

The Other and the Power of Invisibility in the Italian Network Series Zero

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This article centers on the ways the metaphor of invisibility represents otherness, specifically that of the immigrant population in Italy, in the Netflix series *Zero*. *Zero* is an Italian production created by the comic book artist Menotti (the pen name of Roberto Marchionni) that was released internationally in April 2021. The series is loosely based on the novel *Non ho mai avuto la mia età* by Antonio Dikele Distefano, who also contributed to the script. The title refers to the nickname of the protagonist, a second-generation Italian teen of Senegalese descent (played by Giuseppe Dave Seke), whose superpower is becoming invisible when faced with strong emotions. Omar (i.e., Zero's real name) is already invisible in his 'normal' life, working as a pizza delivery guy and navigating the many conflicts plaguing his family and his immigrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Milan. However, Omar's invisibility becomes a superpower that he can use to fight against the developers threatening to gentrify his *barrio*.

This analysis will begin by addressing a technological shift in the media world, specifically Television, brought about by the advent of streaming services, such as Netflix. After which, representations of otherness, particularly that of the immigrant population in Italy, will be discussed and followed by an investigation of how representations of the Other are "told" in Di Stefano's novel and "shown"¹ in *Zero*. Finally, an argument will be made for a possible re-coding of the hegemonic discourse on immigration through television and storytelling requiring a negotiation between the contrasting forces of market logic, artistic creation, and social engagement.

The representation of the Other in Western culture has been the subject of scholarly inquiry at least since Said's seminal study of *Orientalism* and Stuart Hall's influential analysis of ideology and representation. More recently, it has been reframed within the paradigm of postcolonial theories, for instance, through Homi Bhabha's work on phobias and fetishes in the portrayal of the Other². This article adopts a Foucauldian approach and follows Melinda Niehus-Kettler and Sabine Hark's conceptualization to define otherness as the culmination of affective, intellectual, and behavioral dispositifs in hegemonic discourse and practice³. In other words, our idea of what constitutes otherness, of what is other than us, is formed by a process in which a combination of linguistic and behavioral patterns affects our emotions, thoughts, and actions and becomes naturalized through repetition and reinforcement.

It is through and via our discourses and practices that we seem to transform simple manifestations of bodily differences into phenomena such as categories and dichotomies – among them are male/ female, cisgender/ transgender, heterosexual/ homosexual, western/ non-western. At the bottom, these powerful labels can be reduced to the binary systems the norm/ the other, normal/ deviant (63).

In this complex rhetorical and physical landscape, the media play a major role in disseminating hegemonic representations of the Other. In doing so, the discourse intersects

different dimensions of the social and cultural order that ultimately stem from a capitalistic form of production. As Ruz Sanz Sabido points out:

media and cultural contexts are [...] defined [...] also by commercial imperatives that are primarily concerned with what can be sold, read, and/or viewed the most. The postcolonial, therefore, cannot be viewed separately from commercial forms of communication, or from capitalism and the patriarchal order (1).

There's no doubt that Netflix and other streaming platforms have dramatically changed the media landscape transforming the way mass culture is produced, circulated, and consumed:

[Netflix's] role in the popularization of streaming video has fundamentally altered the ways in which we watch, discuss, and generally consume media. From the rise of binge-watching and password-sharing to intermittent debates about spoiler etiquette and how critics should cover programs that are released all at once, Netflix is the central force in the contemporary experience of media consumption (Barker and Wiatrowski 2).

Virtually all aspects of the media sector have been impacted, including the work of TV critics and scholars who had to learn how to deal with the "dropping" of entire series or seasons at once, instead of the traditional "popular—and, for the digital companies, lucrative—style of television criticism, wherein writers produce recaps and deconstruction of [individual] episodes" (4). The scale of the technological, economic, social, and cultural shift brought about by streaming platforms can hardly be overestimated. Much attention and praise have been placed on their empowerment of the audience, who are finally free to choose when and what to watch from an endless catalog of genres and titles. However, as Jenner Mareike explains in her introduction to "Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television":

Netflix builds on the marketing language of previous ancillary technology of television by emphasizing that it offers both, more control and more choice, to viewers. Yet, much as with previous technologies, [...] this control does not translate to substantial shifts in power. Though Netflix disrupts the way media systems are organized, [...], it hardly offers a subversion that leads to sustainable changes to the organization of power—at least not in the relationship between audiences and industry (9).

