, an iconographic instrument widely used in traditional Sardinian music and also inserted in the musical backing. This is followed by a quick sequence of long and medium shots of the rappers performing activities associated with farming and dressed in a mix of hip hop and Sardinian clothes, alternating with shots of farm animals such as roosters, hens, and goats. The overall effect of these establishing shots, along with the inclusion of folk elements, is both playful and ironic, but also somewhat nostalgic. After the first eight bars, a hip hop beat and funky bass drop in perfect synchronism with the traditional tempo to create an original and high-energy synthesis between old and new, local and foreign. Upon this transition, the camera focuses on Quilo, wearing the *su bonete* (Sardinian beret) but using the hand gestures and body postures of global hip hop culture, as he moves around the farmyard, declaring in Italian: '*Scendiamo dall'ovile*' ('We come back from the sheepfold')/ '*Sardacci come pochi*' ('Hard-core Sardinians like few others')/ '*Faccio saltare i culi in aria da Cagliari a Milwaukee*' ('I kick arse from Cagliari to Milwaukee').

The allusion to the shepherds as harbingers of genuine Sardinianess is tied to representations of Sardinia that invariably identify the pastoral world of sheep farming and of shepherds as icons of traditional Sardinian identity (Urban 2013, 9). The shepherds, moreover, have frequently been associated with brutal customs such as the code of honour and the *vendetta* (Urban 2013, 22). Such customs, in turn, have often codified Sardinian shepherds as outlaws and as bandits.¹¹ Significantly, then, the transition from the pronoun 'we', when referring to the shepherds in '*Scendiamo dall'ovile*' ('We come back from the sheepfold'), to the first person of '*Faccio saltare i culi*' ('I kick arse') establishes a dialogic relationship of belonging and affinity between the Sardinian shepherds, identified as hard-core Sardinians, and the rapper, who is characterised by his aggressive and threatening stance. Accordingly, the pejorative suffix ('*sardacci*') chosen to define the shepherds as true Sardinians has undertones of violence, thus resonating with

established representations of Sardinian shepherds, but also with the global hip hop gangsta persona of the rapper. Hence, the reference to his ability (or threat) to ‘kick arse’ from Cagliari, which marks him as Sardinian, to Milwaukee, which links him to international, US hip hop and rap music in general.

In a tongue-in-cheek reference to the sexist tropes of rap video clips, subsequent scenes feature scantily clad female dancers, who wear parts of Sardinian traditional clothes. Similarly, the repeated and collectively chanted ‘*Grandu festa*’ (‘Big party’) and ‘Tra la la’, of the chorus, reinforce the transcultural and transnational link between the foundational hip hop street/block party and the Sardinian festival, while DJ Nike’s signal, which is shown to be received by Jamaica, establishes a further connection to the foundational Jamaican dance hall. As Micio P struts through skate parks during the third verse, he celebrates his rapping in Sardinian language by stating: ‘*Deu seu cantadori deis gaggius*’ (‘I am the storyteller of the boorish’) ... ‘*Grandu festa rappendi*’ (‘Rapping at the big party’). The rapper’s reference to himself as the ‘storyteller of the boorish’ is significant on a number of levels. Firstly, the use of the word *cantadori* alludes to the Sardinian *cantadoris*, improvising freestyle poets, belonging to a variety of traditions present on the island and still active to this day. Sardinian rappers often claim direct descent from the *cantadoris*, arguing that, despite originating in the 1970s with the Afro-American minorities of the New York ghettos, rap had already been a part of the Sardinian poetic tradition (Lutzu 2012, 362; Randagi Sardu interview 2016). Secondly, the term *gaggius* is a Sardinian equivalent of the pejorative label *terrone* (dirty peasant), and in this context it functions as a marker of southern identity. The term *gaggius*, however, is a Sardinian rather than Italian, or northern Italian, label and refers to the ways in which Sardinians think of themselves. Specifically, the term is commonly used to describe those who are perceived to be of lower class and lacking in sophistication. These are traits often associated with those who speak Sardinian in their everyday interactions, come from rural villages, and look Sardinian; that is, they are short in stature and have a darker complexion. In other words, to be *gaggius* is to be *excessively* Sardinian.

