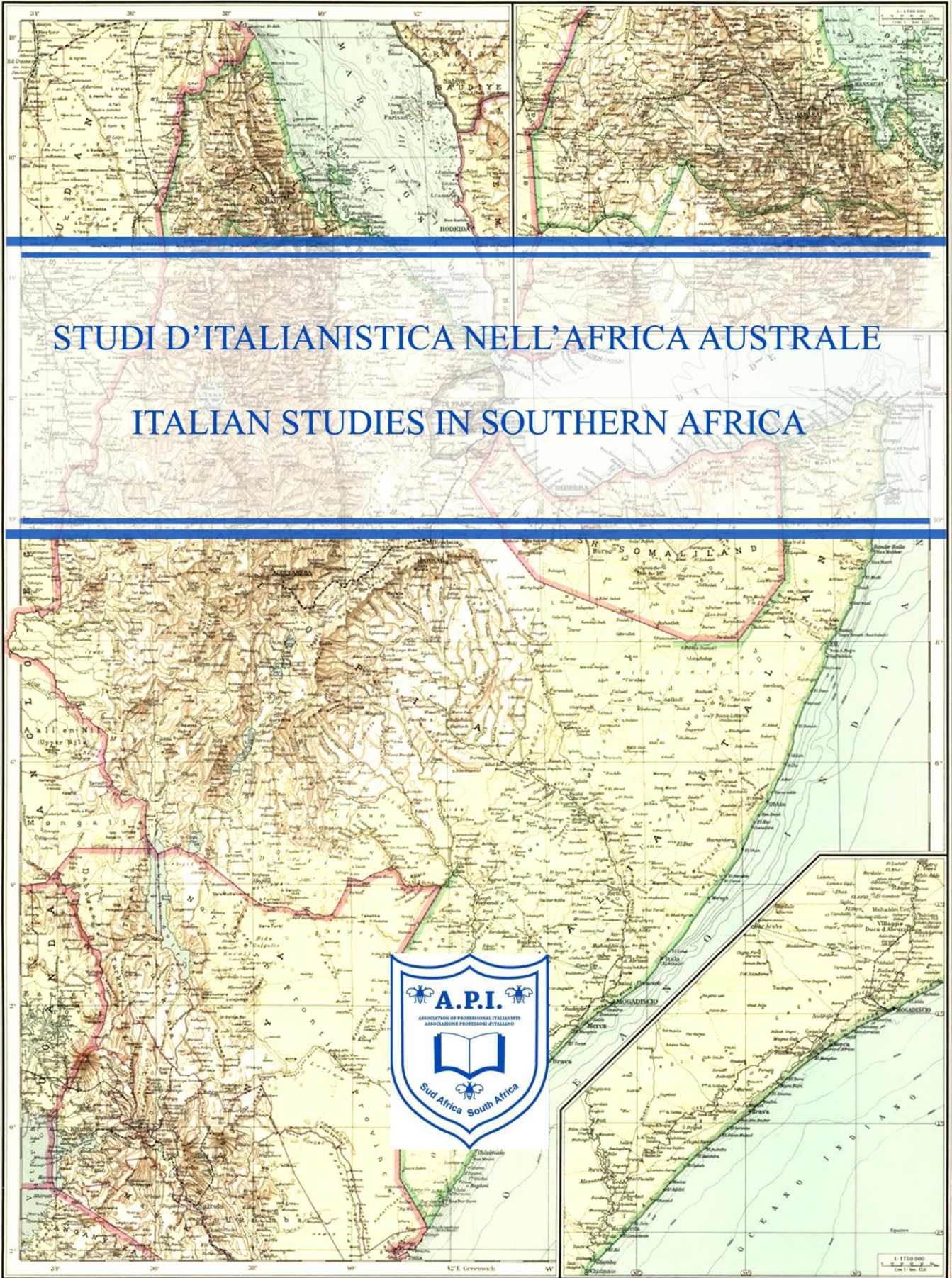


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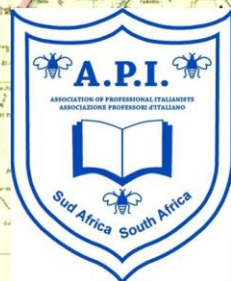
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STUDI D'ITALIANISTICA NELL'AFRICA AUSTRALE
ITALIAN STUDIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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A CURA DI / EDITED BY
ANITA VIRGA & BRIAN ZUCCALA

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CONTENTS / SOMMARIO

Important Information / Informazioni Importanti		vi
Introduction / Introduzione		1
Articles / Saggi		
Norma Bouchard	Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Interruptions	25
Kamalini Govender	<i>Pinocchio</i> and the Uncanny Quest for Subaltern Spaces in Italian Children's Literature	60
Anita Virga	<i>Siliva Zulu</i> (1927) e l'Esibizione Coloniale dell'Alterità	88
Marco Medugno	A Contested Spatiality: The Representation of Mogadishu in Somali Anglophone and Italian Literature	110
Giovanna Sansalvadore	Prejudice, Difference and the Role of Literature: Kossi Komla-Ebri's <i>Imbarazzismi</i> as Decolonial Model	135

Book Reviews / Recensioni

Luigi Gussago	<i>Picaresque fiction today: The trickster in contemporary Anglophone and Italian Literature.</i> (Samuele Grassi)	158
Anita Virga	<i>Subalternità Siciliana nella scrittura di Luigi Capuana e Giovanni Verga</i> (Brian Zuccala)	166

Contributors / Collaboratori	171
-------------------------------------	-----

Information for Contributors / Informazioni per i collaboratori	175
--	-----

A.P.I. Pubblicazioni / Publications	179
--	-----

A.P.I. Executive Committee	182
-----------------------------------	-----

Important information / Informazioni importanti

1. Call for Contributions / Invito a contribuire

In the past decade, the work of Luigi Capuana has attracted renewed scholarly attention not only in the Italian academia but especially in the English-speaking world, where such an interest has been expressed through journal articles, doctoral works and conference papers, not to mention the increased number of English translations. In line with this trend Studi d'italianistica nell'Africa australe/ Italian Studies in Southern Africa invites original contributions for the special issue 32.2 (2019) provisionally titled Rethinking Luigi Capuana and Capuana Studies. Some of the areas and sub-topics addressed in the essays may be, but are not limited to:

- *Capuana's work through the lens of comparative literature (i.e.: Capuana within the European context)*
- *Capuana's work and literary theories.*
- *Capuana's work and its intermedial references*
- *Capuana's work and theatre studies*
- *Capuana's work and/in the Italian 19th century literary 'canon'*
- *Capuana's work and genre studies*

The issue will be edited by Editor Anita Virga and Guest Editor Brian Zuccala.

Please send your 500-word abstract and a provisional bibliography, together with a one-page maximum bio-biblio to anita.virga@wits.ac.za and brian.zuccala@monash.edu

Contributions are accepted in English and Italian.

Deadline for submission of 500 word abstracts: 31 August 2018

Notification of provisional acceptance (pending peer review): 15 September 2018

Deadline for submission of full essays: 15 February 2019

Da un decennio a questa parte il lavoro di Luigi Capuana attrae un rinnovato interesse critico non solo in ambito accademico italiano ma soprattutto nel mondo anglofono, dove tale interesse si è manifestato nella forma di saggi, tesi di dottorato e interventi, oltre ad un numero crescente di traduzioni.

Su questa falsariga *Studi d'italianistica nell'Africa australe/ Italian Studies in Southern Africa* invita a contribuire con saggi originali al numero speciale 32.2 (2019), provvisoriamente intitolato *Ripensare Capuana e la capuanistica*.

Le sotto-aree e i filoni d'indagine includono, ma non si limitano a:

- L'opera di Capuana attraverso il filtro della comparatistica
- L'opera di Capuana e la teoria letteraria
- L'opera di Capuana in prospettiva transmediale
- L'opera di Capuana e gli studi sul teatro
- L'opera di Capuana nel contesto del 'canone' ottocentesco
- L'opera di Capuana e gli studi sui generi letterari

Il numero sarà curato dalla Direttrice Responsabile Anita Virga e co-curato da Brian Zuccala.

Si invita ad inviare un abstract di non oltre 500 parole, accompagnato da una bibliografia essenziale e da non più di una pagina di profilo bio-bibliografico, ad anita.virga@wits.ac.za e brian.zuccala@monash.edu.

Si accettano contributi in inglese e italiano.

Scadenza per l'invio delle sinossi: 31 agosto 2018.

Notifica di avvenuta accettazione provvisoria (soggetta a referaggio): 15 settembre 2018.

Scadenza per l'invio dei saggi: 15 febbraio 2019.

INTRODUCTION / INTRODUZIONE

POSTCOLONIALISMI ITALIANI IERI E OGGI: APPUNTI (SUDAFRICANI) PER UNA (RI)CONCETTUALIZZAZIONE 'RIZOMATICA' DEI *POSTCOLONIAL ITALIAN STUDIES*¹

ANITA VIRGA

(University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

&

BRIAN ZUCCALA

(Monash University, Australia)

Abstract

This introduction aims to shed light on the theoretical raison d'être, the intersections within, and the internal coherence of the corpus of five essays that make up this first ISSA special issue on "Postcolonialismi italiani ieri e oggi/Italian Postcolonialisms: Past and Present". The five contributions were first delivered as conference papers at the XIV International API Conference, 10-12 August 2017, Johannesburg (South Africa). The piece also aims to contribute to the comparatively recent meta-critical reflection on the present status and future directions of Postcolonial Italian Studies, within the broader landscape of Italian studies.

¹ Questo contributo si allinea al saggio che segue in relazione all'ordine degli aggettivi nella definizione dei *Postcolonial Italian Studies*, la cui sequenza si ritrova invece, in qualche caso, invertita in parte della critica a cui questo studio fa riferimento.

Di postcolonialismo italiano (per lo più al singolare) si parla, nel campo degli studi di italianistica/*Italian studies*, ormai da tempo, e sempre più critici trovano all'interno di questa cornice teorica angolature utili dalle quali provare a (ri)leggere non solo i fenomeni artistico-culturali dell'Italia contemporanea, ma anche quelli legati alla storia dell'unificazione e post-unificazione.

Da quando l'Italia ha cominciato a riscoprire, con notevole ritardo e non senza le esitazioni che la accomunano ad altre nazioni europee², il proprio passato di nazione colonizzatrice³, grazie al lavoro di storici quali Giorgio Del Boca⁴ e Nicola Labanca⁵, anche gli studi letterari in senso stretto, e culturali in senso esteso⁶, hanno iniziato ad analizzare operatori e fenomeni culturali del presente, e rileggerne del passato, alla luce degli strumenti critici offerti dagli studi e le teorie postcoloniali.

La natura e l'occasione di questa introduzione non consentono di addentrarsi in una esaustiva ricostruzione degli sviluppi della disciplina, compito questo svolto bene, alla conferenza API 2017 da cui questo volume nasce, dal *keynote speech* di Norma Bouchard, "Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Interruptions", che si ritrova qui, in forma ampliata, come saggio di apertura. Ai fini delle

² Basti qui citare il caso della Francia, quello che forse più le si avvicina, nell'ambito dell'Europa mediterranea. Si veda in questo senso la provocazione di Jean-François Bayart (2011), che appare particolarmente rilevante, come risulterà chiaro dalle numerose menzioni del lavoro di Ponzanesi in risposta a Bayart, ai fini di questa introduzione.

³ Passato che è non privo, come noto, di aberrazioni e mostruosità. Basti qui ricordare, per brevità, l'uso di armi chimiche proibite dalla Convenzione di Ginevra per conquistare l'Etiopia. Su questo episodio e su alcune delle (altre) ignominie commesse dal colonialismo italiano si veda Del Boca (2005).

⁴ Di Del Boca si vedano in particolare la serie dei quattro volumi che compongono *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (1976; 1979; 1982; 1984) e i due volumi di *Gli italiani in Libia* (1986).

⁵ Di cui è importante ricordare almeno *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (2002).

⁶ Quelli, per intenderci, definiti in genere – nell'anglosfera – *cultural studies*, e portati avanti dapprima soprattutto fuori dalla Penisola (ma è opportuno in questo senso citare per contrappunto contributi quali *Fuori centro. Percorsi postcoloniali nella letteratura italiana*, a cura di Derobertis, 2010 e *L'altro sé. Opposizioni letterarie dal Sud: Silone, Levi, Brancati, Pasolini, Sciascia*, 2017, di Lorenzo Perrona), e poi sempre più presenti anche all'interno del contesto accademico italiano.

considerazioni che intendiamo sviluppare in queste pagine introduttive, basterà invece sottolineare come, all'interno del quadro disciplinare complessivo degli studi postcoloniali italiani, si possano distinguere un primo momento prevalentemente 'esplorativo' e un secondo, e più recente momento che non sembra inappropriato definire 'meta-critico'. Gli albori della (sotto)disciplina degli studi postcoloniali italiani (gli anni Novanta), come spesso accade, sono stati caratterizzati da anni di ricerche più o meno pionieristiche che, a partire da letture teoriche fondamentali (notoriamente) soprattutto angloamericane⁷, sono andati in varie direzioni di analisi artistica e testuale, dapprima con l'intento di mettere in discussione il paradigma di 'omogeneità' culturale e nazionale associato all'Italia, poi con l'obiettivo di trarre conclusioni teoriche alternative rispetto a tale paradigma e, nell'ambito delle rispettive sotto-aree, di arricchire la definizione della 'condizione postcoloniale italiana'. È stata questa la traiettoria delineata per esempio dagli studi sulle diaspore italiane e sulle scritture migranti, da quelli sulla Questione Meridionale e da quelli sulla razzializzazione del discorso politico e culturale pre- e post-risorgimentale⁸.

La meta-critica postcoloniale

Di recente sono cominciati a comparire anche interventi di uguale spessore ma natura meta-critica; ovvero contributi intesi a fare il punto sullo scenario esegetico complessivo delineatosi in questi due decenni – si sarebbe tentati di dire strutturalisticamente – all'intersezione di due matrici concettuali (variamente intese), quella 'postcoloniale' e quella 'italiana'. Questi interventi hanno cercato di stabilire e illustrare quali siano le aree di maggiore produttività ed efficacia all'interno di tale scenario, e indicato quali sembrano essere le zone ancora maggiormente inesplorate: hanno riflettuto insomma

⁷ È noto, su questa linea, come gli studi postcoloniali siano penetrati nell'accademia italiana attraverso i dipartimenti di anglistica e americanistica oltre che di antropologia e sociologia.

⁸ Questa parabola di progressivo consolidamento ed esplicitamento della cornice postcoloniale sembra rimandare all'operazione critica di "theoriz[ing] through literature" di cui parla, seppur su tutt'altro terreno, la narratologa Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1996:1), ed è descritta bene da Lombardi-Diop e Romeo (2012:11-13).

sulle potenzialità già espresse e quelle ancora da esprimere di questo strumento critico, con specifico riferimento al contesto italiano. A questo livello meta-critico, il lavoro di Sandra Ponzanesi (2012 e 2016) e quello sia autoriale (2014 e 2016) che editoriale (*Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, 2012, e 2014 in arricchita versione italiana) delle citate Cristina Lombardi-Diop e Caterina Romeo appaiono particolarmente centrali⁹.

Sandra Ponzanesi si è recentemente chiesta: “Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?” (2016, che non è disponibile in italiano); e dopo aver analizzato le diramazioni lungo le quali si articola la specificità del postcoloniale italiano, ha mostrato come, se da una parte è vero che alcune delle nozioni che ancorano gli studi postcoloniali fossero già presenti all'interno del discorso accademico italiano ben prima che venissero raggruppate sotto l'*umbrella term* degli studi postcoloniali, dall'altra la cornice postcoloniale ha consentito di raccogliere sotto una stessa impalcatura concettuale questi spunti teorici e interpretativi altrimenti isolati, di connetterli meglio l'uno all'altro e meglio inserirli all'interno di una prospettiva trans- e post-nazionale. Giova riportare per intero il passaggio:

The postcolonial turn in Italian studies is [...] not just a novelty or a new academic fashion but the confirmation and consolidation of a genealogy in Italian studies that has a long tradition and roots in different discourses connected to the history of Italian migration, racial formations and intellectual thought based on the specificity of the Italian nation formation. This relates to Italy's denied but pervasive colonial legacy and the fragmentation of its identitarian politics based on ethnic, racial and religious complexities. These are not imported or emerging concepts because of the increasing success

⁹ Senza però dimenticare tanto contributi precedenti quali quello di Miguel Mellino, “Italy and Postcolonial Studies: A Difficult Encounter” (2007), e l'introduzione “Colonial and Postcolonial Italy” (2006), di De Donno e Srivastava, allo speciale dallo stesso titolo, quanto contributi successivi quali, a firma della sola Cristina Romeo, “Italian Postcolonial Literature” (2017). In particolare le pagine iniziali di quest'ultimo lavoro (1-5) forniscono una panoramica più completa di quella che ci sia possibile fornire qui della riflessione meta-critica discussa in queste pagine.

and academic establishment of postcolonial critique but pressing issues that find an articulation and connection thanks to a new language and methodological tools that stem from a new global understanding of patterns of domination and resistance that have historical and geopolitical specificities that need to be accounted for. [...] [T]his demonstrates that, if Italy has been postcolonial all along, critical awareness and critique of its postcolonial condition have been lacking or scarcely brought to light. [...] [T]herefore [...] Italy not only needs postcolonial theory but [...] within a wider European and international scholarly landscape its belatedness and specific critical apparatus can yield new, important insights into the origin and future of postcolonial thought. (Ponzanesi 2016:159)¹⁰

La studiosa aveva già qualche anno prima (2012 in edizione inglese, 2014 in traduzione italiana, da cui si cita) riassunto i progressi fatti dagli studi postcoloniali italiani distinguendovi tre aree: una prima area che “si concentra sul riesame e sulla rivalutazione del passato coloniale alla luce di nuove prospettive critiche, tenendo conto delle posizioni subalterne e fornendo anche nuove osservazioni relative all’incontro coloniale”. Un secondo filone che “si concentra sulle voci e sulle rappresentazioni dei migranti (provenienti dalle ex colonie o meno) e di altre minoranze; [in cui] si riesamina il canone letterario e si ridefiniscono le nozioni di valore ed estetica culturale”. Una terza porzione infine che “rivisita la teoria e l’epistemologia [del

¹⁰ Romeo e Lombardi-Diop avevano articolato nello stesso anno (ma il passaggio si ritrova in inglese in Lombardi Diop & Romeo, 2014:427) la propria posizione in maniera simile: “Gli studi postcoloniali applicati al contesto italiano riposizionano la storia coloniale e la sua eredità al centro del dibattito sulla contemporaneità e la collegano alle immigrazioni transnazionali, sottolineando anche come i rapporti di potere creati dal colonialismo vengano riprodotti e rinforzati nelle società postcoloniali contemporanee. Diversamente da altri Paesi europei, l’analisi storica del passato italiano include però anche l’emigrazione di massa (e gli emigranti come ‘soggetti colonizzati’) e la Questione Meridionale (come forma di ‘colonialismo interno’). Inoltre, le questioni sulla storicità e sulla temporalità sono cruciali per il dibattito italiano, visto che l’era postcoloniale è cominciata decenni dopo la perdita delle colonie e il processo di decolonizzazione non è iniziato simultaneamente in tutte le colonie italiane.” (2016:54)

postcoloniale] secondo prospettive di alterità e dissonanza” (2014:56).

Già in questo primo saggio meta-critico Ponzanesi sottolineava come fra i progressi fatti in queste tre aree – due più propriamente ‘contenutistiche’ (colonie, migrazione) e una invece più auto-riflessiva e meta-esegetica (teoria postcoloniale italiana) – vi fosse una visibile discrepanza. Da un lato, infatti, in relazione alla prima e seconda area – scriveva Ponzanesi – “gli studi italiani stanno prosperando”¹¹. Per contro, invece

L’ [...] area [...] che riguarda una teorizzazione del postcoloniale italiano – è quella in cui gran parte del lavoro deve essere ancora fatto [...]. A tale scopo, non si dovrebbe solo tener conto degli adattamenti degli strumenti critici esistenti da applicare alla specificità del caso italiano e alla sua cultura, ma assicurarsi anche che il nuovo apparato critico postcoloniale sia concepito in funzione della realtà e della materialità proprie della cultura italiana, per poi poter essere esportato verso altri contesti. (Ponzanesi 2014:56)

Nel citato e più recente “Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?” Ponzanesi ha poi efficacemente ri-articolato l’universo critico-concettuale del postcoloniale italiano in cinque aree, alle quali il saggio si riferisce usando il termine “intersections”:

¹¹ Quanto alle imprese coloniali dell’Italia: “numerosi studiosi e studiose – storici, antropologi, teorici della cultura – [...] hanno svolto ricerche pionieristiche negli ultimi decenni, portando alla luce non solo un capitolo oscuro della storia italiana, ma anche modificando il modo di utilizzare l’archivio storico e reinterpretando la produzione del sapere in una prospettiva post-coloniale” Ugualmente, in relazione alla seconda area: “la tendenza, al momento, è molto favorevole, data la presenza di studiosi e studiose che operano non solo in ambito accademico anglo-sassone, ma anche nei dipartimenti d’italianistica e di comparatistica in Italia, dove si vagliano e si interpretano nuove voci letterarie e produzioni artistiche di migranti presenti sul territorio italiano, avendone riconosciuta la validità in quanto oggetti di studio” (Ponzanesi 2014:56).

1. The precedent in supposedly 'postcolonial thinkers' or those who have instigated and influenced the development of postcolonial theorising (Vico, Gramsci, Levi).
2. The internal subaltern question in Italy, namely the Southern Question and its relations to *Pensiero Meridiano*/Mediterranean studies.
3. Italy's history of double colonisation (paradigms of emigration as immigration or what is usually referred to as external and internal colonialism) with very specific consequences for the Italian notion of national identity but also geographical reach and scope.
4. Race theories and eugenics. How the discourse on race has followed a specific track in Italian studies and merges and diverges with studies on colonialism and postcolonialism (from Lombroso to Sergi to Burgio, Sorgoni, Barrera, Poidimani, Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop).
5. Contemporary thinkers are readdressing the operation of nation state, empire and globalisation vis-à-vis patterns of migration, capitalism and sovereignty (Negri, Agamben, Dainotto, Passerini, Verdicchio, Mezzadra, Mellino, Passerini [sic] and so forth). (2016:149)

Accostando uno all'altro i contributi citati, si ha l'impressione che gli studi postcoloniali italiani siano, secondo la critica recente, sulla soglia di un *leap*, di un sostanziale avanzamento di natura principalmente teorica che, si anticipa, consisterà nel conio di nuove categorie e/o paradigmi epistemologici specifici per il contesto italiano, ma organicamente legati alle dinamiche europee e globali a cui tale contesto appare sempre più inestricabilmente connesso. Più specificamente, se si incrociano l'ultima 'mappatura' di Ponzanesi in cinque intersezioni e le sue precedenti affermazioni legate alla necessità-possibilità di articolare paradigmi nuovi all'interno di questo orizzonte critico, è lecito desumere che questo *leap* teorico

possa derivare da una (ri)combinazione o rielaborazione dei rapporti esistenti fra le *intersections* di cui sopra.

A.P.I. 2017

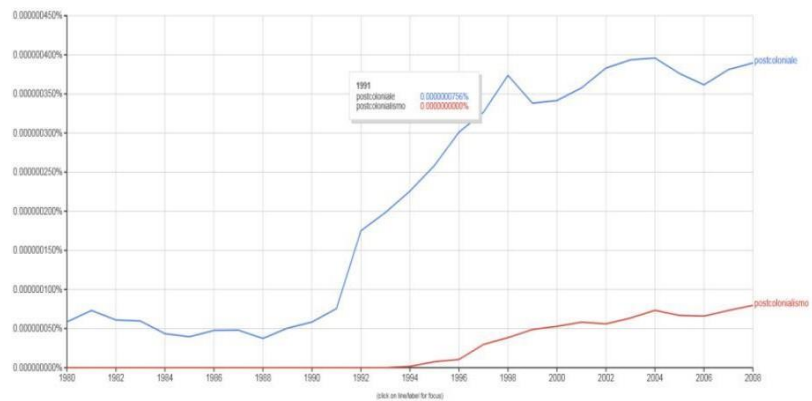
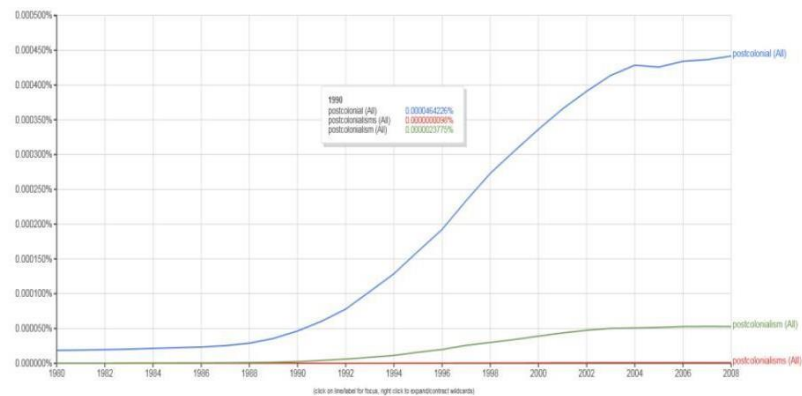
In questo panorama critico, il convegno dedicato al tema del postcoloniale italiano che l'Associazione Professori di Italiano in Sudafrica (A.P.I.) ha ospitato presso l'Università del Witwatersrand a Johannesburg nell'agosto 2017 (10-12), arrivava con tempismo a fornire l'occasione per un incontro tra queste diverse prospettive, per un confronto che potesse auspicabilmente contribuire a fare emergere elementi utili per un avanzamento dei paradigmi epistemologici associati o associabili al postcoloniale italiano.

È legittimo sostenere – almeno a giudicare dalla proliferazione e revisione continua di dizionari del lessico critico e introduzioni a concetti chiave dei diversi filoni di *literary* e *critical theories* – che, nell'ambito della teorizzazione letteraria e culturale, un posto privilegiato spetti alla terminologia. Le teorie postcoloniali, con la loro nota e benvenuta tendenza all'autoriflessione e autocritica costante, non fanno in questo senso eccezione. Nel dibattito in lingua inglese sono numerose le pagine dedicate, sin dagli albori della disciplina, alla definizione stessa del termine *post(-)colonialism*. È stato sottolineato¹² più volte, per esempio, come il prefisso 'post(-)' anteposto al sostantivo '*colonialism*' sia da intendersi in un'accezione di 'critica' e 'resistenza' al colonialismo piuttosto che semplicisticamente in senso descrittivo e cronologico. Lo stesso tipo di attenzione terminologica si potrebbe dedicare al fatto che sia

¹² Per esempio da Ashcroft, B., Griffith, G. and Tiffin, H., in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989): "We use the term 'post-colonial' [...] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" (2). Una decina di anni dopo, pur discutendo le inconsistenze critiche in cui si potrebbe incorrere qualora si indulgesse in un uso troppo esteso del concetto, Loomba (1998) ricordava: "It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (12). Nell'ambito della critica italiana, si veda ancora Derobertis (2010): "Il 'postcoloniale' non è inteso come il tempo cronologicamente successivo al 'coloniale', bensì è una critica a ciò che è stato storicamente il colonialismo" (8-9).

l'italiano che l'inglese siano sembrati e ancora sembrano riluttanti, in ambito critico-accademico, alla pluralizzazione dei 'post(-)colonialismi' (preferendo spesso il meno impegnativo e più duttile aggettivo *postcolonial/postcoloniale*)¹³.

13 Quel che sembra distinguere inglese e italiano è una riluttanza persino maggiore di quest'ultimo a tale pluralizzazione, come si evince da una semplice e se si vuole rudimentale indagine quantitativa (ottenuta attraverso Google Ngram), che rivela appunto – nel secondo grafico – l'assoluta assenza del plurale per l'italiano:



Il che, sia detto per inciso, sorprende un po', soprattutto quando si osservi come all'interno di altri filoni di critica letteraria e culturale cronologicamente più 'maturi' – più o meno vicini al postcoloniale – tale pluralizzazione sia invece avvenuta senza particolari resistenze in anni recenti. È questo il caso, per citare il filone di *literary theory* che ha avuto forse l'effetto più pervasivo negli ultimi quattro decenni negli *Italian studies*, degli studi di genere (*gender studies*), all'interno del quale non si esita a parlare e scrivere di "femminismi" italiani e no¹⁴. Ma è stato questo il caso – per avvicinarci ulteriormente alla sfera di influenza e competenza del postcoloniale – anche per i *diaspora studies*, che per Gabaccia sono diventati quelli sulle 'molte diaspore italiane' (a cui dedica l'omonimo volume, 2000), con una pluralizzazione intesa più a riconoscere la varietà di tipologie diasporiche italiane (economiche, culturali, politiche), quindi di cornici critiche necessarie per analizzarle, che a evidenziarne le molte destinazioni geografiche.