The multiplication of offerings, the disruption of traditional scheduling (replaced by the asynchronicity of the archive), the advent of binge-watching as the preferred practice for consuming television products, and, notably, the globalization of the audience have certainly redefined the language of television production. However, all these changes brought only a marginal shift in the power dynamics at the core of the media industry. The capitalistic logic that permeates the streaming industry continues to limit and shape the choices of stakeholders⁴. For example, the multiplication of offerings, instead of increasing product diversity, results in even more homogenization. Furthermore, algorithms and commercial priorities drive the visibility of the shows in the archives while the globalization of the audience appears to be more the result of cultural imperialism, appropriation, and assimilation rather than promoting true multiculturalism and inclusion.

The latter is particularly interesting in discussing an Italian TV series created for Netflix. Netflix and other streaming platforms have indeed accelerated the globalization of the Television and Media Industry by simultaneously making content available in many countries and languages (or at least with subtitles available in many languages) around the world. Technology has further enhanced this phenomenon by making language translations instantly available through add-ons to streaming platforms. Netflix's transnational archive has provided an opportunity for the

dissemination of media culture from a variety of countries to an international audience on an unprecedented scale as testified by the global success of shows, such as the Korean series *Squid Games* or the French *Call My Agent*. However, taking a closer look reveals that the reality of Internet television is much more complex. For example, in the case of *Squid Games*, the role that the globalization of videogame and anime culture played in the appeal of the series is worth investigation in addition to the internationalization of Korean culture spearheaded by the K-Pop wave⁵. Even the (anti)-Capitalistic undertones of the show appear to align with the growing rejection of market logic observed in younger generations⁶. In other words, the language, style, and content of the series had already been largely assimilated into American culture and ultimately reaffirmed instead of challenging the audience's cultural norms, expectations, and biases. Thus, rather than debating the transnational nature of Netflix's offerings and the globalization of its audience, it has become more urgent to investigate what "transnational" and "global" mean in the context of Internet television.

Both the creation of a transnational audience and the global availability of media products from different countries are two main features of the new streaming service era. They are the result of globalization and, as such, they challenge the traditional assumption that "aesthetic and industrial norms of television are always situated within a national context and history (Jenner 203)." Yet the makeup of this transnational audience and the content offered are heavily influenced by *orientalism* and cultural imperialism. Despite the exponential growth of its international presence – by early 2016 Netflix had expanded to 130 countries and added 12 million new subscribers (Barker and Wiatrowski 1) and continued to expand, at a slower pace, until 2020⁷ – the American market linguistically and culturally makes up the largest homogenous chunk of that audience. Adding the US to other English-speaking countries, such as the UK, Canada, and Australia, we can see how the anglophone world represents an absolute majority of Netflix's subscribers. In addition to these demographical factors, the genres, styles, narrative structures, storylines, and cultural references featured in Netflix's media content conform to a hegemonic code dictated or appropriated by the American cultural industry, which has shaped viewers' tastes worldwide⁸. This becomes particularly evident in the case of Netflix originals, which are shows created specifically for the streaming platform. In the case of Italian Netflix shows, for instance (but the same conclusions can be drawn for any other country), we can easily see how genres, plot lines, acting styles, and settings are specially chosen to accommodate the American public. Mob stories, the Tuscan countryside, the rom com featuring the stereotypical Italian lover, and cooking shows remain prominent in the Italian offerings on Netflix. Even when the story is not as stereotypical, the setting is reimagined as an Americanized version of Italy. This is the case, for instance, of *Baby*, a series set in a school that has no resemblance with a real Italian school, but instead looks like an Americanized idea of what an Italian school would be.

