

HIP HOP AND *LA BELLA FIGURA*: HOW MUSIC REVEALS THE UNKNOWNNS OF ITALY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Hip Hop and *La Bella Figura*: How Music Reveals the Unknowns of Italy

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Within Italian culture is the presence of a social ideology called *la bella figura*, which is the tendency for Italians to present their best selves while trying not to create the impression of a *brutta figura*, which would be a social gaffe or a presentation of one's self that is considered uncouth. This tendency to project a *bella figura* is present in the social nature of Italians, but also their politics and economics, with a history of corruption and income inequality that has long been present but rarely addressed by Italians.

In the early 1990s, in the midst of a corruption scandal and an economic recession in Italy, hip hop began to make its way from the United States, where it was rooted, across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. Hip hop and rap became especially popular with the youth of Italy, as they used the scene to escape life on the streets and counteract *la bella figura*. With their provocative language, samples, and music videos, the early rap and hip hop of Italy criticized *la bella figura* and exposed parts of Italy that were seldom discussed in a public setting. However, as the hip hop scene became more commercialized, the rappers abandoned their tendency to criticize *la bella figura* and instead embraced the philosophy, creating their own hip hop version of a *bella figura*.

This thesis will provide a definition of *la bella figura* as it is seen in Italian culture, describe the roots of hip hop and rap in Italy, and explain how as the Italian hip hop scene became more mainstream, it adopted *la bella figura*. Overall, I intend for this thesis to provide a background on Italian hip hop, and on a broader level discuss how smaller countercultures are affected when they become commercialized.

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INTRODUCTION

When you think of Italy, what comes to mind? For most, it is the beautiful beaches, the rolling hills of Tuscany, the culture, the food, or the wine. Just a quick look at the official website for Italian tourism touts its “art and culture, history, events, nature, lakes, mountains, golf, sci [skiing], boating, thermal spas, sports and adventure.”¹ These traits are certainly all present within the country, but this presentation of Italy and the Italy that we think of is not the Italy that native Italians know. No amount of time looking at tourism websites will reveal the true underbelly of Italian culture: the occurrence a national identity philosophy known as *la bella figura*, which is the tendency for Italians to present their best selves to others at all times, regardless of the situation; in a national-political context, this can take the form of avoidance of discussion about the presence of poverty, drugs, and corruption in major cities across the country. However, through the spread of hip hop, Italian citizens have been able to create a new projected version of Italy. As hip hop scene gained more popularity in Italy, it became a “vehicle for promoting messages of dissent for culturally, sociopolitically, and economically alienated communities.”² In my thesis, I seek to illustrate the presence of *la bella figura* in Italy, as well as demonstrate how the growth of hip hop within Italy worked to counteract earlier concepts of *bella figura* in Italy. Additionally, I will illustrate how, as hip hop gained popularity and became more mainstream, the Italian hip hop scene adopted the traditional tendency to portray a *bella figura*, whereas in the past the scene worked to oppose this philosophy.

¹ *Italian Tourism Official Website*, www.italia.it/en/home.html, accessed on 17 December 2017

² Mitchell, Tony. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

LA BELLA FIGURA

Before delving into the hip hop of Italy, I would first like to provide the reader with a foundation in Italian culture and the history of *la bella figura*, as well as present examples of how this condition is so widely present within Italian culture. Strangely enough, a search for a thorough definition from an Italian source of *la bella figura* returned predominantly American sources or Americans asking other Italians what exactly *la bella figura* is. This leads us to consider the nature of *la bella figura*. Because it has been explained predominantly from a foreign perspective, we must ask if *la bella figura* is merely an attempt made by outside audiences to understand a pattern of behavior within Italy that is so ingrained that Italians do not see it, or if Italians are aware of this national tendency and choose not to acknowledge. I do not believe that it is possible to explicitly classify the psyche of the Italian people; however, I would argue that the Italians are not completely ignorant of *la bella figura*. I think that, even though the *bella figura* is often instinct and a learned behavior for Italians, there is an awareness that this “figure” is being projected. This explains why outsiders see it so clearly in Italians, and Italians that move to other countries are able to offer insight on the behavior.

The Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* offers the best definition of *la bella figura*. This reinforces my idea that Italians are aware of the presence of *bella figura*. However, the paper actually switches from Italian to English to explain the concept, saying “*l’espressione inglese equivalente sarebbe “beautiful figure”, che non rende però l’idea del vero significato idiomatrico della locuzione italiana. Che infatti indica la tendenza tutta tricolore a mantenere*

*un'immagine esterna il più possibile positiva.*³ That is: “the equivalent English expression would be “a beautiful figure, which, in fact, does not convey the true idiomatic meaning of the Italian phrase. It, in fact, indicates the entirely tricolor⁴ tendency to maintain an external image that is as positive as possible.” Merriam-Webster states that it is simply a “fine appearance or impression.”⁵ The avoidance of a strict definition for *la bella figura* has been noted by Gloria Nardini, a professor at the University of Illinois who specializes in Italian rhetoric and culture. She describes how in Italian texts, “little explanation seems to be made of the term *bella figura*.”⁶ She notes how recent publications about the Italian identity write specifically about Italian social constructs such as *la dolce vita* and *mafioso*, yet they never make mention of *la bella figura*. Italians, when asked for their definition of *la bella figura* demonstrate that they understand the concept. However, it is notably “absent in the sociological and anthropological literature written by Italians themselves.”⁷ Italians know that their *bella figura* exists, but they don't like to discuss it - which is another, more meta, facet of presenting themselves in the best light. Yet, Nardini argues that the notion of *bella figura* informs descriptions of Italian life. Many have tried to pin down a definition of *la bella figura*, but it is a phenomenon that is best understood by being seen through example rather than explained. Additionally, it is more than a temporary state of being for Italians. Rather, it is a way of life.

³ Marchetti, Simona. “Le 7 Cose Che Gli Americani Possono Imparare Dagli Italiani.” *Corriere Della Sera*, 30 Dec. 2014, www.corriere.it/cronache/cards/7-cose-che-americani-possono-imparare-italiani/avere-una-bella-figura.shtml.

⁴ Referring to the Italian flag, this can be best translated as “entirely Italian”

⁵ “Bella Figura.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bella%20figura.

⁶ Nardini, Gloria. *Che bella figura!: the power of performance in an Italian ladies club in Chicago*, pg. 6. State University of New York Press, 1999.

⁷ Nardini, 1999

Beppe Severgnini, an Italian author and journalist, focuses his work on explaining Italian culture to foreigners as well as his experience as an Italian travelling through the United States. He was Italy's correspondent for *The Economist* for 7 years and regularly appears on NPR, RAI, and in the *New York Times* to discuss the cultural differences between America and Italy. In his book, *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind*, Severgnini tries to explain the manifestation of *la bella figura* within Italian culture to an English audience. While he does not have any professional background in psychology, Severgnini has spent extensive periods of time living in both Italy and the United States, and is respected in the journalism world for his commentary on the intersections of American and Italian culture. In *La Bella Figura* he argues that for Italians, being Italian is a "full time job." As a native Italian hoping to explain the intricacies of Italy to Americans, "your Italy and our Italia are not the same thing."⁸ By this, he means that the "Italia" that *gli italiani* are living in is different than what we believe Italy to be. We see the image of Italy that is projected to us; they give outsiders their best face. But native Italians know both the good and the bad sides of the country. They know the Italy of wine, cheese, and pasta, but also the Italy of poverty, corruption, and drugs. He also states that there are two versions of the same country. The first version is "Italy," the country as it is known to outsiders, as well as "Italia," as it is known to foreigners. While I believe that it is not possible to reduce these "versions" to a definite binary, I would argue that there are many different versions of the same Italy.

The presence of *la bella figura* is seen on both a national and an individual level. Nardini, even though she argues that the presence of *bella figura* is absent in Italian literature, states in an article with the LA times that *la bella figura* has been cited in scholarly works dating back to the

⁸ Severgnini, Beppe, and Giles Watson. *La bella figura: an insiders guide to the Italian mind*. Hodder & Stoughton, 2008.

1400s, and formed the basis for the honor codes that are present throughout the Mediterranean where Romans colonized⁹. Additionally, an article from *Gli Stati Generali* asserts that Dante originally coined the term¹⁰. Although the specific origins of the cultural presence of *la bella figura* are not certain, we can see that it is not a recent occurrence within the cultural history of Italy. It is deep rooted in the psyche of Italians, and has since seen a resurgence over the years with the growth of international and social media. However, as we see from Nardini's arguments, as globalization increased exposure to other countries, Italian scholarly work has been more reluctant to discuss the *bella figura* and inner workings of Italian society.

Nationally, the phenomenon of *la bella figura* has resulted in more value being placed on aesthetics than on ethics. Severgnini, author of *La Bella Figura*, argues that Italy's passion for beautify induces Italians to "confuse what is beautiful with what is good."¹¹ On a more individual scale, *la bella figura* means the presentation of one's best self to those around him or her. This is present in many layers. On the exterior, it means that one must "make a beautiful figure" at all times. This is dressing well all the time, keeping slim, and knowing the proper etiquette in social situations. For women, a fresh manicure at all times, flawless makeup whether it's 75°F or 105°F. For men, a tailored suit, pressed shirt, and polished dress shoes¹². But, as we saw earlier, *la bella figura* is more than just a projected exterior. It is modus operandi, or a manner of operating. It is knowing how to properly act with others in a social situation, exhibiting good

⁹ Tracy Wilkinson | Times Staff Writer. "Italy's Beautiful Obsession." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 4 Aug. 2003, articles.latimes.com/2003/aug/04/world/fg-bella4.

¹⁰ Squillaci, Alfio. "L'ossessione italiana per la "bella figura"." *Gli Stati Generali*, 3 July 2015, www.glistatigenerali.com/storia-cultura/lossessione-italiana-per-la-bella-figura/.

¹¹ Severgnini, 2008. pg. 6

¹² King, Carol. "Bella Figura and Brutta Figura: Italy's Beauty and the Beast!" *Italy Magazine*, 8 Aug. 2012, www.italymagazine.com/featured-story/bella-figura-and-brutta-figura-italys-beauty-and-beast. Accessed 26 Apr.2018.

manners, and being generally likeable¹³. Although it is exemplified in different ways, the end goal of those that present a *bella figura* is the same: to present oneself in the most positive light. As discussed earlier, it is impossible to know whether or not Italians are truly aware of the constant presence of their *bella figura*, or if they re-creating this figure intentionally. Regardless, its presence is evident to outsiders looking in on Italian culture, one of those being Beppe Severgnini, the Italian expat who now writes social commentary about Italy.

In *La Bella Figura*, Severgnini provides countless examples of the little ways that *la bella figura* is ingrained into Italian culture. Take, for example, an airport. Severgnini argues that “an airport in Italy is violently Italian.” Here Severgnini is really trying to say that if you want to see all aspects of *la bella figura*, go to an airport. You see the external manifestation of *la bella figura*, from the beautiful saleswoman selling cell phones to the impeccable outfits of those boarding the planes. In the terminals, you can listen to couples quarrelling, “their accusations lent extra ferocity by the embarrassment of performing in public.” He says to notes faces of those strolling in shops as they find ways to pass the time, or those coming through customs to their home country. He explains that most of these people have the same expression, one of deference. But if you look closely enough, you can make out an “almost imperceptible hint” of childlike joy for the shoppers, of relief for those arriving home. This is the external *bella figura*: the appearance of composure masking the true emotions of a person. Then there is the internal version, the moral version. In his book, Severgnini uses himself and the way he, a native Italian, would act in public as an example. Say, for instance a woman is struggling carrying her bags. Severgnini states that two different versions of himself would help this woman: the first, the Good Samaritan, or the side of him that genuinely wants to help others, and the second, which is

¹³ “La Bella Figura: An Italian Way of Life.” *EyeItalia*, 17 Mar. 2009, www.eyetalia.com/la-bella-figura-italy/.

the side of him that wants everyone to *know* he is a Good Samaritan (and it is this side that compliments the first side for his good deed).

At the intersection of the philosophy of *la bella figura* and government we find corruption. Corruption has been one of the most widespread and persistent blemishes on the face of government in Italy. Starting on February 17, 1992 - keep this date in mind for later on in the paper - the *Mani Pulite*, a nationwide investigation into the political corruption of Italy shook the political climate of the country. It was discovered that nearly 5,000 different public figures, amongst them more than half of the members of the Italian Parliament, were under indictment for charges of corruption. According to a 2010 report, many Italians have “accepted corruption and poor governance as part of their lives.¹⁴” Additionally, in 2013, 89% of surveyed households considered political parties to be extremely corrupt, while 64% believed that the level of corruption has increased in the past two years, and 61% believed the government efforts to fight corruption have been ineffective.¹⁵ Since the initial scandal in 1992, the corruption levels in Italy have only increased, and some of the politicians that were under fire for corruption in the mid-90’s are actually back in politics today.¹⁶ The corruption in Italy, while obviously common is evidence of the presence of the tendency to create a *bella figura*; the politicians are concerned with their outward appearance rather than the true morality of their actions.

The corruption in the Italian government adds a layer of complexity to politics for the Italian people, because the end result for them is the same; if politicians are taking bribes, why

¹⁴ Scaglia, Paul. "Comment: Quake underlines Italy's sad legacy of corruption." *The Italian Insider*, 9 Apr. 2010, www.italianinsider.it/?q=node/119.

¹⁵ e.V., Transparency International. "Italy 2013 - World's largest opinion survey on corruption - Transparency International". www.transparency.org. Retrieved 2017-06-22.

¹⁶ Roe, Alex. "Why Nothing's Changed Since The Huge Corruption Scandal That Hit Italy 20 Years Ago." *Business Insider*, 21 Feb. 2012, www.businessinsider.com/why-nothings-changed-since-the-huge-corruption-scandal-that-hit-italy-20-years-ago-2012-2?IR=T&IR=T. Accessed 20 Mar. 2018.

do a politician's motives for doing something matter if the people are benefitting whether it is merely for appearance or genuinely for the betterment of the country? For some, a genuine politician is important, but to some, "an ambiguous attitude to graft remains common place,"¹⁷ meaning that politicians often forgo defined stance on issues in favor of more cryptic or vague platforms. The corruption is expected, as it has been present on the peninsula for centuries, but one of the most egregious large-scale corruption cases of post-war Italy occurred in 1968, where the widespread corruption became evident after an earthquake in Belice, a town in northwest Sicily. Money that supposed to be spent rebuilding homes was spent instead on needless construction project, and 6 years after the war 60,000 citizens were still living in the temporary housing that went up immediately after the disaster. Another earthquake happened in L'Aquila in 2009, and Prime Minister at the time, "Silvio Berlusconi stated that Italy would be rebuilt in 24-48 months. However, any casual observer to Italian society would know this is unrealistic. Completing a major public works project in Italy takes slightly less than six years and costs four times more than in other European countries."¹⁸

This leads us into one of the most important figures for *la bella figura* in Italy: Silvio Berlusconi. The influence of *la bella figura* has been vastly evident with the approval of politicians such as Berlusconi, who arguably had no political experience when he was elected, yet had high approval ratings and was re-elected even after a sex scandal, a near-national bankruptcy, tax fraud, and Mafia associations¹⁹, to name a few. But to the Italian people, he

¹⁷ Day, Michael. "Corruption in Italy 'worse than ever' as minister quits over links with gang accused of bribery." *The Independent*, 20 Mar. 2015, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/corruption-in-italy-worse-than-ever-as-minister-quits-over-links-with-gang-accused-of-bribery-10124024.html. Accessed 20 Mar. 2018.