Suggerire allora per il convegno API un titolo al plurale, "Postcolonialismi italiani ieri e oggi/*Italian Postcolonialisms: Past and Present*", voleva avere un valore critico e programmatico. L'intento era quello di segnalare la volontà di includere tutte le forme e maniere in cui il postcoloniale è stato e può essere espresso e declinato nell'ambito italiano, siano esse quelle della critica al colonialismo italiano diretto e indiretto, delle riflessioni sulle migrazioni o delle riletture di testi e contesti legati al *nation-building* risorgimentale e post-risorgimentale e alla attinente Questione Meridionale. Il plurale voleva allo stesso tempo indicare la pari 'dignità' scientifica e relativa autonomia di ciascuno di questi filoni, pur evidenziandone i molti punti di contatto.

¹⁴ Cavassa, Guerra & Brugnoli (1996), Cammarota (2005), Bertilotti, Galasso, Gissi & Lagorio (2006), Bonomi Romagnoli (2014), Bacchetta & Fantone (2015), Contarini & Marras (2015) sono solo alcuni dei contributi che mostrano sin dai titoli di avere assimilato tale pluralità.

Il 'rizoma' postcoloniale

I tre giorni di lavori del convegno¹⁵ hanno non solo confermato i valori di questa pluralità di ispirazioni, ma anche contribuito a rafforzare la convinzione che sia possibile stabilire tra esse nuove e criticamente produttive corrispondenze. L'occasione del convegno prima, e l'opportunità di riflettervi poi, insomma, ci sembra consenta di contribuire concretamente alla formulazione teorica caldeggiata dai critici, nella forma se non di un immediato avanzamento paradigmatico, almeno di una riformulazione delle considerazioni (meta)critiche più recenti e illustrate sopra, che potrebbe fornire alcuni elementi utili per operare tale avanzamento. Ci sembra che uno spunto interessante a partire dal quale esprimere tale riformulazione sia fornito dalla figura del 'rizoma' deleuziano e guattariano. La nota e complessa immagine del rizoma (*rhizome* sia nell'originale francese che nella resa inglese) è quella che si trova riprodotta e definita nel primo capitolo di *Mille Plateaux* (secondo volume, dopo *L'Anti-Ce-dipe*, di *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, 1980 in originale francese)¹⁶.

Qui viene impiegata, a partire da un'analisi del concetto- e dell'oggetto-libro come articolato "assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:4) culturale, per illustrare un sistema di concettualizzazione del reale articolato in maniera non binaria. Un sistema rizomatico, nella concettualizzazione di Deleuze e Guattari, è tale perché sfugge alla nozione intrinsecamente gerarchica di radice unica e architettura 'ad albero' che invece sembra appartenere a molta parte del pensiero occidentale moderno, da quello metafisico a quello linguistico chomskiano e quello psicoanalitico freudiano. Ciò che caratterizza – seppure, per stessa ammissione dei due filosofi, 'con approssimazione' (1987:7) – la rizomaticità di un sistema, sono alcuni

¹⁵ Il programma del convegno è disponibile qui:

http://www.consjoannesburg.esteri.it/consolato_johannesburg/resource/doc/2017/08/programma_locandina.pdf. In qualità di artista, ha partecipato al convegno il regista Fred Kuwornu con un intervento dal titolo "Black-Italiano: Imagining the Black Body in Contemporary Italy". Sulla sua partecipazione al convegno si rimanda a Virga e Zuccala (forthcoming 2018).

¹⁶ In inglese *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987); in italiano *Millepiani* (1997).

principi astratti: quello “of connection and heterogeneity”, in linea con il quale “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be”; il “principle of multiplicity”; il “principle of asygnifying rupture”, che si oppone a “the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure”; i principi di “cartography” e “decalcomania”, in linea coi quali “the rhizome is [...] *a map and not a tracing*: [...] what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward and experimentation in contact with the real” (1987:7-13).

Questi principi-guida concorrono a formare una figura di rapporti aperta, multiradicale, agerarghica, infinitamente e imprevedibilmente espandibile. Una figura che è stata immediatamente e intuitivamente associata alla condizione postcoloniale.

Nell'ambito degli studi postcoloniali, la figura del rizoma si ritrova notoriamente riletta e interpretata, in chiave e linguaggio meno botanico-sperimentali e più cultural-letterari da Édouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1987), che la utilizza come metafora per indicare innanzitutto la radice plurima dell'identità soggettiva – individuale e collettiva – delle popolazioni caraibiche. In virtù non tanto dall'assenza di radici ma dal riposizionamento delle stesse in una struttura multidimensionale complessa, tale identità, spiega Glissant, è un'identità ‘nomadica’. Per Glissant ‘rizomatico’, pluriradicale e multipiano è il rapporto dei caraibici con la terra, con le lingue, con il testo scritto e la parola, con se stessi. Questa metafora del *postcolonial rhizome* si ritrova poi anche nella fondamentale monografia di Ashcroft come metafora dei rapporti tra (post)colonialità, la quale per il critico è caratterizzata da una ‘rizomatica’ propagazione del potere e da una altrettanto rizomatica opposizione ad esso:

The metaphor is useful firstly because the concept of a root system, of a trunk spreading out and colonizing areas of space in a clearly hierarchical way, is, both as an *idea* and a *policy* (or lack of a coherent policy), fundamental to the project of imperialism. But this notion is just as constructed as that of centre and margin, just as much in the interests of perpetuating power as the

Manichaeen binaries of self and other, colonizer and colonized. The operation of power, like the operation of social relations themselves, is both perpetual and discontinuous and propagates laterally and spatially like the rhizome. (Ashcroft, 2001:50)¹⁷

Giova sottolineare come qui Ashcroft sia – per mantenerci sul binario terminologico da cui siamo partiti – precipuamente ‘critico’ piuttosto che ‘meta-critico’, ovvero impieghi l’immagine del rizoma per definire, in linea con lo scopo della sua monografia, la condizione e le dinamiche (post)coloniali nel loro complesso, piuttosto che gli studi postcoloniali nel loro complesso. Anche nell’ambito più specifico degli studi del/sul postcoloniale italiano il rizoma non è completamente assente. Se ne trova traccia, nella sua formulazione originaria e con tanto di riproduzione dell’immagine usata da Deleuze e Guattari, in Barbara De Vivo (2011), con riferimento al romanzo di Ali Farah *Madre Piccola* (2007), dove viene utilizzato come modello di (ri)lettura della struttura del romanzo¹⁸. Il termine era già stato impiegato in relazione ad altre tre scrittrici migranti, Geneviève Makaping, Christiana De Caldas Brito e Jarmilla Očkayová, in un saggio di Sonia Sabelli (2005). In queste pagine scrittura e lingua diventano una maniera non solo per ribadire le proprie radici multiple e ‘altre’ (2005:442), all’interno di una cultura che, se non lo è, certo continua a considerarsi largamente monolitica e monocromatica, ma anche per utilizzarle strategicamente come strumenti di resistenza ai fini della propria emancipazione (443) da uno stato di intersezionale subalternità. Il rizoma compare ancora in *The Somali Within* (2015) di Simone Brioni, nell’accezione glissantiana di “identity-rhizome” (Brioni, 2015:138), con riferimento all’identità multipla, che diventa

¹⁷ Lo stesso argomento si ritrova nella seconda edizione del dizionario dei concetti chiave degli studi postcoloniali (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013:232-233).

¹⁸ Scrive De Vivo: “Ho cercato a lungo una figura che potesse rendere l’immagine mentale che le ripetute letture di questo romanzo mi hanno dato della sua struttura e del molteplice e simultaneo infittirsi e districarsi di fili narrativi. Ho disegnato tante figure stimolata dalle [sic] parole stesse di Ali Farah sul suo romanzo e nel suo romanzo [...]. È stato solo nel momento in cui ho iniziato la lettura di [...] *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. È il rizoma la figura che cercavo” (2011:160).

scrittura polifonica, delle scrittrici e degli scrittori italo-somali. Se ne trovano infine ulteriori tracce in Sarnelli (2018) in relazione al lavoro di un'altra scrittrice dell'afroitalianità, Igiaba Scego, in una maniera che combina identità rizomatica glissantiana e sesto principio della mappa deleusiana e guattariana. Nel recentissimo "Affective Routes in Postcolonial Italy: Igiaba Scego's Imaginary Mappings" (2018), Laura Sarnelli analizza, attraverso il filtro della figura del rizoma, l'operazione di mappatura dell'identità diasporica realizzata in tre opere di Scego (*La mia casa è dove sono*, 2010, *Adua*, 2015, e *Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* 2014, quest'ultimo coautorato con il fotografo Rino Bianchi)¹⁹.

Il 'rizoma' e i postcolonialismi italiani

A partire dalle conclusioni a cui sono giunte le studiose sopracitate sembra che il valore interpretativo del rizoma possa essere ulteriormente ampliato. Sembra, cioè, che l'impiego critico della figura del rizoma possa slittare e divenire, da paradigma esegetico per questi testi e gruppi di testi, paradigma meta-critico della forma/condizione attuale degli studi postcoloniali italiani. Per quanto arbitrario questo *leap* verso un impiego meta-critico possa apparire ad un primo sguardo, esso in realtà sembra essere intrinseco e necessario, e in un certo senso già implicito sin dal menzionato *A Thousand Plateaus*. Il testo che dovrebbe infatti *de facto* introdurre e descrivere il rizoma, in qualche misura non lo fa, se non ellitticamente o meglio... 'rizomaticamente'. Leggere *A Thousand Plateaus*, cioè, invita a pensare che una materia rizomatica come quella postcoloniale non possa che essere approcciata rizomaticamente: che se la condizione postcoloniale (anche italiana) è rizomatica, anche gli studi postcoloniali italiani, in qualche modo, debbano esserlo.

Ci si consenta di puntualizzare come il nostro intento qui non sia quello di suggerire – sulla linea di Ashcroft – che la struttura rizomatica possa essere usata come macro-modello anche per tutti i testi e i prodotti culturali e i discorsi legati alla postcolonialità

¹⁹ Una menzione molto cursoria in relazione al testo di Scego e Bianchi si trova anche in Carotenuto (2016:216).

italiana, o per la condizione stessa di postcolonialità italiana²⁰. Quel che ci si limita a suggerire in queste poche pagine (per la natura e l'occasione di questo contributo) è qualcosa di epistemologicamente più limitato e insieme più squisitamente meta-critico: che potrebbe essere utile avvicinarsi allo stato presente dei *Postcolonial Italian Studies*, come descritto da Ponzanesi nelle sue cinque *intersections* (1- teoria originaria e fondativa, 2- questione meridionale, 3- doppia colonizzazione 4- teoria della razza 5- pensiero italiano contemporaneo) in guisa 'rizomatica'. Nello spirito della provocazione della studiosa ("Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?"), suggeriamo, non sembra inappropriato domandarsi, altrettanto provocatoriamente se si vuole, se non sia lecito intendere le *intersections* di Ponzanesi piuttosto nel senso di *plateaus*, di 'piani' deleuzo-guattariani. In altre parole, ci domandiamo, se la necessità teorico-concettuale del postcoloniale italiano – che è anche la sua specificità – si trova da qualche parte compresa o implicata tra queste intersezioni in una forma non del tutto svelata, conferire a queste intersezioni le caratteristiche di 'millepiani' rizomatici non dovrebbe per definizione accrescere le potenzialità interpretative legate alla mappatura di tali necessità e specificità?

La geometrica astrattezza lungo cui la nostra argomentazione si è sin qui mossa può forse essere ricondotta alla pratica concreta della critica letteraria e dell'indagine culturale ripartendo dalla definizione originaria di Deleuze e Guattari, secondo i quali:

the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature. [...] The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple [...]. It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. [...] The rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable and has multiple

²⁰ Per esempio che la coscienza individuale e collettiva italiana contemporanea e postcoloniale possano essere comprese come facenti parte di un sistema rizomatico. Questa appare certamente un'ipotesi possibile e percorribile – sulla linea di Glissant e Ashcroft – ma non praticabile nello spazio limitato di questo saggio introduttivo.

entryways and exists [...]. The rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical nonsignifying system. (1987:21)

Questa sintetica definizione ci sembra possa essere applicata allo schema a cinque punti di Ponzanesi così da conferirgli ulteriori dimensioni e possibilità. È utile cioè concepire i cinque filoni di cui parla Ponzanesi come legati da rapporti 'rizomatici'. Nessuno di questi filoni può essere considerato la radice 'prima' da cui il postcoloniale italiano si sviluppa, nè in termini cronologici nè tantomeno in termini gerarchici, nel senso che 'ciascuno si connette a tutti gli altri': non gli studi sulle le imprese coloniali, che poggiano sugli studi delle preesistenti nozioni europee di razza e le conseguenti pratiche di auto-orientalizzazione; non le pratiche di auto-orientalizzazione, la comprensione delle quali poggia sulle comprensione sulle pratiche discorsive orientalizzanti che attraversano l'Europa prima che l'Italia; non gli studi sull'immigrazione contemporanea, che non possono prescindere da quelli sulle diaspore italiane degli ultimi due secoli. Non sembra possibile nè appropriato postulare l'esistenza di un centro-matrice degli studi sul postcoloniale italiano a cui altri elementi facciano da corollario; e non esiste quindi neppure una genealogica gerarchia ad albero (o binaria) che consenta di tracciare la mappatura completa di questi rapporti. I collegamenti fra questi segmenti o nodi interpretativi non sono univoci né unilaterali, ma multipli ed eterogenei. Su questa falsariga, anche la questione cronologica, come notano le studiose sopracitate, sembra caratterizzare e distinguere i postcolonialismi italiani in una maniera che non è inopportuno definire 'rizomatica'. Se nel caso di altre potenze coloniali, decolonizzazione e inizio di flussi (im)migratori coincidono, nel caso dell'Italia la fine del dominio coloniale diretto "did not coincide with the beginning of the postcolonial era" (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo, 2012:1) e diventa, con Deleuze e Guattari, una di quelle 'rotture' che si rivelano produttrici però di ulteriori segmenti di critica, specificamente all'interno del paradigma dei *Postcolonial Italian Studies*.

Continuando su questa linea, il caso italiano appare meno 'binario' di quelli per esempio francese e britannico anche sul piano spaziale, oltre che su quello temporale, perché, laddove in quei casi

(im)migrazione significava scambio biunivoco solo o soprattutto colle/dalle colonie, nel caso italiano le rotte di emigrazione e immigrazione si caratterizzano notoriamente in maniera più varia e più variamente legata alla storia coloniale.

In virtù delle specificità illustrate fino a qui, insomma, ci pare proficuo intendere i vari filoni critici postcoloniali italiani secondo queste connessioni rizomatiche, che si sottraggano a gerarchizzazioni troppo rigide e che allo stesso tempo consentano non solo di far risaltare le discontinuità tipiche di tutti i postcolonialismi ma anche di far emergere come, nel caso italiano, tali discontinuità siano ulteriormente accentuate. Non si tratta pertanto di voler rintracciare ad ogni costo 'legami forti', né di voler offrire una mappatura definita e definitiva dei postcolonialismi italiani, ma piuttosto di constatare come ci si trovi di fronte, non solo ma soprattutto nel caso italiano – per dirla con Chambers – a un "broken archive" (2017:6) di frammenti postcoloniali la cui *reductio ad unum* è tanto improponibile quanto anacronistica. I 'postcolonialismi' al plurale riflettono allora anche la consapevolezza e insieme l'auspicio che, nonostante l'archivio unico di una 'storia unica' sia ormai infranto e per sempre compromesso, siano invece proprio le linee di frattura di tale archivio ad alimentare i *Postcolonial Italian Studies* nei decenni a venire.

I saggi dello speciale di ISSA

I contributi contenuti in questo numero speciale, e qui presentati in progressione cronologica, da un lato sembrano confermare e dall'altro rivelano ulteriormente la struttura e la natura rizomatiche del panorama degli studi postcoloniali italiani, a partire dal comprensivo ed efficace *overture* di Norma Bouchard. Il saggio si articola con illuminante profondità storiografica lungo i sentieri esegetici che abbiamo menzionato, per soffermarsi, in una conclusione ispirata all'impalcatura etica del Lévinas di *Totality and Infinity* (1969) e *Otherwise than Being* (1998), sulla auspicabile possibilità che queste (ri)concettualizzazioni per ora in larga parte ancora accademiche possano avere un impatto maggiore di quello avuto sino ad ora sui

“discourses and practices of exclusions” nei quali, sottolinea Bouchard, “mainstream Italy remains trapped”.

L'ampia introduzione di Bouchard lascia spazio al primo di quattro saggi ‘monografici’, nel quale Kamalini Govender illumina di una luce postcoloniale il *Pinocchio* di Collodi (1883). Govender giustappone e combina due cornici metodologiche, una psicoanalitica e legata all'*uncanny* freudiano e l'altra incentrata sulla nozione di subalternità gramsciana, al fine di mostrare come “the hybrid or ‘subaltern’ form of Pinocchio” possa funzionare da prisma interpretativo delle ansie di *nation-building* che attanagliano un'Italia nuova e bambina all'indomani dell'unificazione.

Il successivo nodo critico sul quale questa collezione prova a fare ulteriore luce è quello della rappresentazione artistica coloniale in epoca fascista, su cui si concentra Anita Virga. Virga propone una disamina del relativamente poco noto film *Siliva Zulu* (1927), e si adopera per illustrare come, tra le pieghe di una retorica pseudo-scientifica e pseudo-etnografica, si celino invece motivi stereotipizzanti e animalizzanti, non dissimili da quelli rintracciabili nel cinema britannico coevo.

Il terzo momento di riflessione suggerito da queste pagine invita il lettore a soffermarsi sulla dimensione più squisitamente spaziale e urbana dei postcolonialismi italiani. Il saggio di Marco Medugno analizza due rappresentazioni letterarie della città di Mogadishu – quella in inglese di Nuruddin Farah e quella in italiano di Garane Garane – considerate significative per la maniera di rendere momenti importanti della storia della Somalia attraverso la rappresentazione della sua capitale. Medugno illustra come, allontanandosi da rappresentazioni dominanti che fanno della città nulla più di un simbolo di distruzione (post)coloniale, entrambe queste rese artistiche, seppure attraverso differenti strategie narrative, restituiscano immagini più complesse, sospese tra locale e globale, tra collasso e rinascita, tra topografie dell'oppressione e condizioni diasporiche.

L'ultima e più contemporanea tappa di questa escursione nei territori dell'Italia e della critica postcoloniale è rappresentata dal saggio di Giovanna Sansalvadore sugli *Imbarazzismi* del medico-artista italo-togolese Kossi Komla-Ebri. Sansalvadore propone una

rilettura di questi testi “as *spunti* for the revisiting of central themes associated with interpersonal and social scenarios”, in particolare i temi e le teorie dell'emergente movimento di *decoloniality*: quello della insularità di certa cultura europea, lo scarto generazionale in relazione alla percezione della diversità etno-culturale, le nozioni di identità e appartenenza, i *clashes* tra una declinazione 'tradizionale' di tali nozioni e le situazioni socio-professionali che si presentano nella vita quotidiana nell'Italia del nuovo millennio. Uno stile umoristico e accessibile, suggerisce Sansalvadore, consente a Komla-Ebri di veicolare in maniera stimolante l'impellente e profonda necessità non solo di ripensare secondo parametri 'decolonizzanti' la nozione stessa di italianità, ma di praticarla a partire dal livello delle situazioni più ordinarie.

La lettura combinata di queste cinque prove critiche – che coprono oltre due secoli, incorporano spunti metodologici provenienti da quattro continenti, e propongono analisi 'transmediali' che spaziano dal romanzo di formazione ottocentesco, al film di epoca coloniale, alla contemporanea e quasi-vignettistica satira di costume – sembra fornire una esemplificazione intellettualmente avvincente, per quanto necessariamente parziale, delle possibilità esegetiche ancora insite sia nei postcolonialismi italiani che in una loro (ri)lettura complessiva mediata dalla figura del rizoma.

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ARTICLES / SAGGI

COLONIAL LEGACIES AND POSTCOLONIAL INTERRUPTIONS¹

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Sommario

A partire dalla definizione di Iain Chambers del postcoloniale come il congiungersi di "differenti spazialità e temporalità in una conformazione critica contemporanea" che "penetra il mondo, sia presente che passato, che ha prodotto, organizzato e vissuto il coloniale in molte maniere differenti" (Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorized Modernities, 2017: 18-19, traduzioni nostre), questo intervento fornisce un'ampia panoramica delle condizioni storiche e materiali dei contesti coloniali e postcoloniali italiani dal diciannovesimo secolo fino ad oggi, al fine di illustrare come varie forme di colonialismo e postcolonialismo persistano, si intersechino e articolino con le migrazioni del passato e quelle del presente. Si utilizzano qui una selezione di testi chiave, sia accademici che creativi, per illustrare ulteriormente le specificità e le particolarità dei retaggi coloniali e postcoloniali in Italia. Il saggio conclude riconoscendo la nascita e l'istituzionalizzazione dei Postcolonial Italian Studies a partire dagli anni Novanta e fornisce alcuni esempi della rimappatura della cultura italiana in atto, tanto nei testi creativi quanto nella produzione accademica, all'intersezione di spazi e dimensioni locali, nazionali, e transnazionali.

¹ This is the text of the keynote address delivered at the "A.P.I International Conference XIV - Italian Postcolonialisms: Past and Present", 10-11-12 August, 2017, University of the Witwatersrand. I wish to thank the organisers for the opportunity of a fruitful and enriching exchange.

Keywords: Unification, Internal colonialism and emigrant postcoloniality, External Colonialism and emigrant coloniality in Liberal and Fascist Italy, Postcolonial Italian Studies

Reflecting on the complexity of the term post-colonialism/postcolonialism, in *Post-Colonial Studies* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin remind readers how “the term was a potential site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation almost from the beginning” (2000:186-187)². While the use of the hyphen came to distinguish the post-structuralist orientation of discourse theory from its absence in materialist oriented critiques³, it was the prefix itself that gave rise to an even more vigorous debate which, to this day, continues to prompt a range of questions of fundamental importance. When do colonialism and postcolonialism begin and end? Is it possible to trace a linear development from colonialism to the post-independent state formations that replaced colonial administrations? Has postcoloniality succeeded in overcoming coloniality? Can we truly speak of breaks and discontinuities between colonialism and its political aftermath or, as once again Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin remind us, are there “articulations between and across the politically defined historical periods, of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence culture?” (2000:187).

Among the different answers to these questions, Iain Chambers' recent definition of the postcolonial as the conjoining of “diverse temporalities and locations in a coeval critical configuration” that “cuts into the world – both past and present – that produced, managed and lived the colonial in multiple ways” (2017:18-19), offers a productive framework to situate the historical and material conditions of Italy's colonial and postcolonial contexts. It is a framework that I will embrace here, not to endorse the alleged

² See also Ashcroft (1996); Shoat (1992); McClintock (1994, 1998); and Lomba (1995).

³ For a post-structuralist informed approach, see Spivak (1990) and Bhabha, H.K. (1990, 1994). Parry's materialist approach is well captured in the following statement: “As postcolonial studies became saturated by premises predicated on the priority of signifying processes [...] the discussion [...] has appeared concerned to rearticulate colonialism and its aftermath from a theoretical position freed from the categories of political theory, state formation and socio-economic relationships” (2004:4).

'exceptionality' of the Italian case⁴, but to highlight how its specificities and particularities have transcended – and continue to transcend – the teleology of historicism as well as the boundaries of spaces and territories in a complex configuration where multiple forms of colonialism and postcolonialism persist, intersect and imbricate with past and present-day migrations. I will then proceed to reflect broadly and, by necessity, summarily, on the cultural texts – both imaginative and scholarly – that postcolonial practices and postcolonial studies are enabling in their remapping of Italian culture at the crossroads of local, national, and transnational sites and locations. Lastly, I will conclude with a few comments of the political imports of these practices in a context where the historical, cultural, and social permeability of a multi-ethnic reality meets the resilience of essentialised constructions of *Italianità* and the identitarian politics that derive from them.

The Colonial Genealogy of Italy's Liberal State: Between Internal Colonialism and Emigrant Postcoloniality

Almost at the outset of *La questione meridionale*, Antonio Gramsci, a thinker of great importance to postcolonial theory⁵, describes the legalised violence of Italy's first capitalist modernity and reminds us of the colonial genealogy of Italy's nation-state formation at the end of the *Risorgimento*. It is a genealogy that I here wish to recall⁶ for the purpose of establishing the entanglement of Italy's colonial and migratory contexts at the founding moment of the nation-state but without suggesting or even implying an equation between the magnitude of the colonial and imperial violence of the Liberal and Fascist states that took place outside of Italy.

⁴ On this point see Labanca: "un approccio [...] 'eccezzionalistico', aleggiato assai spesso fra i sostenitori del colonialismo italiano [...] e persino fra i suoi contestatori. Quello italiano fu una variante, piuttosto che un'eccezione, dell'imperialismo coloniale Europeo" (2002:473).

⁵ For a recent discussion, see Bhattacharya and Srivastava (2012).

⁶ For a lengthier discussion of this genealogy, see Bouchard (2010, 2013).

Gramsci writes that with the territorial unification of the Italian peninsula under Piedmontese rule in 1860, “The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies” (1995:16). Gramsci explains that the independent Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was annexed to the Piedmontese monarchy of the House of Savoy – a monarchy that had colonial ambitions even before Unification, as evidenced by a naval display within sight of Tunisia. Within a few decades, the Savoy monarchy turned the South into a supply-base of natural resources and human labour, a site of primitive accumulation necessary for the start of the liberal capitalist economy that lay at the centre of the economic agenda pursued by the monarchy. The century-old feudal land structure of vast areas of the peninsula was broken down and millions of hectares of church and communal property upon which peasants had relied for centuries were confiscated. A 54% increase in direct taxes and a five-year long military conscription further compromised the survival of societies and communities traditionally dependent on the conjoined efforts of female and male labour. These colonial dynamics were not lost to the voices of the opposition. As Wong (2006) reminds us, at the end of the nineteenth century, Napoleone Colajanni, in *Settentrionali e Meridionali d'Italia*, argued that Northern Italy had become a colonising force, exploiting the South to further its progress and inclusion in the European sphere. In *Il Mezzogiorno*, Francesco Saverio Nitti wrote that the South was being transformed into a colonial market for the North. Similar concerns were expressed by Carlo Cattaneo and Antonio Ghisleri and would be summed up by Gaetano Salvemini's *La questione meridionale e il federalismo*. By the end of the nineteenth century, a body of pseudo-scientific research produced by the positivist anthropology and criminology of Cesare Lombroso, Alfredo Niceforo, Giuseppe Sergi, and Enrico Ferri, reified Southern cultural, political and economic diversity in a very resilient discourse of racial inferiority and a ‘natural’ predisposition toward crime. This discourse would traverse the Liberal State governments of the newly formed Italian nation, from the Historic Right (1861-1876) and the New Left (1876-1887) to the two ministries of Francesco Crispi (1887-1891; 1891-1896) and

Giovanni Giolitti (1901-1914) and beyond. As the plight of Southern masses continued to worsen, there occurred two related phenomena of social unrest that would add new dimensions to Italy's internal colonial genealogy: rebellion and emigration. Riots and agitations became a common occurrence as did violent repressions. In 1866, for example, squads of peasants took over Palermo and held it for a week. General Cadorna responded to the uprising with a naval bombardment and the imposition of martial law. But destitute masses also fought against the Italian army in the so-called *brigantaggio*, a conflict that would claim more lives than all the battles of unification combined. By 1890, Sicilian peasants came together in organised associations but, once again, repression was the state's response. Fearing that a large scale revolution would spread across the region, Prime Minister Crispi did not hesitate to send 40,000 troops to Sicily to crush the rioters. Unable to make their voice heard and faced with utter destitution, disinherited masses chose the path of mass migration in a diasporic exodus that, between 1880 to 1915, saw the departure of 13,000,000 people, two-thirds of them from the South. In short, Italy as a postcolonial emigrant nation was born, as Choate (2008), Fiore (2012, 2017), Gabaccia (1998, 2001), Verdicchio (1997a, 1997b), and Viscusi (2010) have persuasively argued from their respective disciplinary perspectives. The Americas were a primary destination, but a significant number of individuals also left for Northern and Central Europe as well as non-Italian colonial holdings in Africa, such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. The establishment of Italian settlements in Goletta, Biserta, Monastir, Sfax and Gafsa testify to this⁷, as do the places of birth of important figures in the pantheon of Italy's national literary canon, such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, and Fausta Cialente.