To this troubled landscape, *Zero* adds the additional issue of the representation of blackness in media. As bell hooks lamented in her powerful *Black Looks: Race and Representation*:

There is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people (2).

With specific reference to the American television culture, Herman Gray adds:

American commercial television programs about blacks position viewers to experience African American culture from the vantage point of the white middle-class experience

[...] In a society such as the United States which remains characterized by social inequality and racism, such representations of black life and culture function, ideologically, to sharpen the "normativeness" of the white middle-class experience (117).

Despite the proliferation of TV shows by, with, and about African Americans catering to a new sensitivity towards racial issues, especially among the younger generations, in recent years, an assimilationist normativity in the representation of black culture and, in general, of otherness on TV and streaming services remain prevalent today.⁹

A combination of Americanization and an assimilationist approach to otherness are very much at play in the case of the TV series at the center of this analysis. The operating of these tendencies becomes clear when we consider the stark differences between the novel, *Non ho mai avuto la mia età*, and the series inspired by it.

In comparing the two, we must be aware of the scope and extent to which we can use the critical tools offered by adaptation studies¹⁰. The two stories are, in fact, quite different. As Antonio Dikele Distefano explained in an interview published in *Vogue Italia*:

[La serie] Sarà molto diversa [dal romanzo], quando ho iniziato a scrivere il libro non pensavo a una storia che potesse diventare una serie o un film. E la sceneggiatura di una serie è molto più complessa della stesura di un romanzo. Quindi la serie sarà differente, le uniche cose in comune sono le ambientazioni, il tema principale e i nomi dei personaggi, però si tratta di storie diverse. Quella della serie è completamente nuova (Dikele Distefano, 2019)¹¹.

Even though the series is not *stricto sensu*, an adapted version of the novel, it was still inspired by it and the elements in common listed by the author, including settings, main themes, characters' names, not to mention the major role that author of the novel played in writing the screenplay for the series, justify a comparative analysis.

Both the novel and the series feature a protagonist nicknamed Zero, a second-generation immigrant of African descent (Angolan in the novel and Senegalese in the Netflix show). In the novel, we follow the life of Zero from the age of seven until his death at age 18. The protagonist is also the narrator – except in the last chapter when Zero's childhood friend (Claud) describes the events taking place in the aftermath of his tragic death. Zero's *bildungsroman* 'a rebours' is a story of subtractions and self-sabotage, but it is also a window into the realities of a lost generation of children from immigrant families, for whom there is no real chance of integration or emancipation. Steeped in systemic racism and discrimination, migrant communities are divided along racial, tribal, and/or religious lines in addition to being suspicious of the white people. As Zero's mother reminds the protagonist when he hangs out with a group of Italian boys: "Mi fa piacere che avete degli amici nuovi, ma state attenti però. I bianchi nei neri vedono sempre qualcosa di cattivo" (Dikele Distefano 2018 23)¹². In this environment, Zero's life unravels through a series of setbacks and traumatic events: his parents' divorce; his mother abandoning him and his sister because her new, white, partner demands her to do so; Zero's discovery of his father's homosexuality; and the extreme poverty and neglect constantly surrounding him. While facing these events forces the protagonist to grow up faster and act like an adult from a very young age – as the title of the novel suggests – the character remains incapable of truly evolving and escaping the fate his circumstances bestow on him. Constantly reminded of his otherness, Zero learns from a young age that he is different and that he does not belong in the country in which he was born and has lived his entire life:

Che ero diveso l'ho imparato stando in mezzo agli altri. Quando mi guardavano con la coda dell'occhio le prime volte che sentivano il mio cognome, quando la maestra o il medico

faceva fatica e pronunciare quelle consonanti vicine. Quando leggendo la città in cui ero nato, sorridendomi, mi dicevano “Ma allora sei italianissimo”, “Sei più italiano di me”. Come se attribuire una cittadinanza occidentale fosse un complimento. [...] Dimenticavano, mentre provavano a essere simpatici e amichevoli, che l’identità non me l’aveva data l’Italia, ma i miei genitori e che non spettava a loro di dirmi chi fossi (49)¹³.