¹⁸ Scaglia, 2010

¹⁹ Silvio Berlusconi: Italy's perpetual powerbroker." *BBC News*, 5 Mar. 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11981754. Accessed 26 Apr. 2018.

exemplified masculinity, as a heroic leader, calling himself “the only virile boss,” as *l’unico boss virile* being an anagram of his own name. His masculinity is even present in his rhetoric towards women, where he uses a simplified register and tends to speak *at* or *of* them rather than *to* them²⁰. By creating a radical image of Italian power and masculinity, Berlusconi exemplifies the trope of the Italian *uomo forte* (“strong man”), that takes *la bella figura* to an extreme. More than this, with his persona, Berlusconi projected the image of Italian strength and power, one that Italian citizens - those that value a *bella figura* over morals - elected into office not only once, but twice.

LA BRUTTA FIGURA

Now that I have provided some examples of the occurrence of *la bella figura* in Italy, I should introduce its less popular - but necessary - ugly stepsister: *la brutta figura*. *Brutta*, in Italian, simply means ugly. But take a deeper look into the origins of the word and find that it is derived from the Latin word *brutus*²¹, which is translated in English to mean dull, stupid, or uninspired²². The opposite of *la bella figura*, *la brutta figura* can be best translated to “making a fool out or creating a negative image of yourself.” In Italy, this would include wearing flip flops and sweatpants in public, or carrying a to-go cup of coffee around²³. And, on a national level, it would be straying away from the “wine and cheese” stereotype of Italy to less discussed ones like the corruption within the Italian government, the poverty, and the mistreatment of women. Italians like to avoid presenting themselves as clumsy, socially inept, or awkward; doing so

²⁰ Pozzo, Barbra. “Masculinity Italian Style.” *Nevada Law Journal*, vol. 13, no. 585, 17 May 2013, scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1475&context=nlj.

²¹ Bonomi, Francesco. “Brutto.” *Etimologia : brutto*; www.etimo.it/?term=brutto.

²² “Latin - English dictionary - English translation of the Latin word brutus.” *Majstro Dictionaries*, www.majstro.com/dictionaries/Latin-English/brutus. Accessed 26 Apr. 2018.

²³ Berkowitz, Rachel. “Rome, part 2: La bella figura « The Great Whatsit.” *The Great Whatsit*, 26 July 2006, www.greatwhatsit.com/archives/1617.

would be a “gaffe,” and *fare una figuraccia*, or make a fool of yourself. The goal of *bella figura* is to not make *una figuraccia*²⁴.

Somewhere between this *bella figura* and *brutta figura* is where we find hip hop. As stated earlier, the rap and hip hop scene became a vehicle for rappers to express dissent about the political, cultural, and economic state of the country, whereas at the time one would be making *una figuraccia* if they openly disagreed with the government or spoke out against social injustices. In countries across the globe, “hip hop becomes the genre of choice for men and women because it gives voice to their present day experiences.”²⁵ The same can be said for Italian hip hop scene with the intersection between the presence of *la bella figura* and the life of Italian youth. The rap and hip hop scene of Italy not only worked against the stereotypical presentation of *la bella figura* in Italy but adopted its own version of *la bella* and *la brutta* figura within the hip hop culture.

In his introductory textbook on music and culture, ethnomusicologist Michael Bakan suggests that music has historically been “a mode of cultural production and representation that reveals much about the workings of a culture.”²⁶ Music has often been used as the catalyst for major political uprisings and opposition to the government. There are a number of reasons why music in particular has been a popular method through which social movements rally and gain attention. Simon Frith, sociomusicologist and Tovey Chair of Music at the University of Edinburgh goes further to argue that “music, like identity, is both performance and stories,

²⁴ “*Le espressioni sulle figuracce.*” Italiano Semplicemente, 20 Jan. 2017, italianosemplicemente.com/2017/01/20/le-espressioni-sulle-figuracce/. Accessed 15 Apr. 2018.

²⁵ Miszczyński, Miłosz, and Adriana Helbig. *Hip hop at Europe's edge: music, agency, and social change*. Indiana University Press, 2017.

²⁶ Bakan, Michael B. *World Music: Traditions and Transformations*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2007. Print.

describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social.”²⁷ Music professor at the University of Southampton Victoria Spau takes this description of music identity a step further and asserts that through these descriptions of identity, there is also the development of a group pride, in which the goal of the group is to “construct a form of solidarity and loyalty of members towards the organisation they activate in.”²⁸ She believes that music can be considered both knowledge and action, and as a cultural expression influences popular culture. This results in music being used as a device for recruitment or as a call to action to mobilize.

Music and government have had a strained relationship in many countries, with some governments even going so far as to ban certain genres of music or music with a specific message. This also includes the censorship of some music that could be considered in opposition to the interests of the government. One of the prime examples of this happening is found in the United States. In 2004, rapper Eminem released a song called “Mosh” with lyrics vehemently opposing the Bush presidency and the United States government. While the government did not completely ban the song, which would violate the First Amendment, they would not allow the song to be played on the radio without the absence of the line that states “...strap Bush with an AK-47...”²⁹ This controlling relationship was also present in Italy. In Italy, until September 2000, the state holding company Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale owned 99.5% of RAI, one of the two major broadcasting networks in Italy. After this, ownership was turned over to the Treasury of Italy. The other major broadcast network in the country is Mediaset, the media

²⁷ Frith, Simon. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Pg. 109, SAGE Publications, 2011.

²⁸ Spau, Victoria. "Social Movements through Music and Culture. An Overview." *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2013, seejps.lumina.org/index.php/volume-i-number-1-democracy-and-civil-society/16-social-movements-through-music-and-culture-an-overview. Accessed 22 Mar. 2018.

²⁹ Terrian, Meredith, and Christie Fantis. *Interaction Of Music And Government*. FSU World Music Online, Florida State University, 25 Apr. 2011, fsuworldmusiconline.wikidot.com/interaction-of-music-and-government.

company founded by Silvio Berlusconi³⁰. It is evident that the media and the government were (and still are) owned by the same parties, much of the popular content at this time was chosen by those in the media industry and the government. Later in this paper, I will discuss further in depth about the relationship between the media and the government in Italy. Especially with state owned or regulated media, governments ultimately have the final say about can and cannot be allowed to be disseminated.

However, one factor that has drastically changed the stage in which music becomes popular is the recent invention of streaming platforms. In the past, much of the popular music could be censored by the government. Mary Madden of the Pew Research Center argues that with the growth of streaming “distributed networks of socially-driven music sharing helped lay the foundation for mainstream engagement with participatory media applications.”³¹ This means that since the growth of music streaming platforms, starting with the creation of Napster in 1999, there has been a space for more interaction between listeners and popular culture. Additionally, Madden argues that music-sharing platforms such as Limewire and YouTube, as well as personal MP3 players allow for listeners to pick and choose what they like and what they do not. This has been a recent development, since charts and popular music in the past could be manipulated by the music industry. In her report, she describes how music critic and musician Sasha Frere-Jones has described the music industry as the “canary in the economic coal mine,” and “if the music business was the canary, then the MP3 was its carbon monoxide, choking an industry that had built its empire on the clean, regulated air of analog music products.” As we will see further on

³⁰ Bechtold, Brigitte. "Italy." *Press Reference*, www.pressreference.com/Gu-Ku/Italy.html. Accessed 26 Apr. 2018.

³¹ Madden, Mary. "The State of Music Online: Ten Years After Napster." *Pew Internet*, June 2009, pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a8b7/cf7876461b6559f6b43ea6793188c66ee90f.pdf.

in this paper, the absence of media sharing and streaming services resulted in much of the anti-government and critical music never reaching a wide audience.

With the presence of *la bella figura* comes *la brutta figura*. As I will explain later in this paper, much of the early hip hop in Italy portrayed the *brutta figura* of Italy. The nature of the music industry and the commercialization of music impacted the rap and hip hop scene, because as we will see, as rap music became more mainstream and commercialized, it began to adopt a hip hop version of *la bella figura*.

THE HISTORY OF HIP HOP IN ITALY

The hip hop scene in Italy is a fairly recent development in the country. The first rap and hip hop was born in the 1970s in the United States, so by the time the movement made its way to Europe it was the 1980s. The earliest hip hop and rap movements in Italy first started as a “direct emulation of what was happening in the Bronx,”³² years earlier in the United States. As a result, most of the first artists rapped in English and imitated Americans. It took about 10 years for Italian rappers to make the transition from using “English as rap’s lingua franca”³³ to using their native language to create music. The first recordings and performances of rap and hip hop of the 1990s first used standard Italian, and then disseminated into regional dialects³⁴. This was possible from the growth of the phenomenon known as “posses” a result of the *centri sociali*, or community centers, in Italy.

The *centri sociali* in Italy emerged around the 1980s as a result of the *riflusso* (recession and resignation) of the 1970s left wing militant students. At the time, Italy was undergoing a

³² Povoledo, Elisabetta. “In Italy, a Long Tradition of Homegrown Hip-Hop.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 July 2000, www.nytimes.com/2000/07/23/arts/music-in-italy-a-long-tradition-of-homegrown-hip-hop.html.

³³ Povoledo, 2000

³⁴ Mitchell, 2004

youth revolution, and disaffected young people organized their own activity centers. Often in the outer suburbs of cities, self-organized groups would refurbish abandoned buildings and use them as community centers for whoever wanted to join. These spaces served as art studios, drug rehabilitation centers, or even cyperpunk computer centers for hackers. These centers were intended to provide “temporary autonomous zones”³⁵ where young people could gather and create art and a counterculture to the mainstream; the graffiti symbol for the *centri sociali* was a bolt of lightning inside a circle, to symbolize “breaking through the confines of the urban prison,” as well as “an autonomous micro-society, jealous of its own independence, bound to its own territory, but ready to forge links with the other islands in the archipelago.”³⁶ It was here in these *centri sociali* where posses were born.

The *centri sociali* encouraged the creation of art and music, and they provided “rehearsal rooms and concert venues for punk groups, eventually transforming into centers for hip hop music and graffiti art.”³⁷ Even though there were posses present in major cities like Rome and Milan, the major growth of the hip hop groups was most present in the smaller and more marginalized regions. Major communities for rap and hip hop music were found in large cities such as Rome, Bologna, Turin, Naples, and throughout various regions, for example Sardinia, Sicily, Calabria, and Puglia. The posses created their own unique form of music, fusing Jamaican raggamuffin (a subgenre of reggae), dance-hall, traditional Mediterranean folk music, world music elements, samples, scratches, and backbeats coined “rappamuffin” (derived from

³⁵ “Centri Sociali. Zone di IV Rivoluzione.” *Alleanza Cattolica*, 29 July 2016, alleanzacattolica.org/centri-sociali-zone-di-iv-rivoluzione/.

³⁶ Lipperini, Loredana. “I sogni della metropoli.” *La Repubblica*, 22 Oct. 1993.

³⁷ Mitchell, 2004

raggamuffin reggae) by an Italian reggae and rap compilation album released in 1992, *Italian Posse: Rappamuffin d'Azione*.³⁸

Not to be overlooked are the sociopolitical factors that led to the rise of the Italian hip hop scene. According to the Nations Encyclopedia, at the end of the 1980s “families living in poverty represented 14 percent of the population,” and “the contrast between north and south could not be clearer, with over 65 percent of impoverished families living in southern regions.”³⁹ Additionally, during the early 1990s, income inequality and poverty grew rapidly in Italy. In the mid-1990s, Italy’s poverty level went from around the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average, 9%, to just over 14%. The country was in economic turmoil with a wage gap growing between the rich and the poor.⁴⁰

The political and cultural climate at the time laid the foundation for the posses to become popular and provide a platform for *i giovani* - the youth - to express their emotions and feelings about contemporary social issues. At the time, the pioneers of the hip hop and rap movements addressed topics like “the Mafia, government corruption (the rise of hip hop coincided with the fall of the ruling party that had governed Italy for nearly 50 years), immigration, heroin addiction, homelessness, and the high unemployment rates in the South.”⁴¹ Martin Gannon, a professor of global cultures, compares Italian culture to that of an opera. He states that the audience (in this case, other Italians) is greeted by “pageantry and spectacle...so visually stunning that it elicits applause.” He says that these aspects of Italian life are so important that

³⁸ Mitchell, 2001

³⁹ "Italy - Poverty and wealth." Nations Encyclopedia, www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Europe/Italy-POVERTY-AND-WEALTH.html. Accessed 7 May 2018.

⁴⁰ "Growing Unequal? Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries." oecd.org, Oct. 2008, www.oecd.org/italy/41524626.pdf. Accessed 7 May 2018.

⁴¹ Povoledo, 2000

people and things are often judged on the appearance first and foremost. To him “the surface of Italian life, playful yet bleak and tragic at times, is similar to what has occurred in Italian history has many of the characteristics of a show...ugly things must be hidden, unpleasant and tragic facts are swept under the carpet whenever possible, and ordinary transactions are all embellished to make them more stimulating...Italians prefer to glide elegantly over the surface of life and leave the depths unplumbed.”⁴² He compares Italian life to an opera for several reasons. First, operas are unusually moving and unreservedly picturesque. Second, Italians are often great dramatic actors. Additionally, the purpose of the opera is to make life acceptable and pleasant; “to put on a show becomes the only way to revolt against destiny and to face life’s injustices” with the weapon of imagination.

This is where classic Italian *la bella figura* and the rap movement meet. The rap and hip hop movement began by discussing the things that Italians are uncomfortable discussing; the origins of posses and *centri sociali* are rooted in “a new rhetoric of political militancy, using rap music to criticize a whole range of social and political ills,”⁴³ in a society where doing so is considered to be *fare una figuraccia*.