The term, therefore, parallels the process of ‘Othering’ initiated during the unification of Italy which, as many scholars have argued, has generated an enduring experience of self-estrangement that marks southern Italians (Schneider 1998).¹² Yet, as Sa Razza’s re-appropriation of the label *gaggius* suggests, further degrees of ‘Othering’ are at work in relation to Sardinians. They are generally configured as belonging to the South, hence sharing with southern Italians the presumed ‘Africanness’ that many northern Italians have assigned to the South since unification (Pugliese 2008). However, due to their remote location relative to the mainland, their distinct cultural traditions, and their language, which is not readily intelligible to fellow Italians, Sardinians are codified as doubly Other in relation to the rest of Italy. More significantly, Sardinians also see themselves as such: that is, *in* the South but not *of* the South, *in* Italy but not *of* Italy. Accordingly, Micio P’s self-declared status of ‘*cantadori deis gaggius*’, and also of rapper, in that he is ‘*grandu festa rappendi*’ (rapping at the big party), makes explicit the correlation between rap music, community, and the Sardinian cultural tradition. This correlation, in turn, underscores the process through which hip hop and rap music allow for the creation of shared connections with other marginal contexts beyond Sardinia. Through these shared communities marked by marginalisation, disenfranchised Sardinians interpret hip hop culture as a global signifier of social exclusion and, as such, adopt rap as a conscious declaration of *difference* from the cultural mainstream and also from mainland Italy.

Paradoxically, then, Sa Razza self-consciously embrace a music scene underpinned by global cultural flows, while at the same time using it to reclaim localised cultural identity and local authenticity. Indeed, the spread of hip hop, and especially the acritical adoption of North American hip hop motifs, can be understood as inherent to the process of cultural colonisation

by the US. The video clip and the lyrics of 'Grandu Festa', however, provide a self-reflexive response to this dynamic. On the one hand, the military base that opens and closes the video clip represents the process of US military and also cultural colonisation of Sardinia. DJ Nike's infiltration and appropriation of the base to disseminate a new and distinctive Sardinian hip hop aesthetic, on the other hand, symbolically resists and reverses dominant global flows, indicating, therefore, both a self-conscious understanding of the dialogical process of glocalisation inherent in their use of hip hop and hip hop's capacity to create new transcultural communities, languages, and identities.

The consciousness-raising rappamuffin of Randagiu Sardu

A protégé of Sa Razza's Quilo, Carlo Concu, aka Randagiu Sardu (Stray Sardinian), is a practitioner of a self-described 'rappamuffin' style, combining raggamuffin and rap alongside folk and world music influences. Similar to Sa Razza, Randagiu Sardu's lyrics, written primarily in the southern variation of Sardinian, *Campidanese*, focus critically and ironically on life on the island, including reflections on the pollution and degradation of the environment, Sardinian history, culture, and politics. Randagiu Sardu achieved immediate and widespread popularity in Sardinia with the release of his first album, *Io Randagiu Sardu (I, Stray Sardinian, Nootempo)*, and first video clip, 'S'arrespiru' ('The Breath', Nootempo), in 2008. Since then, he has released the albums, *Sighimi (Follow Me, Nootempo 2009)*, *Rappamuffin de Sardigna (Nootempo 2011)* and the singles, 'Danza Noa', ('Our Dance', Nootempo 2010), 'Country Man' (Nootempo 2015) and 'Xelu' ('Frost', Nootempo 2016). The latter tracks are included in the 2016 collection entitled *Randagiu Sardu: 12 Original Hitz* (Nootempo). Quilo and Randagiu Sardu often perform together, playing in the main squares of small country towns across Sardinia as well as in clubs and dancehall parties. Randagiu Sardu's video clips, available on YouTube, have attracted well over one million views in total, an impressive number in light of the independent and marginal context in which his music is produced. Translations of his most popular tracks in Italian and English, uploaded by his loyal listeners, can also be found online.¹³