Confined to the margins of society, with no real prospect of changing his circumstances, at one point, Zero turns to pickpocketing and other petty crimes to make a living and pay for the bills and debts that his father is unable to cover. During one of these expeditions, he steals the wallet of a white girl, Anna. The day after, he tracks her down and returns the wallet to her. This is the beginning of their love story and a spark of hope for Zero, who has just landed a job as a factory worker in her mother’s company. Unfortunately, Zero’s hope of a normal life soon turns into a descent into hell. First, he follows some friends into a bar and ends up getting drunk and cheating on Anna. After confessing to his infidelity, Anna breaks up with him. Then, while walking home from a shift at the factory a few weeks later, Zero ends up getting involved in a police chase. Despite his innocence, he is beaten to death by the cops, a tragic ending inspired by an actual episode of police brutality.

In rewriting Zero’s story for Netflix, the authors made some notable changes, some of which were motivated by the need to make the show more easily marketable and to cater to a young audience. That’s the case, for instance, of the protagonist’s power of becoming invisible, which is not part of the novel at all. Adopting a superhero narrative in the Netflix adaptation appeals to the average young adult viewer of the show. Other changes, however, speak directly to the need to sanitize the narrative and adapt to an assimilationist paradigm.

In the Netflix version of the story, we encounter Omar as a young adult living in the *barrio*, an underprivileged immigrant neighbor on the outskirts of Milan, with his father and sister. The only significant breaks from the linear story progression and the present tense are occasional flashbacks in the form of the protagonist’s childhood memories¹⁴. Omar works as a pizza delivery guy, or, to quote the protagonist in the first episode, “another way to say nobody,” saving money to pursue his dream of moving abroad and starting a career as an anime artist. The series’ main plots and subplots develop around this character, and the narrative arc progresses through eight relatively short episodes (ranging from 21 to 27 minutes long). The first plotline involves a fight between Omar and his group of friends and the criminal organization vandalizing the *barrio* to drive down property values and force the current residents to leave, thus, paving the way for a redevelopment project that would gentrify the neighborhood. In parallel to this storyline, the second plotline revolves around the love story between the protagonist and Anna, a rich white girl he meets on a delivery and who, it is later revealed, is the daughter of the CEO of the real estate company at the center of the redevelopment project. Several subplots add to the complexity of the narrative. In one of these subplots, we follow the story of Sharif, one of Omar’s friends, as he is torn between his loyalty to his brother involved in drug trafficking, on the one hand, and his friends and the neighbors, on the other. Then there’s the story of Inno, the promise of the local soccer team, whose potential is hindered by the discrimination and racism he faces in Italian institutions and by the coach of his team. But, more importantly, we follow the story of Omar’s own family: the conflicted relationship between him and his father, whom he considers responsible for his mother’s deportation, and the loving one he has with his sister, Awa, who suffers from a mysterious condition that impairs her vision, and that is apparently connected to Omar’s use of his superpowers.

The themes at the center of the series are the same ones as those that Dikele Distefano explores in his novels: the marginality and invisibility of the immigrant population in Italy; the discrimination, microaggressions, and open racism that even second-generation immigrants face in Italy on a daily basis; and how this systemic racism taints the immigrants' lives within their communities and families, setting them apart and pitting them against one another. However, these themes are represented quite differently in the series than in the novel. These differences become quite evident when looking at the protagonist. Again, the superhero narrative and the superpower of invisibility are only featured in the Netflix series. Furthermore, Omar is never involved in criminal activity in the series. On the contrary, he works hard to save money and dreams of moving abroad to start a career as an anime artist. His love story with Anna is complicated by the social and economic gap dividing the two, like in the novel, but it is never tainted by unfaithfulness or deceit. Instead, they overcome every challenge and end up together at the end of the show. All the most controversial aspects of the original story (i.e., the criminal record of the protagonist; and his moral shortcomings) are replaced by a narrative that aims at making the audience, specifically, a middle-class liberal white audience, empathize with the protagonist: a good law-abiding young adult who tries hard to pursue his dreams and integrate into society. At the same time, the audience is reassured that not all white Italians are bad. If it is true that immigrants who are good citizens and behave ethically can be the victim of marginalization and oppression, it is also true that said marginalization and oppression do not come from Italian society at large but from the greedy 1% – the heartless businessmen, the corrupt politicians, and the criminal organizations that prey on the weak. Nevertheless, even within this somewhat sanitized portrait of immigrant communities in Italy, the representation of otherness in *Zero* presents some noteworthy features in the way it challenges stereotypes and turns a narrative of marginalization into a narrative of empowerment.