CASE STUDY OF HIP HOP OF THE 90’S

“Curre curre guagliò” - 99 Posse

One of the first posses to make waves in Italy was Papa Ricky and his Isola Posse All Stars from Bologna. They were formed near the end of the 1980’s in the *centro sociale* of *Isola nel Kantiere* in Bologna. Gianluca Testani, radio host, music historian, and writer for major

⁴² Gannon, Martin J., and Rajnandini Pillai. *Understanding global cultures: metaphorical journeys through 28 nations, clusters of nations, and continents*. Sage, 2009.

⁴³ Mitchell, 2004

international music magazines such as *Il Mucchio Selvaggio* and *Fare Musica*, argues that the Isola Posse All Stars *ha rappresentato uno dei momenti più importanti*⁴⁴ - represented one of the most important moments - in the history of the birth of Italian hip hop culture and posses. Their success first started with the underground production of *Stop al panico*, a work that was released in response to the *Strage del Pilaastro*, when three police officers were killed by the Uno Uno gang. There were two tracks on the album, the first entitled *Stop war* and the second *Stop al panico*.

Between the years of 1980 and 1992, there were 53 *centri sociali* in 33 Italian cities, with 26 of the *centri* based around Rome - often the social centers were based in the suburbs around the inner city. The subcultural movement of the posses was used as a way to criticize the social and political injustices brought to the low income areas of Italy by the corrupt Christian Democrat government. Rap was considered one of the “main cultural catalysts of a political renaissance of opposition Italian youth movements.”⁴⁵

As noted earlier, February of 1992 was the beginning of the *Mani Pulite* scandals, when much of the Italian government was discovered to be corrupt. Additionally, the summer of 1992 was one other first times that the politically charged posses were present in Italian mass media. As the posses grew in popularity, the 99 Posse emerged as one of the most well-known but also one of the most politically charged. We see the political motivation behind the music in the lyrics of the 99 Posse, who gave performances supporting the left-wing alliance of progressives in the 1994 elections. In 1993, the group released a album entitled “*Curre curre guagliò* (Run Boy Run)” about the year 1992, one that has been called “one of the worst years in Italy’s recent

⁴⁴ Gianluca Testani, *Enciclopedia del rock italiano*, Roma, Arcana Editrice, 2006, p. 202.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, 2001

history”⁴⁶ in regards to the extreme level of corruption, government incompetence, and violence.

The most well-known song on the album is also entitled “*Curre curre guagliò*” about an incident where hundreds of students and unemployed workers left a university assembly to retake the centro Officina 99 (a *centro sociale*) in Naples from the police. I chose this song in particular because it is 99 Posse’s most well known song, and is being taught in college courses about the anti-war movement of the 1990’s⁴⁷.

The song and English translation are as follows:

<p><i>Un giorno come tanti ma non certo per qualcuno Qualcuno che da giorni mesi anni sta lottando Contro chi di questo stato na gabbia sta facendo</i></p> <p><i>Reprimendo attento ascolta dico reprimendo Chi da solo denuncia e combatte sti fetiente E sa bene che significa emarginazione Esattamente quanto costa amare un centro sociale Officina 99 Curre curre guagliò Si può vivere una vita intera come sbirri di frontiera In un paese neutrale, anni persi ad aspettare Qualcosa qualcuno la sorte o perché no la morte Ma la tranquillità tanta cura per trovarla Sì la stabilità un onesto stare a galla È di una fragilità guagliò Forse un tossico che muore proprio sotto al tuo balcone Forse un inaspettato aumento d' 'o pesone Forse un licenziamento in tronco d' 'o padrone Forse na risata 'nfaccia 'e nu carabinieri Non so bene non so dire dove nasca quel calore</i></p> <p><i>Ma so che brucia, arde e freme</i></p>	<p>A day like so many but certainly not for someone Someone that for days, months, years, has been struggling Against who is making a cage out of this state Respressing, careful, listen, I say repressing Who alone denounces and fights these bastards And knows well the meaning of marginalization Exactly how much it costs to love a social center Officina 99 Run, bro, run You can live a whole life like a border cop In a neutral country, years lost to wait Something, someone’s fate, or why not death? But the peace, so much care to find it Yes, the stability, an honest one stays afloat Stability is of such fragility, dude It can be broken by a junkie that dies right under your balcony Maybe an unexpected increase of people Maybe a sudden layoff by the boss Laughing in the face of a military cop I don’t know well and I can’t say where this heat is born But I know it (the heat) stings, burns, and quivers And changes your life, you cannot explain it</p>
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⁴⁶ Navarra Associate, Sydney Democracy Network, School of Social and Political Sciences (SSPS), University of Sydney, Giovanni. “Looking Back at 1992: Italy’s Horrible Year.” *The Conversation*, 8 Oct. 2016, theconversation.com/looking-back-at-1992-italys-horrible-year-66739.

⁴⁷ Chetta, Alessandro. “I 99 Posse Finiscono Sui Libri Di Scuola Da Oggi Si Studia «Curre Curre Guagliò».” *Corriere Del Mezzogiorno*, 6 Nov. 2013,

*E trasforma la tua vita no tu non lo puoi spiegare
 Una sorta di apparente illogicità
 Ti fa vivere una vita che per altri è assurdità
 Ma tu fai la cosa giusta te l'ha detto quel calore
 Ti brucia in petto è odio mosso da amore
 Da amore guagliò
 Curre curre guagliò
 Tante mazzate pigliate
 Ma tante mazzate pigliate
 Ma una bona l'ammo data
 È nato è nato è nato
 N'atu centro sociale occupato
 E mò c' 'o cazzo ce cacciate*

*Why, don't know why feeling saw say
 I don't know why feeling saw say
 Can you feel...
 Get up stand up stand I feel you right
 Get up stand up come the to fight*

*Pecché prima mettite 'e bombe e po' 'o vulite a me
 E me mettite 'e mane 'ncuollo si ve chiedi' 'o pecché*

*Mammà 'e guardie a casa s'avette 'a veré
 E nu spazio popolare nun è buono pecché
 Pecché è controculturale o magari pecché
 Rompe 'o cazz' a troppa gente si ma allora pecché
 Tu me può rompere 'o ***** e no i' pure a tte
 Me se 'ntosta 'a nervatura e 'o saccio buono pecché
 Pecché me so' rutt' 'o ***** pure sulo 'e te veré
 Figurammece a senti' che tiene 'a ricere a me
 Strunzate 'e quarant'anne 'e potere pecché
 Pecché 'a gente tene famme e se fa strunzià' 'a te*

*E tu me manne 'o celerino ca me sgombera a me
 Ma nun basta 'o manganiello mo' t' 'o dico oi né
 Pecché nun me faje cchiù male aggio 'mparato a
 caré'
 Curre curre guagliò...⁴⁸*

A kind of apparent craziness
 It makes you live a life that for others, is absurdity
 But you do the right thing, the heat told you so
 it burns you in the chest, it is hate moved by love
 by love, boy
 run, boy run
 Many blows you take
 But many blows you take
 But we gave one good blow
 It was born it was born it was born
 Another occupied social center
 F*** you, you're going to kick us out

*Why, don't know why feeling saw say
 I don't know why feeling saw say
 Can you feel...
 Get up stand up stand I feel you right
 Get up stand up come the to fight*

Because first you plant the bombs and
 And you put your hands 'round my neck and ask
 why
 Mama guards the home, you can verify
 And a popularly controlled space is no good
 Because it is counter-culture or maybe
 because they break too many people's balls
 So you can bust my balls but I can't bust
 I get pretty mad and I know exactly why
 Because I'm f***** sick of seeing you
 I can't imagine what you would say to me
 Your b***** and 40 years of power because
 Because the people are hungry and if we reproach
 you, you give them the run around
 and send riot cops to kick us out
 The billyclubs aren't enough and I'll tell you why
 Because you can't hurt me anymore, I have
 learned learned to fail
 Run, boy, run⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "Curre Curre Guagliò Testo" ["Curre Curre Guagliò Lyrics"]. *AngoloTesti*, www.angolotesti.it/0-9/testi_canzoni_99_posse_1737/testo_canzone_curre_curre_guaglio_46517.html. Accessed 15 Apr. 2018.

⁴⁹ Carlsten, Virginia, et al. "Curre Curre Guagliò." *Antiwar Songs (AWS) - Curre Curre Guagliò*, 17 May 2007, www.antiwarsons.org/canzone.php?lang=en&id=5984.

Interestingly enough, there are several different versions of the lyrics available online. Most of them were quite similar, but the main difference between the lyrics available was the presence of the verse in English. There were also a vast number of versions available on video platforms, some including and some excluding the English verse. I researched to find a possible reason for the discrepancies between the songs, but the difference had not been noted anywhere. I am choosing to analyze the lyrics that, in my opinion, have been the most widely circulated because they were found on two of the most popular Italian music lyrics sites, musicxmatch.com (which claims to have “the world's largest catalog of song lyrics and translations”⁵⁰) and angolotesti.it.

As you can see from lyrics such as “*Ti fa vivere una vita che per altri è assurdità*” and “*Pecché 'a gente tene famme*” the members of Posse 99 are writing lyrics for a place of disdain for the government. The first lyrics shows that they believe they are unnoticed by the government. The members of 99 Posse believe that they, along with their peers, are living through conditions that others would believe to be absurd. Additionally, he tries to explain that his people are hungry, and they have taken too many blows from the government over the past couple of years. Finally, in the only English verse in the song, he uses a call to action to “*Get up, Get up stand up come the to fight.*” This line is reminiscent of the famous Bob Marley song “Get Up, Stand Up,” which was released in 1973 in response to Bob Marley’s reaction to the poverty of Haitians he observed while touring Haiti. The song has since become an anthem for human rights. It was performed live at an Amnesty International concert for Human Rights⁵¹, and has

⁵⁰ “Home Page.” MusixMatch, www.musixmatch.com/.

⁵¹ Devenish, Colin (11 December 1998). "Springsteen Joins Superstar Lineup At Amnesty Gig". MTV News. Viacom. Retrieved 27 July 2015.

been used in support of the Euromaidan protesters occupying Independence Square in Kiev⁵². In addition, the reference to Marley's song channels the reggae mood of the song to classify "*Curre curre guagliò*" as the "rappamuffin" style, which I will discuss further on in the paper.

I believe the presence of this English verse to be an intentional move by the 99 Posse. The intended audience of this song was obviously Italians, but the inclusion of an English verse implies that they believed this song could have some sort of international appeal. If the song made it an English-speaking country, even if the listener did not speak any Italian, they would still understand this verse and the call to oppose the government. Additionally, the verse is written in very simple English, which would allow for Italian speakers with minimal knowledge of the English language to understand what the artist is saying.

There are further implications of including the English verse on this song. I believe that the verse was included to make the song appeal to English-speaking audiences, which creates *una brutta figura* for Italy on the international stage. Even though this song was the most popular by the 99 Posse, it did not reach international fame. However, the intention to make the song international is counter to the idea of *la bella figura*. As discussed earlier, the common trend within Italian society is to project the best image of oneself to others. This song, on the other hand, does the opposite. It discusses the struggles of life in the impoverished parts of Italy. The line "*ti fa vivere una vita che per altri è assurdità*" highlights this idea perfectly. Those with the most power in Italy at the time were the ones with the most money, and therefore they were able to dictate how Italy was perceived as a country. At the time this song was released, the Italian media was only controlled by a handful of people - among them Silvio Berlusconi. Not only was the power concentrated between few people, but these same people happened to be some of the

⁵² O'Connor, Roisin (15 June 2016). "New music to listen to this week: Bloom Twins". *The Independent*. Retrieved 29 September 2016.

wealthiest in the country. In the year 1990, Berlusconi was worth more than a billion dollars and dominated the private media sector. The rest of broadcast media was public, which meant it was owned by the government.⁵³ So, as we can see, those that were able to dictate what was popular in Italy and thus more likely to reach an international audience were those with money and power. These were the people that would consider daily life in poor Italy to be absurd.

It was understandably not in the best interest of either of these parties to project a negative image of Italy to countries abroad. “*Curre curre guagliò*” - as well as most Italian hip hop at the time - did not receive international success. It was not until recently that Italian hip hop received mainstream international exposure, which will I discuss further later on in the paper. However, had the group been successful in reaching an English speaking audience, the effect the track would have had for the country would have been *fare una brutta figura*, rather than *una bella figura*. The English in the song is enough to send the message to international listeners that the song is heavy, and that the members of Posse 99 are calling to the Italian people to fight for something. Had the song made it overseas to the United States or Great Britain, “*Curre curre guagliò*” would have created *una brutta figura* for Italy, because it would expose international listeners to a reality that Italian people are living that was not often discussed on an international stage.

Even though this song did not reach international fame and *fare una brutta figura* abroad, the song still had a lasting impact on Italian society. Alessandro Pascale, a researcher of history at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart) states that the

⁵³ Cohen, Roger. “Battle Rages in Italy To Control Publisher.” *The New York Times*, 28 Jan. 1990,

song was able to “become a generational anthem for all the social centers and ‘rebels.’”⁵⁴ Earlier, we defined one that *fare una brutta figura* to be one that creates a negative appearance. This is exactly what the 99 Posse is doing by creating a song that talks about the negative aspects of Italy, such as the incompetence of the government, the unemployment, and the constant beating the lower classes of Italy feel they are taking. The early rappers of the posses were not concerned with creating a *bella figura* in the traditional sense. They were not concerned about fashion, or appearing popular or masculine. On the contrary, “posses tended to avoid misogyny.”⁵⁵ They were, however, concerned with exposing the hardships they faced and the shortcomings of the government. Through the use of Neapolitan dialect, incendiary language and the “rappamuffin” style, 99 Posse garnered the support of the impoverished classes to *fare una brutta figura* of the country to the upper classes of Italy.

The main method that the 99 Posse uses to connect to listeners is the language of the song. The song is actually not rapped in traditional Italian but Neapolitan dialect. In the 80’s, there had been a resurgence of the use of regional dialect in music, mostly to appeal to a specific audience. Vernacular language became increasingly used during the rap movement of Italy to channel traditional folk and ritual songs, which established Italian rap “as a genre with analogies with traditional forms of musical improvisation.”⁵⁶ Mitchell argues that within Italy, there has been the “use vernacular language to express cultural opposition through a subcultural

⁵⁴ Pascale, Alessandro. “Recensione: 99 Posse Curre Curre Guagliò.” *Storia Della Musica*, 12 Dec. 2009, [www.storiadellamusica.it/hiphop-rnb-black/rap_militante/99_posse-curre_curre_guaglio\(novenove_bmg-1993\).html](http://www.storiadellamusica.it/hiphop-rnb-black/rap_militante/99_posse-curre_curre_guaglio(novenove_bmg-1993).html).

