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HIP-HOP CULTURE INVASION: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AMERICA AND ITALY

"Rapping is part of the cultural heritage of Black ghetto life. According to Black semantics it not only denotes ordinary conversation, but also defines specific ways of communication. In the 1960s many linguists, sociologists and psychologists conducted thorough research on the behaviour and language-use of 'ghetto Blacks'" (Remes 129).

In his book *Black Popular Music in America*, Arnold Shaw reports that rapping has been associated with the hip-hop culture "since the mid Seventies in the United States and that it originated in the South Bronx, New York (...) where hip-hop started as a collective and positive reaction against the spiral of violence of street gangs" (384).

In sociolinguistic studies rapping is described as "fluent, lively speech, highly determined by personal style" (Folb 76), and rap performances are defined as a "display of complex structures of communication" (Remes 134).

Taking into consideration these definitions, the aim of the present study is to observe in which ways hip-hop as a "language" and, metaphorically speaking, as a "communication vector," develops in Italy.

In order to reflect on these aspects, an overview of the Italian hip-hop scene will be outlined through the analysis of specific songs by Italian MCs.

As Russel A. Potter notes in *Spectacular Vernaculars*, it is widely recognized that "the major linguistic resources of U.S. rap are African American vernacular speech and traditions of oral rhetoric, such as the 'sounding' or 'playing the dozens' studied by William Labov in the Sixties" (55), and by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in the Eighties with the release of *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988).[2] Potter explains that the use of vernacular speech in rap lyrics both underscores the subversiveness of hip-hop against mainstream culture (57), and backs up rap's political focus and its revolutionary potential.

Furthermore, as Tricia Rose[3] highlights in *Black Noise* (1994), hip-hop and rap music constitute a cultural practice through which young black America could raise its voice from the margins, rap being one of the most challenging forms of protest available (21). In the same way, some Italian MCs[4] use rap to speak out against political corruption and social injustices in Italy, in some cases making use of their regional dialects[5]

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[2] In *The Signifying Monkey* Henry Louis Gates Jr. traces the folkloric origins of the African-American cultural practice of "Signifyin(g)," marked on purpose by the author with a capital letter in order to distinguish the black usage of this word from the standard English "signifying". In black vernacular, Signifyin(g) is a verbal play wherein words cannot be trusted since even the most literal utterance allows room for interpretation. For practices such as 'Signifying', 'sounding', and 'playing the dozens' see also Thomas Kochman, *Rappin' and Stylin' Out*: *Communication in Urban Black America* (1972); Abrahams Roger D., *Deep Down in the Jungle: Black American Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (1974); William D. Pease, *Playing the Dozens* (1990); Elijah Wald, *The Dozens: A History of Rap's Mama* (2012); Lisa J Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (2002); John Dollard, *The Dozens: Dialectic of Insult (*1939); Houston A. Baker Jr., *Black Studies: Rap & The Academy. Black Literature and Culture* (1995); Geneva Smitherman, *Talking & Testifying: the Language of Black America* (1976); Linda Goss, *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling* (1989), Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977).

[3] Tricia Rose is one of the world's leading academics on race, gender, and politics.

[4] Emcee or MC literally means "Master of Ceremonies." In hip-hop, this term refers to a person who masters the technique of writing rhymes and of rhyming live. MCs usually perform either a cappella, with the accompaniment of a Dj set or with a beatboxer (a person who imitates with his voice the sounds of instruments such as drums and percussions).

[5] Italian MCs often use their regional dialects, such as Neapolitan or Sicilian dialect. See Michele Loporcaro, *Profilo linguistico dei dialetti italiani*, where the author describes Neapolitan dialect (dialetto napoletano or,

as a device to underline the authenticity of their message.

The analysis of both hip-hop's influence in Italy and of some Italian hip-hop singles will be carried out in order to investigate how Italian MCs reinterpret American hip-hop music and the way they transform it into a language of their own. In fact, as George Nelson states in *Hip Hop America*, "like soul, in many ways, hip-hop no longer belongs to its very creators" (7). Hereto, Joseph Schloss explains: "for beat makers the rules of hip-hop are African American, but one need not be African American to understand or follow them" (10).