Emerging from the independent Nootempo label founded by Quilo, Randagiu Sardu creates music of social protest inspired by the melodies and rhythms of reggae and the militant lyricism of rap. As he recounts, his fascination with reggae began with Bob Marley and with 'this kind of music that sang of protest without violence', but the yearning to voice his critique against the exploitation of Sardinia also led him to US rap music, particularly the music of the 1980s (Randagiu Sardu interview 2016). Thus, the anti-colonial sentiments of reggae allowed him to express his pride in, and affection for, Sardinia, while rap provided him with powerful and passionate examples of protest against inequality, racism, and marginalisation.

Produced by Quilo, the track 'Fibai e tessi' ('Spinning and Weaving'), from his 2011 album *Rappamuffin de Sardigna*, showcases Randagiu Sardu's signature blend of raggamuffin and rap while also exemplifying the sharp irony and self-reflexive playfulness which distinguish most of his lyrics and video clips. The video clip (directed by Roberto Pili) and the lyrics of 'Fibai e tessi' are comic and burlesque in tone. Set in the countryside, where Randagiu Sardu lives and works as a farmer, the video opens with lateral and frontal close-up shots of a donkey before cutting to a medium shot of the singer as he introduces himself as the 'stray Sardinian', sporting streetwear, sunglasses and bandana, while holding a large bottle of the iconic Sardinian beer, Ichnusa.

In the sequences that follow, we see Randagiu Sardu sitting next to two farmers, wearing a T-shirt with the slogan 'No Radar', and declaring that he is playing raggamuffin for Sardinians. These two farmers look at him with a mixture of pride and bewilderment as the camera cuts to

a medium shot of the artist walking by his donkey and repeating his commitment to raggamuffin for Sardinians. These sequences playfully establish Randagiu Sardù's connection to the Sardinian countryside and to the farm, while also equating him to a donkey, as reinforced through the graphic match between alternating shots of the animal and of the vocalist looking into the camera. Significantly, along with being linked to farm work and rural lifestyles, the donkey is traditionally associated with stubbornness, a feature often attributed to Sardinians.¹⁴ This visual association between the donkey and the rapper can be understood to both ironically caricature the claim to Sardinian authenticity that the correlation with the donkey presumably confers and to invite the viewer to question cultural stereotypes that are often implicit in notions of authenticity.

Accordingly, the lyrics of the following lines articulate a pointed critique of Sardinians, with their superstitions and their practice of littering the landscape with rubbish only to blame tourists. Admonishing Sardinians for their inertia, Randagiu Sardù ironically comments on the lack of serviceable infrastructure, the environmental degradation caused by the biggest military polygon in Italy, and indeed in Europe, based in the Sardinian district of Quirra,¹⁵ and the impending dumping of nuclear waste from the mainland being planned by the Italian government. The second person address of the imperative in the line, '*Chi teneis a custa terra cantai in Sardu prus a prestu*' ('If you care for this land start singing in Sardinian now') reinforces the role that he attributes to language, and to rapping in Sardinian, as vehicles for developing cultural and social awareness, while the song's concluding rhetorical question, '*E seus propriu nosu a ddi fai sattai s'arrastu?*' ('And are we going to be capable of stopping it from coming here?'), invites his fellow Sardinians to act rather than assume victimhood and wait for others to come to the rescue. Thus, through his music, Randagiu Sardù presents himself as being a message-bearing social conscience of the island.