⁵⁵ Mitchell, 2001

⁵⁶ Mitchell, 2001

positioning from within one's own society."⁵⁷ By channeling the language traditionally used by the workers and lower classes of Napoli, 99 Posse separates themselves from the elites and connects with the marginalized youth in the *centri sociali*. We see the use of Neapolitan dialect, from the region of Naples in "*Curre curre guagliò*" with the use of words such as *pecché* instead of the standard Italian *perché* (translates to "why"), as well as the word *cchiù* instead of *più di* ("more than"). Finally, the word *guagliò* is a word that was born out of youth culture in Napoli, was popularized around the country, and has since "become a pan-*meridionale* term adopted by all Italians."⁵⁸ The word originated from the standard Italian *qualcuno/a* ("someone") to become *guaglione*, and then finally was shortened to just *guagliò* to mean "boy" or "dude." The use of both the Neapolitan dialect and slang that was birthed from the younger population allowed the song "*Curre curre guagliò*" to resonate with the youths in Naples, as well as channel out traditional genres of Neapolitan songs such as work songs and ritual chants, which helped solidify its place as a radical stimulus and a "new form of social communication"⁵⁹ during the 1990's.

The 99 Posse also utilized radical language to resonate with the lower classes and catalyze the population. The song begins extreme and angry: "A day like so many but certainly not for someone/Someone that for days, months, years, has been struggling/Against who is making a cage out of this state/Respressing, careful, listen, I say repressing/Who alone denounces and fights these bastards..." These lines are catered to the impoverished and

⁵⁷ Mitchell, T. (2004). "Doin' damage in my native language: the use of 'resistance vernaculars' in hip hop in Europe and Aotearoa/New Zealand." In S. Whiteley, A. Bennett & S. Hawkins (Eds.), *Music, Space, and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (pp. 108-123). Aldershot: Ashgate.

⁵⁸ Bullaro, Grace Russo. *From Terrone to Extracomunitario: New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema: Shifting Demographics and Changing Images in a Multi-Cultural and Globalized Society*. Troubadour, 2010.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, 2004

marginalized people, who traditionally felt underrepresented in popular culture and government. These lyrics, I believe, serve two separate purposes, the first of which being to connect with the members of society that felt ignored by the government. The use of “someone” in the lyrics makes the listener feel like he could be talking specifically to them, which created an emotional connection between the listener and the song. Additionally, I believe that the lyrics were meant to draw attention to the shortcomings of the government for those that may have previously been ignorant about the conditions of those in the lower classes, and to expose them to the idea that those in poverty believed the government was putting them in a “cage.”

Finally, as noted earlier, this song employs the use of the “rappamuffin” sound, a term coined in the 1992 compilation album of Italian rap and reggae music *Rappamuffin D’Azione*. The genre of music is defined as the combination of “the influences of Jamaican ragga and dancehall, traditional Mediterranean folk music, ‘world music’ elements and vocal styles, and samples” to create a “distinctively syncretic combination of global and local musical forms.”⁶⁰ The namesake album itself was a tribute to the Italian posses and early rappers that created socially conscious music, and actually featured a song by the 99 Posse entitled *Salario Garantito* (“Guaranteed Wages”). The song “*Curre curre guagliò*” employs the rappamuffin style of music to appeal to the lower classes and immigrant population of Italy. Present within the song are Jamaican-style backbeats, world music style drums, and chanting reminiscent of tribal music. All of these elements were counter to what was considered the “mainstream” for music at the time, and because of this, the rappamuffin style became popular between foreign communities and communities marginalized by the Italian government.

⁶⁰ Mitchell, 2001

Through all of these elements - the use of English, the Neapolitan dialect, the slang, the inflammatory language, and the rappamuffin style - 99 Posse was able to create a song that was counter to the idea of *la bella figura* in Italy at the time. Together, these linguistic and music stylistic strategies serve to show how the narrativization of place might connect to notions of ‘resistance vernaculars’ in non-Anglophone rap.⁶¹ That said “resistance” at the time was that of against the popular culture of Italy, that of *la bella figura*. 99 Posse strived to expose both international and domestic audiences to the injustices that were being committed to the marginalized and work to counteract the idea of *la bella figura* within Italy. The Italian government and people worked hard to put forth their best face, but the songs by 99 Posse, and “*Curre curre guagliò*” in particular, worked to oppose this idea and catalyze people to come together in opposition to the oppression and marginalization the lower classes were feeling from the government.

“*Stop al panico*” - Papa Ricky and his Isola Posse All Stars

Another prominent posse at this time was Papa Ricky and his Isola Posse All Stars out of Bologna. Born out of the *Isola nel Kantiere centro sociale* at the end of the 1980’s. The group began producing music and released their first single *Stop al panico* in 1991. This song, which is critical of the “man” and law enforcement, was influential at the time because was the theme song of the *Stop al panico* campaign that was launched by the *Isola nel Kantiere centro sociale* during the 1990’s to stop the violence of the Gang of the White Uno, a criminal group that was named as such because of their use of a white Fiat Uno - a car notoriously hard to identify in Italy at the time due its widespread use - during some of their criminal actions. They were the cause of many murders, bank robberies, and extortion schemes from 1987 to 1994, when all of

⁶¹ Mitchell, 2001

the members were arrested. *Stop al panico* was released as a response to the Pilastro Massacre, the deadliest crime conducted by the Gang of the White Uno. In 1991, a gunfight broke out between the gang and the police, and 3 police officers ended up being killed. Because the members of the gang were also trained police officers, they were skilled shooters and had extensive knowledge of the streets of Bologna. This caused investigators to go down several wrong paths when trying to indict the members of the gang, and they were not caught for another 3 years after the massacre. The Isola Posse All Stars campaign began after this massacre, and people in *centri sociali* in Bologna were evicted as a result of the gang activity.

In the song *Stop al panico*, the Isola Posse All Stars rap about the fear they feel due to the White Uno Gang, but also the perceived corruption and hypocrisy within the government by the working class in Bologna. The lyrics for *Stop al panico* are as follows:

<p><i>Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop al panico</i> <i>Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop al panico...</i> <i>Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop al panico...</i> <i>Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop al panico...</i></p> <p><i>Papa Ricky:</i> <i>Apri la mente, scuotila per capire</i> <i>non c'è ragione, non aspettare di morire,</i> <i>scopri l'inganno, il piano per impaurire,</i> <i>una città segnata dal dolore... Scegli!</i> <i>il modo giusto per cancellare</i> <i>questo panico che vogliono far crescere</i> <i>cerca di capire bene cosa voglio di-di-di DIRE!</i> <i>C'è qualcuno che ci vuol far morire</i> <i>prima che nel corpo, nell'anima, nel cuore</i> <i>e qualcun'altro che sa cosa fare</i> <i>perché è il momento buono per approfittare</i> <i>de-della paura costruita col fucile</i> <i>pronti come avvoltoi per colpire</i> <i>radere al suolo, chiudere sgomberare</i> <i>centri sociali e case occupate... CHIARU!</i></p> <p><i>Speaker Dee Mo:</i></p>	<p>Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop panicking Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop panicking Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop panicking Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop panicking</p> <p>Open your mind, shake it to understand There is no reason, don't wait to die Discover the deception, the plan to frighten A city marked by grief...choose! The right way to get rid of The panic they want to grow try to understand what I want to sa-sa-SAY There is someone who wants us to die Before in the body, soul, heart And someone else who knows what to do Because it's the right moment to take advantage of-of the fear created by a shotgun Ready as vultures to strike Shaved to the ground, surrounded, vacate social centers and occupied houses, CLEAR!</p> <p>Speaker Dee Mo:</p>
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*Bologna anche questa volta Bologna
rossa di vergogna e sangue non sogna più
anni e anni di cazzate tipo "isola felice"
non han fatto che danni...
Bologna è solo il buco del culo del mondo,
c'è chi ha avuto, ha avuto e chi ha dato e va fondo*

*c'è chi "vive" nove in una stanza, chi incassa,
chi vive da schiavo, chi intasca tangenti, chi spaccia:
questa è l'altra faccia della medaglia
e qui di nuovo i mandanti nascosti e la tensione,
la diffidenza, la divisione cade l'illusione, cade, cade
in un agguato:
pioggia di piombo, sangue sul selciato, ma come per
piazza Fontana,
sono io la bestia e non qui figli di puttana...*

Rit.:

Deda MC:

*Stop al panico, la mia posizione:
è una mossa pura e semplice di controinformazione
non si parli, non si scriva di un Bronx rinato... Un
episodio isolato?*

*Lì fuori non c'è una belva furiosa uscita nella notte
da una tana misteriosa:*

*il mistero è risolto, l'incomodo è tolto,
abbiamo foto e nomi dei mandanti senza volto.*

*Pagine e pagine di allarmismi letali,
di scuse, cordogli, ipotesi tutte uguali
a cui sfugge di nuovo la connessione sicura
la connessione c'è... è la paura!*

*Dura da tempo come il granito,
il momento di scalfirla non è ancora finito
non sciupare parole e falsi rimpianti
tre in una volta non son poi così tanti!*

Gopher D:

*Panico sei tu, che giudichi e scegli,
le tue vittime i tuoi facili bersagli
NO! È un prezzo che non posso pagare,
mettilo nel culo quel dito inquisitore.
Sono sempre in piedi, reagisco ai tuoi colpi,
l'ipocrisia colpisce quando ti volti
con sgomberi infami che non soffocano l'azione:
è il panico che crea giustificazione.*

*Panico, nelle strade tra la gente,
guardami in faccia, usa la tua mente,
per sciogliere le reti gettate su chi muore,
sull'ennesima casa che sarà da demolire.*

Bologna, also this time, Bologna
red with shame and blood that doesn't dream anymore
years and years of crap about "happy island"
They didn't do that damage
Bologna is just the asshole of the world
There are those who had, and those who gave and go to
the bottom
there are those who "live" 9 in a room, who collect
who live as a slave, who pockets bribes, who peddles:

This is the other side of the coin
And here again are the hidden principals and tension
The distrust, the division shatters the illusion, shattered,
shattered, in an ambush
Rains of bullets, blood on the pavement, but as for
Piazza Fontana
I am the beast and not here motherfuckers

Chorus

Deda MC:

Stop panicking, my position
It's a pure and simple move of counter-information
Don't talk, don't write of a born-again Bronx
An isolated episode?

Out there there's not a furious beast of the night
from a mysterious den

The mystery is solved, the inconvenience taken away,
We have photos and names of the faceless instigators

Pages and pages of lethal alarms
apologies, grievances, hypotheses all the same
to which the secure connection escapes again
the connection is...it's fear!

Hard for a long time like granite
the moment to scratch it isn't over yet
Don't waste words and false regrets
three at once are not so many!

Gopher D:

Panic is you, that judge and choose
your victims, your easy targets
NO! It's a price I can't pay
Put that inquisitive finger in your ass
I'm always standing, reacting to your blows
Hypocrisy strikes when you face
with infamous evictions that don't suffocate the action
It's the panic that creates justification
Panic, in the in the streets among the people
Look me in the face, use your mind,
To dissolve the nets thrown on those who die

<p><i>Ascolta! Il vero assassino è chi manovra i tuoi pensieri, le tue lacrime non basta celebrare il dolore... Guardati intorno è inutile sognare!!!</i></p> <p><i>Rit.:</i></p> <p><i>Hai ascoltato i fatti, senza omissis Attenzione! Il panico fa comodo a chi vuole tensione pensaci cento, mille volte, pensaci bene bene, mai ti senti sicuro, mai e questo che ti si chiede hai l'indice puntato su chi? O sei indicato?</i></p> <p><i>Segno che ci sei cascato! Questo è lo scopo del gioco nascosto non ci è dato sapere chi l'ha inventato ma chi vince o chi perde è una questione di pelle o di razza, cultura: è una fregatura! Perché un vecchio gioco e nostalgia, è il manganello della polizia... (speciale) È una strategia, chi ha capito ha capito. Usa la testa, mostragli il dito! Violenza, violenza genera violenza stop al panico-panico: uniti è una potenza!!!</i></p> <p><i>Rit..⁶²</i></p>	<p>On the umpteenth house that will be demolished Listen! The true killer is who maneuvers your thoughts, your tears not enough to celebrate the pain Look around, it is useless to dream</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>You listen to the facts without omitting attention The panic is convenient for those who want tension Think about it a hundred, thousand times, think about it well You never feel safe, never, and this that you ask yourself Who do you have the index pointed at? or are you indicated? Sign that you fell for it! this is the purpose of the hidden game We are not given the knowledge of who invented it But whoever wins or loses its a matter of skin or of race, culture; its a rip off! Because an old game and nostalgia is the police baton (special) It's a strategy, who understands use your head, show him your finger! Violence, violence generates violence Stop panicking - panicking United is a power!!!</p> <p>Chorus⁶³</p>
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As we can see, the lyrics of “*Stop al panico*” are highly provocative and inflammatory.

As one of the members of the Isola Posse All Stars, DeeMo, says, at the time, people were sure that the Gang of the White Uno was responsible for the murders, which resulted in witch hunts all over the city of Bologna. “The piece ‘*Stop al panico*’ was born as a rally, as a watchword

⁶² Rap Genius. genius.com/Isola-posse-all-stars-stop-al-panico-lyrics. Accessed 3 Apr. 2018.

⁶³ Translated by author

against the evacuations and this climate of terror.”⁶⁴ The song vehemently criticizes the terror that was caused not only by the Gang of the White Uno but by the police force in Bologna.

This song is a good example of the tendency of early Italian hip hop to counter the traditional idea of *la bella figura*. The song discusses the sheer chaos that was taking over Bologna over the years that the Gang of the White Uno was active, as well as how the police were ineffective at capturing the criminals, causing fear within the residents of Bologna. In this situation, if one were trying to make *una bella figura* based on the traditional definition, they would stay calm and poised, and trust that the police would do their job to catch the criminals. However, the song shows that the people of Bologna were not concerned with *una bella figura*, but they were overcome with panic about this situation. Additionally, the Isola Posse All-Stars suggest that the police were actually the ones responsible for the attack with the lines “You never feel safe, never, and this that you ask yourself, do you have the index pointed at? or are you indicated?” This song asks the police to look at themselves and question if they are the ones that are causing the panic. In more ways than one, this ended up being true. While the police were causing panic through the use of violence, the police were also responsible for the crime since many of the members of the gang were trained police officers.

The song also directly criticizes the idea of *la bella figura* with the line “years and years of crap about ‘happy island.’” By this, DeeMo means that Bologna, historically called “*un’isola felice*” or a “happy island,” is anything but. His use of this quote counters the idea of *la bella figura* because the use of the nickname for the city in Emilia-Romagna creates the perception that nothing bad happens in Bologna, and everyone in the city is happy with their lives. Instead,

⁶⁴ Garcia, Sonia. "Spazi di comunione: Isola nel Cantiere" ["Communion Spaces: Isola nel Cantiere"]. Noisey, Vice, 12 Oct. 2015, noisey.vice.com/it/article/6exq3k/spazi-comunione-isola-nel-cantiere-deemo. Accessed 27 Mar. 2018.