Stuart Hall has drawn attention to the politics of representation and how anxiety of being seen as different is triggering and leads to using stereotyping as a coping mechanism and form of control:

Stereotyping [...] is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them. It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them - 'the Others' - who are in some way different - 'beyond the pale' (258).

To maintain social order, stereotyping “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference'” (258). In other words:

Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity (258).

The media, and television in particular, are extremely potent dispositifs for the construction and dissemination of stereotypical images and narratives of the Other. However, bell hooks reminds us that “the field of representation remains a place of struggle [since there's always an] ambiguity marking any visual representation” (3). This space of ambiguity, struggle, and negotiation allows for a challenge to the hegemonic discourse on otherness and identity. In the series *Zero*, this challenge happens through the subversion of the re-signification and re-appropriation of invisibility by an immigrant community.

The theme of invisibility is present in Antonio Dikele Di Stefano's novel, where, for instance, we read of the protagonist lamenting: "mi annullavo per paura di essere giudicato ed escluso¹⁵" (88). In the series, however, the invisibility of the protagonist becomes the driving metaphor for the condition of all immigrants in Italy.

In Italian society and media, more specifically, the immigrant community is characterized simultaneously in terms of hyper-visibility (e.g., the panic of "invasion", crime scares, stigma, and demonization used as marketing strategies to grab the attention of readers, viewers, and voters) and in-visibility (e.g., contributions to a declining population as well as immigrants' positive impact on job creation, welfare sustainability, and diversity). The over-exposure of the crimes committed by immigrants (unsubstantiated by the official statistical data) contrasts with silence about the terrible, inhumane conditions in which many immigrants work; their contributions to the economy, which is especially important for a country with a rapidly aging population and record low birthrates; or the increasing numbers of second-generation Italians, born to immigrant parents with an extremely difficult and humiliating path to Italian citizenship. Refusing to grant citizenship to someone born in Italy, who has lived in the country their entire life, speaks Italian, attended Italian schools, and sees themselves as Italian because their parents were not born in Italy is a severe injustice. In the Netflix series, we see this portrayed in the scene when Inno goes to city hall to apply for his citizenship and is denied on a formality. His pleading that he was born in Milan and has lived in Italy his whole life falls on deaf ears as the clerk simply restates that she is not allowed to even pull up his file without the necessary paperwork.

For Omar/Zero, however, invisibility becomes a superpower; it allows him to see without being seen, escape marginalization and violence, and find empowerment in helping the community fight against gentrification and exploitation. Thanks to his superpower, the protagonist can reveal the scheme of the criminal organization behind the development projects threatening his *barrio*. Protected by his invisibility, he can sneak into the house of a Cuban gang leader, known as Fidel Castro, who has been hired to terrorize and bully the inhabitants of the *barrio*, and use his phone to film a damning conversation between the gang leader and Anna's father about their criminal enterprise.

The symbolic meaning of Omar/Zero's invisibility becomes especially clear in his relationship with Anna. When the couple tries to make love for the first time, Omar, who has not yet learned how to fully control his invisibility, suddenly disappears. This understandably causes a rift between the two lovers and convinces Omar of the impossibility of his, a poor immigrant, being with Anna, a middle-class white Italian girl. However, as the story progresses, Omar learns not only to control his invisibility but also to extend it to other people through touch. At the end of the series, the protagonist will use his enhanced superpower to save Anna, who was kidnapped by the criminal organization Omar is fighting against. Sharing his invisibility allows Anna to see and understand Omar – to accept him for who he truly is. In other words, sharing the experience of being invisible is the only way to truly understand the marginalization and discrimination faced by immigrant communities in Italy.