⁷ For additional discussion of these settlements, see Giannotti, Micciché and Ribero (2002).

The Colonial Expansion Outward: External Colonialism and Emigrant Coloniality of Italy's Liberal and Fascist States

The internal colonialism and the postcolonial exodus that followed the creation of the Italian nation-state would soon evolve into the consolidation of Italy's external colonial consciousness. Eastern African territories (and, later on, North Africa and the islands of the Dodecanese archipelago and Albania) were increasingly viewed by Parliament not just as an opportunity for a territorial expansion to solve the problems caused by an oversupply of labour, a landless peasantry and a demographic growth that raised fears of continuous uprisings, but also as a means to affirm the legitimacy of the newly formed nation that followed the *Risorgimento*. In 1887 Crispi became Prime Minister on a platform of outward colonial expansion that led to the occupation of Somalia in 1889 and the invasion and declaration of Eritrea as colony in 1890. Despite a number of defeats (Amba Alagi, 1895 and Adua, 1896) and the oppositions of individuals such as Andrea Costa, Ulisse Barbieri, and Luigi Einaudi, the Liberal Italian State pursued its colonial ambition amid a triumphant imperialistic rhetoric that attempted to refashion emigrant and destitute masses into conquering colonialists and demographic imperialists. It is at this time that the term *colonia* came to designate emigrant communities across the world's continents *as well* as African colonies. As Choate explains, "To distinguish between the two types of colonies, Italian theorists called emigrant settlements 'spontaneous colonies', while African possessions were called 'colonies of direct dominion' (2008:23). In the course of the Italo-Turkish war, Italy made further advances into Africa and eventually proclaimed colonial sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in present-day Libya, in 1913. Yet, the Italian advance also led to the occupation of Rhodes and several islands on the Dodecanese which, as in the case of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, were provinces of the Ottoman Empire. By 1917, Italy was advancing in Central and Southern Albania, a territory that was a key component of the Italian colonial strategy to gain control of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean.

With the collapse of the Liberal Italian State in 1922 and the advent of Fascism, Italian colonialism entered a second, very aggressive phase. To Mussolini, the stability of Italy's African territories had become a top priority. It was a chance to affirm the military strength of the Fascist regime, hold in check the French and British neighboring colonies of Egypt and Tunisia and, especially in the case of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, restore the image of Italians as the legitimate heirs of the Roman *mare nostrum*. Thus, Mussolini gave free reign to his military leaders, empowering men such as Rodolfo Graziani to pursue a most repressive military campaign and put an end to the indigenous resistance that had formed in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. In 1935, the *Colonia di Libia* was proclaimed and in 1936 *Africa Orientale Italiana* was established though the control of a vast territory that merged the Ethiopian Empire previously ruled by Hailè Selassié with Eritrea and Somalia. However, hopes that the second, external colonisation would provide a solution to the problems of the earlier internal one were short-lived. Italians headed for Africa chose two destinations: Italian colonial holdings and non-Italian colonial holdings, including areas in sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria, Congo and South Africa. Among the African destinations, the Italian communities residing in the French colonies of Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia remained much larger than the rest. Moreover, as Nicola Labanca well summarises it, more Italians left for the Americas as emigrants than for Africa as settlers: "a fronte dei nove milioni di emigrati verso le Americhe, i trecentomila italiani emigrati sino alla fine degli anni trenta e il paio di centinaia di migliaia grosso modo colti ancora all'Oltremare dalla sconfitta del regime non danno davvero l'impressione di quella fiumana Africanista propagandata o auspicata [...]. 'La Grande proletaria', quando si mosse, andò alla 'Merica' e non nel Continente africano" (2002:378).

An Atypical Entrance into Postcolonialism: the 1950s and 1960s

With the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, Italy made its formal entrance into the historical period of postcolonialism and was forced to abandon all claims to its colonies, even though it maintained a

Ministry of Italian-Africa until 1953 and was granted the UN negotiated trusteeship over Somalia from 1950 to 1960. Unlike other European colonial powers, such as France, Great Britain and Belgium, Italian colonies had been lost following military defeats and in the absence of the struggles for independent state-formation that had occurred in many European colonial holdings (e.g. Algeria, Angola, Indochina, Indonesia, etc.). This had major consequences in the post-World War II era. Simply put, despite the fact that the modern Italian state that emerged from the *Risorgimento* had a history of having been colonial, imperial and postcolonial all along, the memories of internal and external colonialism, emigrant postcoloniality and demographic colonialisms struggled to coalesce and give rise to a vigorous and necessary process of decolonisation⁸.

National unification was narrated, celebrated and commemorated as a project of collective emancipation and resurgence of Northern and Southern people alike from the Liberal monarchy and Fascism all the way to the post-war Republics, when political parties sought to establish legitimacy and build consensus by promoting a relationship of continuity with the *Risorgimento* through a carefully designed politics of public memory (Baioni, 2009). Even with the advent of post-World War II modernisation, when the *Risorgimento* obviously had to compete with other, more recent national memories and myths, including those of World War I, Fascism, and especially the Resistance, its centrality in public life did not wane and neither did many of its myths of national resurgence, emancipation and rebirth for the people of the entire Italian peninsula.

Colonialism and imperialism were minimised and even concealed for decades, as Del Boca (2003, 2005) and Labanca (2002) have argued. Framed by the rhetoric of Italiani *brava gente*, Italian colonialism was presented as an enterprise on the cheap, that

⁸ For additional discussion for Italy's difficult scene of decolonisation, see: Mellino (2006), Triulzi (2006), Andall and Duncan (2005).

is, as *colonialismo straccione* and, for this reason, presumably friendlier than British or French imperialisms. This discourse not only hid the violence of the Liberal State in Eritrea and Libya and the atrocities committed by the Fascist colonial empire, when strikes on civilians, chemical warfare, mass hangings and deportation of entire populations to concentration camps had become all too common occurrences, but also prevented retributions for colonial wrongs and enforcements of victims' rights. While individuals such as Badoglio, De Bono, Lessona, Federzoni and Bottai did receive life sentences, it is important to recall that their respective roles in the colonies played no part in the verdicts. For example, Graziani, the infamous butcher of Bengasi and Addis Ababa, was ultimately not tried for his crimes in Libya and Ethiopia but for his collaboration with Germany. Needless to say, the demands for reparations advanced by Libya, Ethiopia and Somalia were disregarded while the return migration of thousands of individuals who were settled in Africa when Fascism was defeated, the so-called *Italiani d'Africa*, did not become an occasion to reflect upon the 'heart of darkness' of the national past and was widely considered a problem to be quickly and quietly solved by the Italian government. But the absence of a proper debate also led to a lack of reflection on the systematic racialisation of difference that was already a key component of the positivist anthropology and criminology during the decades of the Liberal State only to strengthen under Fascist imperialism. More precisely, until the early 1930s, Fascism's articulation of race pivoted upon the idea of a Mediterranean race based upon Rome's assimilation of different ethnicities in opposition to both German Aryanism and British imperial racism. Yet, with the proclamation of the Italian Empire in 1936 a fundamental change had taken place. The idea of an 'Aryan-Mediterranean' race in which Italians embodied the Mediterranean branch of the Aryan type was consolidated: neighborhoods, spaces in movie theatres, shops and public transportation were progressively segregated and a regime of 'apartheid' came to be enforced in the colonies. Unions between (primarily) Italian men and indigenous women, tolerated until then, even if regulated by the laws of concubinage, or *madamismo*, were increasingly seen as a

threat to racial, political and cultural hierarchies and were eventually prohibited⁹. This had grave consequences not just for Northern and East African populations but also for Jewish communities, since the Fascist anti-Semitic legislation built upon the 'apartheid' practices in the African Empire. Considering this context of silencing and concealing of memories, Italy's colonial and imperial past struggled to become part of the larger cultural field of the 50s and 60s. It comes perhaps as no surprise, then, that despite the location of the "Second Congress of Intellectuals and Writers of Africa and the African Diaspora" in Rome in 1959, with exponents of the Négritude movement of the likes of Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Gontran Damas in attendance, and the publications and translations in Italy of works by Frantz Fanon and Senghor in close proximity to the same Congress¹⁰, a number of Italian intellectuals and artists – from Parise and Pontecorvo to Visconti, Bertolucci, Moravia, Fago and Pasolini – gravitated towards French, Spanish, British and Portuguese colonialisms, rather than the Italian one. In this turn towards *terzomondismo* lies perhaps another example of the persistence of Italy's colonial legacies and, by implication, the protracted deferral of the nation's conscious engagement with its history of colonialism and imperialism.

The Rise of Multiple and Diverse Postcolonial Consciousnesses of the 1970s

The occluded development of a postcolonial consciousness that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, began to falter in the mid-1970s, when Italy became an emigrant destination as a result of the limits placed on labour migrants by Northern European states since 1974 that redirected the flow towards Southern Europe; the troubled condition of the Balkans and Eastern Europe after the collapse of

⁹ See Sorgoni (1998) and Barrera (2005).

¹⁰ For an overview of this period, see Cantone (2016).

communism; the economic and political upheavals of many former European colonies in the Middle East and in Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa; the rising prosperity levels of traditional out-migration countries and the concomitant need for low wage jobs increasingly shunned by natives (King, 2001). Yet, as migratory movements began to take place through and within Italy from Eastern Europe (Albania, Rumania), Ukraine, followed by Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal) and Asia (China, the Philippines and India), Italians perceived – and continue to perceive – the unprecedented arrivals of large numbers of individuals as a foreign invasion threatening a presumed Italian homogeneity of culture and way of life (Triandafyllidou, 2001). Early episodes of violence and brutality, such as the murder of Jerry Masslo in Villa Litterno in 1989, brought to light the racist and ethno-phobic responses that in-migration was eliciting. Newspapers from *L'Unità*, *Corriere della sera*, *La Repubblica*, and *L'Espresso* and nationally televised broadcasts (e.g., *Nonsoloneo*, *Un Mondo a Colori*, *Shukran*) sought to inform public opinion of the necessity to come to term with this new reality. But as the new migrants reconfigured the labour markets, the *piazze*, train stations, and neighborhoods of Italian cities and suburbs – as had been the case with the internal migration of two million Southerners to the Northern Industrial triangle of Milano-Turin-Genoa between 1951 and 1971 – they also claimed a signifying role and began to tell other stories. Recording their past and present circumstances in documentary and imaginative cultural texts, they contributed in fundamental ways to the recovery of a buried archive by way of the reactivation of a vast receptacle of direct and indirect colonial memories¹¹ – that is, memories from former Italian colonies as well as from territories colonised by other imperial nations. Among the voices of direct postcoloniality were those of writers from the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, whose works I wish to recall here for their exemplary role in bringing back to light key moments of the often forgotten Italian colonial past.

¹¹ For the concepts of direct and indirect coloniality and postcoloniality, I am indebted to Fiore (2012, 2017).

The hidden stories of Eritrea, a region that, with the Bay of Assab's purchase by the Rubattino shipping company in 1869 under the Italian Liberal State, became the first of many areas targeted by Italy's colonial advance, is central to Ribka Sibhatu's *Aulò. Canto-poesia dall'Eritrea*. Written in the first person, Sibhatu's text combines notes on the Italian colonial occupation from the perspective of Sibhatu's grandparents with descriptions of Eritrean customs and culture. However, what is perhaps more unique about *Aulò* is its bi-lingual structure, where Italian language is used on the right side of facing pages and Tigrinya on the left side. While this structure indicates an authorial intention to maintain contact with Eritrea through Tigrinya and other aspects of Sibhatu's native heritage, it also forces readers to dwell on and reflect upon the many historical ties that bind Italy to Eritrea.

Another author from Eritrea is Erminia Dell'Oro. Born in Asmara in 1938, a descendant of early Italian emigrant colonists, Dell'Oro is the author of, among others, *Asmara addio* (1988) and *L'abbandono – Una storia eritrea* (1991). A thinly veiled biography, *Asmara addio* narrates the story of the Conti family and their return migration from the former Italian colony of Eritrea following World War II. *L'abbandono* focuses instead on racial questions in the colonies and is based on oral testimonies recorded by Dell'Oro.

The memory of Libya re-emerges vividly in Luciana Capretti's *Ghibli* (2004). Capretti, who was born to a settler emigrant family in Tripoli, recounts the multiple crossings of the Mediterranean by Italians, as conquerors and emigrant colonists first; and, after Gaddafi's coup and the deposition of King Idrisi al-Sanusi, as return postcolonial migrants on a forced exodus. In her narrative (reconstructed from family history, oral testimonies, and newspaper articles), Capretti's text translates the ebb and flow of the colonial and postcolonial history that entwines Italy with Libya through a chronology that moves forward and backward between 1969 and 1970 but also reaches further back, into the Fascist's display of colonial horrors that was staged by Gaddafi's Revolutionary Committee in the Tripoli Trade Fair as Italian emigrant colonists and their descendants were forced to leave Libya. In her evocation

of the return journey across the Mediterranean by Italo-Libyans, Capretti establishes striking parallels with contemporary crossings of the Mediterranean, as one of the return migrants hides in the hold of a boat inside a cello case to reach Malta and Lampedusa, risking suffocation and emerging soiled by his own excrement, while another one travels in a makeshift vessel, a *carretta del mare*, before being rescued by Sicilian fishermen.

The memories of Ethiopia come to life in the works of Martha Nasibù and Maria Abbebù Viarengo. Nasibù was born in Addis Ababa in 1931, where she remained until 1936 before relocating to Italy. In her compelling *Memorie di una principessa etiopie* (2005), she describes the destruction of the pre-colonial, Ethiopian feudal aristocracy on the part of the Fascist squads, despite the valiant fight of Martha's father, who was the right hand man of Hailè Selassìè, to defend the ancient Orthodox-Copt civilisation that had flourished on this Eastern African land. Maria Abbebù Viarengo was born in 1949 in Ghidami to an Oromo mother and a Piedmontese father, who had come to Ethiopia in 1928. In 1969, Maria moved to Italy. Her autobiography (portions of it have been published as *Andiamo a spasso?*, 1994) records her life through the many languages and cultures that have characterised it in Asmara and then Italy. While the experience of Viarengo's migration is that of an upper class, privileged woman, the text documents the reactions of Italians to her racial hybridity and attempts at categorising her diversity. In the process, Viarengo opens an important testimony of the racialisation of difference that permeates Italy's mainstream culture.

The colonial and postcolonial memory of Ethiopia is central to the work of Gabriella Ghermandi, who was born in Addis Ababa to an Italian father and Italo-Eritrean mother, and migrated to Bologna in 1979. Her first novel, *Regina di fiori e di perle*, is based upon the carefully researched testimonies of men and women who experienced the Fascist empire first-hand. Broadly structured like a historical fiction, it employs the techniques of oral storytelling to narrate the stories of those who suffered the violence of Mussolini's regime. These stories encompass a vast historical period that begins on October 3, 1935, when Italian imperial forces invaded Ethiopia but extends all the way to the contemporary period. In the oral, first

person narratives of many characters, important episodes of the Italian colonial legacy come to life, including the battle of Amba Alagi, when 8,000 people were burned to death, the use of poison gas and the horrifying massacre in Addis Ababa. In a state-sanctioned reprisal ordered by Graziani, up to 30,000 men, women and children were killed, while houses and Copt churches were burned and thousands were rounded up and deported to concentration camps. But the racialisation of difference also plays a fundamental role in Ghermandi's novel as illustrated by the story of Amarech and the Italian soldier Daniel whose dream of raising a family was shattered with the Fascist Law Decree 880 of 1937, which de-legitimated bi-racial children, criminalised mixed race unions and punished violators with up to five years in prison. To escape the Racial Laws, Amarech and Daniel joined the Ethiopian resistance but were ambushed, arrested and executed by Fascist militia. Their interracial child, a baby-girl named Rosa (a thinly veiled portrait of Gabriella Ghermandi's mother), escaped the fate of the majority of mixed race offspring. Over 10,000 of these children, born in Ethiopia between 1936 and 1941, were not recognised by the Italian government and subjected to the prejudice of Italians and Ethiopian alike, were placed in convents under the care of nuns.

The occluded relations between Somalia and Italy resurface in the works of Ali Farah, Fazel, Garane and Scego. Ali Farah, born in Verona in 1976 from a Somali father and an Italian mother, moved to Somalia in 1979 where she remained until 1991. Her main publications to-date are *Madre piccola* and *Il comandante del fiume*. Both novels give voice to the complexities of the present and past histories of Italy and Somalia. They reconstruct the plight of Somali worldwide, bringing together not just their many personal and collective tragedies in narratives based on oral models of storytelling but giving voice to painful quests for origins, identities and belonging against a background of colonialism, civil war, and diasporic postcolonial dispersion.

Born in Mogadishu, Fazel is the author of *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (1994) and *Nuvole sull'equatore* (2010). The autobiographical *Lontano da Mogadiscio* recounts the

transformation of Mogadishu into “the new Beirut” during the post-colonial period (1994:46) while *Nuvole sull'equatore* sketches a broad picture of Somalia, from the years of Italian colonisation to the rule of general Siad Barre through the point of view of a mixed race child, Giulia.

Garane's *Il latte è buono* (2005) paints a large historical fresco through the narrative of a family saga that begins with the arrivals of white colonists in Africa in the eighteenth century and proceeds with the coming of Italians in Somalia and the post-independence Somali diaspora in Italy, France and the USA. Through the character of Gashan, Garane's text also explores the impact of colonialism on the psyche of the main character and the split identities that derive from it in tones that are reminiscent of Fanon's famous examination of colonial subjectivities in *Black Skins, White Masks*.

The ever prolific Igiaba Scego also deserves to be mentioned. While her production is too extensive to be discussed in depth here, I wish to recall at least *Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (2014) and *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010). Written in collaboration with the photographer Rino Bianchi, *Roma negata* takes the reader on a journey across Rome to uncover both the signs and symbols of the Italian colonial past as well as the resurging presence of colonial nostalgia exemplified in the mausoleum to Graziani that was built in Affile in 2012 with public funds. In this and other works – especially *Adua* (2015) and *La mia casa è dove sono* – Scego gives voice to identities formed at the intersection of colonial and postcolonial contexts and explores the forging of immigrant and emigrant subjectivities that straddle multiple cultures and traditions while advancing a notion of an *Italianità*, that is (and has always been) hybrid, multiple and irreducibly crisscrossed.

But in addition to Sibhatu, Viarengo, Nasibù, Capretti, Ali Farah, Ghermandi, Garane, and Scego, to the re-elaboration of a collective counter-memory of colonialism and its many legacies also participate authors with ties to territories colonised by other European powers. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide an in-depth examination of the many distinct voices and unique narrative spaces that have emerged in the last thirty years, I

wish to recall the indirect postcolonial testimonies of what is now known as the first generation of migrant writers of the 1990s: Mohamed Bouchane, Pap Khouma, Salah Methnani, Moussa Ba and Nassera Chohra, who co-authored works in Italian, even though for many of them French was their primary language, having come from France's colonial holdings. While the practice of co-authoring raised legitimate questions of linguistic agency and symbolic empowerment¹², these works were of fundamental importance since they "create[d] multifaceted alternative portrayals to the essentialised and homogeneous definition of 'the immigrant' created by prejudice and racism in Italy" (Parati, 1999:13). The 1990s generation was rapidly followed by a second generation of writers which includes sophisticated and highly accomplished authors, such as Fatima Ahmed, Adrian Nazareno Bravi, Viola Chandra, Christiana de Caldas Brito, Amara Lakhous, Amor Dekhis, Kossi Komla-Ebri, Ron Kubati, Tahar Lamri, Carmelo Quijada, Laila Wadia, Barbara Serdakowski, Yousef Wakkas, Geneviève Makaping, Ornela Vorpsi, Ingy Mubiayi, and Mohammed Lamsuni, to name but a few. Many of them highly educated and politically engaged¹³, they emerged from a condition of linguistic subalternity that, to some critics, characterised earlier co-authorships with Italian writers, through powerful acts of symbolic self-assertion and empowerment. To tell it with Wright, the works of the writers of the second decade evolved into a "performative space of auctoritas" (Wright, 2004:99) that has often extended to the production and distribution of their distinct voices and specific narrative spaces through digital platforms¹⁴. I should also note that while the vast majority of these authors' cultural production deploys itself in

¹² See Wright (2004).

¹³ For a discussion of these writers, see Scego (2004).

¹⁴ See, for example, the on-line journals and initiatives promoted by this generation of writers which include: *Roma multiethnica*, <http://www.romamultiethnica.it/it/bibliografie/letteratura-della-migrazione/bibliografie>, *Sagarana*, <http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero8/index.html>, *Letteranza* <http://www.letteranza.org/autori/kubati.html>, *Eks&Tra*, <http://www.eksetra.net>, *Voci dal silenzio: Culture e letteratura della migrazione*, <http://www.comune.fe.it/vocidalsilenzio/>, *El-Ghibli. Rivista online della letteratura della migrazione*, <http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/>.

narrative, other media, from poetry and drama to films, videos, documentaries and music have also become increasingly common¹⁵. Poetry¹⁶ counts among its most significant voices the Albanian migrant Gëzim Hajdari, but also Hasan Al Nassar, Anahi Baklu, Mihai Mircea Butcovan, Thea Laitef, Egidio Molinas Leiva, Julio Monteiro Martins, Ndjock Ngana Yogo Ndjock, Heleno Oliveira, Lidia Amalia Palazzolo, Candelaria Romero, Barbara Serdakowski, Božidar Stanišić and Spale Miro Stevanović. Drama companies have also been active all over Italy (and beyond) and include *Compagnia del Lazzaretto*, *Cooperativa Teatro Laboratorio*, *Koron Tlé*, *Palcoscenico d'Africa* and *Teatro delle Albe*¹⁷. As far as the cinematic scene is concerned¹⁸, a small but growing number of migrant directors are now active and include Rachid Benhadj, Edmond Budina, Moshen Melliti and Mohamed Zineddaine. Directors of short and documentaries are becoming more and more numerous and mention should be made of Adil Tanani, Hugo Munoz, Razi Mohebi and especially Dagmawi Yimer, the director of the acclaimed *Come un uomo sulla terra*, (2008; with Riccardo Segre and Riccardo Biadene), the story of his experience as a student from Addis Ababa who traversed the desert between Libya and Sudan to reach the Mediterranean shore from where he embarked for Rome. Other important works by Yimer are *C.A.R.A Italia* (2010), *Soltanto il mare* (2010; with Fabrizio Barraco and Giulio Cederna) and *Benvenuti in Italia* (2012), a documentary that he directed along with four other migrants (Aluk Amiri, Hamed Dera, Hevi Dilara, Zakaria Mohamed Ali) to record their respective

¹⁵ For a larger panorama, see Bouchard & Ferme (2013).

¹⁶ See Lecomte (2006); Martianacci and Minore (2010); and Bonaffini and Lecomte (2011).

¹⁷ Among these companies, the work of the Afro-Romagnole *Teatro delle Albe* is especially noteworthy. Through inter-ethnic productions, it brings together Italian-born directors and actors with African immigrants. Among the *Albe's* theatrical performances are *Ruh Romagna più Africa uguale* (1988), *Siamo asini o pedanti?* (1989), *Lunga vita all'albero* (1990), *I ventidue infortuni di Mor Arlecchino* (1993), and *I Polacchi* (1998), which was renamed *Ubu Buur* (2007). Informative discussions of *Albe* are Furno (2001) and Bryant-Jackson (2010).

¹⁸ See Parati (2005) especially the chapter "Cinema and Migration" (104-141) as well as her "Shooting a Changing Culture: Cinema and Immigration in Contemporary Italy" (2001).

lives in the Italian cities of Venice, Milan, Portici, Naples, and Rome. Whether conceived from the point of view of the settler colonists in Italian colonial territories, the former colonised subjects of Italy or of other colonising European states, these works have created and effectively disseminated through an effective network of publishing houses, dedicated journals, televised programs and social media a counter-memory of colonialism in an Italian context. This is a memory that has undeniably played a significant role in facilitating a revisiting of the national past on the part of, for lack of better words, autochthonous voices¹⁹, that is, writers and artists, such as Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli, Raffaele Nigro, Giosuè Calaciura, Susanna Tamaro, Paola Capriolo, Melania Mazzucco, Enrico Brizzi, Vincenzo Consolo, Erri De Luca, Wu Ming's 2 and Antar Mohamed, Gian Antonio Stella, Gianni Amelio, Matteo Garrone, Silvio Soldini, Carmine Amoroso, Emanuele Crialesi, and so on, whose works bring to light experiences of colonialisms and migrations in practices that promote recognition between yesterday's and today's experiences.

Postcolonial Italian Studies

Amidst this flourishing of cultural texts, it is not surprising that postcolonial Italian studies have emerged in departments large and small across the continents of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Australia, undoubtedly also aided by the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory but also by critical race theory, whiteness studies, and so forth. To tell it with Sandra Ponzanesi, "Though belated, the postcolonial turn in Italian studies can no longer be ignored [...]. It has been embraced by academia at large, reaching not only the more traditional realms of *Italianistica* [...] but also other disciplines such as sociology and political theory [...] anthropology [...] history [...] film studies [...] literature, and

¹⁹ As Maria Cristina Mauceri and Maria Grazia Nigro have documented in their *Nuovo immaginario italiano* (2009), while very few autochthonous works addressed issues of immigration prior to the early 1990s, from 1998 to 2008 a number of emerging and established writers are increasingly doing so.

cultural theory at large” (Ponzanesi, 2012:62)²⁰. As a result, cultural texts from the past to the present are being assessed and re-assessed in a re-reading of the particularities and specificities of the Italian colonial and postcolonial contexts.

In a most productive confrontation with the colonial past at the founding moment of the Italian nation state, discourse analyses and the history of ideas from the postcolonial lenses of Teti (1993), Moe (1992, 1998), Wong (2006), Dickie (1997, 1999) and others, reveal the construction of the *mezzogiorno* as a place of barbarism, irrationality, and backwardness and, therefore, as a colony to be tamed by the civilised and progressive North. It is also at this time that a creation of a white Italian self-emerged in opposition to its ‘black’ other, that is, the Italian southerner, the peasant subaltern, and the colonial subject of Italy’s African empire, as Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop have argued in their *Bianco e Nero* (2013). In this revisiting of the national past, works of Southern literature written during the crucial years of unification and in its immediate aftermath by Matilde Serao, Giovanni Verga, Luigi Pirandello and Luigi Capuana, among others, are being re-read from postcolonial lenses in studies by Coburn (2013), Sorrentino (2014), and Virga (2017).

The emigrant post-colonies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that formed in non-Italian colonies and across the Atlantic have also been given a great deal of attention through the discussion of writers such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, Fausta Cialente by Re (2003) and Tomasello (1984) while a revisiting of the unrecognised postcolonial subjects of the global Italian diaspora – Pietro di Donato, John Fante, Dodici Azpadu, Mary Bucci Bush, Kim Ragusa, among others – has been undertaken by Verdicchio (1997b) and Fiore (2012, 2017). Fiore’s most recent *Pre-occupied Spaces* (2017) deserves special attention since it is the first book-length scholarly treatment of the nexus emigration/immigration, direct and indirect postcoloniality. While this nexus had emerged in separate articles and through key

²⁰ See also Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, especially the section “Postcolonial Studies in Italy” in the chapter “Paradigms of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy”, from *Postcolonial Italy* (2012:11-13).

episodes in films (e.g., Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica*, Vincenzo Marra's *Tornando a casa*) and literature (e.g. Angioni, 1992; De Luca, 1993, 1999; Ghermandi, 2007), Fiore has developed a framework to examine side-by-side the themes and aesthetic visions of migrant and non-migrant authors. As a result, she has created a hermeneutic model that, by binding Laura Pariani with Amara Lakhous, Melania Mazzucco with Moshen Melliti, Renata Ciaravino with Gabriella Ghermandi, fosters in the readership "recognition via memory and imagination and rethinks the national in the transnational dimension" (2017:10).