DeeMo says that this is no longer true. Instead, he says that Bologna is the “asshole of the world” full of shame and people that don’t dream anymore. This verse in the song provides a look into the “real” Bologna, the one where people are scared and unhappy; not quite the same picture depicted by the phrase “happy island.”

The song itself is also heavily influenced by the rappamuffin style, although less than “*Curre curre guagliò*.” The beat for the song is funky and tropical, like the music coming out of reggae movement at the time. Similar to 99 Posse, the Isola Posse All Stars reference outside music with their own. The beat for this song is sampled from the song “Express Yourself” by N.W.A, an American rap group known for their criticism of law enforcement. One difference between this song and that of the 99 Posse is the chorus. The chorus of “*Curre curre guagliò*” is melodic and laid back, while the chorus of “*Stop al panico*” is more reminiscent of chanting, something more like would be performed by a crowd at a sporting event than in the middle of a song. I believe the Isola Posse All Stars madeo the chorus of the song a chant to make it easier for crowds to repeat, as we see in the video for the song. Through the use of provocative language, rappamuffin style, and a chorus that is easy for a crowd to chant, the Isola Posse All Stars counteracted against the philosophy of *la bella figura*.

The video created to accompany the campaign is also very telling about the purpose of the song. The whole video was shot in the streets of Bologna, featuring hundreds of citizens singing and rapping “*Stop al panico*” into the camera. The video also shows the riots in the streets, newspaper headlines about the death of the police officers, and footage of old abandoned buildings in the city. The video is all about contradicting the idea of *la bella figura* by showing the chaos and trouble that Bologna is in. Even though Bologna was known as the “happy island,” the video shows otherwise. At one point, Papa Ricky and his Isola Posse All Stars are seen

rapping in a pile of rubble in the middle of the city, a part of Bologna that shows the *brutta figura*. Additionally, we see the police presence in the city, with the riot police patrolling the streets. People were tearing up the streets, and were all scared of what the White Uno Gang was going to do next. The makers of this video were not interested in the showing the “happy island” version of Bologna, but the lives of the people that actually live there, as they walk amongst the dilapidated buildings and buy their groceries in a busy supermarket.

So, as we can see from both “*Curre curre guagliò*” and “*Stop al panico*,” the hip hop music of the early 1990s was angry and critical about the state of Italy. Much of the music opposed the police and government and discussed the *brutta figura* within the country. The use of reggae influence as well as lyrics discussing the violence and corruption of Italy work together to counteract the traditional idea of *la bella figura*. However, as the hip hop scene gained more popularity, even this traditionally counterculture scene was not immune to the influence of *la bella figura*.

HIP HOP’S TRANSITION

One of the first groups to signal the transition of Italian hip hop from the *brutta figura* of Italy to adopting a *bella figura* within the Italian hip hop community is Articolo 31. The group, formed in 1990, was known along with Jovanotti, one of the leaders of commercial rap in the Italy, whom I will discuss further later on in this paper, as one of the main protagonists of *rap leggera*, or light rap. While they released their first album in 1993, it wasn’t until they signed with BMG Records and mixed hip hop and pop that they were noticed for their music. They released *Messa di Vespri* (Vespers Mass) their first popular album, in 1994. On it, they released their most popular single, “*Ohi Maria*,” a serenade to marijuana that parodied the *cantautori*, or singer-songwriter style of music mainstream in Italy at the time.

Articolo 31 is indicative of the embracing of *bella figura* within the hip hop culture of Italy for a number of reasons. They were one of the first rap groups to provide rap soundtracks for television commercials, which shows the movement toward the commercialization of rap music in Italy. Additionally, like Jovanotti, Articolo 31 did not use their music to spur social movements like posse and combat rappers did. As Mitchell writes in *Global Noise*, “the relatively smooth progress of Italian rap music from the *centri sociali* to the pop charts has resulted in an almost complete indigenization of rap in Italy, along with its appropriation as a subgenre of Italian *musica leggera*.”⁶⁵ With this came the establishment of a distinct style, subject matter, and *bella figura* within the hip hop community.

There is actually a conservative connotation attached to the phrase *music leggera*. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the phrase was used to indicate music that wasn’t “serious.”⁶⁶ At the time they rose to fame, Articolo 31 was criticized for their lack of political raps, and their commercial success alienated them from the rap scene in Italy at the time. However, as their growth was actually just a preview of what was to come.

When the first left-wing Italian government since World War II came into power in 1995, the Italian rap scene also began to mellow out and diversify. *Centri sociali* were still present and still provided venues for rap and hip hop concerts, but they no longer played the nurturing role they had in the past. While the rap scene in the early 90’s had been militant, anti-government, anti-establishment, and considered “combat rap,” the rap scene in the second half of the decade was less radical and more focused on education of the general public. The rap scene moved toward a trend of “edutainment,” which centered around educating young people about drugs, safe sex, violence, political corruption, and other social issues. Rap became softer and more

⁶⁵ Mitchell, 2004

⁶⁶ Fabbri, Franco, and Goffredo Plastino. *Made in Italy: Studies in Popular Music*. Routledge.

commercial, as previously extremist rap groups like 99 Posse and Papa Ricky with his new group I Cauti mellowed into a more reggae-folk hybrid. Many artists that were previously considered pure rap altered their styles to a point where they were no longer considered rap. Additionally, the feuds between the combat rappers and more commercially inclined rappers subsided.

The last major change that happened during this time period was the commercialization of rap. As these previously “purist” rappers changed their styles, they also changed their outlook on the recording industry. Groups that previously wanted no involvement with the recording industry changed their musical styles and started recording music on their own labels to be sold at their own shows for a profit. One of the major rappers to capitalize on this transition was Jovanotti, who had previously been ostracized by the “serious” rap community.

We see this juxtaposition between the two schools of thought in the song “*Appeso un filo*” (*Attached to a String*) by the Italian rap group Possessione. Their song discusses the ongoing conflict between views of Italian hip hop as a playful, fashion-oriented (and potentially ironic and parodic) lifestyle on the one hand, and an exclusive vehicle for 'authentic' political statement on the other. They discuss the dependency of Italian hip hop on imported fashion on one hand and the total politicization of rap on the other with the lyrics: ‘There are those who consider you to be a rapper if you wear Jordan shoes and hold you in contempt if you don't wear Raiders bomber jackets and those who make an exclusively political issue out of it and spit on those they don't consider to be 'militants', often ignoring everything that has gone before, and why a brother has got into hip hop...’⁶⁷

These lyrics are indication of the embracing of *bella figura* within the rap scene of Italy, one that began as a small subculture of pop-rap in the early 1990’s and then grew to the

⁶⁷ Mitchell, Tony. “Questions of Style: Notes on Italian Hip Hop.” *Popular Music*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1995, pp. 333–348. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/853129.

mainstream by the second half of the decade. This *bella figura*, not unlike that of general Italian society, idolizes expensive things, dressing well, and masculinity. Additionally, rappers stopped rapping about the general state of the government and on a more personal level. The transition to this *bella figura* happened slowly, and much of the music of the second half of the 1990's, although not the combat rap that initiated the hip hop and anti-*bella figura* movement, still showed some signs of its roots. It was not until the present day music that most, if not all, of the music produced was considered *musica leggera* and exemplified *la bella figura*.

“*Quelli che benpensano*” - Frankie HI-NRG

Like “*Penso positivo*” but unlike the songs of the posse rappers, the song “*Quelli che benpensano*” (“Those That Think Right”) by Italian rapper Frankie HI-NRG MC did receive exposure in popular culture; it was named the best Italian song of 1997. The popularity of Frankie HI-NRG was a turning point for Italian hip hop, as he was the first hip hop artist to be signed to a major label.⁶⁸ His song was popular because it exposed the “yuppie” culture of Italy. Frankie HI-NRG raps about how he feels like his peers all think they are better than him, how he feels like no one has morals, and everyone else’s main goal is just to get one step ahead of him. As discussed previously, during the 1990’s many Italian people felt marginalized and taken advantage of, and this song speaks to those that feel like those in power are taking advantage of those with less power. The lyrics are as follows:

<p><i>Sono intorno a noi, in mezzo a noi, in molti casi siamo noi</i> <i>A far promesse senza mantenerle mai se non per calcolo</i> <i>Il fine è solo l'utile, il mezzo ogni possibile</i> <i>La posta in gioco è massima, l'imperativo è vincere</i></p>	<p>They are around us, among us, in many cases it's us who make promises without ever keeping them other than out of self- interest, the end is just profit, the means is any one at hand, the stakes are at their highest,</p>
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⁶⁸ *Halftime Online*. 12 Dec. 2012, halftimeonline.net/portfolio/italy/. Accessed 26 Mar. 2018.

*E non far partecipare nessun altro
Nella logica del gioco la sola regola è esser scaltro
Niente scrupoli o rispetto verso I propri simili*

*Perché gli ultimi saranno gli ultimi se I primi sono
irraggiungibili
Sono tanti, arroganti coi più deboli,*

*zerbini coi potenti, sono replicanti,
Sono tutti identici, guardali,
stanno dietro a maschere e non li puoi distinguere.
Come lucertole s'arrampicano,
e se poi perdon la coda la ricomprano.
Fanno quel che vogliono si sappia in giro fanno
spendono, spandono e sono quel che hanno*

Ritornello:

*Sono intorno a me, ma non parlano con me.
Sono come me, ma si sentono meglio
Sono intorno a me, ma non parlano con me.
Sono come me, ma si sentono meglio*

e come le supposte abitano in blisters full-optional,

*Con cani oltre I 120 decibel e nani manco fosse
Disneyland,
Vivono col timore di poter sembrare poveri
Quel che hanno ostentano, tutto il resto invidiano, poi
lo comprano,
In costante escalation col vicino costruiscono
Parton dal pratino e vanno fino in cielo,
han più parabole sul tetto che S.Marco nel Vangelo..
Sono quelli che di sabato lavano automobili
che alla sera sfrecciano tra l'asfalto e I pargoli,
Medi come I ceti cui appartengono,
terra-terra come I missili cui assomigliano.
Tiratissimi, s'infarinano, s'alcolizzano
e poi s'impastano su un albero*

*Nasi bianchi come Fruit of the Loom
che diventano più rossi d'un livello di Doom*

[Ritornello]

*Ognun per se, Dio per se, mani che si stringono tra I
banchi delle chiese alla domenica*

mani ipocrite, mani che fan cose che non si

the imperative is to win and not let anyone else
participate,
in the rationale of the game, the only rule is to be sly:
no scruples nor respect towards our fellow human
beings,
because the last will be last, if the first are out of reach.
They are many, arrogant towards the weaker ones and
bootlickers towards the powerful ones,
they are replicants,
they all look the same, look at them,
they are behind masks and you can't tell them apart.
Like lizards, they climb, and if then they lose their tail,
they buy it new.
They do what they want others to know they do,
they squander their money and they are what they have.
They are around me, but they don't talk with me.
They are like me, but they feel superior.
They are around me, but they don't talk with me.
They are like me, but they feel superior.
Like suppositories, they live in full-optional blister
packs,
with dogs louder than 120 decibels
and garden gnomes as though it were Disneyland,
they live in the fear that they might look poor;
what they have, they flaunt it, and all the rest, they envy
it, then they buy it;
to keep up with the Joneses, they build:
they start from a nice lawn and go up to the sky,
they have more satellite dishes on their roof than Mark's
Gospel has parables.
And they are the ones who, on Saturdays, wash cars
which at night speed between tarmac and little kids,
mediocre as the class they belong to,
simplistic like the missiles they resemble.
All gussied up, they sniff, they get drunk
and then they splatter onto a tree. (boom!)
Nose as white as Fruit of the Loom
that becomes redder than a level of Doom.
Everyone for himself, God for themselves,
hands that shake one another among the pews on
Sundays,
hypocritical hands, hands that do things that they don't
tell one another,
otherwise, who knows what other hands might think,
they might be scandalised.
Hands that then sign evacuation petitions,
hands as smooth as castor oil,
hands brandishing billy clubs,
stuffing jewels,
raising to the brother's backs.

<p>raccontano Altrimenti le altre mani chissà cosa pensano, si scandalizzano Mani che poi firman petizioni per lo sgombero, Mani lisce come olio di ricino, Mani che brandisco Manganelli, che farciscono Gioielli, che si alzano alle spalle dei fratelli. Quelli che la notte non si può girare più, quelli che vanno a mignotte mentre I figli guardan La TV, Che fanno I boss, che compra Class, che son sofisticati da chiamare I NAS, incubi di Plastica Che vorrebbero dar fuoco ad ogni zingara Ma l'unica che accendono è quella che da loro l'elemosina ogni sera, Quando mi nascondo sulla faccia oscura della loro luna nera [Ritornello 2x]⁶⁹</p>	<p>Those who say "it's no longer safe to go out at night", those who go whoring while their children are watching TV, who play the boss, who buy Class who are so sophisticated that you have to call NAS, nightmares of plastic, who would like to set fire to every gypsy woman, but the only one they turn on is the one who gives them a handout every evening, when I hide on the dark side of their Black Moon. [Chorus 2x]⁷⁰</p>
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Quelli che benpensano offers a discourse on the presence of *la bella figura* and *la brutta figura*. He feels like everyone around him is acting like they are better than him, even though they do not know him and they have not spoken with him. In the lines “they live in the fear that they might look poor; what they have, they flaunt it, and all the rest, they envy it, then they buy it,” he is describing the phenomenon of making *una bella figura*. These lyrics are reminiscent of those by 99 Posse and Jovanotti when they say that those living in poverty are living lives that would be considered absurd by others. Frankie’s lyrics are about those with money that are so worried about looking good for others they do not even think about the money they are spending. To them, the only thing worse than being poor would be looking poor, and they will spend money just so others do not think they are living in poverty.

⁶⁹ "Quelli Che Benpensano Testo" ["Quelli Che Benpensano Lyrics"]. *Angolo Tesi*, www.angolotesti.it/F/testi_canzoni_frankie_hi-nrg_mc_1502/testo_canzone_quelli_che_benpensano_37719.html. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

⁷⁰ "Frankie HI-NRG MC - Quelli che benpensano (English translation)." *LyricsTranslate*, lyricstranslate.com/en/quelli-che-benpensano-those-who-right-think.html. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

Even the title of the song, which translates to “Those That Think Right” or “Those Who Right-Think” is a commentary on the way that Frankie feels. He knows that in the end, everyone is the same person living their own struggles. However, those that he raps about believe they are the ones that think right, while anyone else is wrong. The rich think that they are above the poor because they have money and education, while the poor do not even worry about being right because they are already at a disadvantage in life because they do not have money.