The process of appropriation of hip-hop by Italian artists will be examined both from a linguistic point of view (I am referring to the linguistic contamination evident in the lyrics, where English words are to be found scattered throughout the text, but also to the choice of using Italian dialects), and from a social and political point of view. As a matter of fact, some Italian MCs adopt and use hip-hop as a means of social and political protest, in much the same way their American counterpart does.

Thus, the language that in America is used to claim the situation of the ghetto is reinterpreted in Italian hip-hop songs as the language that gives voice to those who are witnesses or victims of social injustices in Italy.

In fact, as Tricia Rose suggests in her book *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop and Why It Matters* (2008), hip-hop can be a poetic force for a social movement.

I would like to specify that even though my analysis refers mainly to the Italian artists who take hip-hop as a means of expressing their socio-political discontent, hip-hop culture, both in Italy and in the United States, is not only the language of socio-political protest.

As scholar Remes notes, in fact, rap and hip-hop developed different functions, which can be divided into two main categories: 'primary' and 'secondary' functions (Remes 141-148).

In the early days of its development in America, the primary function of rap was to "change gang-related violence: creativity took the place of destruction. (…) In fact, through music and rhymes the youth could escape the ghetto environment" (Remes 140). Hence, rap constituted a communication medium through which Black youth could utter their grievances and talk about racism. Rap's primary function is expressed for example through political hip-hop (also called political rap), a subgenre of hip-hop music that developed in the 1980s.[6]

However, as mentioned above, according to Remes' categorization, rap and hip-hop also developed some 'secondary functions.'[7] The 'expressive function,' for example, belongs to this group. Rap is in this sense used in order to bring forward one's personality, often conveyed by the choice of a specific name.[8] Live performances thus bring to light the artist's style, which can be expressed through intonation, body movement, and facial expressions. Moreover there is the 'entertaining function,' i.e. when rappers want to entertain their audience by displaying rhyming ability in word-games. In this case words are used because they 'sound good,' even though they might drop their semantic value (Remes 143).[9]

Although my analysis focuses mainly on hip-hop taken as a means of expressing socio-political topics (i.e. the 'primary function of rap,' according to Remes), I will also briefly mention some Italian artists who use rap

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napulitano) as a linguistic diatopic variety that belongs to the group of southern Italian varieties according to the classification ISO 639-3 of the nap code in Ethnologue (https://www.ethnologue.com/language/nap). The term "dialect" is used by Loporcaro as referring to a variety that contrasts with the national standard language.

[6] It was inspired by 1970s politically engaged artists such as The Last Poets and Gil Scott Heron. Public Enemy were among the first predominantly political hip-hop groups. See Last Poets's song "When the Revolution Comes," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M5W_3T2Ye4; Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGaRtqrlGy8; Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PaoLy7PHwk.

[7] I selected only some examples of 'primary' and 'secondary' functions of rap. Pieter Remes, in *Rapping: A Sociolinguistic Study of Oral Tradition in Black Urban Communities in The United States*, illustrates a much more detailed range of rap's functions and themes.

[8] See for example how LL Cool J elaborates on his own name in the song "Ahh, Let's Get Ill," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfp0vLse3nw.

[9] "The rapper uses words, but has dropped their semantic value, so that the sound value prevails" (Remes 143). "Funky Rapping" from Rick & DJ Jimmie Jazz is an example of combining nonsense with meaningful rhymes in a fast flow of sounds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnC4ojdbsXg.

as an entertaining medium and whose lyrics are characterized by much lighter topics[10] than socio-political concerns (i.e. the 'secondary function,' according to Remes).

Hip-hop culture emerged in Italy in the 1980s thanks to the movement of the so-called Italian "Posse,"[11] i.e. alternative music groups whose activity was tightly related to that of the social centres, alias "C.S.O.A": Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti (Self-managed Organized Social Centres).