But scholars are also examining how the 'other-ing' of the *mezzogiorno* in the aftermath of *Risorgimento* came to justify the Italian state's external colonial ambitions for an Italian *Oltremare* (Schneider 1998; Lombardi-Diop and Giuliani 2013) through a discourse that articulated a vision of proletarian nationalism inextricably tied to imperial expansionism and racial superiority. Active participants to this discourse were Gabriele D'Annunzio, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giovanni Pascoli, Alfredo Oriani, and Enrico Corradini but also many directors of Italy's silent cinema, recently discussed by Welch's *Vital Subjects: Race and Biopolitics in Italy 1860-1920* (2016) and Reich's *The Maciste Films of Italian Silent Cinema* (2015). The matrix of this discourse informed colonial fascist propaganda, establishing a line of deep continuities that is being reconstructed through the examination of a large body of texts from the *ventennio*, ranging from colonial novels (e.g. by Mario Dei Gaslini, Luciano Zuccoli, Mario Milanese), songs and photographs to films, the latter the focus of Giuliani Caponetti's *Fascist Hybridities* (2015), Ben Ghiat's *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*, De Franceschi's *L'Africa in Italia* (2013) and Greene's *Equivocal Subjects. Between Italy and Africa* (2012).

Yet, it is perhaps the flourishing of cultural texts by so-called migrant writers and artists of the first and second generation that has elicited the largest body of scholarly works. Among an ever-growing bibliography that comprises single articles, edited collections and monographic studies, mention should be made of important contributions by Gnisci (1993, 1998), Ponzanesi (2004), Parati (1997, 1999, 2005, 2017), Mauceri and Negro (2009),

Quaquarelli (2010), Portelli (1999, 2006), Comberiati (2009, 2010a, 2010b), Brioni (2015), Burns and Polezzi (2003), Burns (2013), Lori (2013) and Di Maio (2001), to name but a few.

Towards Coming Communities?

At this juncture, however, it is important to observe that the rich imaginative and intellectual discourse of postcoloniality that I have broadly discussed here remains far from being translated into the current Italian political and social context. Reprising Chambers (2017), the force of this discourse is one of “postcolonial interruptions,” rather than of fundamental transformations of the fabric of our “unauthorised modernities”. The ongoing tragedies of present day economic migrant, political refugees and asylum seekers that find themselves caught between the geopolitics of Europe’s internal and external borders, are all too well-known, as are the conditions of those who survive the human trafficking and the new Mediterranean Middle Passage (King, 2001) only to end up in one of the CPTs, aptly described by Mario Rovelli as *Lager italiani* (2006), or sent back in unspeakable acts of mass deportation. As for those who succeed in remaining on Italian soil, the reality that they face is that of a neoliberal capitalist state that is not only increasingly dependent upon the production of subalternity through the exploitation of a migrant labor force, but holds fast to outdated cartographies of state sovereignty, as the deferred reform of Italy’s citizenship laws and its impact on the G2 generation testifies. Otherwise stated, mainstream Italy remains trapped in discourses and practices of exclusions that reveal the resilience of nationalist and imperial agendas and the strength and power of the legal and political institutions over human life, as Dal Lago (2004), Mezzadra (2008), Ferguson (2006), Rigo (2007), Sassen (1999), and Pugliese (2006) have persuasively argued. More broadly, these practices are such that it is impossible to consider colonialism as a heritage that has been transcended, as a historical event that has been overcome in an authentic non-colonial present. Rather, alongside Chambers, it is more accurate to think of Italian “colonialism as a temporal and spatial structure [that] continues to

promote the processes that sustain the present” (2017:10) in a “cruel combination of colonial histories and postcolonial proximities that come to be stitched into the very fabric of the modern metropolis” (5). Thus, it is legitimate to ask *how* and *if* the growing readability, audibility and visibility of postcolonial interrogations across imaginative and scholarly practices could unfold into the spheres of rationality, law and justice.

In his monumental reflection on ethics articulated in both *Totality and Infinity* (1969:212-14), as well as *Otherwise than Being* (1998:156-62), the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas discussed what he called the third party, or *le tiers*. This is the space where the ethical relation of interiority and proximity of the-one-for-the-Other theorised by Lévinas can be leveraged with the goal of opening it to encompass the beings of a larger community. In turn, this community not only provides an ethical alternative to the political rationality of the nation-state, but can also become the location from where institutional formations are put under scrutiny for an ongoing democratic project. In other words, for Lévinas the legitimacy of law and justice can be founded upon and held in balance by the existential demand of the ethical relation and the infinite responsibility for the Other, rather than by the laws and systems of justice sanctioned by the state. This is the reason why Critchley, one of Lévinas' most acute commentators, writes: “Lévinas's thinking does not result in an apoliticism or ethical quietism [...]. Rather, ethics leads back to politics, to the demand for a just polity [...]. Ethics is ethical for the sake of politics, that is, for the sake of a more just society” (1992:25-25). In this sense, then, the third party, or *le tiers* of Lévinas is similar to what Giorgio Agamben (1993) describes as the new forms of sociality of the “coming communities”. Founded on models of non-essential and yet inclusive solidarity, these communities can become agents of change and of a coming politics, as the rise of an ever-growing number of grassroots initiatives, intercultural projects, civil associations and NGOs that put institutional formations under scrutiny, testifies. As such, these communities carry the promise of an ethical human sociality and, with it, a more just and democratic polity capable of fully and finally overcoming the many forms of

Italian colonial heritages in their complex and on-going imbrications with past and present day migrations.

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PINOCCHIO AND THE UNCANNY QUEST FOR SUBALTERN SPACES IN ITALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Sommario

Con il suo occupare uno spazio liminale, ibrido e frammentato, *Pinocchio* sembra rispecchiare l'ansia italiana di fronte ad un potere egemonico, nell'Italia post-unificazione. Da pezzo di legno a 'ragazzo per bene', la ricerca continua di *Pinocchio* per dare un senso alla sua identità e a quella del mondo che lo circonda, può essere paragonata a quella della giovane Italia, una nazione in cerca di una cultura nazionale che possa convalidarne l'esistenza. Il *Pinocchio* di Carlo Collodi (1883) può essere considerato un racconto di ricerca postcoloniale che non solo serve ad educare i bambini ma che rivela anche elementi essenziali di una giovane nazione e risponde al quesito circa che cosa renda una persona italiana. Rivelando lo sconcerto di coloro che occupano spazi ambigui di (dis)unità, e mettendo in evidenza l'importanza di rivisitare racconti per l'infanzia in quanto documenti dal valore storico, è possibile comprendere meglio l'emarginazione e l'impotenza dell'Italia post-unificazione nel corso del viaggio da essa intrapreso per diventare 'autentica' nazione.

Keywords: *Pinocchio*, uncanny, subaltern, children's literature, identity-formation

Existing in a liminal space as a hybrid or fragmented form, the figure of *Pinocchio* can be read as a reflection of Italian anxiety at the hands of hegemonic power in the aftermath of the unification. In *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860-1920*, Suzanne Stewart-

Steinberg suggests that post-unification Italy was “in a state of perpetual infancy” (2007:3), like children battling marginalisation and powerlessness on their journey to nationhood. The comparison of fragmented nations with children seeking a sense of self, should not be seen as derogatory towards ideas of childhood, but rather taken in light of the valid research done over the centuries concerning childhood and adolescence as tumultuous times of self-development (Coats, 2008:78). Likewise, marginalised nations or what Antonio Gramsci refers to as ‘subaltern’ groups, by being likened to infancy, can see such a comparison as offering hope that national emancipation is indeed a possibility. Literature, in particular fairy tales or children’s stories, offers sites for cultural understanding through the realisation and awareness of ideological power struggles that explicitly or implicitly exist within narrative structures (Hunt, 1992). In this way, Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio* (1883) can be seen as a postcolonial quest story that not only serves educative purposes for children, but reveals elements of nation-formation that in turn helped address the troubling question plaguing the Italian people after unification: what makes an Italian? From a log of wood to a ‘ragazzo per bene’ (a real boy), Pinocchio’s search to make sense of himself and the world around him can be paralleled with Italy as a young nation: one that underwent a similar quest for authentication of a national culture amidst various hegemonic forces. I will be utilising a combination of Gramsci’s notion of the ‘subaltern’ (1948) to situate *Pinocchio* within a postcolonial landscape, and scholarly variations of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic concept of the ‘uncanny’ (1919) to reveal how the character of Pinocchio functions as a site of cultural articulation. In conjunction, I will draw on current literary debates surrounding the validity of children’s literature as powerful centres for identity-formation and change as it can be applied to Italian children’s literature. It is my aim to unravel the ‘unhomely homeliness’ inherent in feelings of uncanniness by those occupying ambiguous arenas of unity and marred by a sense of dislocation both geographically and psychically. Adding to the exhaustive critical attention that Collodi’s fairy tale has already received (Perella, 1986; Stewart-Steinberg, 2007), I wish to show the relevance of the psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny within one of the most

celebrated novels in Italian children's literature, and the implications that understanding such a concept might have within a nation's literature. It is thereby possible to highlight the importance of revisiting texts (originally created) for children as important historical documents that shed light on Italian nationhood whilst providing a truthful depiction (albeit allegorical) of social and political contexts within Italian history.

Pinocchio and the Uncanny: An Introduction

The playful and impetuous wooden marionette, Pinocchio, inhabits an ambiguous space within the confines of literary narratives and Italian history. The very words 'marionette' or 'puppet' as a description of Pinocchio, instantaneously signals a warning of an unusual dilemma. Semantically, 'puppet' and 'marionette' are indicative of something inanimate, typically moved by strings or controlled physically by a person. The *English Oxford Dictionary* offers the following definition for the word 'puppet': "A movable model of a person or animal that is typically moved either by strings controlled from above or by a hand inside it" (2018). The character of Pinocchio, however, on the surface is dependent on neither strings nor person and exhibits all the human qualities of a typically rebellious, young boy. Pinocchio is first revealed to us as "a piece of wood" (Collodi, 1995:11) with a mysterious unknown origin: "I cannot say how it came about, but the fact is, that one fine day this piece of wood was lying in the shop" (11). According to David Del Principe (2006), possible translations of Pinocchio's name as 'pine wood' or 'pine nut' reveal Pinocchio's "arboreal" heritage (Del Principe, 2006:34). There is something earthly, immortal and paganistic proposed in his origin, which remains unknown till the end of the novel. This piece of wood, which the carpenter Master Cherry remarks as having "come at the right moment" (Collodi, 1995:11), is laden with primordial insinuations that suggest something older and more powerful than the forces of the town and people Pinocchio will soon meet on his adventures. Herein lies the problem of placing Pinocchio within the rules of categorisation. As a puppet who is not quite puppet, or a boy who is not quite a boy, the figure of Pinocchio can be seen as an

“ambulatory” (Bernstein, 2003:1119) revelation of the Freudian concept of the uncanny in literature. He is the epitome of a contradiction that defies signification as he walks, talks and cartwheels his way from immaturity to a responsible citizen or ‘upstanding boy’. As something beyond the normal signifying process, as something aberrational in terms of beginnings, and as something that points to the unknown concealed beneath the surface, Pinocchio becomes the living embodiment of that ever-elusive concept known as *Das Unheimlich*, ‘unhomely’ or uncanny.

The uncanny, according to Freud’s seminal essay entitled “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919), expresses an ambivalent nature in which opposite meanings come to coincide, as the word *heimlich* (translated as ‘homely’ or ‘canny’) or all that is familiar and known, reveals an additional meaning of that which is “concealed” or “hidden” (Freud, 1997:199-200). Freud reveals, the word *heimlich* “belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (Freud, 1997:199). The meaning of *heimlich* thus leads into the very meaning of its opposite *unheimlich* (uncanny) which comes to represent all that is unfamiliar, hidden and strange. Freud advocates Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as most poignant in unravelling its true meaning, “‘Unheimlich’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light” (Freud, 1997:199). The uncanny, then, contains an inherent ambiguity from an etymological point of view and invokes the feeling of fear or uncertainty by being the unlikely inhabitant of the canny or homely. It is indicative of an estranged unhomeliness that lives within the familiarity of that which is home to us. On studies of the uncanny in fiction, Maria M. Tatar in “The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny” (1981) comes to the following conclusion concerning the idea of home and the elusive concept of the uncanny: “It is precisely in the border area between the familiar and the strange – at the point where *heimlich* and *unheimlich* merge in meaning to suggest the sinister or treacherous – that we must search for the matrix of those effects that are called uncanny” (1981:171). For Tatar, the uncanny comes alive in fiction through haunted homes or eerie

presences invading familiar, home-like spaces: when something unknowable pushes its way into the fabric of what is real and knowable. Whether we agree with psychologist, Ernst Jentsch's (pre-Freud) definition of the uncanny (1906) as "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, 1997:206), or with Freud's interpretation of the uncanny as the return of something repressed (Freud, 1997:217), the uncanny almost always seems to invoke a sense of fear and anxiety at the point where boundaries of what is familiar and unfamiliar blur.

Similarly, Susan Bernstein's approach to the term foregrounds the possibilities the uncanny has within fiction, and proves most useful to my argument, when applied to the puppet figure of Pinocchio. In her article, "It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny" (2003), Bernstein draws on the arguments made by critic Samuel Weber in "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment" (1973) and his essay "Uncanny Thinking" (2000) which admit to the uncanny's ability to be both "an emotive phenomenon" (Weber, 1973:1103) (identified with feelings of fear and anxiety) and containing "'objective' factors" (1103) that may expose its textual structure as something that "demands *reading*" (Bernstein, 2003:1112) rather than focusing on conceptual results alone. For Bernstein and Weber both identity and self-realisation come forth through the reading process, at the moment the uncanny shows itself within a text. Weber concludes that oppositional relationships need to be dislodged, there needs to be a fracturing of subject and object in order to get to the essence of a thing or kernel of meaning (2000:28). The uncanny becomes the means for achieving realisation of essences stuck in patterns of cyclic repetition through its blurring of oppositional boundaries. Weber (1973) supports the idea of the uncanny as a mode of realisation by rejecting Freud's narrow psychoanalytic approach to the uncanny as stemming from the anxiety of physical castration. Instead, Weber calls on a Lacanian tradition that sees the moment of castration as a mental process that shows the 'difference' a child experiences when aware that a lack exists within herself and the other (Weber, 1973:1112). Simply put, for Weber, the problem of castration is a "restructuring of experience"; of desires, perceptions and consciousness that questions difference and leads to an uncanny destabilising of binary oppositions (1973:1113). For Bernstein, the uncanny is not only an indicator of difference but also a

reminder of absence which is consequently thematised in texts as the “experience of dislocation, loss of control, the sense of the origin of the ‘I’ in an other or elsewhere, the experience of self-forgetfulness [...] lapses of consciousness” (Bernstein, 2003:1125). The uncanny thus, according to Bernstein, questions definitions, the defining process and the very possibility of something having a rigid or correct definition. The uncanny becomes something rebellious, revolutionary, and border-breaking as it walks across constraints delineated by society and man through the centuries. It hints at the possibility of transforming the old and familiar into the new and unfamiliar. With no borders to enslave or restrict one’s identity, it is infinitely possible to reconstruct and challenge our places within society, both as individuals and as part of a social community. Enter Pinocchio the puppet.

If we see the moment of destabilisation, afforded by the uncanny, as offering a space for subversion and challenging ‘truth’, then Pinocchio is not only “an expression of the Italian character” (Perella, 1986:2), but he is also a site for the nation’s articulation of identity. How does one articulate a divided or chaotic nation to reach a consensus regarding nationhood? The answer lies in Pinocchio’s physical and psychical aspects, which, through their uncanny nature, allow Pinocchio to become an apt site of articulation for those considered ‘subaltern’. This ‘uncanny subalternity’ within examples of postcolonial literature, unearths inherent dislocations and penetrating anxieties of physical and mental spaces that are both familiar and unfamiliar to the Italian people. The psychoanalytic concept of the uncanny as a ‘subaltern space’ within a postcolonial landscape, is able to assist in restructuring cultural pasts and identities by offering a space where meanings and the idea of self may be confronted. I will attempt to illustrate this further through an analysis of Pinocchio’s character and reference to the English translation of the text. Before analysing Pinocchio’s uncanny subalternity, I will first examine Collodi’s use of the fairy tale narrative within a European use of the genre, and then explain how his variation of said genre complemented Italian unification. Secondly, I will situate children’s literature as complementary to postcolonial literature, and in doing so I hope to reveal *Pinocchio*’s ‘uncanny subalternity’ as a

literary text and national emblem. The uncanny is gaining attention within what is currently being referred to as children's Gothic (Jackson, 2017)¹, a subgenre of children's literature and a contemporary hybrid mix of many genres including Gothic, fairy tale, myth and fantasy genres. The possibilities children's Gothic literature hold for nations in distress and for fragmented societies, remains to be fully explored. Lindsay Myers has already identified Italian fantasy novels for children as a "key field of cultural production that formulates a culture's identity for the following generations" (2012:190), leaving the debate open for discussions on how children's Gothic texts (likewise) may offer interventions on socio-political issues past and present. For now, however, it is my hope that in exposing an 'uncanny subalternity' within Collodi's *Pinocchio*, I shall add to the plethora of debates surrounding *Pinocchio*'s ability to transgress national and international readerships, the almost immortal capacity it has as one of the most beloved and successful children's stories to date, and the ways in which it (re)negotiates Italian national anxiety.

On Collodi and the Use of Fairy Tale Narratives

First appearing, as a serial publication between 1881 and 1883, in an Italian periodical for children, *Giornale per i bambini*, Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio: Storia di un burattino* managed to traverse the story's original didactic intention, meant solely to instruct children on the 'Italian character'. Appealing to both adults and children, the popular fairy tale slowly became a part of Italian culture and an encouraging call "to all Italians to better themselves and, thereby, their 'nation'" (Perella, 1986:9), proving that the text appealed to a double audience. In *La coltura italiana* (1923), Giuseppe Prezzolini succinctly summarised *Pinocchio*'s effect on understanding Italian nationality as "whoever understands the beauty of *Pinocchio*, understands Italy" (Perella, 2005:2), giving the text an almost mythical quality within Italian literature. Fairy tale narratives

¹ This essay follows its references as far as capitalisation goes, with non-capitalised genres and capitalised styles.

had been no stranger to the process of socialisation and nation-building at the time of Prezzolini's remark. Fairy tales, as extensions of oral tales, myth, wonder tales and folk tales were first adapted to text, as a literary genre, on the European continent. Although French writers such as Charles Perrault and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy of the 1690s were seen as chiefly responsible for establishing the literary genre, it was actually in Italy that the transition had begun (Zipes, 2012). According to Jack Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Italian sixteenth century writers Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile introduced oral tales into short narratives which were later translated and rewritten into French and German (Zipes, 2012:12). Straparola's collection of fairy tales, *Le piacevoli notti* (1550/1553), displayed irreverence towards authority and delicately utilised a narrative frame to reveal the political tensions rife in Italy during his time. Adding magic, supernatural elements and unpredictability of events, Straparola used active male protagonists who went on quests and ultimately exposed harmonious 'happily ever afters' which were impossible without a change in Italian society (2012:14). Basile, likewise, used the fairy tale genre to comment on social inequality, family conflicts and social customs from a Neapolitan point of view (2012:16). His use of language and a carnivalesque atmosphere is very similar to the approach that would later be taken by Collodi in his writing. In a cheeky yet juvenile invocation of the carnival spirit of *commedia dell'arte* theatrics, Collodi will later, in the same manner as his Italian predecessors, invoke the use of the familiarity of the Italian Harlequin figure, through the acrobatic, wilful puppet, Pinocchio, with his agility and penchant for getting into trouble, to combat an unfamiliar characteristic in post-unification Italian consciousness.

The literary fairy tale genre continued to gain popularity thanks to (but surely not solely based on) Basile and Straparola, and was later adopted by French writers, allowing them to join in the European civilising process of the time, where they could express educative or subversive thoughts through a subtle medium. Zipes (2012) interprets the fairy tales of Italian and French writers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as foregrounding important questions: "What virtues are necessary for members of the ruling class to bring about an

ideal kingdom? What type of behaviour must a young man or woman exhibit to rise in society or reform society so that there is just rule?" (Zipes, 2012:22-23).

From the scholarship on Collodi it is possible to deduce that, as a disillusioned republican clinging to *Risorgimento* ideals, he wished to answer similar questions as those put forth by Zipes. In answering such questions within his own time, he was able to inform Italian children on possible ways to survive the post-unification environment of Italy through the utilisation of a narrative structure. His answer comprised an idea of Italian-ness that encompassed all Italians across the divisions of class, gender and race. Following political unity in the nineteenth century, Italy was in need of building a culture that was inclusive of all. Yet, forming this unity proved challenging when, after unification, approximately seventy-five percent of the population were illiterate, and most Italians could not speak the national language (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007:2). It was an ensuing anxiety, initiated by the unification's disruption of what was known and familiar that began the project of 'making Italians'. Stewart Steinberg (2007:2) contends that Italians were forced in their state of infancy to navigate ideas of what it meant to become a 'postliberal subject', how to successfully invent a national tradition and how to restructure predominantly masculine, paternal discourses within Italy. It is within this 'ego of anxiety' that the figure of Pinocchio somersaulted his way into Italian lives as "puppet-people-Italy" who "matured through grief and misfortune, represents one of the truest searches into the national identity" (Perella, 1986:3). The simplicity of the fairy tale narrative within the children's literature canon, with its allusions/illusions to 'safety', helped the text to become an unlikely canvas onto which Italians started to form their very 'Italian-ness'. But they were in truth responding to something more troubling under the surface of this simplicity.

It is known that Collodi had spent time as a soldier during the first and second Wars of Independence, and he also actively voiced his opinions as a journalist, reinforcing his cause for national independence (Cro, 1993:87). By relying on a familiar fairy tale narrative, that had already proven reliable in transposing writer's social, political and moral beliefs, Collodi was able to tell a story

about “his Italy, its virtues and its flaws, its landscapes, festivals, poverty, people and puppets, its laws and legends” (Bacon, 1970:73-74). Yet, he also makes use of and deconstructs the traditional hero paradigm found in adventure and hero-quest stories for children. Pinocchio, like most male protagonists in typical hero narratives, will undergo a familiar, adolescent rite of passage or ‘night-sea journey’ (Stephens & McCallum, 1998:105) in the belly of the dog-fish sea monster that will prove to be the necessary transformation to set the reckless puppet onto the right path. It is through this skilful variation of traditional children’s stories that Collodi was able to create what Stewart-Steinberg refers to as *Pinocchio*’s “hyperinterpretability” (2007:22), which permits varied interpretations, and consequently succeeds in being read as a cultural document that chronicles Italian national identity.

Postcolonial and Children’s Literature: Literature of the Marginalised

Children’s literature, which encompasses fairy tales and hero quest stories, thus develops from a tiny voice (like the wise Talking Cricket in *Pinocchio*, who is often ignored by the wooden protagonist) capable of skilfully outwitting dominant forces by exposing the power struggles of a Western, patriarchal society that render both child and citizen equally powerless. Historically, Italy, preoccupied with independence as a unified state, was characterised by a sense of anxiety stemming from the disintegration of national/international, Northern/Southern regions, traditional/modern and a search for a national language to match a national identity (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007). The hybrid or ‘subaltern’ form of *Pinocchio* (which I will later reveal in my analysis of textual examples) easily translates the Italian need for a consummation of oppressive opposites into something resembling cohesiveness and harmony through its uncanny shattering of signification. In a rethinking of Gramsci’s use of the term ‘subaltern’, Marcus E. Green (2011) highlights the misconception in Subaltern Studies that the term “subaltern social groups” (387) was created by Gramsci to evade prison censors, or as a euphemism for ‘proletariat’. He attributes the persistent and often exaggerated claims

by scholars using the term, to a circulating of incorrect information within scholarship that relies on references to incomplete readings of English translations of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. He insists that the term 'subaltern' has become restricted to issues of class alone, thus losing its radical or liberating element implied by Gramsci that 'the subaltern' is a representation of marginalised groups in Italy that include the common people, slaves, women, differences of race and religion, etc. (Green, 2011:2). By focusing on the 'subaltern' as including *all* those subordinated by hegemonic practices and denied meaningful roles within society (children, citizens of the state and those considered by society as 'other'), it is possible to view Collodi's *Pinocchio* as an allegory for Italy's pursuit of unity and a disavowal of subordinated subaltern spaces. This is possible through the presence of the 'uncanny'. The uncanny is not found in all children's literature, and Freud has been insistent that the uncanny cannot be evoked within fairy tales due to the fact that a magical, strange world is already adopted from the very beginning of a fairy tale (Rudd, 2013:108). Nor is the uncanny found in all postcolonial literature; however, when it does push through a text and reveal itself (as Weber & Bernstein declare), it can present troubling or disturbing aspects of reality in a recognisable literary form, which we can thus process, reflect upon and challenge if need be. This is where *Pinocchio*'s continual appeal lies: in his uncanny subalternity.

In what manner can a fairy tale quest of a wooden puppet, who seeks to become a 'ragazzo per bene' ('real or upstanding boy'), exhibit the uncanny apertures of 'unhomely homeliness' of subaltern Italy? The answer is situated in the character of *Pinocchio* and his interactions with his environment and its various inhabitants. The uncanny complexity of not feeling at home in the universe, within a nation, or in one's own skin, is a familiar predicament of otherness that can be likened to feelings associated with Gramsci's 'subaltern groups' in society. Christopher Larkosh-Lenotti (2006), discussing the integrative possibilities of the notion of the subaltern, says that Gramsci's work "facilitates the drawing of numerous connections between class inequality and social immobility, but also racial, ethnic, geographic, linguistic factors, as well as questions of gender and sexuality that, by now, have become virtually inseparable from issues

pertaining to Italian and global meridionalitas" (2006:312-313). It is evident in the very character of Pinocchio, who as a walking, talking puppet not only epitomises the subaltern uncanniness of occupying ambiguous spaces or identities, but challenges notions of collective and individual freedom through his transgression and denial of animate or inanimate categories. His birth parodies the Gothic and Romantic traditions in literature of giving life to abominations as he rises similar to Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* (1818) and exhibits dual sides of good and bad like Robert Louis Stevenson's characters, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, in his 1886 novel (Del Principe, 2006:32). Carved in Geppetto's (the second carpenter we meet in the text) workshop he continues as a womb-less creation, one that proves immortal through repeated surpassing of deathly encounters throughout the text. David Del Principe (2006) through a disturbing Gothic linking to Frankenstein's monster, presents Pinocchio's figure as "mirroring Italy's emergence from tyranny as an orphan state and the problematics of its (truant) pursuit of true revolution and independence" (2006:35). Similarly, from a postcolonial point of view, *Pinocchio* (1883) can be seen as an important historical document that reflects an infant state's fractured birth and development through disorder and domination. The Gothic inflections, interpreted by Del Principe, allow us to discover the pedagogical uses *Pinocchio* serves in the modern day as a way to "explore social problems facing the post-unitary Italian government – poverty, a lack of natural resources, literacy, and regionalism – as an historical frame to discuss these issues in contemporary Italy and the continuing political and economic divide between the North and the South" (Del Principe, 2006:31).