“*Quelli che benpensano*” is rapped in standard Italian language, which makes it accessible to more people, since standard Italian transcends the individual dialects within the country. I believe that this is one of the aspects of the song that helped it gain popularity and be named the best Italian song the year it was released. In addition to the language used, the subject matter of the song connected with many Italians in that they felt marginalized and isolated by their peers. Whereas 99 Posse used regional dialect to connect with listeners, Frankie uses the subject matter of the song to make listeners feel like they are not the only ones that feel the way they do.

Frankie uses his song to discuss and express his opinion on the attitudes of people within the country and their inability to see the narcissism of his people and the human condition that is present in everyone, from rich to poor. In the lines “hands that shake one another among the pews on Sundays, hypocritical hands, hands that do things that they don't tell one another...hands that then sign evacuation petitions...hands brandishing billy clubs,” he comments on the role that religion plays in the lives of Italian. In Italy, religion, and more specifically the Catholic church, has played a “basic role in defining Italian national identity and in political equilibrium.”⁷¹

⁷¹ Martino, Simone. "POLITICS AND RELIGION IN ITALY: A CATHOLIC HISTORY." *Politics and Religion*, vol. 9, no. 2, 27 Dec. 2016, www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/index.php/prj/article/download/29/27/. Accessed 26 Mar. 2018.

However, Frankie believes that this commitment to religion is just a facade, because those same members of church are the same ones evicting tenants or are members of the corrupt police force. The song contains biblical references, such as referring to those that think they are above him as reptiles, referencing the snake in the Garden of Eden, as well as the parables in the Gospel of Mark.

The music video to *Quelli che benpensano* also offers a look into the “real” Italy that Frankie sees. In the video, he plays a taxi driver that spends his days driving the streets taking people to and from their daily activities. Through his job, he sees humans from all walks of life. However, they have one thing in common: they are using Frankie. They do not see him as a human, but just someone taking them from one place to another. However, he sees them at their most vulnerable and sees that they are just like him, even if they do not treat him with respect. The first person he drives is a businessman. We see him in a nice suit, putting a wedding ring on and taking a long piece of hair off of his suit and putting on the floor of Frankie’s cab. The impression to the viewer was that he was with another woman even though he is married. However, at the end of the video, we see that through the night he was dressed in drag and partying and kissing other men and women. We also see men yelling at Frankie, a man with two women who appear to be his escorts, and a woman appearing to grieve a loved one. Two things are conveyed to the viewer by these interactions that Frankie has. The first is the isolation that Frankie feels as someone working in the service industry for others. They treat him as nothing more than an ends to a means to get somewhere, even though Frankie is a human being that lives a life just like them.

The second aspect of this video that conveys a *brutta figura* is that as a cab driver, Frankie sees that when people are in his cab, they become their true selves, dropping the facade

of *la bella figura*. Frankie, as their driver, sees the people for who they are when they are not trying to put on an impression for someone else. Because they do not think of him as someone worth making a *bella figura* for, they do not try to appear to be someone else. When Frankie sees this, he sees that even though other people think they are the ones that “think right,” when it comes down to it, everyone is living a struggle; there is really no difference between being poor and rich.

This song and its popularity at the time was important because it showed that many Italian people were feeling the same was as Frankie HI-NRG in his song. Even though the marginalization and isolation of people was not commonly talked about within Italian society, the fact that Frankie was able to connect with his listeners shows that he was not the only one feeling this way. Additionally, the fact the song was popular was important for the acceptance of the hip hop community and to counteract the idea of *la bella figura*.

“*Quelli che benpensano*” is demonstrative of the transition happening in the Italian rap scene at the time.⁸ While we do see characteristics of the early hip hop scene within the song, such as its criticism of *la bella figura*, we also see elements that are evidence of the transition within the scene like the use of standard Italian language, mainstream popularity, and the lack of provocative language.

Jovanotti and the growth of pop rap: “*Penso positivo*”

At the turn of the century, as the hip hop scene in Italy started to drift away from the posses of the *centri sociali* and toward pop rap. One of the most popular rappers during this time was Jovanotti. Although he was releasing music starting in the 1980’s, it was not until the late 90’s and the 2000’s that he received critical acclaim, exposure, and recognition as a culturally

important rapper. He initially began rapping “without any interest in ideologies and politics,”⁷² but has since the 1990’s become increasingly active in the political scene. His music was some of the first to move away from the traditionally critical discourse on the government and Italian society, but also the first to combine light political rap with pop-rap to receive both commercial and critical success. He is the first step we see being taken towards the modern “candy-rap” that we have today (which will be discussed at length later in this paper), in which the goal of the music was not to oppose the traditional idea of *la bella figura* but to create a *bella figura* within the hip hop culture itself.

During the mid-90’s Jovanotti began as a rapper that was known for exemplifying the types of *la bella figura* seen in modern Italian hip hop. Jovanotti was initially considered a *paninaro*, an epithet for wealthy youngsters who distinguished themselves by their fashion designer clothes. He was known for his teenage pop-rap and during the mid-90’s Jovanotti was criticized for his style. He “subsequently became the target of satirical barbs and scorn on the part of *centri sociali* rappers, who saw his form of pop rap as a gross commercial travesty of the politicized ‘combat rap’ that they were having difficulty getting television and airplay for.”⁷³ However, he started to move away from this style and developed a political interest, which is when he started to truly reach domestic and international success. However, his political interest was not a return to the counter-cultural nature of early Italian rap. Much of Jovanotti’s music remained within the genre of *music leggera*. When Jovanotti became popular through the shift towards pop-rap, he capitalized on this shift and used his profit to donate to philanthropic causes. Even though his political activity was increased, his primary goal with his music was to promote positivity. He emphasizes in an interview, “the role of music in making positive change on

⁷² Tummino Titti (21 April 2002). "Jovanotti, la musica e l'impegno". *la Repubblica* (in Italian).

⁷³ Mitchell, 2004

both a global and individual scale” and “that music is perhaps the most powerful because it promotes a sense of freedom that connects to the freedom of expressing yourself as a human being.”⁷⁴ While early combat rappers rapped about the *brutta figura* they see in Italy as well as their unhappiness, Jovanotti’s music still portrays *la bella figura* because he puts forth an image of positivity and happiness that is evident in his song “*Penso positivo*,” (“I think positively”) which I will analyze in depth in this chapter.

Jovanotti released his most popular albums *Lorenzo 1992*, *Lorenzo 1994*, and *Lorenzo 1997* after developing a political conscience in 1992, when he voted for the Left Wing Democratic Party. He composed an election rap called “*Ho perso la direzione*” (I’ve Lost the Drift) as well as a song called “*Cuore*” (Heart) after the assassination of Giovanni Falcone, an anti-mafia magistrate. However, Jovanotti still represented the flippant, mainstream face of Italian pop-rap, he incorporated ideological commentary within his music. His album, *Lorenzo 1994* is the album most indicative of his position as a political-pop rapper. Two of the most popular singles on the album, *Serenata rap* and *Piove* are considered to be pure pop-rap, whereas the third most popular single, *Penso positivo*, was one of his most political songs and become an anthem for some Italian youth. In his song, he discusses the religious state of Italy, and criticizes the actions of the Vatican. The lyrics for the song are as follows:

<p><i>Rit.</i> <i>Io penso positivo perché son vivo perché son vivo,</i> <i>io penso positivo perché son vivo e finché son vivo,</i> <i>niente e nessuno al mondo potrà fermarmi dal</i> <i>ragionare,</i> <i>niente e nessuno al mondo potrà fermare, fermare,</i> <i>fermare, fermare</i> <i>quest'onda che va, quest'onda che viene e che va</i> <i>quest'onda che va quest'onda che viene e che va,</i></p>	<p>Chorus I think positively because i am alive, I think positively because i am alive and because I am alive, Nothing and nobody in the world could make me stop thinking Nothing and nobody in the world will be able to Stop, stop, stop This wave that goes, this wave that comes and</p>
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⁷⁴ Bearman, Sophie. "Pop Icon Discusses Music, Activism." *The Harvard Crimson*, 28 Apr. 2010, www.thecrimson.com/article/2010/4/28/jovanotti-music-poverty-human/. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.

<p><i>quest'onda che va quest'onda che viene e che va quest'onda che va, quest'onda che viene e che va .</i></p> <p><i>Io penso positivo ma non vuol dire che non ci vedo io penso positivo in quanto credo, non credo nelle divise né tanto meno negli abiti sacri che più di una volta furono pronti a benedire massacri, non credo ai fraterni abbracci che si confondon con le catene Io credo soltanto che tra il male e il bene è più forte il bene. Bene Bene Bene</i></p> <p><i>Rit.</i> . <i>(Positivo)</i> <i>Uscire dal metro quadro dove ogni cosa sembra dovuta guardare dentro alle cose c'è una realtà sconosciuta che chiede soltanto un modo per venir fuori a veder le stelle e vivere l'esperienze sulla mia pelle sulla mia pelle.</i></p> <p><i>Rit.</i></p> <p><i>Io credo che a questo mondo esista solo una grande chiesa che passa da CHE GUEVARA e arriva fino a MADRE TERESA passando da MALCOM X attraverso GANDHI e SAN PATRIGNANO arriva da un prete in periferia che va avanti nonostante il Vaticano.</i></p> <p><i>Rit.</i></p> <p><i>Liberi (Po-si-ti-vo, positivo positivo...) quest'onda che va quest'onda che viene e che va</i></p>	<p>goes, this wave that goes, this wave that comes and goes this wave that goes, this wave that comes and goes this wave that goes, this wave that comes and goes.</p> <p>I think positively because i am alive,</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>Exiting the subway, where everything seems like it should be Looked at, inside things there's an unknown reality That asks only for a way to come out and see the stars and live the experiences on my own skin, on my own skin. I think in this world there's only one big church that begins with Che Guevara and ends with Mother Teresa passing from Malcom X through Ghandi and Saint Patrignano and arriving to a priest in periphery that goes ahead on regardless the Vatican. Chorus</p> <p>Free Positive, positive, positive This wave that comes and goes that comes and goes History, maths, Italian, geometry, Music, music...fantasy. History, maths, Italian, geometry, Music, music...fantasy.⁷⁶</p>
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⁷⁶ Lyrics Translate. lyricstranslate.com/en/Penso-Positivo-I-think-positively.html. Accessed 3 Apr. 2018.

<i>quest'onda che va quest'onda la storia, la matematica, l'italiano, la geometria, la musica, la la musica... ..la fantasia la storia, la matematica, l'italiano, la geometria, la musica, la la musica... ..la fantasia</i> ⁷⁵	
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This song is a large divergence from the combat rap and the highly politicized lyrics we saw in the posse raps. This is one of Jovanotti's most political songs, yet it only features one verse explicitly about the church and the culture of dishonesty within the Catholic Church. The song is also more pop-influenced rap than the other examples we have seen. While the combat and rappamuffin rap of the early 1990's was violently political, Jovanotti choose to express his views in a different light. Rather than taking a harsh stance against the church, his lyrics say that he chooses to see their actions but still keep a positive outlook on life. The majority of the song is spent on the chorus, focusing on the idea that Jovanotti thinks positively about life. The only time the music stops is when he recites his verse about the Vatican, and because the rest of the song is so repetitive, the breakdown in the music forces the listener to focus back in on the song and the lyrics. For Jovanotti, this song was a big step. It was the first time his music had a cultural impact, as much of his other music, although mildly popular, was often criticized for being too heavily pop-influenced.

However, the cultural impact the song had was much different than that of the music of the posses from the *centri sociali*. While early combat rap songs explicitly denounced the government, police, and church, Jovanotti takes a more pacifist approach, an approach more accessible to the mainstream audience of Italy. While there is not much content to the lyrics of "*Penso positivo*," Jovanotti still expresses his notice of the presence of a *bella figura*, or a

⁷⁵ *Angolo Testi*.

www.angolotesti.it/J/testi_canzoni_jovanotti_168/testo_canzone_penso_positivo_9543.html. Accessed 3 Apr. 2018.

widespread facade, within Italy. He says that when he takes the subway, everything seems like it is where it should be. But “looked at, inside things there's an unknown reality.” This is reminiscent of the line by 99 Posse about the citizens of Napoli living “absurd realities.” Both of the artists understand that there is an underlying Italy, one that is more grimy and corrupt than most people know. However, the lyrics in Jovanotti’s song is still much more lighthearted and positive than both “*Curre curre guagliò*” and “*Stop al panico*.” Unlike these songs, which criticize the government, the police, and the church, “*Penso positivo*” notes the corruption of Italy and the church but is all about the fact that Jovanotti still has a positive outlook on life. This is indicative of the transition happening in the Italian hip hop culture away from violence and contempt for the government, towards acceptance and rap on a more personal level, which we will see in analysis of songs later in the paper.

The music video for Jovanotti’s song also shows a large deviation from the styles of the combat rap. The combat rap of the early 1990’s either did not have a music video at all (*Curre curre guagliò*), or had low budget and low production home-shot videos. They often featured artists in their own neighborhoods or performing at a gig (some of the posses have actually released present-day music videos for songs that came out in the mid-90’s). However, along with the improving technology for music videos, and the commercial aspect of the *musica leggera*, pop-rap songs had a bigger budget for videos. Jovanotti’s video is a stark contrast from that of Papa Ricky. Whereas the video for “*Stop al panico*” was filmed in the the streets of Bologna among the rubble of dilapidated buildings, the video for “*Penso positivo*” is filmed in a grocery store. It does not have an actual plot or storyline, but the video is more fun and lighthearted than most of the content produced by the combat rappers.

The video starts out with a dog walking through a supermarket full of products labeled '*Penso Positivo*.' The dog then transforms into Jovanotti, who raps through the aisles of the supermarket, then to be joined by a group of people and a band, all playing around in the store. Children are playing basketball, a couple is caught kissing behind a curtain, and at one point some mimes are performing for the store. Then, when Jovanotti's most political verse begins, the music in the background drops out and the camera focuses on only his face. The viewer is completely focused on what Jovanotti is saying; then as the chorus begins again, the camera moves away from his face and the mischief in the store begins again. At only one point in the video is there a solo shot of a man dressed as a priest. The camera pans to him and then goes back to the grocery store. The video is lighthearted and does not really have an underlying message. The viewer can see that Jovanotti is having a good time, even though he knows that there is corruption happening in the outside world.

