In this talk, I attend to the proliferation of Black Italian movements—projects that address the Italian nation-state and the wider Black diaspora by disrupting the link between whiteness and Italianness and challenging the interlocking racist violences of Fortress Europe. What are the possibilities and limitations of these emergent mobilizations? What new formations are possible, and what older ones are resuscitated in this attempt to challenge the racial borders of Italy and of Europe? I am interested in opening up discussions of the so-called migrant “crisis” by focusing on a previously invisible generation of Black people who were born or raised in Europe but have been thrust into the same racist, xenophobic political climate as the immigrants and refugees who are arriving in Europe from across the Mediterranean Sea from the African continent. How are these Black Italians now actively remaking what it means to be Italian and to be European today?

To answer these questions, I trace not only mobilizations for national citizenship, but also the more capacious, transnational Black diasporic possibilities that emerge when activists confront the ethical and political limits of citizenship as a means for securing meaningful, lasting racial justice—formations that are centered on shared critiques of the racial state, as well as shared histories of racial capitalism and colonialism.

Bio
Camilla Hawthorne is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the founder and co-director of the UCSC Black Geographies Lab. Her work addresses the racial politics of migration and citizenship and the insurgent, abolition geographies of the Black Mediterranean. She is the author of Contesting Race and Citizenship: Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean (Cornell University Press, 2022), translated into Italian as Razza e cittadinanza. Frontiere contese e contestate nel Mediterraneo nero (Astarte Edizioni, 2023), and co-editor of The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders, and Citizenship (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), The Black Geographic: Praxis, Resistance, Futurity (Duke University Press, 2023), and Heartbreak and Other Geographies: Assembling Katherine McKittrick (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 2025). She is currently working on a new book entitled Black Mediterranean Geographies of Abolition: Toward a Relational Theorization of Global Racisms.