On other occasions, the rappamuffin artist adopts the role of a decolonising counter-narrator. Two examples of this are his early collaborations, 'Sa Battalla' ('The Battle', 2009) with Quilo, and 'Polvere Rossa' ('Red Dust', 2008) with Momar Gaye, both produced by Nootempo. 'Sa Battalla' is a Sardinian-language hip hop ballad recounting the history of the Battle of Sanluri, on 30 June 1409, which the Sardinian *giudicati* lost to the Spanish Crown of Aragon. Since in-depth study of Sardinian history is generally not included in the island's school curriculum, 'Sa Battalla' represents a powerful example of rap being used as a counterhegemonic discourse that seeks to reawaken a contemporary collective Sardinian consciousness of its longstanding anti-colonial fight for independence. This consciousness-raising alternative history, which is recounted *in* Sardinian and *from* a Sardinian perspective, links past and present, as demonstrated in the chorus chanted by Randagiu Sardù and Quilo:

Arregoda sa battalla rimas forgiadas in su fogu 'e sa muralla

Po sa libertadi 'e custa terra seus bivendi

Oi comenti un'orta seus sempri cumbattendi, e intzandu.

Remember the battle, rhymes forged in the fires of the fortification

We are living for the freedom of this land

Today like in the past we are always fighting, and then.

The use of the second-person address of the imperative, *arregoda* (remember), highlights the didactic intent of the ballad, as Randagiu and Quilo take upon themselves the task of narrating the events that took place on the day of the battle. The reference to rhyming emphasises the role of Sardinian language rap in remembering the past but also the role that it plays in fighting for

libertadi (freedom) in the present. In this context the word, *libertadi*, implies freedom from Italian control but also refers to the cultural and intellectual freedom that comes from knowledge and consciousness of self.

Similarly, 'Polvere Rossa' ('Red Dust') weaves together a counter-discourse which problematises and undermines dominant past and present narratives that serve both to depict Africa and Africans as an alien 'Other' and to associate southern Italians with this alien African 'Otherness'. The song combines a melodic hip hop backing track, which calls to mind the historic Senegalese ragga-hip hop fusions of Positive Black Soul, with Randagiu Sardu's trademark rap-pamuffin style, and lyrics toasted, rapped, and sung by Randagiu Sardu in both Italian and Sardinian, and from Gaye in Wolof. The transcultural and interlinguistic bridge created through this layered synthesis underscores a narrative which seeks both to shift the African continent from the periphery to the centre, by claiming it as the centre of human evolution, and to establish parallels with other colonised territories, such as Sardinia. The 'red dust' referred to in the song, therefore, symbolises a common life-giving force and tangible link between distant geographies, and the complementary use of Italian, Sardinian and Wolof, in combination with a hybrid musical style, foregrounds historical and contemporary commonalities across marginalities as well as unity within diversity.

The transnational and transcultural music of Momar Gaye

Within the independent Sardinian music scene, Momar Gaye's Afro-reggae music embodies the transnational flows of people and culture, ties together the postcolonial realities of Sardinia and Senegal, and creates new solidarities across cultural and linguistic divides. Gaye's production and dissemination, from the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, of his Senegalese version of Jamaica's post-colonial and pan-African musical form, underscores both music's mobility and its transcultural dimension. Fusing indigenous Senegalese musical traditions with reggae (and hip hop), Gaye creates a self-consciously anti-colonial music that is Afrocentric yet global. Sung in a mixture of Wolof, French, English, and Jamaican patois, Gaye's work reflects – both musically and lyrically – the layering of indigenous, (post)colonial, and diasporic elements, amplifies the circularity of music's global flows, and speaks to a dynamic and multidimensional marginality.

Gaye is a Baay Fall Sufi, a sub-group of Senegal's Islamic Mouride Brotherhood which is bound up with the country's colonial and anti-colonial history. Like Jamaica's Rastafarians, its members wear their hair in dreadlocks and are renowned for their local interpretation of reggae (Broughton, Ellingham and Trillo 1999, 618). Having migrated from Senegal to Sardinia, via France, in the year 2000, Gaye transplanted his musical career to new cultural, linguistic, and political terrain, and from one post-colonial space to another. In Cagliari, he reassembled his band, Zaman, including local Senegalese and Sardinian musicians to create what they refer to as 'one of the best examples of music and integration present in the Italian landscape' (www.momargayemusic.com).