In contemporary debates concerning the usefulness of Gothic elements in children's literature, Karen Coats, in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008), argues that the 'sanitisations' that have occurred within the fairy tale genre over the centuries render them less effective. She argues that faced with keeping material appropriate for children, free from horror and vice, fairy tales have lost the transformative capacity their original sources once maintained. In "The Novel and the Fairy Tale", John Buchan, insists the origin of the fairy tale "sprang from a society where life

was hard, when a man was never quite certain of his next meal, when he never knew when he arose in the morning whether he would be alive in the evening” (1970:220). Seen in this light, Coats’s argument – that placing value on the surface of texts have led to what she terms less “psychically effective” stories being produced (2008:79) – cannot be easily counter-argued. Dismissing literary qualities that may beneficially shock, scare or induce anxiety within child readers prevents them from achieving the human connection and hope that humankind has used to overcome adversity and the changes society has undergone. Coats advocates for children’s Gothic literature as a suitable mode, one that can be seen as complementing Buchan’s ‘fairy tale’, capable of expressing abstract psychic processes which children may find themselves struggling to give concrete expression to. She advocates a return to the elements that were once intrinsic to original fairy tales or folk tales. The uncanny is one such technique, evident in many contemporary texts that fall under the sub-genre of children’s Gothic, that is permitting this return to what can be called “an eternal impulse in human nature” (Buchan, 1970:220) to transform human lives and their worlds. The uncanny functions ‘reparatively’ by mentally allowing readers to make sense of individual and collective identities through the protagonists encounter with ambivalent characters, situations or emotional states that are in keeping with the beneficial aspects of the uncanny as already outlined in this article. Interestingly, Carlo Collodi was already creating a way to express psychical conflict within Italian history in the nineteenth century through his use of an uncanny puppet.

Collodi’s fairy tale can be viewed as slipping from under the supposed ‘naïve’ façade of children’s literature, often accused of dealing with ‘childish’ things, to highlight previously marginalised literature and its capacity to engender cultural emancipation. The importance of forms of children’s literature in contributing to current critical interrogations of texts and genres is highlighted by Peter Hunt (1992), who draws a parallel between postcolonial and children’s literature emphasising the negative views both forms of literature have had to endure, “As a body of texts, as well as a body of criticism, it does not fit into the dominant system’s hierarchies or classifications, and consequently, like colonial or feminist literatures,

it has presented an irritant to established thinking” (Hunt, 1992:2). Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg (2007), by interpreting post-unification Italy as “in a state of perpetual infancy” (as previously mentioned) symbolically joins child and postcolonial through the powerful image of a sprightly wooden puppet who rebels against the hegemonic forces that persistently try to render him mute and immobile. Stewart-Steinberg adds that Pinocchio is “one site in and through which questions of the Italian subject came to be worked out in the late nineteenth-century Italy, to the extent that he embodies broader social and cultural conflicts centred on the problem of the postliberal subject’s increasingly contested autonomy in the face of forces beyond his control” (2007:24). What then, is the link between Italian nations or subjects to Pinocchio? What allows him to be a conduit of conflict? It is his uncanniness that permits an exposing of the subaltern condition, that simultaneously provokes a response of sentimentality, adoration and camaraderie.

The use of the puppet figure as a motif for the ways in which political states influence and dominate within their respective countries is hardly new. Jeffrey Dirk Wilson (2016) compares Collodi’s *Pinocchio* with Plato’s *Laws* to underlie the effects of political crisis on citizens. Interestingly, Wilson centres his argument around Plato’s “Athenian Stranger” (284) who asserts that the law (represented by the golden cord of ‘logos’) and other non-golden cords are necessary if the puppet/marionette is to work efficiently. Plato uses the allegory of a puppet figure to highlight the conflicting forces within citizens of a distressed state and reinforces balance in achieving a successful resolution. Wilson goes on to stress that Collodi’s text is concerned with the very same problem, “This piece of animated matter is the first premise of the new nation, because the challenge before Italy after 1861 was not whether they could make kings – there were more than enough of them about – but whether they could make citizens – of which there were all too few. Could the human-like denizens of the new Italy become fully human as citizens?” (Wilson, 2016:294). Pinocchio’s figure as puppet is not coincidental, but integral in the restructuring of a fragmented nation that Italian adults and children alike were forced to come to terms with. In “National Consciousness in Italian Literature” (1973), Joseph

Rossi attributes the hostility of the Italian people towards unification to selfish economic interests and a refusal to relinquish “the ideal of a larger unity, the unity of the entire Western World embodied in the myth of the Roman empire” (Rossi, 1973:160). The Italian re-education that prompted the acceptance of unification was achieved by many factors, according to Rossi, with literature playing an important role: “Literature created the image of a united Italy and preserved it for centuries like a dormant seed” (166). Is it any wonder, then, that Pinocchio’s arrival shattered the notion of a ‘unified image’ by exposing the inherent fractures that exist within a person and their country? As an uncanny puppet, Pinocchio disturbs readers, as a constantly evolving being he calls attention to previously held assumptions of the Italian people, asking them to evolve with the times (like himself), and achieve both personal and national liberation as a result.

In *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011), Kenneth Gross identifies the inherent madness and ecstasy that the uncanny figure of a puppet can evoke as it disturbs the viewer. From their disproportionate bodies to their mechanical movements, there exists in their composition something jarring, a craziness that borders on the delirious. Gross attributes the potential uncanny feelings linked with puppets, to the fact that their “spirit” or “soul”, their ability to be animate, are linked to a puppeteer (often unseen and mysterious) who permits this transfiguration of energy from self to puppet (2011:1-2). Pinocchio can be seen as a stringless puppet who spends his journey subjected to whim and fancy (his constant desire for fun and play throughout the text that keeps him from going to school and subsequently lands him in the Land of Toys (1995:177) where all wishes are supposedly gratified), to persuasions of others or naïve propaganda (the Cat and the Fox who misleadingly convince him burying his gold coins can sprout hundreds more); he is constantly fighting against the unseen hand of the puppeteer (economic, historical and social forces). However, unlike a typical puppet, Pinocchio’s lack of strings gives him the choice of freedom. Not truly a puppet or a boy, Pinocchio has the option of blending both to create a unique identity, and herein lies the Italian’s dream of maintaining autonomy yet existing under new control as a unified nation. Within

an uncanny space, ambiguities offer models or opportunities to subaltern readers who in turn may interrogate their place as subaltern figures. Pinocchio's appeal to the Italian people and his reproducibility as a cultural icon, is his ability to navigate hegemonic forces as a result of his uncanny ambiguity. Instead of accepting fragmentation and dislocation, he challenges the forces that would keep him as a powerless subaltern. He becomes a force to be reckoned with, which, as a result, has allowed nations (Italian and non-Italian alike) to latch onto his empowering frame as they in turn use it to interrogate their own place in the world. The following close-reading of *Pinocchio* will attempt to reconcile the above ideas with Collodi's text in an effort to offer a new interpretation to the substantial body of *Pinocchio* criticism.

An Analysis of *Pinocchio*

From the very first chapter of *Pinocchio*, the reader is made aware of uncanny incongruities within the text. An eerie presence invades the cosy, seemingly homely workshop of the carpenter, Master Cherry. The uncanniness unravels from what appears to be a haunted piece of wood that enters a familiar space of a common Italian citizen. The juxtaposition of wood as a material associated with nature, warmth-giving and building safe spaces against an unknown, unfamiliar, supernatural being, instantly breaks the illusion of home as a safe, familiar space. From the beginning, then, Pinocchio, as an uncanny harbinger and invading presence, alerts us to the false notions of safety and security a place like home can offer. The uncanniness is further accentuated when the character Geppetto rushes into Master Cherry's workshop announcing his sudden need for a piece of wood and his dreams of creating a puppet like no other: "I thought I would make a beautiful wooden puppet; but a wonderful puppet that should know how to dance, to fence, and to leap like an acrobat. With this puppet I would travel about the world to earn a piece of bread and a glass of wine", Geppetto exclaims (Collodi, 1995:16). In recalling Bernstein's emphasis on the dynamic quality of the uncanny and her statement that it "is not itself uncanny until it has violated its own nature by stepping forth into actuality, into the ontic" (Bernstein,

2003:1118), it is thus evident how the uncanny overthrows the laws of order within this seemingly normal society. Meaning slips from the surface of Geppetto's spoken words into our knowledge that there is already a mysterious piece of wood containing some sort of magical spirit within it, possibly capable of making his ideas of a 'grand puppet' into something more concrete. The laws of rationality and possibility are thus muddled as we sense something greater in the universe of the tale, about to work its way into the ordinary reality of two common citizens. Geppetto also ominously foretells his own future, further defying the laws of rational order, as he will travel the world indeed, in search of his runaway puppet, and will find himself trapped in the belly of a sea monster with a piece of bread and a glass of wine to keep him company. The ironic and repetitive structure within the narrative suggests Freud's aspect of the uncanny as something inescapable, an "inner 'compulsion to repeat'" (Freud, 1997:215) that stems from our unconscious. It is itself primitive and instinctual in all men, and a wish to return to a state of 'unorigin'. It will be a darker version of Geppetto's proclaimed hopes that materialises in the future, and the uncanny seizes itself at this point of something inescapable, to release the fugitive, Pinocchio. Pinocchio's form is one that cannot escape being unmade, and this is visible in his many transformations that he undergoes in the text, but mostly in his defiance of death. The anxiety of a beginning, of an identity or place in the world, can be likened to the constant reminder of a lack or absence within the subaltern. All that is left is the possibility of transformation. Like Pinocchio, the subaltern cannot escape her place in society and must constantly transform to adapt to the world. Gramsci adds that "Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves" (Gramsci, 1999:207). Thus, Pinocchio, as an uncanny figure can be seen as representing the subaltern condition in his unwillingness to be subordinated or follow the natural rules allotted to him by nature. His rebelliousness is his defence against anxiety, an anxiety attached to a 'homelessness' or

displacement that can only be overcome once he attains self-realisation.

In his puppet form, Pinocchio's uncanny subalternity reveals itself in his identification with being a boy. He is, in fact, a wooden copy of a 'real boy', who acquires human needs only after Geppetto painstakingly carves him into one. His overwhelming hunger and fear of thunder appear only once he has assumed his boyish façade. His childish tantrums even go so far as to cause him to commit murder: he kills the Talking Cricket by throwing a hammer at him in a fit of rage. Despite his wooden exterior, he evidently starts to display human and childlike qualities. But these human qualities fluctuate constantly between a sense of good and bad, creating a tension that reflects the Italian hesitation towards being good, welcoming citizens of a unified Italy, or fighting the dominant system that keeps them subordinated. In the incident where he kills the Talking Cricket, Pinocchio is aware of his underlying penchant for rage and warns the Talking Cricket:

“Take care, you wicked ill-omened croaker! Woe to you if I fly into a passion!...”

“Poor Pinocchio! I really pity you!...”

“Why do you pity me?”

“Because you are a puppet and, what is worse, because you have a wooden head.”

At these last words Pinocchio jumped up in a rage, and snatching a wooden hammer from the bench he threw it at the Talking Cricket. (Collodi, 1995:27)

Pinocchio is aware of his antagonism towards being told what to do and to being demeaned through words or actions. The Talking Cricket underestimates Pinocchio, assuming he does not have it in him to act upon his threats. He treats him like a child who needs adult supervision and reprimanding. Whilst it is true that Pinocchio may require these things, he will learn only through his own self-reflection and experience. His is not just a “wooden head”, there is more to this puppet, and he proves that he is calculating and somewhat witty, by using wood (a word used to insult his intelligence) to kill the Talking Cricket in a final ‘look what this wood can do’ gesture. This sense of

dark rebellion is surely desirous in the subaltern who wishes to overthrow dominant hegemonic forces that force one to play the role of powerless puppet, and Pinocchio is a testimony that action may be required when tensions are insurmountable.

Pinocchio, as a wooden boy, is also at odds with himself as a double of a man yet helplessly divided by his non-human status as a puppet. A characteristic theme of the uncanny, that Freud discusses in his essay, is the 'double': "the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own [...] there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (Freud, 1997:210). The double in literature, in its positive form, is seen as an insurance against death, as preserving the soul against extinction. The double form also provides the self with an object it can observe, criticise and thus self-reflect upon. Pinocchio as a 'double figure' – a wooden puppet and human boy – is able to express, on a general level, humanity's plight to survive life, and on a more specific one, the Italian subaltern struggle to make sense of their post-unification Italian-ness. This is achieved through his non-destructible, wooden boy exterior, thus preserving the characteristic features of the Italian people indelibly.

Andrew Barnaby, in "After the Event': Freud's Uncanny and the Anxiety of Origins" (2015), identifies the uncanny as related to an anxiety of origins, more in line with a type of existential anxiety stemming from uncertainty (2015:983). When transposed onto the subaltern form of Pinocchio, the uncertainty of identity becomes troublesome and even frightening. In a scene that can be read as similarly disturbing, Pinocchio falls asleep with his legs on a brazier, "And then he fell asleep; and whilst he slept his feet, which were wooden, took fire, and little by little they burnt away and became cinders" (Collodi, 1995:33). This is one of the first signs that Pinocchio has no instincts of his origins, of himself as a wooden puppet that could easily be susceptible to being set alight, as he "continued to sleep and to snore as if his feet belonged to some one else" (Collodi, 1995:33). Both these examples exemplify the subaltern's plight within a fragmented nation and insinuates that until the subaltern is 'awake' or aware of themselves as active, self-actualised citizens of a society, that they will continue to 'snore' and

'sleep', losing parts of themselves to threatening outside forces in the process. The Italian people are thus challenged, through Pinocchio's ignorance, to assert their identity or perish into dust.

Pinocchio also displays incompatible dualities present within his character throughout the novel. It is in the refusal to fit neat categories of definition, in the destabilisation of binary opposites that the uncanny starts to empower one's identity. The instability that is produced from undermined binaries can be seen in the novel when Geppetto returns home (from jail) and demands that Pinocchio open the door, and the puppet finds that he cannot:

"Open the door!" shouted Geppetto from the street.

"Dear papa, I cannot," answered the puppet, crying and rolling about on the ground.

"Why cannot you?"

"Because my feet have been eaten."

"And who has eaten your feet?"

"The cat," said Pinocchio, seeing the cat, who was amusing herself by making some shavings dance with her forepaws. (Collodi, 1995:35-36)

Pinocchio, legless, falls onto the floor and continues to roll about helpless. It is a dislocation of self, represented by the loss of limbs that prompts what Weber refers to as the uncanny's "articulation of difference, which is equally a dis-articulation, dis-locating and even dis-membering" of the subject (Weber, 1973:1114). Divisions are shattered and no longer hold the subject in place, signifier and signified become disrupted and poor Pinocchio finds himself impeded from moving forward as he crawls on the floor in a zombie-like state. Italy, after unification, would not have been oblivious to the plight of a legless Pinocchio as a sense of "backwardness" (Stewart-Steinberg, 2007:5) was evident in the growing need of Italians to adapt to a 'New Italy' with new ideas, new ways of living and ascertaining meaning under new power. Pinocchio's uncanniness is felt in his cohabitation of opposites that has led him to lose his foundation and topple over into powerlessness. It is his unruly and mischievous side that has led him to run away from Geppetto (Collodi, 1995:22), yet it

is his innocent ignorance and unrealised need for the order of parental rule (or home) that allows him to fall asleep hungry, without thinking about the hazards of the brazier. As a site of conflict, Pinocchio has not yet learned how to overcome his fragmentary halves. In fact, he cannot even take responsibility for his burnt legs and admit his carelessness, as he blames the cat. He later goes on to lament “poor me” (1995:36) and feel very sorry for himself, completely oblivious or unwilling to admit his accountability. When Geppetto offers Pinocchio whatever little he has to eat, the puppet proves insolent and demanding (contrary to the humility he should feel at having, only moments earlier, lost his very foundation):

“These three pears were intended for my breakfast; but I will give them to you willingly. Eat them, and I hope they will do you good.”

“If you wish me to eat them, be kind enough to peel them for me.”

“Peel them?” said Geppetto, astonished. “I should never have thought, my boy, that you were so dainty and fastidious. That is bad! In this world we should accustom ourselves from childhood to like and to eat everything, for there is no saying to what we may be brought. There are so many chances!...”

“You are no doubt right,” interrupted Pinocchio, “but I will never eat fruit that has not been peeled. I cannot bear rind.” (Collodi, 1995:37-38)

Pinocchio's refusal to eat what he has been offered despite his ravenous hunger is a sign of his inability to match his desires to the reality of the world. Firstly, he is a puppet and therefore should not be able to feel (let alone feel hungry) and this is incongruous to his wooden toy-like exterior. His internal and external environments do not match each other, and he struggles to find a connection between the two. The instability of internal and external environments pervades the text and thus becomes a pertinent allegory for the uncanny subaltern fractures that may exist within dominant systems.

Lastly, we will look at Pinocchio's interaction with the Blue Fairy, who also serves as a conduit of the uncanny within the text; and who emphasises Pinocchio's perilous subaltern position within society. The Blue Fairy in her many guises represents the uncontrollable forces within Italian life. She can be read as a glimpse of religion or providence that offers control in Pinocchio's world, or as a futile feminine influence of domestication typical to fairy stories that follow patterns of female suppression (see Zipes, 2012:48-51). Either way, she is only able to exert an influence if Pinocchio is willing to accept it, therefore teaching the lesson that to defy one's subaltern state one needs to battle against their own incongruities. Alternatively, the Blue Fairy can be seen as a powerful combination of death, fate and luck that assists the protagonist towards self-realisation: a force that can materialise to help or annihilate the everyday man or woman. Giorgio Bacci (2017) calls attention to the themes of 'darkness' and 'shadow' that run through Collodi's novel and the representation of the Blue Fairy's house (as first encountered by Pinocchio) as the depiction of a "troubled world" (Bacci, 2017:194). He quotes Giorgio Manganelli's (2002) unsettling vision of the home as "The snow-white little house, then, is the repository of death [...]. Its familiarity is an illusion, its hospitality deceptive." (Bacci, 2017:193-194). The Blue Fairy is first introduced to us when Pinocchio is at his most desperate, "the puppet's courage failed him, and he was on the point of throwing himself on the ground and giving himself over for lost" (Collodi, 1995:77). She comes to signal impending doom and destruction that awaits the passivity of the puppet when he allows outside forces to control him or lead him astray. The first description we have of her is reminiscent of something ghostly or vampiric, "She had blue hair and a face as white as a waxen image; her eyes were closed and her hands were crossed on her breast. Without moving her lips in the least, she said in a voice that seemed to come from the other world: 'In this house there is no one. They are all dead'" (Collodi, 1995:78). Her refusal to help Pinocchio in his time of need echoes the helplessness of the subaltern who mistakenly believes power to be outside himself. However, anxiety and powerlessness can engender a moment of re-birth. After what seems like the puppet's death – "His breath failed him and he could say no more. He shut his eyes, opened his mouth,

stretched his legs, gave a long shudder, and hung stiff and insensible” (Collodi, 1995:80) – the Blue Fairy, upon seeing his hanged body swinging violently from the Great Oak tree, is moved to compassion. She quickly has him rescued and tends to him within the confines of her home, which was previously a forbidden space to Pinocchio. The puppet’s enduring identity is realised as he accepts and proves able to manoeuvre the forces of death, fate and luck to his advantage. His wooden body, as a defiance of most forms of death, continuously saves him from expiration. Later in the novel, he changes his fate across species, from wood to human flesh, as he learns to possess the true qualities of a human boy, and he actively transforms his misfortunes by overcoming poverty through hard work and dedication (Collodi, 1995:219). Whilst the Blue Fairy does help influence all three of the above triumphs, it is through free will and his own understanding (concealed familiar things we possess deep within ourselves) that Pinocchio overcomes his struggles. He proves to be the master of his own fate. That which is concealed or hidden (uncanny) reveals itself to become a bridge between Italian consciousness and freedom. It is not an instant freedom or one that can be relied upon however, for at the end of the story, Pinocchio, in his boy form, is aware of his wooden puppet form seated disconcertingly in the corner of his room. His puppet shell becomes what Carl Jung would refer to as human-Pinocchio’s ‘shadow’, that darker aspect of our personality that houses all that is unacceptable, considered wrong or evil, and at odds with what civilization deems correct (Le Guin, 1975:140). It is also the aspect that is responsible for creativity, spontaneity and a true understanding of our identity as a whole. Like a Jungian ‘shadow’, Pinocchio’s other half will continue to watch him, an uncanny reminder that the subaltern self must constantly work at achieving and establishing identity if it wishes to be liberated.

An Afterthought on *Pinocchio*

The complexity of a culture or people suspended between states, brought to life through an uncanny literary character for children, indicates the importance national examples of children’s literature

offer in commenting honestly on social issues within historical contexts. As we follow Pinocchio's infantile quests to satiate his overwhelming needs and desires against outside forces, we cannot ignore an underlying message, that to break free from our own egocentrism, we must find victory against dominating influences. In realising our individual and collective identities within a group or nation, mirrored or interrogated by the literature we surround ourselves with, there is a chance to restructure physical and psychological alienated or conflictual spaces. It is, after all, only through the shedding of the subaltern's hard wood of hegemony that real emancipation becomes truly possible, and identity can be (re)formed.

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SILIVA ZULU (1927) E L'ESIBIZIONE COLONIALE DELL'ALTERITÀ

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Abstract

The Italian film Siliva Zulu (1927) was, at the time of its release, praised as a 'true document' of the Zulu people's everyday life, with an ethnographic value. In this article, I will show how the film, instead of creating new knowledge or reflecting a true/factual representation of the Zulu people, at once reproduces and helps to construct the European stereotypes largely used, at the time, to approach or define African populations. Not as unique as claimed, Siliva Zulu shares some features similar to contemporary British movies and can be considered to be produced in the legacy of the tradition of the 'human zoos'.

Keywords: Siliva Zulu, rappresentazione dell'altro colonizzato, esposizioni etnografiche

Nell'aprile del 1927 una spedizione guidata dal regista Attilio Gatti¹ (1896-1969) partì da Trieste sulla nave *Perla* diretta a Durban, in Sudafrica, con scalo a Mombasa. Ad accompagnare il regista c'erano il professore di antropologia Lidio Cipriani² (1892-1962), l'operatore

¹ Originario di Voghera, Attilio Gatti fu volontario della prima Guerra Mondiale dove conquistò il grado di comandante. Affascinato dall'Africa, da lui vista come terra magica e di conquista, compì diverse spedizioni in vari Paesi del continente la prima delle quali, nel 1924, fu seguita da ben dodici successive. Nel 1930 si trasferì negli Stati Uniti. Fu anche autore prolifico, che vanta al suo attivo la pubblicazione di diversi volumi di racconti di viaggio.

² Lidio Cipriani insegnò antropologia all'università di Firenze dal 1926 e fu direttore del Museo Nazionale di Antropologia ed Etnologia di Firenze dal 1937 al 1940. Quello del '27 era il suo primo viaggio in Africa, cui ne seguirono altri due: quello compiuto tra il 1928 e 1930 fermandosi in particolare nell'attuale Zambia, e un secondo ancora nell'Africa

di camera Giuseppe Paolo Vitrotti³ (1890-1974), il suo assistente Carlo Franzeri e un gruppo di attori e attrici. Lo scopo della spedizione era la produzione di un film in terra sudafricana strutturato su una trama tipicamente colonialista: “la fuga di una donna bianca dai selvaggi” (Davis, 2013:26, *trad. mia*). Le autorità locali, però, bloccarono presto le riprese perché secondo le leggi dell'epoca non era consentito filmare bianchi e neri insieme (Davis, 2013). Affinché la spedizione non risultasse un fallimento, Gatti decise di rinunciare agli attori bianchi e scrisse il copione di quello che sarebbe poi diventato *Siliva Zulu* (1927), uno degli ultimi film dell'epoca del muto, incentrato su una storia d'amore tra due giovani zulu ostacolata dal rivale del protagonista. Si trattava evidentemente di una trama che richiedeva solo attori neri e che dunque non avrebbe infranto alcuna legge. Il prodotto finale è così un film che attira molta attenzione e si distingue proprio per essere il primo prodotto cinematografico italiano, e tra i primi nel mondo, ad annoverare un cast completamente formato da attori neri.

Questa caratteristica, che determina la mancanza di un confronto diretto con l'uomo bianco, unitamente a un intreccio che si concentra su aspetti di vita quotidiana piuttosto che su motivi più tipicamente coloniali, ha fatto addirittura parlare qualcuno, anche recentemente, di *Siliva Zulu* come di una “narrativa che diede voce agli Zulu” (Di Carmine, 2011:81, *trad. mia*). Secondo Di Carmine, “lasciando fuori l'immagine dell'uomo bianco, il film manca di stereotipi costruiti intorno alla dicotomia del bianco e nero, dando al pubblico l'esperienza di immagini che sono ciò che rappresentano, la vita degli zulu” (Di Carmine, 2011:82, *trad. mia*). In questo articolo intendo, al

meridionale nel 1930, che confluirono in un libro del 1932, *In Africa dal Capo al Cairo*. Nei suoi numerosi viaggi, compreso quelli del 1927 durante la spedizione di Gatti, Cipriani raccolse molto materiale etnografico, tra cui fotografie e calchi di gesso dei volti degli abitanti dei luoghi visitati.

³ Torinese di nascita, Vitrotti, appassionato di fotografia, a 18 anni iniziò a lavorare per la casa cinematografica Ambrosio Film. Tra il 1922 e il 1925 fu in forze presso l'Unione Cinematografica Italiana a Roma, quando la crisi dell'industria cinematografica portò Vitrotti a ritornare alla fotografia. Nel 1927 partecipò con la moglie alla spedizione di Gatti in Sudafrica da cui nacque il film *Siliva Zulu*. Al suo ritorno, il 25 marzo 1928 il quotidiano torinese *La Stampa* dedicava a lui e sua moglie un articolo di tre colonne dal titolo: “Due coniugi torinesi tra gli zulu. I selvaggi tramutati in attori cinematografici” (Leva, 25 marzo 1928).

contrario, dimostrare non solo “l’innegabile pregiudizio con cui lo sguardo italiano si rivolge paternalisticamente a un *popolo selvaggio e primitivo*” (Coletti, 2013:82), ma anche come il film si inserisca a pieno titolo all’interno delle dinamiche proprie del colonialismo. Nello specifico, la pellicola di Gatti va idealmente a coprire uno spazio di esibizione e spettacolarizzazione dell’alterità che in quegli anni era molto popolare in tutta Europa e che trovava la propria realizzazione in apposite mostre etnografiche dal vivo. L’apparente genuina curiosità con cui il film viene tutt’oggi consumato da parte di un pubblico di spettatori bianchi dimostra la pervicacia di questa modalità di approcciarsi all’*altro*, anche in un’epoca lontana dalla fine del colonialismo storico. Ai fini di questa analisi, la lettura postcoloniale offre una produttiva e stimolante prospettiva da cui interpretare il film, soprattutto se si considera il postcolonialismo secondo la definizione di Sandra Ponzanesi:

Il postcolonialismo dovrebbe essere inteso [...] non in termini cronologici come transizione da uno stato coloniale a uno postcoloniale, ma come strumento teorico che mira a valutare criticamente le operazioni degli imperi e la persistenza della loro eredità e degli effetti sulle società odierne. (Ponzanesi, 2012:59, *trad. mia*)

Una definizione questa a cui fa eco Derobertis quando scrive che “il ‘postcoloniale’ non è inteso come il tempo cronologicamente successivo al ‘coloniale’, bensì è una critica a ciò che è stato storicamente il colonialismo” (2010:8-9).

Siliva Zulu viene dunque qui analizzato come prodotto culturale di una certa epoca – quella coloniale; ciò che interessa per questa analisi non è tanto l’influenza o l’importanza del film all’interno della cinematografia italiana né sono i suoi aspetti più tecnici, quanto piuttosto il suo contenuto culturale e l’esemplificazione che ne offre.

Il film va inoltre inquadrato all’interno dell’inizio della cinematografia fascista, in un periodo, cioè, come spiega Brunetta (1993), in cui le pellicole non rispondono a richieste di propaganda esplicita ma in cui “una consistente serie di opere cerca di interpretare

lo spirito ideologico del presente, riuscendo a fornire al regime una prima forma di supporto di messaggio ideologico indiretto nel campo dello spettacolo di puro intrattenimento” (275). Non troviamo, perciò, in *Siliva Zulu* rimandi diretti al fascismo né una dichiarata volontà di servire l'ideologia fascista e coloniale; nondimeno il film di Gatti “interpreta lo spirito ideologico del presente” e si allinea ad esso, fornendone un indiretto supporto. *Siliva Zulu* risente inoltre – come vedremo dall'analisi delle prime scene – di quella che Coletti (2013) individua come una moda orientalista presente nei film italiani della fine degli anni '20 in conseguenza all'espansione imperialista europea. Il film, dunque, pur non essendo dichiaratamente di propaganda né fascista né coloniale, si trova in sintonia con le ideologie legate al fascismo e al colonialismo.

