

Geographies of Motherhood: Race and Diaspora in Global Italian Cultures and Beyond

Across diasporas and continents, motherhood is one of the most contested and politically charged sites of cultural life. This special issue of NeMLA Italian Studies invites interdisciplinary scholarship that examines how race and diaspora shape maternal identities, care practices, and kinship structures in Italian and global cultural production. We approach motherhood not as biological essentialism but as a socially constructed, negotiated practice of care, one that can be claimed, performed, and resisted beyond biological relation or gender identity.

Italy serves as one particularly generative node within a broader transnational network. As both a historic emigrant nation (over 26 million Italians left between 1861 and 1985) and a contemporary destination, especially for communities from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, Italy sits at the intersection of colonial legacies, European border regimes, and global care economies. Yet this volume treats Italy as a case study that illuminates dynamics visible across many diasporic contexts: the persistent racialization of care labor, the residues of colonialism in contemporary mobility, and the ways maternal practices become sites of both state regulation and creative resistance.

We welcome work that engages directly with Italian cultural production as well as scholarship situated in other geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Contributions may use Italy or the Italian diaspora as a comparative lens, but this is not required. Essays centered on other national and diasporic contexts — particularly those addressing broader patterns of racialized mothering, transnational kinship, and migrant care — are equally encouraged.

Guiding questions include: How do maternal representations circulate and transform across diasporic networks? How is motherhood racialized depending on geography, historical period, and proximity to whiteness? What shared strategies emerge across disparate migration trajectories, and where do race, colonial legacies, and citizenship regimes produce radically different conditions for mothering? How might centering race and diaspora reveal power relations previously obscured by nationalist or Global North frameworks?

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

Racialized Motherhood and Representation: Colonial and postcolonial maternal figures; the racialization of care across diasporic and migratory contexts worldwide; intersectional analyses of race, class, and maternal identity in literary, cinematic, and visual culture.

Transnational Care and Labor: Global care chains and migrant domestic work; long-distance mothering and family separation; refugee and asylum-seeking mothers; the racialized division of reproductive labor; return migration and reunification narratives; literary, cinematic, and testimonial representations of care work and maternal absence across borders.

Cultural Transmission and Memory: Intergenerational transmission of language, belonging, and practice; food, music, and storytelling as vehicles of diasporic memory; second- and third-generation representations of maternal migration; grandmothers and extended kin as custodians of cultural identity.

Non-Normative Kinship: Queer and trans parenting; transracial and transnational adoption; chosen families and intentional care networks; childlessness and maternal refusal; race and queerness in transnational family formations; narratives and cultural imaginaries of non-normative motherhood in literature, film, and visual culture.

Submission guidelines:

We encourage interdisciplinary approaches across the humanities and social sciences, including Italian studies, cinema and media studies, comparative literature, cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical race theory, postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, ecofeminist and ecocritical studies, and related fields.

Please submit:

1. **A title**
2. **A brief proposal** in Italian or English consisting of original and unpublished research (200–300 words) that clearly identifies:
 - The cultural text(s) or archive you will analyze
 - Your theoretical framework and methodology
 - Your central argument and contribution to existing scholarship
3. **A short biography** (maximum 200 words)

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Proposal deadline: May 31st, 2026

The outcome of the selection process will be communicated shortly thereafter. Authors of selected proposals will be invited to submit full-length articles (approximately 5,000 words, not including endnotes or works cited) in Italian or English and formatted in MLA style by **July 31, 2026**. These articles will be double-blind peer-reviewed and, if accepted, included in the special issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies*, Volume XLVII.

We aim to foster interdisciplinary and intercontinental dialogue among scholars, so contributions from various disciplines, methodologies, and global contexts are strongly encouraged.

NeMLA Italian Studies has a blind reader policy, and the editorial staff will erase personal information from copies sent for evaluation to readers. We encourage submissions by graduate students and by established scholars of all ranks.