In his adoptive land, Gaye also promotes music as a vehicle for integration through his role as a cultural ambassador and community leader, formalised through his position as president of the Sardinian Senegalese community's Cultural Commission. During a 2017 interview on Sardinian television, Gaye described music as one of the most significant unifying forces, stating that it was a 'language' that could 'open a gateway' to integration and understanding between newly arrived and host communities (Sardegna Uno 2017). His promotion of music in this way is rendered even more significant within the fraught contemporary Italian (and global) climate, where anti-immigrant – and particularly anti-African and anti-Muslim – sentiment and violence

continue to be stoked from above by the media and politicians and to be exacerbated by economic crises.

Gaye's intercultural musical collaborations extend beyond his work with his interethnic band, Zaman, with whom he recorded the 2010 album *Santati* (*S'ard music*). Since his arrival in Sardinia, Gaye has been a key protagonist in the local reggae scene, helping to establish the island's most prominent reggae sound system, Isla Sound, in 2002 with two local DJs from Cagliari, De Vita and Diaz. Furthermore, as a solo artist, Gaye's 2013 album *Exodus* (One Drop Record) and his various singles have involved collaborations with a range of local Sardinian musicians, such as that with Randagiu Sardu discussed above. A closer look at one example of Gaye's work with Zaman provides an insight into the way in which his music embodies the diasporic and global flows of reggae to convey alternative messages of hope, harmony, and unity in the face of marginalising and divisive social and political realities.

Shot in Cagliari, Sardinia, and directed by Federico De Virgiliis, the videoclip for the title track of their 2010 album, *Santati*, is both a spiritual homage to the Baay Fall and an expression of music's transcultural connective power. In the opening shots, the clip establishes a symbolic connection between Senegal and Sardinia through an extreme long shot of a blue-skied, savannah-like Sardinian landscape with a lone tree, which resembles the culturally and spiritually significant baobab, also known as 'the tree of life', positioned in the centre-background of the frame. The use of a paint filter, complemented by melodic instrumentation comprising light guitar, keyboard notes and pan flute, imbues the scene with mystical elements.

Reinforcing the supernatural quality of the opening shots, the tree lights up in a ball of fire and the paint filter dissipates. A serpentine trail of fire shoots out towards the viewer and two figures materialise from the tree and move towards the camera in time-lapse. A close-up of African drums being played, with the two Sardinian members of Zaman in the background, is intercut with the image of the two figures, who reveal themselves to be Momar Gaye and Boure Gueuweul (percussionist and backup vocalist) dressed in Baay Fall attire. The image cuts back to the close-up of the African percussion, and this drumming is then overlaid with the customary drum roll that marks the beginning of roots reggae songs, thus aurally solidifying the ensuing Afro-reggae fusion.

As the bright, percussive, and melodic rhythm kicks into full swing, the band members are captured strolling together on a Sardinian beach at sunset, this time Gaye wearing a Fulani hat and the wooden Muslim prayer bead necklace typical of the Baay Fall. After a couple of close-ups of Gaye with his beads, the viewer is transported back to the opening landscape, where Gaye, flanked by his dancing companion, Gueuweul, begins to sing and toast, directly to the camera, Wolof lyrics in a 'singjay' style reminiscent of Jamaican dancehall.¹⁶ Gaye's decision to perform in Wolof is congruent with the message of inclusion he wishes to convey to his Senegalese cultural, linguistic and spiritual community. His direct address to the camera and lyrical homage to the Baay Fall and their founder, Cheikh Ibrahim Fall (whose portrait is shown attached to a necklace in a subsequent shot), resemble and ostensibly evoke Jamaican reggae artists' expression of Rastafarian messages and iconography. This attempt to emulate Jamaican artists within a Sardinian setting and through Wolof demonstrates how reggae's musical and cultural practices are used to create transnational voices for marginal, Afrocentric religious communities. However, the underlying themes of togetherness and inclusion which permeate the clip are communicated powerfully through rhythm and melody, reinforcing the capacity for Gaye's music to communicate more broadly across diverse communities.