La pellicola è stata riportata alla luce nel 2011⁴ dall'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Pretoria e da allora è stata mostrata svariate volte, con proiezioni organizzate dallo stesso Istituto o con la sua collaborazione. Insieme al film, sono state organizzate diverse mostre fotografiche che espongono parte del materiale raccolto da Cipriani durante la spedizione. La prima mostra si è tenuta nel 2011 presso la galleria d'arte della University of Johannesburg, poi spostata al museo Iziko di Città del Capo dal 15 agosto 2011 al 30 aprile 2012⁵. Tali mostre sono state accolte non senza qualche perplessità. Sebbene, infatti, i curatori abbiano integrato le fotografie con delle didascalie per fornire una contestualizzazione che attenuasse l'impatto del loro

⁴ Il film, alla sua uscita, fu mostrato in Italia e in vari cinema europei. Secondo Davis (2013), *Siliva Zulu*, prima degli anni recenti, sarebbe stato proiettato in Sudafrica una sola volta, nel dicembre del 1929 a Johannesburg. Non c'è invece traccia di proiezioni dell'epoca nello Zululand, quindi gli attori non avrebbero mai visto il prodotto finale. La compagnia Anaphora Film (<http://www.anaphorafilms.co.za/>) ha in progetto la realizzazione di un documentario che ricostruisca la storia delle persone coinvolte nelle riprese del film. Il progetto prevede la ricerca dei discendenti degli attori all'interno della loro comunità di provenienza vicino a Eshowe tramite le fotografie scattate da Cipriani, la proiezione del film nella comunità e la documentazione delle reazioni della comunità di fronte sia alle fotografie che al film. Lo scopo è di indagare quale eredità il film abbia eventualmente lasciato all'interno della comunità e di proporre una costruzione critica, insieme al pubblico odierno, dei modi di rappresentazione degli zulu all'interno della pellicola di Gatti.

⁵ In entrambi i casi tra i curatori non risulta esserci nessun zulu. L'esposizione a Johannesburg è stata curata dal personale dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura, mentre quella a Città del Capo dai curatori del museo Iziko Lalou Meltzer, Gerald Klinghardt e Fiona Clayton.

contenuto palesemente razzista, diverse voci critiche hanno espresso dei dubbi sull'allestimento⁶, a indicazione del fatto che sia le fotografie sia il film ancora oggi necessitano di essere avvicinate attraverso uno sguardo critico non del tutto acquisito.



Figura 1

Il film⁷ si apre con l'inquadratura di un paesaggio collinare all'interno del quale si trova un gruppo di mucche al pascolo (figura 1); le immagini sono precedute dalla dicitura: "distese sconfinite di colline nude". Un secondo testo ci spiega che "gli zulu non sanno cosa siano le immagini in movimento, parlano e capiscono solo la loro lingua; ma sono nati artisti come Mdabùli (la vergine Mdabùli Ngèna)". Nelle

⁶ Secondo Leibhammer (2011), ad esempio, "mentre i curatori di *Siliva Zulu* hanno provveduto a fornire il *background* concettuale dal quale il materiale può essere riletto, hanno mantenuto intatti i canoni espositivi occidentali" (*trad. mia*).

⁷ Qui si considera la versione inglese del 2012 distribuita dalla Villon Films a cura di Peter Davis, essendo l'unica commercialmente reperibile. Tutte le didascalie riportate nell'articolo sono perciò tradotte dall'inglese.

prime due didascalie il punto di vista da cui guardare le immagini è già sapientemente costruito. In apertura abbiamo sia una natura incontaminata sia un paesaggio che vengono dati a chi osserva – e ancora prima alla cinepresa – ‘senza filtri’: le colline nude, mentre descrivono fisicamente un lembo di terra privo di alberi, alludono metaforicamente a un’immediatezza di conquista. Le colline si danno allo sguardo del pubblico così come sono: l’assenza di alberi è una precisa scelta registica che sottintende la mancanza di ostacoli o barriere, sia naturali che umane, che impediscano o ostacolino l’accesso alla terra. Nell’allusione al senso di conquista c’è anche l’erotizzazione della terra ‘nuda’: non casualmente infatti nella seconda didascalia troviamo la presentazione di Mdabùli, con la specificazione della sua condizione di verginità, che nuovamente rimanda alla conquista di una terra / un corpo e alla connotazione sessuale di tale conquista⁸.

Prima della presentazione della ragazza, il film rende esplicito il punto di vista bianco occidentale e stabilisce il confine tra un ‘noi’ e un ‘loro’ attraverso la pretesa motivazione che è quella di spiegare la ‘loro’ alterità a ‘noi’. La menzione degli zulu in apertura della didascalia intrinsecamente classifica questi ultimi come oggetto dello sguardo – una situazione, dunque, ben lontana dalla presunta volontà e capacità di ‘dar loro voce’, e questo indipendentemente dal fatto che i protagonisti e tutti i personaggi siano zulu. Anche senza la presenza di personaggi bianchi, la dicotomia è stabilita: gli zulu non sanno cosa sia il cinema, conoscono solo la loro lingua. Sono perciò primitivi e confinati in uno spazio pre-tecnologico o a-tecnologico in cui le nuove conquiste della scienza europea non sono penetrate. Il fatto di parlare e capire solo la propria lingua li confina ulteriormente in uno stato di isolamento che è sia spaziale e temporale sia culturale. Se il

⁸ Per una discussione sul rapporto tra la donna colonizzata, la terra colonizzata e l’erotizzazione di entrambe si veda McClintock (1995). La studiosa analizza il mito della ‘terra vergine’ riconducendolo a quello di una terra ‘vuota’ di desideri e di *agency* sessuale, che non aspetta altro di essere inseminata dall’uomo bianco: “All’interno delle narrative coloniali, l’erotizzazione dello spazio ‘verGINE’ attua inoltre un’appropriazione territoriale, secondo cui se la terra è vergine, i popoli colonizzati non possono rivendicare diritti territoriali aborigeni e il patrimonio dell’uomo bianco è assicurato in modo violento attraverso l’inseminazione sessuale e militare di uno spazio che risulta essere vuoto” (30, *trad. mia*).

primo invito a guardare il film è quello ottenuto attraverso un colpo d'occhio per così dire voyeuristico – le colline nude –, ora l'istanza narrativa assume un atteggiamento prettamente orientalista. Said (2001), nel suo fondamentale studio *Orientalismo*, descrive l'atteggiamento del ricercatore occidentale nei confronti dell'Oriente con parole che possono essere efficacemente riferite al caso in questione:

[i] singoli orientalisti [...] non sentono più il bisogno di considerarsi [...] membri di una sorta di corporazione, dotata di tradizioni e rituali propri. L'orientalista è diventato piuttosto il rappresentante della cultura occidentale, colui che riassume nella sua opera la maggiore dicotomia di cui tale opera (indipendentemente dalla sua forma particolare) è l'espressione simbolica: la consapevolezza, il sapere, la scienza occidentali come possesso delle più ardite conquiste e dei più minuti particolari dell'Oriente. Formalmente l'orientalista ritiene di operare in favore dell'unione tra Oriente e Occidente, ma lo fa soprattutto ribadendo la supremazia tecnologica, politica e culturale dell'Occidente. (243-44)

Nella dichiarazione sulla non conoscenza da parte degli zulu del cinema c'è precisamente la supremazia tecnologica e culturale di cui parla Said. Illustrando alcuni aspetti della vita degli zulu, l'istanza narrativa vuole farsi promotrice di un presunto ponte culturale fra le due società. In realtà, si afferma la superiorità di quella italiana/europea su quella zulu/africana.

Dopo la didascalia, troviamo l'immagine della ragazza sorridente inquadrata in mezza figura (figura 2); poi la pellicola torna a spiegare che “non ci sono villaggi. Solo qua e là kraal, gruppi di tante capanne quante mogli, avendo ogni capo famiglia diverse mogli”. Segue l'immagine in campo lunghissimo ripresa dall'alto di un kraal (figura 3). Le prime sequenze del film si avvicinano molto al racconto documentario. Siamo vicino al villaggio di Eshowe, nello Zululand, area della provincia dell'attuale KwaZulu-Natal (in Sudafrica).



Figura 2

Il film, tuttavia, contrariamente a quanto ci si aspetterebbe avvenisse in un documentario, non specifica né luogo né tempo dell'azione: di conseguenza tutto ciò che viene presentato, dalla storia narrata ai personaggi, dalla descrizione delle usanze alle immagini di vita quotidiana, rimane sospeso in un tempo imprecisato e in una prospettiva storica che è da un lato il 'presente' delle didascalie, ma dall'altro si estende verso il passato e il futuro cristallizzandosi in un eterno sempre uguale. Molte delle stereotipizzazioni di matrice coloniale sono dunque già all'opera: l'*altro* come natura, come primitivo, arretrato, imprigionato in una realtà immutabile, senza tempo, remota seppur contemporanea – ciò che Fabian (2014) definisce brillantemente come "*denial of coevalness*", "negazione della contemporaneità", ovvero la tendenza dell'antropologia e in generale del mondo occidentale a rapportarsi con 'il resto del mondo' in modo allocronico, dove l'*altro* vive sempre in un 'là e allora', lontano nello spazio e nel tempo⁹.

⁹ Fabian definisce la 'negazione della contemporaneità' nella rappresentazione dell'*altro* come una "persistente e sistematica tendenza di sistemare il/i referente/i dell'antropologia in un tempo diverso dal presente di chi produce il discorso antropologico" (2014:31, *trad. mia*). Il distanziamento dell'*altro*, secondo lo studioso, pone chi scrive – o in questo caso filma – e il



Figura 3

Le vicende narrate nel film appaiono completamente decontestualizzate. È questa una mossa funzionale innanzitutto a rappresentare gli zulu come esseri immersi in una bucolica esistenza tradizionale e atavica, confinata al di fuori della storia. Ma quello che soprattutto rimane fuori dal racconto del film è il colonialismo. Il villaggio non pare subire alcuna influenza degli eventi storici e del colonialismo. La vita di questa comunità si svolge come si è sempre svolta, senza alcun cambiamento né tantomeno alcuna sofferenza causata dalle invasioni e conquiste straniere. Per estensione l’Africa – o il Sudafrica – appare una zona remota non solo temporalmente ma anche spazialmente. Tale decontestualizzazione porta anche a una mancanza di qualsivoglia criticità storica e sociale nella rappresentazione. Il confronto mancato con l’uomo bianco non solo rimuove un paragone diretto fra personaggi bianchi e personaggi neri, dando l’illusione di trovarci a contatto immediato con gli zulu, ma

suo destinatario in una posizione privilegiata e dà adito all’utilizzo di termini quale ‘primitivo’ per indicare l’appartenenza dell’*altro* a uno spazio temporale precedente.

rimuove anche ogni criticità legata a tale confronto. In questo modo è come se il colonialismo in *Siliva Zulu* semplicemente non esistesse. Esso, tuttavia, esiste e informa la pellicola come discorso epistemologico, come struttura del potere, secondo modalità non uniche al film italiano e che metteremo in luce più oltre.

Le immagini iniziali servono, tra l'altro, per inquadrare il film entro una dimensione esotica, di un esotismo creato dalla differenza e dalla sensazionalità, veicolate dalla mancanza di indicazioni precise e dalla menzionata distanza tanto geografica quanto temporale. E dunque, sulla falsariga evolucionistica, *Siliva Zulu* accentua la differenza: non rappresenta 'oggettivamente' una parte dell'Africa, come vorrebbe far credere, ma aiuta a creare e a consolidare una 'certa idea' dell'Africa basata su rappresentazioni stereotipiche. Quello che pare essere un documento 'vero' e reale sugli zulu non è altro che il prodotto di uno sguardo coloniale ed europeo sull'*altro* africano. La pretesa realistica rende ancora più insistito questo sguardo e palesa il meccanismo attraverso cui uno sguardo parziale e ideologico viene presentato come verità universale. Chi filma e chi guarda si pone nel cosiddetto 'punto zero', quello che il critico colombiano Castro-Gomez (2007) definisce l' "*hubris of zero point*": cioè il fatto che lo sguardo occidentale si consideri neutro e perciò obiettivo, non riconoscendo il fatto di incarnare anch'esso una prospettiva particolare inserita in una determinata cultura, in uno spazio e in un tempo. Lo sguardo universalista occidentale, sostiene Castro-Gómez, si comporta come lo sguardo di Dio: "l'osservatore osserva il mondo da una piattaforma di osservazione invisibile in modo da ottenere un'osservazione veritiera che non lascia spazio a dubbi" (2007:83, *trad. mia*); però, prosegue Castro-Gómez, quando la scienza occidentale prova a fare la stessa cosa commette il peccato di presunzione credendo di poter essere come Dio senza in effetti esserlo, e considerando il proprio punto di vista superiore a quello degli altri, non avvedendosi del fatto che esso è un punto di vista tra gli altri.

Lo stile documentario o, meglio, di documento etnografico – non si dimentichi la presenza dell'antropologo ed etnografo Lidio Cipriani nella *troupe* – delle prime sequenze del film conferisce alle immagini un'aura di 'verità', le presenta cioè come vere nonostante si tratti di un film di finzione. L'arroganza del punto zero di cui parla Castro-

Gomez in questo caso specifico si combina con ciò che Kuehnast definisce “imperialismo visuale”, cioè l'uso di immagini selezionate che funzionano come rappresentazione dell'ideologia dominante passata per ‘verità’:

l'imperialismo visuale è il messaggio subliminale di una gerarchia culturale dove la condizione di una cultura sopra un'altra è trasmessa tramite la presentazione di ciò che a livello culturale è naturale, normale e desiderato secondo i canoni degli stereotipi di genere e razza della cultura dominante e di ciò che è innaturale, non normale e indesiderato all'interno dei riferimenti della cultura subordinata. (1992:185, *trad. mia*)

Dopo aver mostrato le capanne e spiegato come le mucche quando non sono al pascolo vengano rinchiusi in recinti al centro di questo villaggio, il film dice, ancora, che: “bestiame – famiglia – magia – questa è la vita degli zulu, spesso allietata dalle loro danze nuziali, a cui si uniscono gli abitanti dei kraal vicini”. In questa frase si condensa la prospettiva italiana e più in generale europea dalla quale non solo si scelgono le immagini, ma le si organizza, le si mostra e le si riceve. In quelle tre parole iniziali è riassunta l'“essenza” del popolo zulu. Il bestiame equivale alla pastorizia, a un contatto diretto con la natura. La famiglia rappresenta la tradizione. La magia è la superstizione. Si ribadisce l'idea del popolo primitivo, lontano dalle sofisticazioni e dalle artificialità delle società moderne, ancora legato alla terra e alla trasmissione delle credenze e della conoscenza di generazione in generazione. Queste caratteristiche vengono contemporaneamente esaltate – secondo il mito rousseauviano del selvaggio buono e lo stereotipo dell'Africa libera dalle complicazioni moderne, caro ad esempio a Marinetti – e usate come cifra della differenza che, di conseguenza, mette in rilievo la superiorità del soggetto europeo. L'inquadramento ideologico, la cornice entro cui leggere le immagini è, dunque, predeterminata, a dispetto dell'immediatezza e naturalezza rivendicata dallo stile documentario ed etnografico.

Segue una di queste danze, di cui il film mostra e spiega la preparazione. Poco dopo, entra in scena il personaggio principale. Mdabùli confessa alle sue amiche di essere innamorata di Siliva e nell'inquadratura successiva vediamo il ragazzo vestito a festa ripreso dal basso all'alto, in modo da esaltarne la possanza fisica, con il piede destro sollevato su una roccia di fronte, il braccio poggiato sulla gamba, mentre nell'altra mano impugna lo scudo, il busto eretto in una posa intesa a trasmettere tutta la forza e la fierezza dell'eroe (figura 4).



Figura 4

Anche questa presentazione, che caratterizza positivamente il protagonista, rientra perfettamente fra gli stereotipi attraverso cui alcune etnie africane, e soprattutto gli zulu, vengono descritti dagli europei: fisicamente forti, prestanti, fieri, orgogliosi¹⁰.

¹⁰ Gli zulu devono la loro nomea di forti e valorosi guerrieri all'interno dell'immaginario occidentale soprattutto al regno di Shaka e alla resistenza di fronte all'avanzata dei britannici alla fine del XIX secolo. Nel 1818 sotto la guida del re Shaka, gli zulu si costituirono come stato sottomettendo diverse tribù; Shaka è ricordato dalle cronache come un temibile comandante. Nel 1879 gli zulu si scontrarono con i britannici. L'esercito europeo fu sconfitto nella famosa battaglia di Isandlwana il 22 gennaio di quell'anno, anche se nei successivi scontri i britannici riuscirono alla fine ad avere la meglio sugli zulu.

In *Siliva Zulu* la gerarchia è così stabilita tramite la presentazione della vita quotidiana degli zulu cui si applicano categorie quali quelle di 'primitivo', 'selvaggio', 'tradizionale', 'remoto', nella doppia accezione della curiosità per l'esotico e il folkloristico che è però allo stesso tempo irrimediabilmente inferiore. La diversità degli zulu diventa interessante e affascinante proprio perché inferiore e, dunque, implicitamente confinata in uno spazio che non costituisce una minaccia concreta per la cultura che la giudica. Il fatto che il film sia girato in una colonia britannica e che esalti i valori di forza e fierezza dei guerrieri zulu è anche da inquadrarsi all'interno della rivalità italiana con il Regno Unito (la perfida Albione) e con la distanza dagli interessi italiani: agli zulu, allora, può essere consentito di essere fieri e coraggiosi guerrieri, perché non sono in diretta competizione con gli italiani per il dominio coloniale.

Il film prosegue poi con lo sviluppo di una trama romantica di stampo occidentale, arricchita di elementi considerati esotici in un'ambientazione rurale ugualmente esoticizzata. Mentre lo spettatore assiste alle danze dei guerrieri zulu da una parte e delle vergini dall'altra, il rivale di Siliva, Nomanzidela, aiutato da una stregona, provoca, attraverso riti magici, la morte del bestiame di Siliva, che era stato promesso al futuro suocero come pagamento della *lobola* – la dote che nella cultura zulu è pagata dallo sposo al padre della sposa. Intanto la siccità attanaglia il villaggio. Nella riunione degli uomini si giunge alla conclusione che sia la presenza di qualcuno ad avere cattiva influenza sugli dei: Siliva viene individuato come il responsabile dallo stregone Tuabeni e condannato al linciaggio. La scena della riunione e del linciaggio sono quanto di più 'selvaggio' e 'primitivo' il pubblico (italiano) potesse immaginare: Siliva è legato ad un albero, circondato dalla folla degli uomini del villaggio che danzano, levando le proprie lance e avvicinandosi sempre di più al protagonista, fino a ferirlo con le armi acuminata e quasi ucciderlo. Grazie, però, all'intervento di Mdabùli che invoca l'aiuto di un anziano capo tribù, Siliva viene scagionato dall'accusa e salvato poco prima che gli vengano inferti gli ultimi colpi. Una nuova riunione condanna gli avversari di Siliva all'esilio dal villaggio e al risarcimento del bestiame ucciso. Siliva e Mdabùli possono così concludere felicemente la propria storia convolando a nozze.

Ironicamente, il mensile *Cinemalia*, che per tutto il 1928 dedicò molto spazio al film prima che esso cadesse in dimenticatoio (fatto dovuto, in larga misura, all'avvento del sonoro), per annunciare la proiezione del film titolava: "Gli Zulu invadono Milano!". E poi iniziava l'articolo tranquillizzando: "Niente paura. Gli Zulu stanno benissimo al loro paese e mai hanno lontanamente pensato, neppure nelle notti di plenilunio, quando si tramandano le più strane leggende di spiriti maligni e di bestie feroci, di venir ad occupare la città della "busecca" e del risotto" (CIN, 1928a:20). I 'temibili' zulu, 'selvaggi' e dediti "per abitudine atavica, a qualche guerriglia con le popolazioni finitime", vivono a debita distanza e non rappresentano una minaccia per i 'civilizatissimi' milanesi. Inutile sottolineare i riferimenti a leggende, bestie feroci, spiriti maligni e notti di plenilunio, riferimenti presenti in tutti gli articoli riguardanti il film apparsi su *Cinemalia* in quell'anno.

Nello stesso mensile, il film era presentato e lodato come coloniale:

Mentre per comandamento del Duce e per aspirazione di popolo, si va formando in Italia una "coscienza coloniale" e la nostra letteratura [...] va diffondendo nelle giovani generazioni la necessità di occuparsi più intensamente delle questioni coloniali, di viaggiare e di conoscere terre e popoli lontani, di trovare nuovi sbocchi alla nostra esuberante vitalità ed ai nostri manufatti, la spedizione Gatti giunge a buon punto per valorizzare questi concetti. (Migliavacca, 1928:18)

Altrove, sempre sulle pagine di *Cinemalia*, il recensore scriveva: "La psicologia e le raffinatezze sensuali di noi bianchi vengono lasciate per un momento in disparte per dar sfogo alle manifestazioni primitive e profondamente libere e sane dei 'Zulu' popolo guerriero, buono, lavoratore. [...] Si può dire che questo film ci reca [sic] tutta l'anima di questo popolo nero, che tanto filo diede da torcere all'Inghilterra colonizzatrice" (DUEMME, 1928:54). La griglia interpretativa è palese. In più occasioni sul mensile si sottolineano le qualità di questo popolo "primitivo" e "selvaggio" e lo stesso regista

riporta il proprio stupore nell'aver scoperto che gli zulu sono molto più intelligenti di quanto i bianchi credano (Migliavacca, 1928:23)¹¹. Viene anche lodata la maggiore conoscenza che si ha di questo popolo grazie alla spedizione della *troupe* cinematografica e a Cipriani. La componente etnografica, la sensazione che il film porti davvero il popolo zulu a contatto con il pubblico, è la qualità di *Siliva Zulu* che viene più esaltata ed apprezzata dalla stampa culturale; si legge per esempio che: “Lo spettatore viene trasportato, come in un magico sogno di avventure, lontano, nell’Africa Tenebrosa dove popoli liberi e selvaggi vivono una vita primitiva intessuta di costumanze strane, di cerimonie fantastiche e di danze guerriere” (CIN, 1928b:40).

Se è vero che caratteristica del cinema è quella di trasportare lo spettatore in una realtà differente, in questo caso in gioco non c'è solo più questo classico viaggio virtuale: essere trasportati nell’“Africa Tenebrosa” non si limita alla possibilità di esperire una realtà diversa. *Siliva Zulu*, infatti, si inserisce in un contesto dove insieme alla conquista territoriale l'Europa guardava all'*altro* colonizzato anche con la curiosità della conquista scientifica, attraverso le armi dell'antropologia e dell'etnografia: in questo senso il film italiano, lodato per le sue qualità di documento etnografico, non fu un caso isolato. Inoltre, nonostante *Cinemalia* sostenesse con vigore che si trattava del primo film che annoverasse un cast di soli attori neri, c'è un altro precedente britannico molto simile, *Nionga* del 1925. Girato in Africa centrale, racconta la storia di una donna, Nionga, che si lascia convincere da uno stregone a persuadere il proprio amante a distruggere il villaggio vicino. Sandon nota come tutta la costruzione del film e la rappresentazione dei personaggi siano volti a veicolare l'idea dell'africano come primitivo e selvaggio e, in particolare, della donna come oggetto sessuale:

La macchina da presa si sofferma su Nionga e altre donne africane, il cui seno è nudo, e la narrazione fa riferimento in un paio di occasioni alla desiderabilità sessuale delle donne da parte degli uomini. Queste

¹¹ In un'intervista per *Cinemalia* in cui gli veniva chiesto come si comportassero gli zulu sul set, Gatti rispose: “Magnificamente. Si tratta d'un popolo intelligentissimo, al contrario di quello che crediamo noi bianchi” (Migliavacca, 1928:23).

sequenze sarebbero andate contro i severi controlli sulla rappresentazione delle donne europee nel cinema britannico dell'epoca e il fatto che la gente non porti molti vestiti e decori i propri corpi è l'evidenza della loro inciviltà e del loro barbarismo. (Santon, 2000:119-20, *trad. mia*)

Lo stesso commento si può estendere a *Siliva Zulu*, in cui le donne compaiono a petto nudo e tutti i personaggi sono scarsamente vestiti con abiti fatti di pelle animale – facilmente riconoscibili da un pubblico europeo come 'tradizionali'. Una simile rappresentazione, al contrario, sarebbe stata impossibile per personaggi bianchi. La nudità è associata alla primitività e perciò, per l'epoca, è ammissibile solo all'interno di questa dimensione *altra*. In particolare, la nudità femminile è anche un elemento che connota eroticamente il personaggio, in maniera non differente da quanto avveniva nelle cartoline e fotografie di epoca coloniale che propagandavano la conquista delle nuove terre africane: "Il mito della donna indigena nuda o seminuda", nota Forgacs (2015), "venne creato dall'uomo bianco e si nutriva della fantasia occidentale della sua disponibilità sessuale, che allo stesso tempo contribuiva ad alimentare" (64). Le immagini prodotte in epoca coloniale sotto forma di cartoline e fotografie sono uno dei maggiori veicoli di questo mito: "Le fotografie, sia quelle private [...] sia quelle stampate come cartoline, trovano nei seni, solitamente di donne giovani o adolescenti, uno dei particolari di maggiore interesse" (64).

Per continuare il parallelo fra i due film, si noti come anche *Nionga* rappresenti scene di danze collettive e mostri guerrieri in posa: *Siliva Zulu*, dunque, non si distacca dal suo precedente modello britannico, per quanto non sia dato sapere se e in che misura Gatti fosse a conoscenza di quest'altra opera. Ciò che importa qui, però, non è tanto l'influenza di un film sull'altro, quanto la corrispondenza delle modalità di rappresentazione e di alcuni elementi delle trame, ovvero la condivisione di quello che Quijano (2007a e 2007b) definisce la matrice coloniale del potere. In entrambi i casi abbiamo una coppia di amanti, capi villaggio, stregoni e guerrieri, che si muovono seguendo superstizioni, magie, rivalità, danze e rituali. Si

tratta perciò tanto di personaggi quanto di situazioni stereotipate, prevedibili e attese da un pubblico europeo. Il cosiddetto documento etnografico finisce non per documentare la realtà di persone, luoghi ed eventi, ma per rispondere e appagare l'aspettativa del pubblico europeo bianco, fornendogli esattamente le rappresentazioni che tale pubblico si aspettava. Troviamo di nuovo un rispecchiamento tra quanto il film ci propone e quanto le fotografie e cartoline coloniali riproducevano. Le persone nelle immagini sono rese 'tipi' e diventano oggetti simbolici davanti allo sguardo voyeristico occidentale: "La persona, ritratta bloccandone l'azione nella posa, non spiegata o compresa, ma definita in una didascalia sintetica, viene tutta ridotta alla sua esteriorità: di qui il gusto estetico-erotico per le nudità e quello folklorico per il vestiario, gioielli, attività 'tipiche'" (Sturani, 1995:135). Il risultato è comunque la creazione di distanza tra chi guarda e chi è guardato, funzionale ad erigere una barriera che separa il 'noi' dal 'loro', il 'qua' dal 'là'.

Ancora Sandon considera *Nionga* e un altro film dell'epoca, *Stampede* (1930)¹², come continuazioni della pratica nata verso gli anni '90 dell'Ottocento delle esibizioni etnologiche di culture indigene¹³. Soprattutto in occasione delle Esposizioni internazionali, nativi dei paesi colonizzati venivano trasportati in Gran Bretagna per riprodurre i loro modi di vita e mostrarli al pubblico europeo: interi villaggi venivano ricostruiti e ai nativi esposti in questi fittizi villaggi veniva chiesto di rappresentare danze e rituali tradizionali, in ciò che

¹² Il film, girato in Sudan, racconta la storia di un ragazzo, Boru, adottato da un'altra tribù. La madre viene uccisa da un leone, che a sua volta è ucciso dalla tribù locale. Il bambino, rimasto orfano, viene adottato da Sheikh e cresce con il figlio di questi, Nikitu, e la figlia, Loweno. Quando, durante una migrazione, sia Sheikh sia successivamente Nikitu muoiono, Boru prende il posto del padre adottivo e sposa la sorellastra.