In fact, hip-hop culture in Italy is bound to these creative and self-managed occupied social centres for alternative culture that have been among the most dynamic spaces hosting representatives of the Italian Left and that were usually set up in squat buildings.

The centres' association with the Italian alternative independent music scene was originally related to punk, then in the early 1980s rap and ragamuffin[12] were also adopted as musical forms through which the first-generation of Italian MCs could endorse a critical stance on politics. The Italian Posse's aim was to use rap music as a means of exposing political corruption, the problem of Mafia, homelessness, unemployment, racism, and other social and political illnesses that were affecting Italy in the 1990s.

Among the first Italian Posse and MCs related to the activity of centri sociali are Onda Rossa Posse, Assalti Frontali, AK 47, and 99 Posse.

Onda Rossa Posse, a hip-hop crew from Rome, is considered to have been among the earliest and most significant Posse of the Italian hip-hop scene of the 1980s. The line-up consisted of Ice One, Castro X and Militant A. In 1990, the group released its self-produced single "Batti il tuo Tempo"[13] (Beat Your Time), whose opening is characterized by Ennio Morricone's sample of "C'era una volta in America" (1984), soundtrack to the movie with the same name by Sergio Leone *C'era una volta in America* (*Once Upon a Time in America,* Sergio Leone 1984).

Music and politics are perfectly interrelated in the song: Onda Rossa Posse's political engagement is evident both on the album cover and in the lyrics. The cover back, to give an example, depicts a star containing a black panther (which was the Black Panther Party logo) while in the lyrics "The Bologna massacre" is mentioned. "The Bologna Massacre" refers to the terrorist bombing of the Central Station of Bologna which took place on the 2nd of August 1980. Eighty-five people were killed and more than 200 wounded. The attack has been attributed to a neo-fascist terrorist organization. Moreover, in "Batti il tuo tempo" the language is direct, brutal, and it mirrors the abundant use of the word "fuck" by most of American hip-hop MCs.[14] This self-produced work sold thousands of copies and is one of the first examples of successful juxtaposition of cultural contribution and political commitment.

In 1991, another important group emerged from the ashes of Onda Rossa Posse: Assalti Frontali, whose line-up included members of the former Onda Rossa Posse.

For Assalti Frontali, too, rap is a vehicle of political and social protest. This can be clearly seen in the song "Baghdad 1.9.9.1."[15] (later included in their album *Terra di Nessuno - No Man's Land* in 1992). The song was written as a response to the Gulf War and it openly criticizes both the attitude and engagement of the United States and the Allied Forces in the Gulf War, and the activity of media such as CNN and Rai, the Italian national TV channel.

[10] See, for example, Jovanotti and Articolo 31, who will be both mentioned later in this study.

[11] Most Italian Posse, beside standard Italian language, use regional dialects and incorporate indigenous markers in their lyrics and music. Further, as Toni Mitchell notes, they started to revive the political rhetoric of the militant student groups of the 1970s and some of them also "began to excavate Mediterranean regional folk music roots which had been neglected since the Italian folk music revival of the late 1960s" (1995, 335).

[12] As Toni Mitchell notes in *Doing Damage in My Native Language: The Use of "Resistance Vernaculars" in Hip Hop in France, Italy, and Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Italian rap groups gave birth to a musical syncretism that fused ragamuffin reggae, dance hall, and ska, a fusion which ended up with the coinage of a new term: "rappamuffin" which appeared in 1992 in the compilation entitled *Italian Posse: Rappamuffin d'Azione* by Flying Records (Mitchell 2000, 46).

[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBmXpXQGbhE.

[14] In fact, in the lyrics of *Batti il tuo tempo* we find sentences such as "Fottere il potere" which literally means "to fuck the power."

[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yw0dCepMUSE.