The video for "*Penso positivo*" shows the true contrast between the combat rap and the pop-rap during the 1990's. The goal of the combat rap was to show *la brutta figura* of Italy and they used their videos to do this. It is unknown if it was intentional or because the posse rappers only had a limited budget for their music videos, but what videos are available for combat and posse rap songs (like "*Let's Get Dizzy*" by Radical Stuff⁷⁷ and "*Categorie a rischio*" by Onda Rossa Posse⁷⁸) were filmed in the streets, which highlighted the parts of Italy that did not portray a *bella figura*. They showed the real streets of Italy, whereas Jovanotti's video is lighthearted and only shows the inside of a supermarket. Because of this, we do not get a *bella figura* or *brutta figura* from the video like we do with the lyrics. Jovanotti's video is another aspect of the song

⁷⁷ "RADICAL STUFF LET'S GET DIZZY (VIDEO)." *YouTube*, 30 Dec. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMzzKRkQzps. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.

⁷⁸ "Onda Rossa Posse - categorie a rischio [1990]." *YouTube*, 17 Dec. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=92_leJWk9d8. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.

indicative of the transition that was happening in the Italian hip hop culture. The videos for combat rap almost exclusively portrayed a *brutta figura* of Italy while the pop-rap videos were more focused around plot and watchability. However, some artists, like we will see in the next song by Frankie HI-NRG, used music videos to counteract the idea of *la bella figura*.

As we can see from the music of Frankie HI-NRG and Jovanotti, the Italian hip hop scene faced a transitional period during the second half of the 1990s. While there was still music that opposed the philosophy of *la bella figura*, like “*Quelli che benpensano*,” there was a new genre of pop-rap emerging that adopted the idea of *la bella figura*, as evident from Jovanotti’s “*Penso positivo*.” However, after the turn of the century, the hip hop scene moved even further away from focusing on *la brutta figura* of Italy.

RAP OF THE EARLY 2000’S

“Applausi per Fibra” - Fabri Fibra

The 90’s were known in Italy as the Golden Age of rap and hip hop. At the turn of the century, the hip hop industry nearly died out. There was still the production of underground rap, but nothing near the level that it was during the 90’s. Most of the music produced at the time was pop and soft-rock. In fact, not a single Italian rapper had a #1 song from the years 2000-2010. In 2006, some major MC’s, Mondo Marcio and Fabri Fibra, were signed to major record labels. This signalled the beginning of a resurgence in the hip hop scene of Italy, one that today is not only strong domestically, but has started to reach an international audience, as we will see later on in the paper. At this point in the history of Italian rap, the scene has completely shifted away from the counterculture of exposing the *brutta figura* to completely adopting the traditional *bella figura*. One of the major artists at this time was Fabri Fibra. His music, especially from the years

2004 to 2006, are very indicative of the new type of *bella figura* that had become of the hip hop scene in Italy since its inception.

Fabri Fibra began his career in the underground scene, recording his first demo in 1995 and performing for the first time 2000. At the time, he also recorded background vocals for various Italian rap groups, as well as writing lyrics for the mixtape circuit. His first album, *Turbe giovanili (Juvenile Troubles)* was released in 2002. He wrote the album as an introspective dedication to the youths of the rap and hip hop scene that, even though the scene was dying out, still tried to make it in hip hop. With this album, Fabri Fibra dedicated the album to those that “insist on believing in this scene...I will never stop believing in every one of you, from those who love me to those who hate me, anyone who writes or produces, anyone who dances or paints, those that have been doing it a year or those who have spent their lives doing it.”⁷⁹

Fabri Fibra began his career as rapping with a more political aim, even if it was about the state of the hip hop industry. We see through this album that the focus of hip hop transitioned from commentary on external factors like the government and the church to more meta rap about the state of the industry itself. This would not have been possible in the early years of rap because there was not a true industry to criticize.

The real transition of Fabri Fibra’s work is seen, however, after the release of *Turbe giovanile*. His next album released was *Mr. Simpatia*, the last album he released before signing with a major record company. In this album Fibra rapped about his resentment of the Italian rap scene, his relationship with girls, his contempt for other people, and his frustrations about his

⁷⁹ Fibbra, Fabbri. *Turbe giovanili CD pamphlet*. 2002

job.⁸⁰ The album was fairly successful, but shortly its release, Fibbra split from his recording company at Vibrarecords and went underground, unheard of by anyone. When he emerged again in 2006 he had a new record deal with major recording company Universal Music. It was after this news that he released his most commercially and acclaimed (as well as criticized) album to date.

In 2006, Fabri Fibra released *Tradimento (Betrayal)*. The main themes of the album were distaste for other people, self-praise, and how Fibra overcame personal and life struggles to reach fame. However, the album was criticized for its overwhelming use of expletives, its provocative lyrics, and its extreme misogyny.

This album was important in the timeline of Italian hip hop and its relationship of *la bella figura* because it sets itself apart from the pop-rap that had become popular at the time by using violent imagery and styles reminiscent of the militant rap that was born out of the early 1990's, but using these styles to talk about himself or his success. His second single off of *Tradimento* is entitled "*Mal di Stomaco (Stomachache)*" about the way he feels about Italy and his relationship with society. was one of the most popular songs off the album. His song at first glance seems like it has the same characteristics as the combat rap that made hip hop in Italy popular, the song is actually indicative of the embracing of *la bella figura* within the culture. With lines like "I could fire a shot in my head if I wake up one morning next to a gay," and "Do you know that your daughter at 16 is already a bitch?" Fibra shows that even though he is aware of the state of Italy, he is also still misogynistic and homophobic. The posse rappers tended to avoid misogyny, even

⁸⁰ Giovanazzi, Paolo. "Mr. Simpatia Recensione" ["Mr. Simpatia Review"]. *Rockol*.
web.archive.org/web/20130317002823/http://www.rockol.it/recensione-2886/Fabri-Fibra-MR.-
SIMPATIA.

though the scene was very heavily male dominated.⁸¹ Additionally, though the posse rappers were not successful commercially, they were important for the social movements within the youth at the time. On the contrary, Fabri Fibra states that his “salary looks like a utopia.” By this, he means that he is not earning enough money and he is working too hard to make money. This line is peculiar because it comes directly after he had signed a major record deal with Universal Records, in addition to the fact that he had released two moderately successful records in Italy in the 4 years prior. He is creating the illusion that he identifies with those that are struggling, even though he makes much more money than the people he is rapping about.

The most indicative aspect of Fibra’s new *bella figura* is that a majority of his songs are about himself. The lyrics are as follows:

<p><i>Oh io non capisco perche', ma ogni periodo c'e' qualcuno che se viene fuori dicendo che io sono morto ha ha ha ha, raga applausi!</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Io mangiavo lucertole aperte da ragazzino tornavo a casa e vomitavo in mezzo al giardino non ho mai smesso un giorno di fantasticare, non ho mai fatto grandi successi in generale, guardando gli altri mi sembravano cosi' lontani, chiedendomi se a casa loro volassero i divani! L'ultima volta che mio padre e' andato a letto con mia madre prese a calci una parete e in testa gli cadde una trave, e mio fratello che mi chiese quanto fosse grave, fatto sta che litigando si divisero le strade, anche se restano le urla e rimangono le grida, per casa, per strada raga...</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p>	<p>Oh, I don't understand why, but every time someone tells everyone that I'm dead ha ha ha ha Guys a round of applause</p> <p>a round of applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra</p> <p>I used to eat open lizards when I was a child back home I threw up in the garden I've never stopped to fantasize, not even for one day, I never been particularly successful, generally The others seemed so far Asking myself if sofas did fly at their homes too The last time my father slept with my mother</p> <p>He kicked a wall and a timber fell on his head And my brother asked how serious was that The point is that, arguing, they parted ways Even if the screams [Oh] are still there In the house, on the street guys...</p> <p>a round of applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra</p>
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⁸¹ Mitchell, 2004

<p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Ho perso la testa troppe volte da ragazzino, a ogni flash mi nascondevo in uno stanzino, ho ancora qualche problema a socializzare ma tutto sommato non diresti che sto andando male questo e' Fibra Fibra l'anno scorso dove andava, posso dire una cazzata? mi son ripulito raga non c'e' stata mai la strada da seguire in qualche modo che sfiga sfiga e' Fabri Fibra, hai comprato il mio cd e lo canti tutto a memoria, e' uno scandalo quando poi l'hai copiato a meta' scuola questo e' il mio passaparola, questo e' l'anno "abbasso Vibra!" doppia F e' la mia sigla raga,</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Ora se tu hai seguito il mio percorso come se fosse un concorso allora fai l'ultimo sforzo e chiediti il perche'. E' sempre il solito discorso ogni mattina col rimorso</i></p> <p><i>almeno pagami il rimborso e vaffanculo anche a te. Non voglio Fibra in giro, non voglio Fibra ai party, non voglio chi ha successo, non voglio quattro infarti</i></p> <p><i>non voglio far del bene perche' tu non vuoi bene</i></p> <p><i>non si puo' stare insieme se m'ingorghi le vene non domandarti come passano i giorni e le notti, non guardi mamma mentre piange e lacrima dagli occhi. Cambio lavoro cambio casa cambio figa, cambio le amicizie che sfiga!</i></p>	<p>Fibra</p> <p>a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for...</p> <p>I lose my mind so much as a child Every [camera] flash I was hiding into a closet, I still have some problems socializing but the point is, you would not say I'm doing bad And this is Fibra Fibra last year where was he going Can I say bullshit? I'm clean guys... Here's never been a road to follow in any way bad luck Bad luck is Fibra, You bought my CD and you sing it all by the heart It's a scandal when you burnt it for half of the school</p> <p>This is my word of mouth, this is the year "down with Vibra" Double F is my initials guys</p> <p>a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra</p> <p>a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for...</p> <p>Now If you followed my steps Like If that's a competition So make one last effort and ask yourself why It's always the same speech, every morning, with regret At least refund me and then fuck off I don't want to see Fibra around I don't want to see Fibra in any party I don't want one that is successful, I don't want 4 heart attacks I don't wanna do any good, 'cause you don't care about me We can't stay together if you clog up my veins Do not ask yourself how nights and days pass You don't see your mother cry</p> <p>I change my job, my house, my pussy⁸³ I change friends, What bad luck!</p>
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⁸³ His girlfriend

<p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i></p> <p><i>Applausi per Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra, applausi applausi applausi per Fibra...</i>⁸²</p>	<p>a round of applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for Fibra Fibra Fibra a round of applause, applause, applause for...</p> ⁸⁴
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This song is about how people hate on Fabri Fibra for being successful but those people are the same ones that will buy his albums and applaud for him at his concerts. As we can see, the lyrics to Fibra’s song are a far cry from those of the early rappers. He is not focused on political commentary or causing social change. In this song he demonstrates his misogyny and his emphasis on superiority to others, with his lyrics about changing girlfriends all the time and how he gets hate for being successful. He raps about how he “don't wanna do any good, 'cause you don't care about me,” but also “you bought my CD and you sing it all by the heart.”

Fabri Fibra’s position within the hip hop community is difficult to unpack, as he criticizes those that sell out to the industry but he releases his music through major record companies. Some believe that Fibra was preaching of a “false revolution,”⁸⁵ capitalizing on the incoherence of the listeners to pretend to be independent of the influence of the major corporations. His lyrics lack the complexity and content that were previously evident in the rap and hip hop of the time. Most of his songs and lyrics are about himself and his relationship with his haters. This is very different from the music of the early 1990’s because their music was intended to speak out against the government and the injustices that were being committed in Italy. On the contrary,

⁸² "Applausi per Fabri Testo" ["Applause for Fabri Lyrics"]. *Genius*, genius.com/Fabri-fibra-applausi-per-fibra-lyrics. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

⁸⁴ *LyricsTranslate*. 20 June 2016, lyricstranslate.com/en/applausi-fibra-round-applause-fibra.html. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

⁸⁵ *Debaser*. 9 July 2006, www.debaser.it/fabri-fibra/applausi-per-fibra/recensione. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

Fabri Fibra's music is about how much he does not need his fans or how much he does not care about his haters. This is evidence of the acceptance of *bella figura*, one that is not concerned about the actual underside of Italy, but one that that is about presenting yourself as better and more successful than others.

The style of the music that is found in "*Applausi per Fibra*" is standard for the mainstream rap that was found in Italy at the time. It is written in typical intro, verse, chorus style that much of the music in Italy as well as America was written in at the time. The chorus repeats Fibra's name many times, which makes it easy for listeners to remember as well as repeat in a concert setting. This is also different from the rap of the early 90's because much of the emphasis was on the content of the lyrics and the message of the song, whereas Fibra's song has shorter verses and a simpler chorus for more accessibility to listeners, which results in better commercial success. Fibra's song was tailored for mainstream listeners, and much of his song is about creating a *bella figura* to listeners.

This is even more obvious in the music video for "*Applausi per Fibra*." The music video is simple but conveys the message that Fibra cares about what people think about him and the way he presents himself. The video stars Fabri Fibra and his two younger brothers, Big Fish and Nesli, as well as three models with their faces painted white and black "X's" taped over their eyes and face. The men take turns rapping in front of the camera with the models, as well as a woman dressed as an astronaut also rapping the lyrics⁸⁶. The women are meant to represent death, but their costumes, dancing, and lack of diversity are also a symbolism of the sexism of Fabri Fibra. The women are only there for the male gaze, and their presence was not necessary to

⁸⁶ Although this woman may have had symbolic presence in the music video, there was no information available as to why Fibra included an astronaut in his music video, nor did the author understand the symbolism of her inclusion.

the message of the music video except to for the male gaze. The three men also wear a shirt that says “*Io odio Fabri Fibra,*” or “I hate Fabri Fibra.”

The video is intended to convey that Fabri Fibra does not care what his haters think. His shirt parodies those that claim to hate him even though they still support his music by buying CD’s and concert tickets. Fibra says that he does not care what people think of him; however, his appearance in the music video is indicative of *la bella figura*, as he wears American brands and jewelry as a symbol of his wealth and as a fashion statement. He wears a New York Yankees hat, a gold chain, and a full rhinestone belt buckle with his name on it. This is reminiscent of the critique by Mitchell earlier as well as the lyrics by Possessione about the rappers that import American fashion and focus on their appearance rather than focusing on the political and social issues that plague Italy.

Since the release of *Tradimento* in 2006, Fabri Fibra has released six new albums. It is important to note that even though the vast majority of these albums have overwhelmingly displayed the acceptance of *la bella figura*, Fabri Fibra did channel the roots of Italian hip hop with his sixth studio album released in 2010, *Controcultura*. This album addressed the themes of corruption, gerontocracy (oligarchical rule in which an entity is ruled by leaders who are significantly older than most of the adult population), the New World Order, and the sexual scandal involving Silvio Berlusconi that was, at the time, recent. His album, however, was an anomaly among his more recent releases. The rest of his discography, especially his most recent release, *Fenomeno* - which he surprised released, channeling the likes of Beyonce and Frank Ocean - was a more introspective and personal album. He raps about his mother and his brother,

as well as questions his dedication to the rap scene as more up and coming “youngsters” create a radical new era rap scene in which he is seen as “washed up.”⁸⁷

The hip hop *bella figura* within Fabri Fibra’s music is seen through his emphasis on fashion, misogyny, and money. The hip hop scene no longer acted as a whistleblower on the presence of *la bella figura*, but instead adopted the philosophy. Whereas early rap placed value on speaking out against injustices against the Italian people as well as crime and corruption in the government, the more commercialized rap scene placed value on wealth and fame. As we move closer to the present day in Italy, this ideology only becomes more evident and extreme within the culture.