The symbolism of invisibility is taken a step further at the very end of the first season of the show when we see the protagonist, still invisible, joining a religious rite reminiscent of African animist and syncretic rituals, in which he meets his mother, his father, and other members of the immigrant community. As sociological and ethnological evidence has shown: "the practice of ritual produces two primary outcomes: belief and belonging" (Marshall 260). Belonging, specifically, is "composed of attraction, identification, and cohesion [...], [it is] a step beyond

membership” (261). Building this sense of belonging is essential for all communities, and it is especially so for migrant communities. In her study of the meaning and purpose of rituals for migrant communities, Anne Sigfrid Grønseth has coined the concept of “migrant rituals,” to refer to “rituals of migrants, but also [...] rituals that ‘migrate’ between contexts and cultures” together with the communities that produce them (2618). Consequently, “as people move and migrate, rituals are taken to new locations and assume new values and meanings, thus informing new identities” (2620). In this sense, the function of rituals is not merely to foster a sense of belonging or build a shared collective identity¹⁶. “Rituals are simulated or ‘virtual spaces’ [...] that also facilitate processes of becoming” (2626). This dialectical relation between belonging and becoming, tradition and innovation, preservation, and negotiation of meaning within the virtual space of the ritual is at the core of *Zero*’s final scene.

In this scene, we see the protagonist follow La Vergine, a mysterious woman gifted with supernatural powers – also the leader of the criminal organization Omar is fighting against – to a secret place where a ceremony is taking place. Zero meets La Vergine for the first time at the casino she runs during the second episode. He is using his invisibility to help Sharif and Sara cheat at the poker table. They intend to use the money they win to fix a power outage in the *barrio* caused by Fidel Castro’s gang. La Vergine approaches the poker table after security alerts her to an unusual winning streak. The audience learns then that she is also gifted with superpowers and can see Zero when he is invisible. The two meet again at the end of the series, at the hospital where Omar is visiting Anna, who is in recovery after escaping from her kidnappers. La Vergine confronts the protagonist and invites him to follow her to learn the truth about his family and save his sister from the condition that is messing up her vision. Omar reluctantly complies and finds himself in an unknown place, surrounded by members of the African immigrant community, his parents included, all invisible, dressed in white, holding candles, and chanting as if they are performing some sort of religious ritual. It is immediately clear that in this sacred and mysterious space of invisibility, rooted in the traditions of a lost homeland, the immigrant diaspora finds a sense of connection and belonging – a home away from home – as well as an empowering way to manifest its agency. The audience knows that for Omar and his sister, who is also present at the ceremony, this is a rite of passage. In a previous scene, in fact, we see a Senegalese doctor, who is friends with Omar’s dad, telling La Vergine that Omar and his sister are “ready.” No more information is provided to the viewers on the meaning of this interaction or on what awaits the two siblings. However, we can assume that the ritual is a threshold they need to pass in order to fully join the community present at the ceremony. We also know that this event will finally allow Omar to finally understand the meaning of his invisibility, a superpower that now he sees shared by all the immigrants gathered. Still, the ending seems quite abrupt. There’s no closure or resolution for the many of the different plotlines making up the narrative arc of the show. The audience does not learn what happens to the redevelopment project threatening the *barrio*, or whether Omar and Anna will go to Paris together and begin a new life there. We do not know if Omar’s sister will heal from her illness or what is going to happen to Omar’s friends. All of this seems to indicate the intention on the part of the authors to launch a second season of *Zero*. Unfortunately, the market logic that directs and controls Netflix, stifled their plan. In Italy, the series was in the top 10s for 12 days, short of the 28-day minimum required for a second season to be approved. Since the show was not successful enough to justify further investment, the series was suspended. As discussed at the beginning of this article, the market logic driving Netflix and all other streaming platforms ultimately dictates what content is made and offered. Immediate access to a broad range of data about viewers’ preferences and consumption, the competition threatening Netflix’s dominant