In their later album *Conflitto* (*Conflict*) the track "Fascisti in doppio petto"[16] (Fascists in double-breasted jackets) clearly underlines Posse's ability to combine music and politics. In fact, it was recorded after Silvio Berlusconi's election victory and the opening line "I fascisti alla porta" (Fascists at the doorstep) is a clear reference to Berlusconi's political orientation as the leader of the centre-right party Forza Italia.
Another politically engaged rap group is 99 Posse, whose name evokes Officina 99, one of Naples' best known squatting spaces.
99 Posse's style is characterized by a ragamuffin fusion of reggae and rap, and by the use of both Italian and Neapolitan dialect in their lyrics.
The band's first hit, which gave its name to the album, is in Neapolitan dialect "Curre curre guaglió"[17] (Run Boy Run). It was released in 1993, celebrating the birth of the social centre Officina 99, and it is also in the soundtrack of Gabriele Salvatores'movie *Sud (South),* released in the same year. The opening lines are as follows:

> September 9, 1991/
> A day like any other for the majority, but a special one for someone/
> someone who's been struggling for days, months, years/
> against the state that's building a cage/
> reprimanding, listen, I said, reprimanding/
> someone who alone denounces and fights these stinking bastards/
> and who really knows what marginalization means/
> and who knows what the cost is for loving a squat social center/
> Officina 99.[18]

The song is in fact a hymn to the birth of Officina 99. It is a song that is maintained to have made Italian hip-hop music history. Furthermore, the fact that the lyrics of "Curre curre guaglió" were included in the *Anthology of Italian Literature* by Bruno Mondadori Editore in 2013, as a text exemplifying the youth's anger against the state in those years, is highly indicative of their relevance.
This track, specifically, describes what happened on the 9th September 1991, when nearly five hundred students and unemployed workers left a university assembly to occupy the Officina 99 in Naples (from which the group takes his name).
Following the example of these first groups, almost all MCs nationwide who came later chose to rap in Italian and in various Italian dialects. Pioneers who had started rapping in English, such as Kaos One and Ice One later on, ended up switching to Italian as well. As Ice One states in an interview:

> My first experiences as an MC in 1985 and 1986 together with Duke Montana and Julie P. were characterized by the fact that we used to rap in English. Honestly, we did it quite well but we were still too unaware because we sang in a language that was not our own, and because we were trying to convey a political message of street knowledge using the wrong language.[19]

Notably, there is an abundant self-conscious use of English words and expressions scattered throughout the lyrics of Italian MCs. The above mentioned "Batti il tuo tempo" by Onda Rosse Posse contains for example the word "sucker":

> Questo è il nostro tempo/ (…)/
> non posso perderlo per aspettarti *sucker*[20]/

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGfs8URDUdk.
[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVNgLcJ0PiY.
[18] This is my translation of the song. The original lyrics can be found at the following link: http://www.lyricsbox.com/99-posse-lyrics-curre-curre-guaglio-vkr7wxt.html.
[19] My translation. See the full article at the following link: http://xl.repubblica.it/articoli/ice-one-uno-dei-primi-protagonisti-dellhip-hop-italiano/5826/.
[20] My emphasis.

dicono state calmi/
ma intanto io li vedo in armi.[21]

Sometimes whole sentences in English are used, as for example in Frankie Hi Nrg's "Fight da faida."[22] The chorus "You gotta fight da faida" is in fact an English utterance, apart from the final word "faida" which is kept in Italian (in English, the feud).
Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Italian rappers experimented a fusion of Italian and English terms, resulting in the Italianization of U.S. hip-hop expressions, as it is the case with the verbs "rappare" (to rap), "scratchare" (to scratch), and "slengare" (to use slang).
Another group whose origin is close to the social centres' movement is the collective from Naples known as Almamegretta, who boasts international collaborations with Massive Attack.
The members' musical philosophy aims at achieving a fusion of Neapolitan musical tradition with hip-hop, reggae and funk, as well as traditional African styles. The attempt to establish a dialogue with the African culture is evident in their 1992 debut album title-track, "Figli di Annibale"[23] (Hannibal's Sons) released in 1992. Here below a few translated lines from the song highlight the song's message:

Hannibal, you, the great black general/ (…)/
you crossed the Alps at a time when Europeans could not even pass them on foot/ (…)/
Hannibal defeated the Romans, and he reigned in Italy for fifteen or twenty years/
that's why many Italians have dark skin/
that's why many Italians have black hair/
a bit of Hannibal's blood has remained in everybody's veins/ (…)/
If you know your history, you know/
where the blood that flows in your veins comes from/ (…)/
What do you think a whole black army could do/
in twenty years of military occupation in Southern Italy?/ (…)
That's why, that's why/
we are Hannibal's sons/
we people from southern Italy/
we are Hannibal's sons.[24]

As can be inferred from these lines, Almamegretta not only establishes a link with African culture, but also tries to redefine the Southern Italian identity by recalling a forgotten collective cultural memory that links Italian and African blood. This is one of Italy's most meaningful anti-racial songs and its strikingly revolutionary power is even more evident if we take into consideration that this song was released during the years when Lega Nord's influence was rising in the Italian political scene.[25] Borrowing Adam Bradley's words, Italian MCs, as well as American MCs, don't just rhyme sounds, they rhyme ideas. Bradley is one of hip-hop studies' brightest young scholars who, in his *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop,* celebrates the lyrics of hip-hop as the most vivid and revolutionary form of American poetry.
Another important step for the Italian hip-hop scene took place in 1994, when the crew Sangue Misto released the album *SXM*[26], which continues to be considered a milestone of Italian hip-hop.
The crew's line-up comprised rappers Deda and Neffa, and beatmaker DJ Gruff. They are all members of the former Isola Posse All Stars, a memorable but short-lived crew active in Bologna at the end of the 1980s.

[21] Translation: "This is our time/ (…)/ I cannot lose it in order to wait for you *sucker*/ they say 'keep calm'/ but I can see they carry weapons."
[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dol5U8uDSk0.
[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp4wLi5Ptog.
[24] This is my translation of the song. The original lyrics can be found at the following link: http://www.angolotesti.it/A/testi_canzoni_almamegretta_1936/testo_canzone_figli_di_annibale_57161.html.
[25] Lega Nord is an extreme-right oriented nationalist and separatist party, mainly rooted in the Northern regions, claiming that the problematic conditions in Southern Italy are due to ethnic inferiority.
[26] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RXBBlWJa1s.

Isola Posse All Stars' biggest hit "Stop al Panico"[27] (Stop Panicking) describes the climate of terror and panic in the 1990s after the Pilastro Massacre in Bologna, where three policemen were murdered by the criminal organization "La banda della Uno Bianca."

However, it is worth noting that not all Italian MCs emerged from the Social Centre's Movement and from Posse. Among Italian rap artists that played a crucial role for the development of the Italian hip-hop scene, although not being related to the phenomenon of the Social Centre's Movement, are Frankie Hi-Nrg, Articolo 31, and Jovanotti.

In the 1980s, while the Posse were articulating their politically active approach in the Social Centres, Jovanotti became famous in 1988 thanks to the TV programme "DJ television," where he used to rap every day in the afternoon. His performance of the song "Gimme Five"[28] (1988) brought him fame. Jovanotti conceived rap as a variant of traditional Italian pop and the contents of his lyrics are light and carefree: he thus distanced himself much from what Posse were doing in the social centres in the same years. In fact, Jovanotti and Posse were poles apart. However it can be said that Jovanotti was among the first to make Italian rap known to large audiences: targeting the mainstream market, he has long been considered a lightweight representative of commercial pop.

As anticipated in the previous paragraph, Frankie Hi-Nrg's debut 1991 hit "Fight da faida" (Fight the Feud), perfectly epitomizes the Italian attitude towards hip-hop being based upon the politically active American model. As in this form of American hip-hop, "Fight da faida" addresses a series of social and political topics as well, relating to urgent social issues in Italy. It is about family blood feud practices of the Camorra and Mafia and it is built around the English refrain "You gotta fight da faida," a call for people to fight against this internal conflict. In fact, the song openly criticizes the historical socio-economic dominance of the Mafia in Southern Italy as well as Camorra and corruption, and it is a call for the Southern people to react against such a situation. This hit had so much success that it was played in clubs as well. For this reason, and since Frankie Hi-Nrg had been the first hip-hop artist in Italy to sign a contract with a major label in 1993, he was bitterly attacked by social centres' members. He responded by saying that the aim of an MC is to address an audience as large as possible in order to spread a variety of different themes, mostly political subjects, including the Mafia, the increase of racketeering in the region, and the historical neglect of Southern Italy by the government:

> I don't believe that someone who has something to say can necessarily only go to a social centre or a squat. There's no such thing as a privileged audience, at least as far as I'm concerned, and I think rap has a duty to get across to people who go to clubs, people who until now never thought it was possible to dance to a text like *Fight da faida.* The important thing about being part of the scene is sharing the essential coordinates that make hip-hop into a philosophy of life. (Santoro and Solaroli 479)

"Fight da faida" was produced by sampling well-known black artists such as Sly and the Family Stone.[29] It is mostly sung in Italian but it also includes the use of Sicilian dialect (the song ends with a boy reciting a traditional Sicilian children's nursery rhyme) and the use of an instrument called 'maranzano' (the jaw harp) in the Sicilian musical tradition.

This song is a perfect example of contamination with its half English and half-Italian refrain. Moreover, the use of a brief burst in Sicilian dialect, with its barrage of rhymes and its inner melodic quality of consonant and vowels, highlights the great facility for rhyming and the musicality that the Sicilian vernacular is endowed with. As Goffredo Plastino underlines, dialect is used for its musicality, for the "greater possibilities of rhythmic and musical organization of phrases which it allows" (100). As a matter of fact, the lines in Sicilian dialect within the song "Fight da faida" are endowed with extraordinary musicality:

[27] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIMFhW9v21w.
[28] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHwUJQYZK-U.
[29] Sly and the Family Stone, a band from San Francisco active from 1967 to 1983, was pivotal in the development of funk, soul, and psychedelic music. It was one of the first major American bands to have an integrated and multigender lineup that consisted of Sly Stone and some of his family members and friends.

> Tri tri tri setti fimmini e un tarì[30]/
> E u' tarì ch'è pocu pocu/
> setti fimmini e u'baccocu/
> e u' baccocu è duci duci/
> setti fimmini e la nuci/
> e la nuci è dura dura/
> setti fimmini e la mula/
> e la mula avi li denti/
> setti fimmini e u' serpenti/
> e u' serpenti è avvilinatu/
> setti fimmini e u' granatu (…).[31]

This use of Sicilian dialect is also a way to get closer to the people who experience the Mafia firsthand[32]. Furthermore, the relevance of employing a local dialect is well expressed by Sicilian group Nuovi Briganti, whose members explain:

> We are based in one of the most devastated areas of the city, and the people in the neighbourhood have difficulty expressing themselves in standard Italian. They have been used to speaking dialect since they were children. And they were our first reference point, the people who have followed us since we began. And rap is about communication. (Pacoda 42)

As Felice Liperi explains, in fact, the motivation behind the use of dialect is both technical and cultural. From a technical point of view, rap is based on the relation between words, rhymes, and rhythm. Hence, Italian DJs and musicians found dialect a more malleable and ductile language than standard Italian when combining rhythm and rhyme. But it is also true that when Italian MCs "found themselves talking about the domination of the Mafia in the South and about urban disintegration, a more coherent use of the language of these localities came spontaneously. Dialect[33] is also the language of oral tradition, and this brings it closer to the oral culture of rap" (Liperi 201).
However, by also using standard Italian in the main corpus of the text, Frankie Hi-Nrg can evidently address Italy as a whole, thus reaching a larger audience.
Another well-known Italian rap band is Articolo 31, renowned for its poetic notion of "Spaghetti Funk." The term underlines the band's will to hybridize Italian and African American culture (Androutsopoulos 463). The expression "Spaghetti Funk" is clearly drawn from the term "Spaghetti Western."[34] "Spaghetti Funk" refers,