¹³ Famoso in proposito il caso di Sara Baartman (il cui vero nome non è noto), una giovane donna Khoikhoi proveniente dall'attuale regione dell'Eastern Cape in Sudafrica. Sara fu portata in Europa ed esibita come fenomeno da baraccone per via delle natiche e dei genitali particolarmente sviluppati. Fu conosciuta come la 'venere ottentotta', dove l'aggettivo ottentotto è il termine coloniale dispregiativo per definire la popolazione Khoikhoi. Venne studiata da vari scienziati in Francia e quando morì, a soli 26 anni, il cervello e i genitali vennero estratti dal corpo, posti in delle giare, ed esposti al Musée de l'Homme fino al 1974. Gli articoli scritti dagli scienziati sull'esame del corpo di Sara Baartman contribuirono al sostegno delle teorie sulla superiorità degli europei (si veda Qureshi, 2004). Solo nel 2002 il Sudafrica ottenne la restituzione dei resti di Sara Baartman. Sull'uso propagandistico che il Fascismo fece di Sara Baartman si veda Sòrgoni (2003).

diveniva un vero e proprio zoo umano. Secondo la studiosa, dunque, ci sarebbe un legame tra queste esposizioni etnologiche e le scene di vita quotidiana, le danze e i rituali rappresentati nei film che prende in esame: *Nionga* e *Stampede* non farebbero altro che riprodurre su pellicola lo stesso concetto alla base delle esposizioni etnologiche.

La Greater Britain Exhibition di Londra del 1899 fu essenzialmente un'esibizione coloniale, con la sezione legata alle miniere organizzata, significativamente, da Cecil Rhodes. Per l'occasione quasi duecento zulu vennero portati a Londra e fatti vivere nei kraal¹⁴, accessibili al pubblico dietro pagamento di un biglietto speciale. Non diversamente avveniva in Italia. La Penisola non solo ospitò diverse *tourné* di spettacoli europei che proponevano *performance* di nativi di territori extra-europei, ma dal 1884 iniziò a esibire gruppi di africani principalmente provenienti dalle nuove colonie italiane all'interno delle Esposizioni: gli Assabesi nell'Esposizione Generale Italiana di Torino del 1884¹⁵, sessanta abissini a Palermo nel 1892 per la prima mostra coloniale italiana, sudanesi ancora a Torino nel 1902 e poi nel 1911 con la riproduzione di un villaggio eritreo e uno somalo e nel 1928 con la presenza di quattro villaggi provenienti dalle colonie¹⁶.

In questo contesto di esposizioni etnologiche, zoo umani e propagande coloniali, va inquadrato e inteso un film come *Siliva Zulu*,

¹⁴ All'arrivo degli zulu al porto di Southampton fu girato un film dall'eloquente titolo di *The Landing of Savage South Africa at Southampton* (Lo sbarco del selvaggio Sudafrica a Southampton) della durata di un minuto in cui gli zulu agghindati in abiti tribali, scudi e lance, avanzano danzando di fronte alla cinepresa fissa. Alcuni di loro guardano fuori dall'inquadratura, probabilmente per seguire le direttive di qualcuno. A un certo punto, compare in mezzo al gruppo un uomo bianco vestito di tutto punto con cappello a cilindro per dirigere meglio la danza. Il messaggio è chiaro: non c'è solo la costruzione degli zulu come selvaggi che sbarcano nella civilizzata Gran Bretagna, ma anche il dispiegamento della forza dell'impero britannico che li domina. Allo stesso tempo, come sottolinea Taylor, c'è il dispiegamento delle potenzialità del "potere del cinema nel portare eventi, luoghi e persone esotiche – in pratica l'Impero – al pubblico cinematografico britannico" (2007:150, *trad. mia*). *Siliva Zulu* può considerarsi il prodotto di questa tradizione.

¹⁵ Su questo episodio si veda Abbattista 2004b.

¹⁶ Sugli zoo umani in Italia e in generale sulla presenza di africani per scopi espositivi o di interesse etnico-scientifico non ci sono molti studi, mancanza motivata dal propagandato concetto di 'italiani brava gente' e dell'idea di un colonialismo italiano 'straccione'. Sugli zoo umani in Italia si veda almeno Abbattista 2004a.

che per quanto peculiare non è un caso isolato e che per quanto girato in una terra lontana dagli interessi italiani non può essere pensato come esente dal discorso coloniale. La pellicola di Gatti con la sua enfasi sull'autenticità, il suo indugiare su aspetti di vita quotidiana e rituali tradizionali porta nelle sale cinematografiche italiane l'esposizione dell'*altro*, qui rappresentato allo stesso momento come selvaggio buono e violento, primitivo, ancestrale, esotico, non diversamente da quanto avveniva nelle sezioni coloniali delle Esposizioni. In *Siliva Zulu* gli zulu sono nulla più di un oggetto esotico da esposizione.

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A CONTESTED SPATIALITY: THE REPRESENTATION OF MOGADISHU IN SOMALI ANGLOPHONE AND ITALIAN LITERATURE

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Sommario

In questo articolo si analizzano e paragonano le rappresentazioni letterarie di Mogadiscio nei romanzi di Nuruddin Farah e Garane Garane. Lo scopo è duplice: da una parte recuperare la memoria del colonialismo italiano in Somalia e riconsiderarne il ruolo e la funzione, dall'altra dimostrare come questi due scrittori offrano un quadro della città alternativo rispetto a quello fornito dalla narrativa dominante, che vede in Mogadiscio la città simbolo di distruzione, guerra civile e fallimento dello stato Somalo. Verrà quindi dimostrato come i romanzi di Farah e Garane contribuiscano a sviluppare una rappresentazione alternativa e complessa rispetto all'omogeneità della narrativa dominante, presentando Mogadiscio come città al centro di dinamiche globali neo-coloniali.

Keywords: Mogadishu, postcolonial literature, mediascapes, colonialism, spatiality

Introduction

“I tried to view the city [Mogadishu] as the principal character, and the people living in it or visiting it become secondary characters”, the Somali writer Nuruddin Farah said in an interview after the publication of *Links*, the first novel of his so-called “Past Imperfect Trilogy” (Appiah, 2004:54). This instance is no exception in the

overview of Italoophone and Anglophone Somali literature, since other Somali writers – such as Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Igiaba Scego, Cristina Ubx Ali Farah and Garane Garane – show a particular attention to the representation of the same urbanscape. Indeed, all of them have featured Mogadishu as the main *topos* in their novels or short stories¹.

However, urban spatiality has not been underscored with regard to the fictional representation of Mogadishu, a city which has been often looked at from a few perspectives. As scholar Garth Myers has noted, the capital city of Somalia has been studied according to a generalised logic, thus focussing on a few mainstream concepts such as slumification, corruption and state failure, as if “the differences between places and circumstances and history and geography just [didn't] matter” (Myers, 2011:3-4). Literature, consequently, has been considered marginally, as if the fictional representation of the city were ancillary compared with the political, architectural, geographical or historical standpoints. On the contrary, in the case of Somalia, literature appears to be a crucial tool to portray the numerous aspects that characterise, and have characterised, the urban life of Mogadishu. Moreover, since Somali authors write in exile, literature becomes the fundamental means to retrieve the past and the memories of Mogadishu before the disastrous civil war or, to use Farah's words, literature represents the attempt to “to keep [his] country alive by writing about it” (Farah, 2012).

So, by studying the novels written by Somali authors, I wish to show how literature features the complex transformations occurred in the city through the prism of Somali eyes over time and, moreover, I wish to highlight how the representation of Mogadishu challenges the homogeneous perspective that portrays the city as “the world capital

¹ Nuruddin Farah has set almost all his literary production in Mogadishu; Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's autobiographical account has the telling title *Lontano da Mogadishu* (*Far from Mogadishu*, 1994); Garane Garane wrote *Il latte è buono* (*Milk is Good*), which is set in Mogadishu during the AFIS period (1950-1960); Igiaba Scego, even though Mogadishu is not the main setting of her novels, the city frequently appears in the memories of the diasporic characters she portrays, as in the case of *Oltre Babilonia* (*Beyond Babylon*, 2009) and *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home is where I am*, 2012); Cristina Ubx Ali Farah set in Mogadishu the short stories *A Dhow is crossing the Sea* (2011a) and *Mogadishu, Pearl of the Indian Ocean* (2016).

of things-gone-completely-to-hell” (Bowden, 1999:7). In other words, I argue that their novels work as “an attempt to destabilize dominant discourses” (Yeoh, 2001:457) about Mogadishu, which developed mostly following the civil war of the 1990s and the US military intervention (Myers, 2011).

In order to do so, I shall focus on the latest production by Nuruddin Farah, especially on the novels *Links* (2005) and *Crossbones* (2011), and on the novel by Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono* (*Milk is Good*, 2005). It will be shown how, even though being the “the geographical site of the collective collapse” (Farah, 2000:187), Mogadishu is indeed a lived space rooted in a global setting, where Somali people are not represented only as victims, terrorists or pirates. Furthermore, the section on Garane’s novel *Il latte è buono* aims to emphasise how Mogadishu’s colonial architecture has shaped Somalis’ identity during and after the Fascist administration.

On Mogadishu

From the onset of the civil war in the 1990s, Mogadishu aroused, in the collective consciousness, as a mere unruly and riotous space, as the fulcrum of riots and the centre of national collapse (Myers, 2011:138-151). According to Myers, the feature of being the foremost theatre of war in the whole Africa has prevailed in the Western discourse, fuelled by the American media after the downing of two US helicopters in Mogadishu, during the initiative “Operation Restore Hope” (5 December 1992-4 May 1993). From that moment onward, the global view of the city (and Somalia) has been persistently negative (Mohamed, 2012; Myers, 2011:138; Besteman, 1999:3-5). Also, in the Italian case, numerous articles in *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere* supported this generalised narrative of collapse. Indeed, from 1984 to 1995 the main topic about Somalia’s reality in Italian newspaper is that of a wounded scenery of violence, war, famine, crime and turmoil, a failed and corrupted state ruled by tribalism and clannism².

² As one can find out through a repubblica.it and corriere.it search.

Conversely, the novels by Farah and Garane provide images of Mogadishu far more composite and multifaceted than those expressed by the dominant Western narrative. In other words, the novels challenge the essentialist perspective of homogeneity that characterises the so-called “African talk” and they represent a counter-discourse to that of collapse (Ferguson, 2006:2).

Even though Farah's last novels are set in Mogadishu, while Somali-Italian authors mostly look at the city as a place of loss and memory, all of them engage in the process of developing a non-Western centric vision. Indeed, they place Mogadishu as the privileged site to unravel the plots of their novels and, as this article will show, both Farah and Garane fashion complex and articulate perspectives on postcolonial and neo-colonial issues, by placing urban spatiality at the centre of their narratives.

This article then will be structured according to the chronological representation of the city and divided into two sections: the first one will be focused on Garane's *Il latte è buono*, since his novel is set during the AFIS period (1950-1960) and immediately after Siyaad Barre's coup; it will be analysed how the Italian colonial architecture shaped Somali people's identity, customs and habits (Ali, 2016). The second part will study the idea of spatiality portrayed in two novels by Nuruddin Farah, *Links* and *Crossbones*, which belong, along with *Knots*, to the so-called “Past Imperfect Trilogy” (2003-2011). It will be argued that Farah, far from considering Mogadishu only as an isolated city devoured by internal conflicts, aims to represent it as the centre of global and neo-colonial dynamics.

Mogadiscio between the Italian Colonial Legacy and the Beginning of the Dictatorship

Il latte è buono (*Milk is Good*) is the first novel by Garane Garane, published in 2005 in a book series edited by scholar Armando Gnisci, who identified it as “the first postcolonial Italian novel” (Gnisci, 2005). Indeed, *Il latte è buono* shares several recurring aspects of postcolonial narratives, such as the structure of a family saga, the unifying function of a symbolical and mystical ancestor, the recourse to orality both on the linguistic and the thematic level, the themes of

exile and belonging, and a mixture of fantasy and realism which “reconcile the myth with the story, [...] the magical reality of the postcolonial imaginary with the horrors of the history” (Albertazzi, 2000:18). Besides, *Il latte è buono* is a semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman* that portrays the process of decolonisation both of Somalia and of the protagonist Gashan who, like Garane, studied in Mogadishu, in Florence, in Grenoble and ended up working in the United States of America as a literature professor.

In particular, the second chapter of the novel, entitled “Mogadiscio la noiosa” (“Boring Mogadishu”), is set roughly between the end of the AFIS (a UN Trust Territory administered by Italy from 1950 to 1960 following the dissolution of the former Italian Somaliland) and Siyaad Barre’s coup (1969). Mogadishu is described in two contrasting and conflicting ways, personified in the characters of Shakhlan and Gashan who, during their strolls through the streets, perceive and portray the fragmented urban transformations. In the novel, the description of the city is the essential means to convey the tension between opposite perspectives since, inevitably, the urban renovation “was not confined to the built form”, but it shaped “local cultural practices” (Ali, 2016:15). In other words, the urban transformation of the 1960s, as well as the legacy of the Italian urban plans of the 1930s, provided a specific identity of the city, which is experienced differently by Shakhlan and Gashan, who embody, respectively, the pre-colonial past and the post-colonial present. Accordingly, the architect Rashid Ali states that architecture “tells the story of Somalia’s journey from the traditional African nation, via colonisation and post-colonialism, to emergent independent state” (Ali, 2016:10).

The importance of spatiality finds its place in the toponymy and in the simultaneous and contrasting references to Somali and Italian cultures provided in *Il latte è buono*. Indeed, a great amount of the second chapter is committed to the representation of the city during its post-independence years, before architecture was “largely seen as a way for the country to assert its identity” (Ali, 2016:10) in opposition to the Fascist urban plan of the 1920s and 1930s. A national identity that was subjected to contrasting trends and paradigmatic oppositions, as Garane highlights when he describes the role of clannism. In a

different way than Farah, who never mentions clan names and openly opposes the idea of a clan-based system (Carbonieri, 2014), Garane remarks their importance within the Somali tradition. Their removal, indeed, is evidently problematic, as if the urban reality of Mogadishu, no longer based on clan hierarchies, is deeply in contrast with the traditional social organisation of Somali people. Garane stresses this aspect through the sceptical eyes of Shakhlan, the mythical figure who symbolically represents the consciousness of the Ajuran people, who foresee the future turmoil caused by this problem at the heart of Somali society's development, namely the contrast between clannism and urbanisation. Indeed, Shakhlan Iman feels bewildered by the appearance of the new Mogadishu full of Fiat cars, instead of camels or donkeys, traffic lights, Italian schools and cinemas (Garane, 2005:44). Moreover, Shakhlan Iman notices that the traditional hierarchies which have governed the clan-based system are subverted:

“Everything is beautiful, here”, she thought: “But why should an Ajuran, the noblest above all, stop to give way to a Daarood or to a Hawiya?”

For her, Mogadishu now represented the lie, the nationalism, the reality mistaken for what? At the traffic light near Cinema Centrale, she had had to stop, to let the cars pass. In one of them, she saw an Arab [...]

“What a land!” said Shakhlan Imam to herself: “We have to stop even in front of an Arab, a *dhaga cas*! One who's got red ears!”. (Garane, 2005:44, translations are mine)³

Mogadishu is depicted as a place where – apparently – Somalis can live together without minding their own clan affiliation, playing *kalscio* (namely “football”, a loan word from the Italian “calcio”) and spending their free time eating and walking (Garane, 2005:44-46).

³ “Tutto è bello qui”, pensava lei, “ma perché un Ajuran, il più nobile di tutti, deve fermarsi per dare la priorità ad un Daarood od a un Haeiya?” Per lei Mogadiscio ormai il falso, il nazionalismo, la realtà scambiata per cosa? Al semaforo vicino al Cinema Centrale aveva dovuto fermarsi per lasciar passare le macchine. In una di esse vide un arabo [...] “Che terra!”, disse tra sé Shakhlan Iman, “Dobbiamo fermarci anche di fronte a un arabo, un *dhaga cas*! Uno che ha le orecchie rosse!” (Garane, 2005:44).

Along via Roma, there are clothing stores and ice cream shops, and “the long, wide thoroughfares previously used for ceremonial marches become appropriated for new local forms of social, economic and cultural practices” (Ali, 2016:10). So, while Mogadishu is living moments of independence, the legacy of the Italian colonialism remains ubiquitous, mostly in the toponymy and in the education system. This happened because, in Somalia, political, cultural and economic independence has not been the result of anticolonial struggles or protracted processes of decolonisation, like other African countries which freed themselves through conflicts. Instead, independence was the outcome of negotiations (Guglielmo, 2013:20-21) and the in-between phase from independence (1960) to dictatorship (1969) witnessed the co-existence of Italian legacy with the growing awareness of the idea of the nation. In the decade of the AFIS, Mogadishu experienced a period of transition and negotiation, when urban life consisted of a “context of intersection” (Simone, 2010:115) between opposite tendencies, well represented in *Il latte è buono* by the points of view of Shakhlan and Gashan, as the following passage shows:

Mogadishu was a ‘Little Italy’. The streets, the shops, the schools and the cinemas were Italian-like. Many new names had become part of the Somali culture: via Roma, Corso Italia, Cinema Centrale, Liceo Scientifico Leonardo da Vinci ... Garibaldi was more important than the Imam, even if both had had the same ideology of the leader. Shakhlan Iman glimpsed the future, full of death and catastrophe. In Mogadishu, every house, every electric wire, every person, every tree was part of a language, of a people, recalling Shakhlan to the glorious past. The difference was that here, in Mogadishu, electric lights had been added to the ancestors, Fiat’s noise and the *climatiseur*: the black skin wanted to turn white, the African into European. She saw whitened faces with a black mask. (Garane, 2005:45, translations are mine)⁴

⁴ “Mogadiscio era una «Little Italy». Le vie, i negozi, le scuole, i cinema erano all’italiana. Molti nuovi nomi erano diventati parte della cultura somala: via Roma, Corso Italia,

The city appears in all its bustling and contradictory transformation, as seen through the critical perspective of Shakhlan. While Gashan, the embodiment of the colonial discourse, feels a sense of belonging conveyed by toponymy, Shakhlan Iman, the embodiment of the pre-colonial period, experiences what Harry Garuba defines as “the postcolonial alienation” (Garuba, 2008:180-197). He uses this concept to describe “the alienation that results from *the wholesale transference of rural norms into the space of the city*” (Garuba, 2008:181). Accordingly, the character of Shakhlan Iman notices that the fracture within Somali society consists of the absence of any hierarchies between nomad and sedentary people, a dichotomy removed too fast and too easily in the new reality of Mogadishu. In other words, the newly freed country is experiencing a process where the traditional opposing key features of Somali society are coexisting (and got mixed up) with new ones: traditional (clan) and modern (socialism); agrarian communities and urban citizens; oral and written culture; finally, emblems of the past (colonial architecture) and new planning (modernism).

The dichotomy built on opposing elements experienced by Somali society is also mirrored in the stylistic structure of this passage: the first paragraph includes the recent and active Italian influence, while the second underlines the hidden presence of the practices which belonged to Somali tradition. Garibaldi finds his place along with the Imam in juxtaposition; finally, the last paragraph makes the contradiction manifest, bringing to the surface all the contrasting but coexisting elements in the new Mogadishu (the cult of the ancestors and the electric current dwell side by side). In this passage, three other aspects should be noted: the alarming allusion to the imminent civil war – placed right in the middle of the two paragraphs, as an

Cinema Centrale, Liceo Scientifico Leonardo da Vinci... Garibaldi era più importante dell'Imam, anche se tutti e due avevano avuto la stessa ideologia di tutti i capi. Shakhlan Iman intravedeva il futuro, pieno di morte e di catastrofe. A Mogadiscio, ogni casa, ogni filo elettrico, ogni persona, ogni albero faceva parte di un linguaggio, di un popolo, che riportava Shakhlan alla gloria del passato. La differenza stava nel fatto che qui, a Mogadiscio, agli antenati si erano aggiunte le luci elettriche, il chiasso delle Fiat e il *climatiseur*: la pelle nera voleva trasformarsi in pelle bianca, l'africano in europeo. Vedeva facce imbiancate con una maschera nera.” (Garane, 2005:45).

imaginary glimpse of the future between past and present – foreseen by Shakhlan as the result of the unsolved contradictions of that time. Finally, the slightly twisted reference to Frantz Fanon and his famous work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) underlines the specific influence of the postcolonial context and the use of Italian toponymy.

The imperial Mogadishu is crossed by roads that recall Rome and by names derived from the Fascist period, with an unceasing recurrence of Italian cultural context broadly. This use of toponymy in the exercise of colonial power is well described in *Il latte è buono* and embodied in the character of Gashan. Indeed, Garane himself explains his relation to toponymy, i.e. his “luoghi prediletti” (“favourite places”):

His nephew was quick-witted. He ended up attending the Italian school in Mogadishu too. Somali wasn't a written language. Gashan memorized poems by Dante, Petrarca, Pascoli... He attended Casa d'Italia. It was like the passport to civilisation [...] He liked pasta more than Somali corn mush. He was proud of being a young Italian. [...] He read greedily and he knew about Italy more than the Italians who used to attend Casa d'Italia. He bought Italian newspaper by Croce del Sud: he read more about Italy than about Africa. (Garane, 2005:47, translations are mine)⁵

In this passage, Garane makes clear the role of Italian influence in shaping Gashan's identity. Both places (Casa d'Italia, hotel Croce del Sud) and culture (books, newspapers) actively contribute to making Italy Gashan's inner homeland. As it is clearly underlined by the

⁵ “Suo nipote aveva l'aria sveglia. Anche lui finì nelle scuole italiane di Mogadiscio. Il somalo non era una lingua scritta. Gashan memorizzava le poesie di Dante, Petrarca, Pascoli... Frequentava la Casa d'Italia. Era per lui come un passaporto verso la civilizzazione. [...] Preferiva la pasta alla polenta somala. Era fiero di essere un piccolo italiano. [...] Leggeva con avidità e ne sapeva sull'Italia più degli altri italiani che frequentavano la Casa d'Italia. Comprava i giornali italiani alla Croce del Sud: leggeva di più sull'Italia che sull'Africa” (Garane, 2005:47).

sentence: “It was like the passport to civilisation” in reference to Casa d'Italia, colonial spatiality still shapes Mogadishu cityscape and cultural practices of Somalis.

The insistent focus on colonial place names and on some particular buildings over time, in order to describe Mogadishu during the AFIS as well as in the present days, appears as a way to link the fragmented experiences of the diasporic present with the narrative of a common past. This seems true above all for the Somali-Italophone authors, who seek to tell and re-tell the colonial history, to challenge the unawareness of the Italian consciousness but also to find a common memory to share. Thus, the strong ties with Italy could not be overlooked, as colonialism has shaped Mogadishu's cityscape and influenced the local cultural practices, until the onset of the civil war in the 1990s. Garane, in particular, pays attention to the importance of that past by considering architecture as the deposit for the memories of the colonial period. He seems to agree with the words by Somali urban planner Mohamed Abdulkadir Ahmed on cultural heritage, for whom it “represents an integral part of cultural and economic development. Architectural and environmental goods are part of cultural heritage. Each of these aspects is critical for the development of any country – an inevitable resolve for each country development” (Ahmed, 2016:21).

Mogadishu as a City in a World of Cities

This section shows how Farah connects Mogadishu to the neo-colonial dynamics which are ruling present-day Somalia and, at the same time, how he symbolically represents the city not just as an isolated case study, but in connection with a strong literary precedent, i.e. Dante's Florence. However, before the analysis, a few words about Farah should be provided, for a better understanding of his literary background.

Nuruiddin Farah was born in 1945 in Baidoa, in Italian Somaliland. As a child, Farah attended schools in Kallafo, in the Ogaden region, a contested territory between Somalia and Ethiopia. During his childhood, he studied English, Arabic and Amharic, while Somali, which became a written language only in 1972, was mainly spoken.

After staying in Mogadishu for a couple of years, he moved to India in 1965. There, he pursued a degree in philosophy, literature and sociology at Panjab University in Chandigarh. Farah then came back to Mogadishu, to teach as a professor in school. However, he subsequently went to England after becoming *persona non grata* for the regime of Siyaad Barre, and he never returned to Somalia until a short visit, in 1996 (Jussawalla & Dasenbrock, 1992). During his career as a writer, even when living abroad, Farah placed Somalia and Somali people at the core of his writings, trying to connect his country, in his novels, to a broader global perspective. His first trilogy, entitled "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship" (1980-83), describes the harsh period of the regime of Siyaad Barre during the late 1970s. The second trilogy, "Blood in the Sun" (1986-99), is mainly set during the Ogaden conflict and explores the issue of cultural identity in post-independence Somalia. Finally, his most recent trilogy, which comprises *Links* (2005), *Knots* (2007) and *Crossbones* (2011), deals with the civil war, covering roughly a period of a decade, from 1996 to 2005.

Starting with *Links*, Farah tells the story of the exiled Somali Jeebleh, a scholar of Dante, who lives in New York and decides to come back to Mogadishu, after two decades of exile. Once in Somalia, he struggles with his own identity, being an American citizen who studied in Italy and who left his own country years before; he meets two of his best friends, Bile (a Somali doctor) and Seamus (an Irish polyglot) and eventually gets involved in the pursuit of two kidnapped girls. Farah's *Links* fictionalises the anarchy and the clan-collapse during the civil war, after dictator Siyaad Barre fled the country. The novel directly engages and challenges the representation of Somalis and Mogadishu made by the American media, with a direct reference to the film *Black Hawk Down* by Ridley Scott (2001) and to the non-fiction book of the same title published by Mark Bowden in 1999. As Garth Myers notices, *Links* re-represents an episode of the alleged "Operation Restore Hope" from the Somali perspective, by re-telling the moments of the attack and the tearing down of two American helicopters on 3rd October 1993. Thus, Farah gives voice to the Somali victims of that operation, not focussing only on the American side of the story that prevails in the Western

imagery. Farah's enduring attempt to provide a counter-discourse for Somalia and to deconstruct the abovementioned generalised logic of the African talk, surfaces also in the always critical perspective he uses to portray Somali people and society over time. Indeed, *Links* questions also a fundamental theme connected with Somalia, that of clannism. According to his long-running effort to portray the multifaceted aspects of Somali reality in contrast with the supposed homogeneity of Somali society (Markovitz, 1995; Ahmad, 1995; Besteman, 1999), Farah challenges and aims to overstep the trope of clannism – one of the main local traits supposed to represent Somali society – by showing how clan-based logics (and their legacy) have caused the collapse of the state (Farah, 2008:10). In *Links*, this situation is well emphasised on a spatial level by the description of a Mogadishu halved by a green line that divides the northern and the southern territories. To paraphrase Wole Soyinka, “the lust for power [...] needs a bounded estate to manifest itself” (Soyinka, 2012:14), and so appears Mogadishu, as a battlefield where a ruinous war of power – deemed as an ethnic conflict – takes place: two rival warlords, whose real names are replaced by the monikers Strongman North (Mohammed Farah Aideed) and Strongman South (Ali Mahdi Mohamed), fight for the control of their respective zones driving the population to a bloody civil war.