position in the market, and the plateau in the number of subscribers reached in recent years are all factors influencing a more conservative approach to content creation in an attempt to reduce investment risks. As a consequence, content tends to become more formulaic and less original and innovative. The hope for shows like *Zero* to not remain an anomaly resides in creators' and directors' ability to make use of narratives and visual languages appealing to the Netflix audience and adapt them without losing the transformative message they are trying to convey. At a time when even the streaming platforms seem to have reached (and passed) their peak, a fragile balance between the diktats of market logic, political messaging, and artistic creation will determine the future of the representation of otherness in the media industry.

¹ For an analysis of the difference between the “telling” and “showing” modes in the context of adaptation see Hutcheon (2006), pp. 33-46.

² On this see, for instance, Newton (1997) and Krishna, S. (2009).

³ “[...] authors of medical, colonial, religious, and legal discourses have re-/created and disseminated a number of fictional stories that re-/generate our “economy of credibility”, which still affects the others much more adversely than our human norms. Within cyclic systems, these narratives, commonly distributed and controlled by (self-)proclaimed authorities, reinforce dominant ideologies. They beget, nurture, and manifest in segregating and eliminating practices, phenomena such as binary systems and the concept of deviance. It seems, in the course of time, all of these elements and processes re-/create perceived otherness, i.e., a social construct and potpourri of (bodily) attributes that have a negative connotation” (p. 59).

⁴ For a more nuanced analysis on the impact of Netflix and streaming services on audience practices, also in the context of the changes to consumption habits shaped by the blurred life-work rhythms of late capitalism, see Theodoropoulou, 2017.

⁵ We could apply here the concept of ‘cultural odorlessness’ used to describe the global impact of Japanese anime culture (see Iwabuchi, 2002). In contrast, see Han (2023), who stressed the importance of cultural specificity in his analysis of the success of *Squid Games*.

⁶ See: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/268766/socialism-popular-capitalism-among-young-adults.aspx>

⁷ According to the Netflix website, the streaming platform is currently accessible in 190 countries.

⁸ On the “classical Hollywood cinema” style of storytelling and how it has influenced Television see Thompson, 2003.

⁹ Stuart Hall confirms that “there have been many twists and turns in the ways in which the black experience was represented in mainstream American cinema. But the repertoire of stereotypical figures drawn from ‘slavery days’ has never entirely disappeared” (252).

¹⁰ For a general theory of adaptation see Hutcheon (2006).

¹¹ The series will be very different from the novel, when I started to write the book, I was not thinking of a story that could become a TV series or a movie. And the screenplay of a TV series is much more complex than a novel. Therefore, the series will be different, the only things in common are the settings, the main theme, and the names of the characters, but the stories are different. The story of the TV series is completely new. [my translation]

¹² I am glad that you are making new friends but be careful. White people always see something bad in us black. [my translation]

¹³ I learned that I was different being around other people. When they squinted their eyes at me at first when they heard my last name, when the teacher or the doctor had a hard time pronouncing all those consonants so close to each other. When, upon reading the city where I was born, they told me: “But you are so very Italian,” “You are more Italian than I am.” As if bestowing the citizenship of a Western country was a compliment. [...] They were forgetting, while trying to be nice and friendly, that Italy didn’t give me my identity, my parents did, and that it was not up to them to tell who I was. [my translation]

¹⁴ On the use of flashbacks and flashforward to represent the past and the future in the narrative in cinema and television see Hutcheon, 63-68.

¹⁵ I used to cancel myself out of fear of being judged and excluded. [my translation]

¹⁶ On the construction of identity, Anne Sigfrid Grønseth notes how: “identity appears as constructed both internally, by way of self-representation and configurations with others, and externally through the power of ‘Others’ to set criteria for membership formally or symbolically” (2626).

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