[30] The "tarì" is a coin. In Arab the term means "fresh," hence "fresh-forged coins." I thank Francesco Nicita for this suggestion.
[31] Translation: Three three three, seven girls for a tarì/ one tarì is not enough/ seven girls for an apricot/ the apricot is very sweet/ seven girls for a nut/ the nut is really hard/ seven girls and a mule/ the mule has got teeth/ seven girls and a snake/ the snake is poisonous/ seven girls and a pomegranate.
[32] Interestingly, however, Sicilian dialect is not only the language of the victims of the Mafia, but also of the Mafia itself.
[33] A comparison between Italian dialects and African American Vernacular speech is problematic and it would require a much deeper scientific investigation, which is not the scope of this essay. Here, my juxtaposition of African American Vernacular speech to Italian dialects is mentioned just as a descriptive confrontation of the linguistic devices used in American hip-hop and in Italian hip-hop.
[34] "Spaghetti Western" is a broad subgenre of Western. The movies belonging to this genre emerged in the mid-1960s. The term Spaghetti is used because these productions were directed by Italians, as for example worldwide known film director Sergio Leone, whose films proved to be an international success. "Spaghetti Western" is an example of how culture crosses national borders, thus becoming a transnational cultural product. The Western is, in fact, a typical American genre that has been heavily employed and reworked by Italian film directors, who created the so-called "Spaghetti Western." In such a new revised form, the genre travelled back to the United States, mocking its original model and, nevertheless, influencing the American western. The impact of Italian "Spaghetti Western" on the United States is evident also in recent times as can be seen in Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), defined by many critics as belonging to the genre of "Spaghetti Western." I thank Elisa Bordin for this suggestion.

on the one hand, to a typical Italian dish, Spaghetti, whilst on the other it refers to African American music (funk), thus signalling Articolo 31's will of intertwining two different cultural traditions.
The Spaghetti Funk concept is portrayed in their CD cover of *Messa di Vespiri* (1994): it depicts the band members sitting at a table, eating spaghetti with parmesan cheese and drinking wine.
Moreover, the lead singer of the band on the far left has the shape of Italy tattooed on his arm. Apart from these hints at Italian culture, the band simultaneously connects to wider international hip-hop culture by wearing their baseball caps back-to-front.
Like many other groups, Articolo 31 underlines its "Italianness" by quoting in their songs lyrics from famous Italian cantautori (songwriters) of the 1960s and 1970s. "Maria Maria,"[35] for example, contains a long series of quotations of female characters taken from well-known cantautori's songs like Fabrizio De André's "Marinella"[36] and Riccardo Cocciante's "Margherita"[37] (Santoro and Solaroli 481). In 1993, Articolo 31's album *Strade di città*[38] (*City's streets*) sold more than 90,000 copies, entering the Italian charts, a record for a hip-hop album at that time.
It is necessary to make clear that Italian rappers of the mid- and late Nineties are much less politically oriented than Posse. In fact, groups such as Articolo 31 and Sottotono are considered to be much more commercial. Their lyrics include lighter topics such as love and everyday life. As mentioned in the introductory part, their rap belongs to Remes' category related to rap's secondary functions.
Moreover, in 2001, the group Sottotono, whose members are rappers Nega and Tormento, DJ Fish and DJ Irmu, took part in the most important Italian popular music festival, "Sanremo," with the single "Mezze Verità"[39] (Half Truths), further evidence of the introduction of hip-hop into the mainstream Italian music scene.
Further evidence of Italian hip-hop commercial success is the fact that in 2006 many MCs obtained a contract with important labels: Mondo Marcio (Rotten World) from Milan signed with EMI, Fabri Fibra and Club Dogo with Universal. In 2006, Mondo Marcio released "Solo un Uomo"[40] (Just a Man), a track which made its debut at number 10 on the Feb. 6 FIMI (*Federation of the Italian Music Industry)* chart and which has stayed in the top 40 ever since. Moreover, some videoclips such as "Applausi per Fibra"[41] (Applause for Fibra) by Fabri Fibra were broadcast on All Music and MTV, and reached top positions in national charts. Also Marracash, member of the crew Dogo Gang, reached a peak of number 25 on FIMI with his first single "Badabum Cha Cha."[42] Young artists currently making a name in the hip-hop scene are Fedez, Emis Killa, and Rocco Hunt.
Interestingly, many Italian MCs intentionally choose names (either referring to their songs, albums, or to their own artist name) that are play on words, or that embed some significant cultural and musical references both to American and Italian artists.
Just to mention some examples, Italian rapper Luigi Martelli, a.k.a. Lou X, in 1991 released the song "Fotti la Pula,"[43] (Fuck the Police) which is a clear reference to "Fuck Tha Police" by N.W.A.[44] Moreover, the use of the X as "family name" by Lou X, as well as by many other artists, signals the MCs' will to pay tribute to Malcolm X.[45]
Another example is Neffa's ep called *Chicopisco* (1999), his last "hip-hop" production before he decided to turn to pop-soul music. In fact, *Chicopisco* contains a reference to worldwide renowned Italian musician Tullio De Piscopo. Neffa considered Tullio De Piscopo an icon of artistry, expertise, mastery and style, hence