As the clip progresses, the underlying sense of harmony, respect and understanding fostered by Zaman's inclusive Afro-reggae project is underscored by shots of Zaman and friends interacting and jamming together. Significantly, the Sardinian members of this musically-bounded community

also participate in the Baye Fall rituals, conveying a welcoming and joyous image of Islam which works against the negative ‘Othering’ prevalent in Italian mainstream media and discourses. Thus, through its combination of music and images, *Santati* fashions a positive ‘Southern’ and decolonising alliance through symbolic and tangible geographies and soundscapes that connect African, Caribbean and Mediterranean peripheries.

Conclusion

Since their foundation, reggae and hip hop have been imbued with transculturality, absorbing a range of cultural influences to create new syntheses. These transcultural musical forms have been adopted globally as powerful vehicles for giving voice to marginal languages and perspectives which counter colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies. The practice of using reggae and hip hop as vehicles for conveying opposition and raising collective social and cultural awareness took hold in Italy and Sardinia during the 1980s and 1990s and in Africa and Senegal during the late 1970s/1980s.

The institutional failings and neo-colonial treatment of Sardinia, demonstrated by the widespread presence of missile and weapon testing military bases, continue to plague the island. Moreover, within the broader context of Italian and European neoliberalism and austerity there has been an increasing normalisation of exclusionary and explicitly racist commentary, policies, and ideologies to which Sardinia has not been immune. Sardinia’s independent music scene provides a fascinating case study of the way in which self-reflexive and socially aware artists are responding creatively to these troubling and marginalising trends. To this end, our analysis of selected lyrics and video clips from Sa Razza and Randagiu Sardu shows how the political, self-conscious and often playfully ironic adaptation of the sounds, aesthetics and tropes of reggae and hip hop within the local Sardinian reality has provided, and continues to provide, a means for Sardinians to express individual and collective agency by amplifying, in their own language, their critical voices. Further layering and enriching these decolonising discourses within Sardinia’s independent music sphere is the presence of Senegalese-Sardinian Afro-reggae performer, Momar Gaye. As we have discussed, Gaye’s intercultural musical practice and collaborations demonstrate the way in which reggae’s adaptation within postcolonial African contexts has been transplanted to Sardinia to provide a parallel means of self-representation which reinterprets marginality and challenges dominant discourses and narratives.