THE RADICAL BELLA FIGURA

The most obvious, and perhaps most interesting, evidence of *la bella figura* in the rap scene is the new era of rappers. In the mid-2010’s, the rap scene moved to a new style of music that had recently become popular in the United States: trap. Those that embraced this new style were typically younger and used the Internet as a major mode of pushing their music to the ears of listeners. Thanks to YouTube and the growth of Spotify (as we discussed earlier), *trap italiana* made its way to Italy.⁸⁸

Before we discuss the new era of rappers in Italy, it is necessary to discuss the origins of trap music. The name and development for trap music comes from the term “trap house,” which is used to refer to the houses in Southern United States where drugs were cooked and sold. The

⁸⁷ Boroni, Michele. "Recensione: Fenomeno - Fabri Fibra" ["Review: Phenomenon - Fabri Fibra"]. *Rockol*, 7 Apr. 2017, www.rockol.it/recensioni-musicali/album/7029/fabri-fibra-fenomeno?refresh_ce. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

⁸⁸ Redazione. "Musica Trap italiana: spazio agli artisti del futuro" ["Italian Music Trap: space for the artists of the future"]. *SnapItaly*, 9 Jan. 2018, www.snapitaly.it/musica-trap-italiana/. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

term originated in Atlanta in the late 1990's and early 2000's, when American trap music started to make its way into the mainstream. It emerged as a recognized genre in the US after albums and singles detailing the life in the trap, such as drug dealing and struggling for success, were successful on the American charts. Trap music was diverse in production styles, but there was still a similar sound shared between all trap music, usually based round synth, orchestra and string swells with tight, bass-heavy 808 kick drums⁸⁹.

The trap movement made its way to Italy in 2011 and by 2013 had taken over the hip hop scene. Some of the major artists to come out of this movement were Ghali, Sfera Ebbasta, and Tedua. However, arguably the most controversial but also infamous *trap italiano* artist is Dark Polo Gang.

Raised in affluent neighborhoods in Rome, Dark Polo Gang members DarkSide, Pyrex, Tony, and Wayne, as well as producer Sick Luke were not raised knowing the struggle of living in poverty that most American trap artists rapped about. However, they adopted the style of music and, with the help of an independent record label called *Triplosette Entertainment*, have reached widespread fame (or infamy) throughout Italy. They are most known for their indifference toward the way people think about them and their blatant desire only for fame and money. They tell interviewers that they “do not give a s*** about what you think or say about their music.”⁹⁰ They are not hesitant to spend money on designer clothes, and often rap about their passion for fashion, money and women. This has earned them enemies in the music industry, but it also exemplifies the idea of *la bella figura*.

⁸⁹ Unknown - listed as 'Admin'. "TRAP MUSIC: UNDER LOCK & KEY." *DJ Mag*, 23 Feb. 2013, djmag.com/content/trap-music-under-lock-key. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

⁹⁰ Contigliozzi, Matteo. "Che cos'è la Dark Polo Gang?" ["What is the Dark Polo Gang?"]. *Noisey*, Vice, 20 Jan. 2016, noisey.vice.com/it/article/6exkjp/dark-polo-gang-cosa-sono. Accessed 9 Apr. 2018.

Although most of their music focuses on the same content - women, money, and fame - the best example of this is found in their song “*Cono gelato (Ice Cream Cone)*.” The lyrics are as follows:

<p>Sick Luke, Sick Luke Prendo sempre tre gusti, fumo un cono gelato</p> <p>Ho tre collane al collo, sembro un cono gelato</p> <p>La tua ragazza si scioglie come un cono gelato Mi tuffo verso i soldi come un doppio carpiato</p> <p>Al collo ho il fior di latte sono un cono gelato</p> <p>Sto pensando solo ai soldi giuro sono malato Vogliono mio fratello, color cioccolato In questa merda sono il plug baby chiamami Lapo Ho dieci grammi su un piattone rosa che fa contrasto</p> <p>La tua tipa mi chiama ogni giorno dell'anno Contando soldi su ogni strofa baby sono il contatto La tua attinenza è zero morirai nell'anonimato Come un cono gelato mi sciolgo quando lei mi lecca Dalla tua troia in strada baby sai che prendo la stecca Culo su due posti rossa ogni donna mi cerca</p> <p>Playboy sai che sono la sua scelta</p> <p>Rit.</p> <p>E digli a tuo padre di non rompermi il cazzo Giuro che stavolta lo prendo e lo ammazzo Passo sul tuo blocco siamo tutti griffati Mi senti arrivare come un carro gelati Capelli bianchi penso di essere Karl Lagerfeld Oro giallo dovrei starmene a Springfield Faccio tre di tutto un po' come [?] Troia non vuole me, ma vuole due figli</p> <p>Rit.</p> <p>Yah</p>	<p>Sick Luke, Sick Luke I always choose three flavors, I smoke an ice cream cone</p> <p>I have three necklaces, I look like an ice cream cone Your girl melts like an ice cream cone I dive towards money like a double pike</p> <p>I have milk ice cream on the neck I'm an ice cream cone I only think about money I swear I'm sick They want my brother, chocolate color In this shit I'm the plug baby call me Lapo I have 10g on a huge pink plate that contrasts</p> <p>Your girl calls me every day of the year Counting cash on every line baby I'm the contact Your relevance is zero, you'll die anonymously Like an ice cream cone I melt when she licks me</p> <p>You know I get the rod from your bitch on the road</p> <p>Ass on the red two seater, every woman looks for me Playboy, you know I'm her first choice</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>And tell your father don't piss me off I swear this time I'll kill him step on your block, we are all branded You hear me coming like an ice cream truck White hair I think I am Karl Lagerfeld Gold, yellow, I should stay in Springfield I always do all three like [?] Hoe, she doesn't want me, but she wants two sons</p> <p>Chorus</p>
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<p>Yah-yah-yah-yah-yah-yah Si sto fumando un gelato Sto fumando un gelato Sto fumando un blunt così grande Pensavi che fosse un gelato al pistacchio Mi chiamo baby ho il cuore congelato Non sono fresco ma ghiacciato Come un champo da hockey sul ghiaccio Lei è stra-figa ma scassa il cazzo L'ho portata fuori a prendere un gelato Ho scopato sia lei che l'amica Hanno preso 5k a testa su Insta Come gelataio ho diverse opzioni Quando vado dal mio fornitore Conto soldi con un polso rotto Rolex sopra il mio polso Non è moda se ho strappi sui vestiti Ero con quattro milf come Sex and The City Siamo i Beatles, siamo i Sex Pistols In giro ci stanno chiamando i Sex Beatles DPG Gang non ci servono amici Alzo soldi, alzo soldi amico Stiamo regalando amore in giro</p> <p>Da queste parti è sempre San Valentino Lei vuole provare un po' tutti i gusti Gelato, gelato, gelato per tutti</p> <p>Rit. x2</p>	<p>Yah Yah-yah-yah-yah-yah-yah Yes I'm smoking an ice cream I'm smoking an ice cream I'm smoking a blunt so big You thought it was a pistachio ice cream My name is baby, I have a heart of ice I'm not fresh but frozen Like hockey on ice She is super hot but she pisses me off I took her out to buy an ice cream I f***** her and her friend too They got 5,000 likes on Instagram Like an ice cream maker I have different options When I go to my pusher I count money with a broken wrist It's not fashion if I have scratches on my clothes I was with 4 MILFs like Sex and the City We are the Beatles, we are the Sex Pistols, They are calling us the Sex Beatles as a joke DPG gang, we don't need friends I get money, I get money amico We're gifting love around In this part it's always Saint Valentine (Valentine's Day) She wants to try all the flavors Ice cream, ice cream, ice cream for everyone</p> <p>Chorus x2⁹¹</p>
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As you can see from these lyrics, Dark Polo Gang is not focused on rapping about the social issues of Italy. Their song displays their love of fashion (“Rolex on my wrist,”), women (“I f***** her and her friend too,”) and money (“I only think about money I swear I’m sick.”) They exemplify the most extreme version of the new *bella figura*. There is not much lyrical content within the song to analyze, but their raps make it clear they value being superior to others as well being famous.

⁹¹ Bartolini, Nicolo, editor. "Lyrics and Translation - Cono Gelato." Translated by Chris Shard. *MusixMatch*, 23 June 2017, www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Dark-Polo-Gang/Cono-Gelato/translation/english. Accessed 10 Apr. 2018.

The song itself has the typical trap style. It begins with a sample from “Do Your Ears Hang Low?” which is the song that commonly plays out of ice cream trucks. Then the beat switches into a typical trap beat, with heavy synth and hi-hats. Like the Fabri Fibra song, the song is in typical intro, verse, chorus, bridge style of song. Overall, the beat and lyrics are quite generic.

Finally, the music video for the song is an extreme example of *la bella figura*. The members of Dark Polo Gang are all dressed in high end fashion, with gaudy jewelry and several different outfits for each member.⁹² Recall the music videos for “*Stop al panico*” or even “*Quelli che benpensano*,” and the fashion and production for the videos of earlier rap and hip hop. These music videos were filmed with a low budget, with simple clothes and were not focused on the artists rapping but the message of the music. While those videos were aesthetically quite ascetic, the music video for “*Cono gelato*” is extravagant and clear display of the wealth that the members DPG have. In addition to the flaunting of wealth ostentation, the members of DPG also display aspects of rap music videos most seen in American trap. In more than one music video (also “*Pesi sul collo*”) they show off the guns they own, which is not characteristic of Italian rap since until the new era rap much of the rap was against violence and gun culture. However, many American trap-rap music videos have rappers holding guns. Dark Polo Gang has imported this facet of American music as another way to showcase their wealth and show the acceptance of *bella figura* within the hip hop culture of Italy.

This music video is just a taste of the other videos and things Dark Polo Gang does to showcase their love for excess. They are constantly posting pictures and videos on Instagram and Snapchat of them buying new expensive shoes, smoking weed constantly, and spending their

⁹² *DARK POLO GANG - CONO GELATO (Prod by Sick Luke)*. Triplosette Entertainment, 2017. *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVjl2dhMXc8.

money. They are not the only rappers that display this excess of wealth either; rapper Sfera Ebbasta, with whom Dark Polo Gang has collaborated with several times, also has a love for high end fashion and expensive cars. He is even featured in a song entitled “*Lamborghini*,” with a video that just features him rapping standing next to a Lamborghini⁹³. It should also be noted that on his most recent album, Sfera Ebbasta collaborated with Quavo, a member of the popular American trap-rap group Migos that often emphasizes their love for guns, jewelry, fashion, and women. Popular trap-rapper Tedua has a video for his song “*Burnout*” where he is being circled by motorcycles as he raps in a park. In another shot, sports cars speed on a city road. Like Dark Polo Gang, he is dressed in expensive clothes and is wearing excessive jewelry.⁹⁴ The new era of rappers exhibits many characteristics that the early combat rappers rapped in opposition to.

As we can see, this music is a far cry from the combat rappers of the combat rappers of the early 1990s. The first Italian rappers were rapping about the poverty and violence they experienced, which exposed the *brutta figura* of Italy; the emphasis on money, women, and fame that is present in hip hop culture today is evidence that the hip hop scene has embraced the philosophy of *la bella figura*.

CONCLUSION

The rap scene of Italy has undergone many changes since it was brought to the country in the late 80’s and early 90’s. The early rap in Italy, which was born out of the social centers established for the youths of major urban areas, was majorly political as well as anti-establishment. As we saw with songs like “*Curre curre guagliò*,” and “*Stop al panico*,” the

⁹³ *Guè Pequeno - Lamborghini (RMX) ft. Sfera Ebbasta, Elettra Lamborghini*. Universal Music Italia, 2017. *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkXgmrGlpjQ. Accessed 10 Apr. 2018.

⁹⁴ *Tedua - Burnout (Prod. Chris Nolan)*. 2018. *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iqckugp590. Accessed 10 Apr. 2018.

posse rappers in Italy were concerned with rapping about the corruption, mistrust of the government, violence, and poverty within Italy. These early songs in the history of Italian hip hop undermines the concept of *la bella figura* within Italy and instead established a *brutta figura* by discussing the aspects of Italy that were not often discussed.

As the music scene of Italy moved into the late 1990's combat rap began to fade away and pop-rap began to make its way into the mainstream. Artists like Frankie HI-NRG began to sign to major record labels and move away from violent raps about the state of the country and to more resigned state of rapping about life in Italy. There was also an increased focus on the individual rather than the state of the country as a whole. We saw in Jovanotti's "*Penso positivo*" that even though he knows the government and the church are not honest, he still keeps a positive aspect on life, while Frankie HI-NRG raps about how he feels like he is marginalized by those around him, even though everyone is the same. There is a shift to less of an "us vs. them" mentality that was present in combat rap and more of a "common human condition" mentality in that everyone in life has their own struggles.

There was a brief period of stagnation within the Italian rap scene during the 2000's. The resurgence in music happened around 2006, when several artists were signed to major record labels. One of these artists was Fabri Fibra, an artist often criticized for his misogyny, violence, and narcissism. In his song "*Applausi per Fibra*," we see that Fibra does not care about what people think of his music, because many of his haters are the same people that will buy his tickets and CD's. Additionally, in his music video we see that he values fashion, since he wears expensive and imported clothes. The ambivalence towards criticism and emphasis on fashion were one of the main characteristics of the hip hop version of *bella figura*, which we saw with the style, lyrics, videos of trap-rappers.

The presence of *la bella figura* is still evident today in Italy, even more so in the rap and hip hop scene. *La bella figura* is manifested in the current rap scene through excess and emphasis on money, misogyny, and fame. Although there is a *bella figura* that is seen on a nation-wide scale, as discussed at the beginning of the paper, the *bella figura* of the current rap scene is an amplified version of what the general population exhibits as a *bella figura*. The trap-rappers of today have taken the principles of the early rap in Italy, which were opposition to money, excess, and gaudiness, and made them major characteristics of the popular rap within Italy. Therefore, we can conclude that while early rap in Italy opposed the presence of *la bella figura*, the modern rap of Italy has not only embraced *la bella figura* but severely intensified it, to the point of overkill.

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