[35] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USk43unFTpI.
[36] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBecFeMzaPA.
[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOiWNftto0s.
[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE6yLn8Twm0&list=PLg0NSoDABSp8EvHoIaxcc0mTVN-Q0TqXo.
[39] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcnKMCBuc7I.
[40] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXRhCeHkpUw&list=PLD879CFB198DA583A.
[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PrdA2gLaOc.
[42] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAv35_htHZg.
[43] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6__P-yeQsec.
[44] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jOqOlETcRU.
[45] I thank Luca Gricinella for his precious suggestions on this topic. See also Luca Gricinella, *Cinema in rima. La messa in scena del rap* (2013).

Neffa invented the term "chico Piscopo"[46] to indicate a guy who has got skills and know-how. As a consequence, he reworked this term and turned it into "Chicopisco" for his own ep.
What is of foremost importance, is that hip-hop in Italy is not an attempt at homogenization to the American model but, rather, an act of creative appropriation of a musical form, meant to give prominence to local and national peculiarities.
I think that the words of Maori rapper Danny Haimona of Dann Native well exemplify Italian MCs' attitude, as well:

> There is a good vibe out there for New Zealand hip-hop, but it's being poisoned by the Americanism – the Tupacs and the Snoop Doggy Doggs. You have to have a balance, and Dam Native are trying to help kids work out that they have their own culture, they don't have to adopt Americans. (Russel 18)

In line with Danni Haimona's artistic philosophy, Italian hip-hop shows great concern for linguistic authenticity against the risk of becoming a pale copy of American hip-hop.[47]
Further evidence of this is the fact that Italian MCs often make use of their regional dialects as markers of their specific cultural identity (as previously mentioned in this article).
Our overview on the different modalities of appropriation of American hip-hop by Italian artists sheds light on how hip-hop in Italy can take different and even opposing forms, ranging from a politically and socially engaged musical genre, to a much more commercial and light one.
All in all, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, hip-hop and rap remain the most important popular outlets for the Italian youth when verbalizing resentment on politics and social structures. As Roopali Mukherjee states, in fact, "like film and other mass-mediated constructions of race and class-identity, rap music symbolizes social conflict and presents listeners with indexical markers of enduring crises in the cultural imagery" (Mukherjee 2).

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[46] "Chico" means "boy" in Spanish. I thank Tannen Records, Giulio Segato, and Luca Gricinella for their insightful explanation of the term "Chicopisco." See also http://www.rockit.it/news/neffa-rap-storia-chicopisco-ep.
[47] One of the first big protagonists of the Italian hip-hop scene, Ice One, observes that at the beginning Italian MCs were copying American MCs, but later they developed a much more personal style: "in quegli anni scimmiottavamo gli americani, solo in seguito la nostra proposta musicale si fece più personale." See Ice One's whole interview at the following link: http://xl.repubblica.it/articoli/ice-one-uno-dei-primi-protagonisti-dellhip-hop-italiano/5826/.

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