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Notes

1. Hip hop culture encompasses four elements – DJing (the manipulation of pre-recorded music), break-dancing, rapping/MCing, and graffiti writing. As is common practice, throughout this article we use the musical terms hip hop and rap interchangeably.
2. The label ‘reggae’, is used as an umbrella term to describe a range of styles and subgenres, including ska, rocksteady, roots reggae, dub, rub-a-dub, and raggamuffin/dancehall, which have developed and spread throughout the globe since the 1960s. Crucially, key aspects of the musical culture of Jamaica, such as the use of megawatt sound systems, the foregrounding of drum and bass, the practice of toasting/rapping over rhythm tracks, and the technique of the remix were also fundamental for the development of hip hop and rap, leading to ‘reggae-inflected global hip-hop confluences’ (Marshall and Radano 2013, 738). The term ‘raggamuffin’ is an intentional misspelling of ‘ragamuffin’, and this genre identified itself as the voice of Jamaica’s ghetto youths and rude boys. The term ‘dancehall’ is often used synonymously with raggamuffin/ragga, especially since the late 1990s. Raggamuffin represents the evolution of the deejay style originated by such earlier artists as Count Machuki and King Stitt and bears numerous parallels with rap.
3. The ‘posse era’ is a term used to describe the nationwide emergence, roughly between 1989 and 1994, of diverse collectives, groups, and vocalists practising reggae, ragamuffin, dub, and hip hop, often mixing these into a hybrid new genre (Scarparo and Stevenson 2008, 9).
4. Groups and artists who use the Sardinian language or a combination of various languages include the reggae group Train to Roots (from Sassari); the reggae-hip hop group Dr Drer & CRC Posse (mainly from Cagliari, the capital city of the island); the hip hop group Menhir (originally from Nuoro, the main town of inland Sardinia); and the rappers Balentia (named after the Sardinian word that means courage and valour, and which was often used to describe the traits of Sardinian bandits). For a discussion of language use by these and other Sardinian artists, see Lutz 2012.
5. Our discussion of Sa Razza and Randagiu Sardu’s music draws on a larger study of reggae and hip hop in southern Italy published in our monograph (Scarparo and Stevenson 2018), while our discussion of Momar Gaye develops aspects of Stevenson’s 2018 article.
6. Sardinian (*Sardu*) is not a dialect but is considered to be a distinct Romance language and, in its local variations, is spoken by about 70 per cent of the adult population and by about 13 per cent of youth (Bomboi 2014, 16).
7. See, for example, Nigeria’s Sonny Okosun, Côte d’Ivoire’s Alpha Blondy and South Africa’s Lucky Dube.
8. In the reggae tradition, the MC is referred to as a ‘deejay’ and the DJ as a ‘selector/operator’.
9. The focus on local themes and the use of a local language is not unique to Sa Razza. As hip hop scholars have demonstrated, the turn to local languages and themes is characteristic of the modes of indigenisation and syncretism that exemplify the global spread of hip hop (see Bennett 2000; Pennycook 2006; and Helbig 2014).
10. For a compelling account of the debates surrounding the extensive presence of NATO bases in Sardinia and the repercussions of missile and weapons testing on the local population and fauna and flora, see Lisa Camillo’s 2018 documentary, *Balentes*.
11. See, for instance, Vittorio De Seta’s 1961 neorealist film, *Banditi a Orgosolo (Bandits in Orgosolo)*.
12. Pugliese points out that this practice of ‘Othering’ generated a ‘lingering sense of “interior estrangement” that has positioned and marked Southerners as *in* Italy, but not *of* Italy’ (Scarpino 2005, 161; cited in Pugliese 2008, 6, emphasis in original).
13. See the following websites: <http://lyricstranslate.com/it/randagiu-sardu-lyrics.html>; http://www.raptxt.it/testi/randagiu_sardu/sarrespiru_13670.html; <http://www.cagliariartmagazine.it/randagiu-sardu-country-man-omini-de-sattu>.
14. The characterisation of Sardinians as marked by a wilful and stubborn nature has its origins in literature and has become a widely accepted categorisation (Urban 2013, 423).
15. This reference recalls Sa Razza’s previously discussed video clip. The area of Quirra is occupied by an experimental polygon for ballistic missiles and by a training base commanded by the Italian Air Force,

and at the disposal of NATO, and has drawn attention for its higher than normal incidences of cancer and genetic defects in infants born there (Zucchetti 2006, 83).

16. Singjaying is a Jamaican style of reggae vocals combining toasting and singing.

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Italian summary

L'intersezione tra i generi musicali hip hop e reggae/ragamuffin nasce in Sardegna tra la fine degli anni e l'inizio dei novanta. In questo articolo si esamina il modo in cui questo genere di musica segue modalità transnazionali e si sviluppa in contesto sardo post-coloniale a cavallo fra generazioni e culture mediante la produzione musicale del gruppo storico Sa Razza, che influenza la produzione di genere a sui generis del musicista Randagiu Sardu che ri-inventa hip hop e reggae tramite il suo 'rappamuffin' per finire con la produzione afro-reggae di Momar Gaye, musicista sardo di origine senegalese. L'analisi si conduce mediante lo studio di video-clips che accompagnano i testi musicali facendo particolare riferimento a contesti culturali, sociali e politici che mettono in evidenza i danni e le conseguenze della continua strumentalizzazione della sardegna da parte di interessi nazionali e internazionali.