However, all Farah's characters “are never identified by the names of their clans” (Carbonieri, 2014:86) and *Links* makes no exception, since Farah denotes Jeebleh as the spokesman of this belief, in sharp opposition to that clannish logic (Farah, 2005:30, 41-42, 95-95, 128-129). Again, it is a description of a place – a past Mogadishu – that suggests the possibility of a clan-free society for Somalia:

He remembered his youth, and how much he had enjoyed living close to the ocean [...] Time was, when the city was so peaceful he could take a stroll at any hour of the day or night without being mugged, or harassed in any way. As a youth, before going off to Padua for university – Somalia had none of its own – he and Bile would go the Gezira nightclub and then walk home at three in the morning, no hassle at all. In those long-gone days, the

people of this country were at peace with themselves,
comfortable in themselves, happy with whom they were.
(Farah, 2005:40)

The overall feeling of nostalgia for a lost and peaceful past collides with the present situation of destruction. The presence of nightclubs and quiet streets convey also a difference in terms of society, based on the Somali word *tol*, meaning both “kinship” and “to stitch together”, in opposition to *clan*. In order to stress this particular situation of Somalia during the 1990s, plagued by infighting, Farah draws an intertextual parallel between Dante’s *Inferno* and Mogadishu. As Fiona Moolla correctly notes, Dante and the *Divine Comedy* are part of the “mental universe of a number of the characters” (Moolla, 2014:158) and this intertextuality comes to light, for example, in the numerous and explicit references that Farah makes to Dante’s poem. Indeed, before each of the four parts which *Links* is made of, there are quotations from Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* as epigraphs. This choice can be read, first, as a way to support the link between the experiences of the protagonist Jeebleh, who is a scholar of Dante and a political exiled as Dante himself, and Dante’s journey through Hell (Moolla, 2014:158-159). Second, these epigraphs can be read as an introduction to the following part of the novel, since they suggest and partially reveal the themes and the events deployed in the plot. Finally, the presence of *Inferno* as the main subtext to describe Mogadishu is deeply constitutive in terms of spatial description, since the capital city of Somalia is often described using Dantesque periphrases, such as “the city of death” or “the place of sorrow” (Farah, 2005:5, 20, 35, 70). Moreover, Mogadishu is symbolically organised in circles, according to the structure of Dante’s Hell, where souls dwell according to the weight of their sin. In this regard, the case of the epigraph which appears before the first part of *Links*, i.e. Jeebleh’s arrival in Mogadishu, may be telling, since it is the famous quotation from *Canto III*, which reports the inscription written on the gate of Dante’s hell: “Through me the way into the suffering city/Through me the way into the eternal pain/ Through me the way that runs among the lost” (Farah, 2005:1). Furthermore, the trope of void and of the lifeless emptiness of Hell, which can be found also in

Farah's description of Mogadishu, is present in Book VI of the *Aeneid* by Virgil (Dante's guide in *Inferno*), in which the entrance of Avernus is described as: "perque domos Ditis uacuas et inania regna" ("through the void domiciles of Dis, the bodiless regions", Book VI, line 269): "The road had no names. No flags flew anywhere near where the car was now parked, and there were no sheds, however ramshackle, to mark the spot" (Farah, 2005:76).

The city has been abandoned by its inhabitants and turned into a battlefield. The semantic field that denotes Mogadishu is related to decay, as it can be noticed in the scene before the meeting between Jeebleh and his old friend Bile, where Farah uses the words "devastation" and "destruction" five times in the same paragraph (Farah, 2005:79). Dante, again, can be considered the main source of intertextuality: the lines of the *Divine Comedy* placed as epigraphs in *Links* refer to the circles of Hell encompassed inside "la città c'ha nome Dite, coi gravi cittadin, col grande stuolo" ("the city that bears the name of Dis is drawing near, with its grave citizens, its great battalions", *Inferno*, *Canto VIII*, lines 68-69). This view of destruction instils in Jeebleh a nostalgic feeling for a peaceful Mogadishu, which is embittered by a sense of hopelessness conveyed by the ethical decay of its inhabitants.

Many houses have no roofs, and bullets scarred nearly every wall [...]. The streets were eerily, ominously quiet. They saw no pedestrians on the roads, and met no other vehicles. Jeebleh felt a tremor, imagining that the residents had been slaughtered "in one another's blood", as Virgil had it. He would like to know whether, in this civil war, both those violated and the violators suffered from a huge deficiency – the inability to remain in touch with their inner selves or to remember who they were before the slaughter began. (Farah, 2005:70)

So, the recurring lines from *Inferno* to depict Mogadishu suggest that Dante can be considered as the meta-textual common point that links and encompass experiences, languages and traditions coming from different backgrounds. Indeed, Dante appears to be a leitmotiv also

for the protagonist of Garane's *Il latte è buono*, Gashan, who often quote the very first lines of the poem ("Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura": "I found myself in a dark forest", *Inferno*, *Canto I*, line 2) to stress Gashan's feeling of uncertainty and misgiving during some precise moments of his life (above all, when the coup occurred and Siyaad Barre took power, in 1969). Moreover, in a passage of *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home is where I am*, 2012), the author Igiaba Scego describes the neighbourhood of Wardhingleey by using references to the *Divine Comedy* (Scego, 2010:27). In another novel, *Adua* (2015, and *Adwa*, 2016), Scego refers to the Italian language using the periphrasis "the language of Dante" (Scego, 2016:12) and she quotes the same tercet from *Canto III* by Dante used by Farah in *Links*: "Per me si va nella città dolente" ("Through me the way into the suffering city" (Farah, 2005:1; Scego, 2016:34).

So, Mogadishu, due to this network of intertextuality and its association to the famous literary antecedent of Florence and its factions, reaches the symbolical status of the wounded city connected with universal themes of betrayal, violence, individualism, evil and hope. By linking Mogadishu to the strong antecedent of the *Divine Comedy*, Farah tries to portray the "hard realities of today's Somalia" (Farah, 2005:43) in order to dismantle the idea of Mogadishu as a mere hopeless and isolated case.

The effort to link Mogadishu to a broader perspective can be noticed also in the way Farah places the capital city in relation to global dynamics. In this regard, the following passage of *Link* underlines how the city, because of its seaward position, has always been a crossroad of influences, invasions and trade: "It was from the ocean that all the major invasions of the Somali peninsula had come. The Arabs, and after them the Persians, and after the Persians the Portuguese, and after the Portuguese the French, the British, and the Italians, and later the Russians, and most recently the Americans [...]. In any case, all these foreigners, well-meaning or not, came from the ocean" (Farah, 2005:124).

This wide-reaching perspective is strongly emphasised in *Links* as well as in *Crossbones*, because of the broad historical matrix of both stories, since Somalia is at the centre of a crucible of relations that involves several foreign countries, such the US, Ethiopia, Italy and

the UK. One can read the tripartite plot of *Crossbones* from a non-sectarian perspective, both in terms of narrative style – since it does not present a single story – and in a geographical way. Indeed, Farah portrays three different stories: one of Jeebleh (the same protagonist of *Links*) and his journalist son-in-law Malik, who aims to write an article about Mogadishu (ruled by the Islamic Courts); the second of Ahl (Malik's brother) in Bosaso, which deals with the quest for Taxiil, Ahl's adopted son recruited by Al-Shabaab; the third tells the events of YoungThing, a boy enlisted by Al-Shabaab too and his tragic death in Mogadishu.

In essence, *Crossbones* appears to be an attempt to widen the viewpoint on Somali reality and to open it up to various trajectories in terms of time and space (Garuba, 2008; Woods, 2011; Proglío, 2011). In doing so, Farah displays the unfulfilled processes of negotiation between the different and fast-moving dynamics that occur on a global level and the legacy of the past of colonialism and dictatorship on a local scale. If in *Links* Farah tries to deconstruct the clan-based system, in *Crossbones* he questions the role of Islam in Somali society and “attempts to debunk several myths pertaining to piracy off the Somali coast and the alleged collaboration of Al-Shabaab with the pirates” (Ganga, 2013).

Farah, once again, sets the novel primarily in Mogadishu and opens *Crossbones* with a geographical mistake (Norridge, 2012), which would inevitably lead to a fatal error: YoungThing, a young boy enlisted by Al-Shabaab, loses himself in the streets of Mogadishu on his way to secure a house, from where the jihadist fundamentalist group could eventually launch attacks against the transitional government and Ethiopian troops. The boy, while trying to follow his orders and find the right way in a desolate Mogadishu with no signs of any kind, meets by chance Cambara, the protagonist of the previous novel, *Knots*. She eventually shows him the wrong way, grasping the intention under YoungThing's query. Later in the plot, in what can be considered as a little slip that results in a dreadful consequence, we discover that Cambara has sent him involuntarily to death. Indeed, YoungThing reaches the wrong house and this mistake causes the tragedy: Al-Shabaab man in chief – identified as BigBeard – punishes the boy by shooting him. These events allow Farah to draw a parallel

with the story of Ahl, who seems to be lost in the quest of his son (recruited by Al-Shabaab from the US) in Bosaso, a city ruled by hidden logics that find their *raison d'être* in tangled relations between Somali pirates and global powers.

In this complex scenario, Farah succeeds in combining both the local and the global, in order to place Mogadishu (and Somalia) at a crossroads between several global dynamics. It is worth considering Farah's approach in terms of the key concept of *mediascapes* as theorised by scholar Arjun Appadurai. He proposes five dimensions of global cultural flows as a framework for understanding the contemporary disjuncture between economy, culture and politics: *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescape*, *ideoscapes* and *mediascapes*. The latter refers "both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), and to the images of the world created by these media" (Appadurai, 1990:299). Accordingly, by focussing on descriptions of places (airports, streets, markets, neighbourhoods) and paying attention to numerous references to mass culture production (above all films and books) Farah allows Mogadishu to cross national borders and join a transnational public sphere (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:9). Hence, for example, YoungThing holds his gun "the way he has seen it done in movies" and he mimics some behaviours "from watching videos on a jihadi website" (Farah, 2011:8-9). Other youths linked to the Court are described while "mimicking a movie they have seen or some jihadi documentary they have been shown" (Farah, 2011:21). In the case of *Crossbones*, representations coming from different devices and sources affect the lives of the two boys. In other words, *Crossbones* shows how pervasive the power of image-centred narrative is, and how "the lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes are blurred" (Appadurai, 1990:35). Indeed, the references that Farah displays to constantly link the local to the global can be found in the frequent mentions of newspapers and tv news (Al Jazeera, the BBC, the CNN, *Le Monde*, *Star Tribune*) which strike the reader as being the main sources of information about Somalia from an outer perspective. The result, then, is twofold: to counterbalance the inward look of the protagonists and to dismantle the orthodox idea

that the notion of culture can be contained within national and regional borders (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992:7-8).

So, YoungThing appears to be the embodiment of a polarity, the upsurge of the diasporic condition. He is – at the same time – lost *in space*, in a Mogadishu where streets with no names can lead anyone to a fatal destination, and lost *in time*, like many Somalis of his generation who become victims of psychological manipulation by terrorist groups. According to Farah, the boy “has no home he can call his own” (Farah, 2011:9). However, this idea of homelessness toward the dismantled spatiality of Mogadishu is shared also by the generation who lived under the Italian rule during the 1950s and 1960s. In the following passage of *Crossbones*, Dhoorre, the old man who lives in the house mistaken by YoungThing, is described during a daydream moment. Farah again emphasises the coexistence of different time levels. Indeed, before his meeting with the boy and at the very beginning of their misfortune, Farah depicts Dhoorre’s nostalgic dream about “one of his favourite Italian movies, Vittorio De Sica’s *Shoeshine*” (Farah, 2011:47). Again, “the city with no innocents” (Farah, 2011:48), or rather a place where sinful people dwell, can be read as one of the numerous references to hell made previously in *Links*.

In this sense, in *Links* and *Crossbones*, Farah represents what Achille Mbembe in his *On the Postcolony* (2001) calls *durée*, i.e. a series of “discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another and envelope one another” (Mbembe, 2001:10). Indeed, Farah locates Mogadishu and Somalia at the intersection of multiple trajectories, by displaying characters of different generations, upbringings and nationalities in a background of both local and global perspective.

Conclusions

As has been shown through the fictional representation of Mogadishu in the novels by Farah and Garane, the city emerges as a lived space that overcomes the dominant narrative of collapse. If in Farah’s vision the city represents a composite urban reality globally connected (both symbolically and practically) and in continuous development, in

Garane's portrayal it features as the main *locus* where colonial discourse has been employed during Fascism and post-war Italian administration. Both Farah and Garane aim to counterbalance the view of a city "outside the norms of social order" (Myers, 2011:138) by reimagining Mogadishu as a complex and multifaceted site where intimate and domestic relation should be reinvented and reconstructed. At the same time, they question the existing relationships and affiliation within Somali people, as well as they address the ubiquitous presence of Italian colonialism and its legacy to the present. In doing so, they place the urban spatiality of Mogadishu as the main subject. If Farah tries to give a broader perspective of Mogadishu by describing its cultural, economic and historical influences and by placing it at the centre of present-day neo-colonial dynamics, Garane describes a postcolonial Mogadishu that has not been represented in literature yet. In Farah, for example, Jeebleh – the exiled Somali who lives in New York – in *Links* tries to restore the meaning of his Somaliness but struggles with his American citizenship (Farah, 2005:36); his friend Bile – who did not leave during Barre's dictatorship – aims to keep a place, called The Refuge, away from the conflict to re-establish a sense of community, a *tol*; at the same time, Bile struggles with the feeling of belonging to Somalia, his native country, to the new reality of a devastated post-1991 Mogadishu; Malik deals with a city and a nation that he does not consider his home, but toward which he feels both a sense of belonging (he knows the language) and unfamiliarity.

In the case of Garane, instead, toponymy plays a fundamental role, according to the idea that the built form could not be confined to the architectural level but is strictly linked to cultural and social practices. The Italian spaces, which were used for "celebrating the triumph of the Fascist state" (Ali, 2016:13), are described from a Somali perspective, through the eyes of Gashan and Shakhlan Imam. Garane shows how "the café culture, cuisine (pasta become a staple Somali diet) and the unhurried Mediterranean tradition of evening strolling to shop, see and be seen" (Ali, 2016:13) were problematically adopted by Somali people.

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PREJUDICE, DIFFERENCE AND THE ROLE OF LITERATURE: KOSSI KOMLA-EBRI'S *IMBARAZZISMI* AS DECOLONIAL MODEL

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Sommario

Questo articolo analizza le due raccolte di racconti, Imbarazzismi e Nuovi Imbarazzismi, dello scrittore italo-togolese Kossi Komla-Ebri, con riferimento al dibattito decoloniale. L'immigrazione in Italia da parte dei cittadini di quelle che erano colonie introduce una molteplicità di nuove 'realità'. Raccontate dal punto di vista del migrante nero nei centri urbani italiani, queste 'narrazioni flash' espongono atteggiamenti razzisti latenti da parte degli italiani. I libri di Komla-Ebri sfidano l'eurocentrismo dell'establishment mostrando principalmente il punto di vista degli oppressi. In questo senso si può dire che i libri siano parte integrante del dibattito intorno a questioni di decolonialismo.

Keywords: Decoloniality, Kossi Komla-Ebri, Postcolonial Italian Literature, Short Story

This article focuses on two Italian short story collections by the Italian Togolese writer Kossi Komla-Ebri. The author, a medical doctor whose recreational writing has turned him into a well-known authorial figure in Italian literary circles, is involved with issues of immigration, particularly relating to the experience of people from African countries. These 'flash narratives' stem from his personal experiences, first as a student, newly arrived in Italy from Togo in 1974, and his subsequent encounters with the racial bias of his Italian hosts, during the course of the next thirty years of Italian sojourn.

His two best known books, originally published as *Imbarazzismi* (2002) and *Nuovi Imbarazzismi* (2004) are a springboard for

discussion around the issue of racism and its many connected themes as well as generalised reflections on the social 'clashes' between ideological standpoints *vis-à-vis* disparate cultures and their host environment. Short and engaging, these stories have layers of multifaceted relevance: simplicity of language, a marked standardisation in their modern European urban settings, humour and an engaging immediacy which contribute to their versatility in the debate around decoloniality in Western settings. As texts they lend themselves to varied applications and should be seen as *spunti* for the revisiting of central themes associated with interpersonal and social scenarios. These issues, of course, are multi-varied and diverse: racial identities are ever more at the centre of modern Italian society. Seen in the light of the current worldwide political debate on the ever-growing necessity for decoloniality in universities and society at large, the polemic against racism in movements such as Black Lives Matter and other varied regional examples, these stories can claim more immediate relevance in a wider social network and could be utilised effectively in the classroom, in the sensitisation process of young people against racism.

Extending beyond the clash of cultures that engaged many of the earlier examples of migrant literature in Italy, these stories record the minutiae of day-to-day experiences of long established African citizens living and working in Italian cities of the North, thereby grappling with "the concept of diversity in the future of Europe" (Kokodoko, 2011:1). The themes running through the stories cover most of the ground on which the decoloniality debate focuses. They closely observe the diverse perspectives that are the result of the Italian colonial experience and describe the many facets of cultural diversity that still today arise out of historical misreadings and misunderstandings. They therefore address the decoloniality debate at a more fundamental level than other purely theoretical approaches, identifying personal struggles that speak directly to the reader's emotional understanding.

It is the contention of this article that the necessity for sensitisation of the general public would be best served by having children read these stories in classrooms as experiences of cultural interaction rather than purely literary texts. According to Komla-Ebri himself

“[m]any immigrants think our emancipation is only economic and political, but we are convinced it's cultural and that we can have a more profound influence through culture” (Scherer, 2013:1).

The main point of discussion is, of course, racism, which can be broadly defined as “a dense system of ideological practices over time entwined with history, language, gender and problems of representation and interpretation” (Collits, 1994:64) constituting the starting point for the collection's broad-based social investigation. If, with Collits, we take the broad categories of “history”, “gender”, “language”, “representation” and “interpretation” as areas of intersection in any definition of racism, we can see these terms representing a multiplicity of nodes of engagement with contemporary Italian society, making these stories far more complex and far-reaching than appears from their apparent simplicity. If, however, we start from Foucault's identification of racism as a by-product of the “technology of power” (Mezzadra, 2012:39), which echoes Fanon's idea of its “mutual support with economic and political or military practices, [making racism] the most visible element of the whole” (Julien, 2000:156), then the stories assume an even greater relevance in a modern urban interrogation, laying bare the dynamics that still dominate engagement in the currently extant hierarchies of power in Western societies.

Told mainly from the perspective of black migrants of the Italo-Togolese community, the characters are, however, also Somalian, Eritrean and Ethiopian, amongst the many cultures that today create the contemporary Italo-African diaspora. Through the eyes of the author, the reader witnesses brief interactions, both good and bad, first-hand, between people of different races in everyday settings, starkly identifying a spread of attitudes that mask deeply entrenched notions of the ‘Other’. The importance of these stories, therefore, is not simply the retelling of autobiographical detail or the engagement with amusing social vignettes, but the fact that, within the broad parameters of the decoloniality debate, they take cognisance of important theoretical nuclei that are at the root of the discussion.

Immigration into Italy by the citizens of what were former Italian colonies – the so-called new “country areas” (Julien, 2000:150) – has brought current Italian society face-to-face with a multiplicity of

realities, amongst which the need for a revision of the “concept of *italianità*” (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 2012:3). These ‘realities’ can be defined as a “family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem [of] the modern age” (Nelson Maldonado Torres, quoted in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). However, it is one thing to identify the strands of coloniality and the layers of “colonization of the imagination” (Quijano, 2007:160) in western societies, another to introduce a regime of change that can become integrated into a new, common process of knowledge creation that is both truly equitable and fully inclusive. The scenarios that appear in the stories all revolve around the basic theme of prejudice towards anyone who is perceived as the ‘Other’ by being ‘different’ in outward appearance, or what the author calls “differently visible” (Kokodoko, 2011). Komla-Ebri’s book adds to this already raging intellectual debate on a creative or, as it were, more ‘applied’ level as a systematic taking of cognisance what amounts to a face-to-face confrontation between Italy and Africa in its multiple day-by-day social interactions. As such, this intellectual debate becomes more easily consumed, understood and emotionally absorbed by those levels of Italian society most distanced from any possible sympathy for the issues at stake. Working as he does in the Northern regions of Italy, associated most closely with the country’s openly expressed anti-immigrant sensibilities, Komla-Ebri’s stories are almost akin to the notion of journalism from the war front.

Written with dry humour¹ and an honesty of approach that looks unflinchingly at all aspects of the immigrant condition, from both sides of the racial divide, the book is accessible reading while also hard hitting in content. Vignettes of immediately recognisable social situations, enlarged to embrace the general plight of migrants attempting to find new lives in the ‘old’ centres from which their historical colonial experience had originated, the stories are at once personal and emblematic and would be valuable teaching tools with which to create resonance where it counts most; in the school environment. The South American idea of *buen vivir* could be a case in point as illustrative of the “pedagogical model [...] [that] derives

¹ Humour is a very important aspect of the author’s approach and would justify a full study of its own, unfortunately outside of the scope of the present work.

from a concept of reciprocity that precedes capitalist formations” (Jaramillo & Carreon, 2014:399). Although not based on the political ends envisaged by the *buen vivir*, *Imbarazzism*'s confrontational, educational and profoundly transformative aims have a lot in common with this movement's notion of reciprocity in a society based on common ideas and mutual respect:

The need to establish acceptance and respect for others thus depends upon a basic measure of equality where the other is recognized for having a voice worthy of being heard. (Jaramillo & Carreon, 2014:400)

Komla-Ebri's books make the immigrant voice in current Italian society “worthy of being heard” as well as easily spread.

If we tease out the central themes using the writings of principal theorists involved in the movement, we can correlate the stories' content with the broader decoloniality debate. In a teaching environment, this could be a useful tool for a dramatisation of the consequences the entrenched notions of the West and its supremacy can have on the daily existence of people living in antagonistic environments. In the tradition of the American writer Richard Wright, who described himself as Western while also “inevitably critical of the West” (Julien, 2000:162), Komla-Ebri provides the double vision of the insider/outsider, a salutary perspective of ‘distance’ still part of his vision in spite of his long standing ‘westernisation’. His analysis of the immigrant's relationship with the racially prejudiced society of modern Italy is therefore a carefully honed personal perspective which provides the reader with his deeply considered viewpoint. The value of each story is global and its interest universal but the point from which these truths spring is the small day-to-day interaction that happens between individuals at the bus stop, in church or at the supermarket.

In the way in which he presents ‘cultures’ as parallel, Komla-Ebri's writing is able to enlighten the native Italian reader – the intended recipient of the book – on the value of diverse identity to be found in personal culture and its varied manifestations in everyday life. In the words of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony

Appiah, “social identities connect the small scale where we live our lives alongside our kith and kin with larger movements, causes and concerns” (Appiah, 2016). This is exactly what Komla-Ebri has achieved in writing these stories. Each story covers certain prejudices identifiable with a number of concepts dealt with by decolonial writers, often in a manner that makes the idea lighter and more accessible to a casual reading public. For this reason, the use of these stories in the classroom could lead to theoretical teachings in the guise of entertainment.

In a brief overview of the main areas of contestation relating to decoloniality, we find a number of relevant themes which are also at the core of the encounters portrayed in these stories and identifiable as talking points for the clashes to which the collection addresses its attention. As a starting point the reader encounters the core issue, perhaps most important of all others, in the recognition of the insularity that is at the root of European self-identification. In the story “Culture ... altre” about the author’s German friend Michael, the insularity of European identity is pitted against the even narrower personal identification of each nation within its own cultural context.

Culture...altre

Questa storia mi è capitata con un mio amico tedesco, Michael, ai tempi dell’università.

Michael si diceva avido di conoscere altre culture ed imparare cose nuove.

L’ho invitato un’estate a casa mia in Togo.

All’inizio era entusiasta di tutto, ma dopo due giorni si era chiuso in un mutismo totale. Alla mia reiterata insistenza di conoscere la causa di questo pesante silenzio che stava minando la nostra amicizia, egli sbottò nervosamente:

“Ma perché camminate così e fate tutto con tanta lentezza? perdetevi troppo tempo! Perché mangiate tutti assieme nello stesso piatto? Non è igienico! Perché i vostri cortili sono sempre pieni di tanta gente? Così non c’è privacy! Perché non fate come noi, noi... noi...?”

Cercai di spiegargli che questo nostro modo di mangiare diverso, di camminare diverso, di vestirsi diverso erano appunto gli elementi della nostra cultura e che, rifiutando questo, egli in qualche modo rifiutava la mia cultura.

Allora non riusciva a capirmi. Solo al suo ritorno Michael mi dichiarò abbracciandomi all'aeroporto:

“Sai, Kossi, ho imparato una cosa importante in Africa: io sono europeo.”

“Sì, caro Michael” avrei voluto dirgli “stai ancora sbagliando: tu sei tedesco!”. (Komla-Ebri, 2002:55)²

In Komla-Ebri's emphasis on the need to see cultures as parallel, we find a mirror of the decolonial emphasis on the West's hegemonic self-evaluation which exposes the self-referential nature of the European culture while providing the model of an alternative world view, one which offers broader identification with “the question of production of knowledge from a global perspective” (Bhabra, 2014:116). A call for cultural exchanges representative of diversity rather than insularity would be the antidote to the narrow perception of restrictive ‘Italianess’ amongst the younger generation, resulting in an awareness of Italy's own historically abusive colonial past. “Le

² **Other...cultures**

This story happened to me during my university years, during the time of my association with my German friend Michael. Michael used to often say how keen he was to get to know other cultures and to learn new things.

One summer I invited him to my home in Togo.

At first he was enthusiastic about everything, but after two days he had sunk into what could only be called profound mutism. On my repeated enquiries to discover the reason of the heavy silence that had started undermining our friendship, he finally blurted out:

“Why do you walk in this manner and do everything so slowly? You waste so much time. Why do you all eat together from one plate? It's not hygienic! Why are your courtyards always so full of people? There is no privacy! Why don't you do like us, us...us?”

I tried to explain to him that in this manner of our different eating style, our different way of walking, our different way of dressing resided our culture and, in rejecting this, he was in some fundamental way rejecting my culture.

But at that moment he wasn't able to fully absorb my meaning. Only on our arrival back to the airport in Italy did Michael explain himself. Embracing me, he said:

“You know Kossi, I have learnt a very important thing in Africa: that I am European.”

“Yes, my dear Michael”, I thought of replying “you are still wrong there: you are German!”

ragioni della speranza” illustrates this point by comparing, almost in vignette form, the generational attitudes of the mother and son, the potential “colour blindness” of youth with the irrationally prejudiced older generation:

Le ragioni della speranza

Salendo sull'autobus, sentii gridare ancora prima di vederlo, un ragazzino di una scuola in cui ero andato a parlare dell'Africa:

“Kossi, ciao Kossi!”

Girai la testa in direzione della sua voce e lo vidi strattonato da sua madre che mi squadro con gli occhi diffidenti, mentre si abbassava per dirgli concitatamente qualche cosa a bassa voce. Lo sentii ribattere ad alta voce con la faccia stupita:

“Ma, mamma è Kossi!” (Komla-Ebri, 2002:37)³

In its exposure of the underlying racism of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ that defines the racial polarisation of attitudes in present day Italy, the writer is serving, in minor key, Mignolo’s, notion of “epistemic disobedience” achieved by “de-linking from the Western idea of modernity” (2009:3) so often defined in its stratification of cultural hierarchy. Therefore, the stories are far more trenchant and focused on a specific level of social integration between groups making up current Italian, or European, societies in general.

The title of the book, *Imbarazzismi*, is a neologism that exemplifies, according to the author, the dominant idea running through the book; the sense of ‘embarrassment’ arising out of a

³ **Reasons for hope**

On boarding the bus, I heard, even before catching sight of him, the loud greeting of a young boy from the school where I had gone to speak about Africa:

“Kossi, hi Kossi.”

I turned my head in the direction of the voice and saw his arm being jerked by his mother, who eyed me with profound suspicion, while leaning down to say something urgently to him in a low voice.

I heard him answer his mom loudly, an incredulous expression on his face:

“But mom, it’s Kossi.”

perception of diversity, understood essentially as the 'difference' associated with skin colour. This 'difference', appearing as it does here in the Italian cultural environment which is not familiar with such diversity on a daily basis, leads to scenarios in which migrants and locals find themselves clashing on the periphery of both embarrassment and racism⁴:

La gaffe

Il mio amico nigeriano Dan fa l'ingegnere di mestiere e vive in Toscana. Tempo fa, ebbe un incarico dal tribunale come consulente tecnico per una perizia. Uno dei consulenti di parte era un ingegnere livornese di mezza età. I livornesi sono singolari per la loro spontaneità (talvolta ironici) e si dice (alla faccia dei luoghi comuni) che sono abituati a trattare con il mondo senza pregiudizi.

Per farla breve, la prima sessione di lavoro avvenne dopo un contatto telefonico. Il nostro livornese sentì il suo buon italiano con accento toscano e quindi non si accorse di nulla.

Due giorni dopo si incontrarono nell'ufficio di Dan. Si presentarono e parve tutto ok: si trovò davanti un giovane architetto "di colore" e da buon livornese riuscì a gestire la sorpresa egregia.

Dan, da parte sua, cercò di metterlo a suo agio trattando argomenti sociali, politici e, ovviamente, parlando di calcio.

L'ingegnere livornese volle sapere dove aveva conseguito la laurea e altre cose sulle sue esperienze professionali. Rassicurato, si prodigò in complimenti e non nascose il suo stupore per la sua conoscenza delle tematiche italiane.

Ormai in confidenza, l'ingegnere si sfoga su quanto la sinistra abbia rovinato questo paese (crede molto nella

⁴ I am thankful to Dr. Komla-Ebri for this insight gleaned in a private conversation during his lecture tour of Pretoria, South Africa, in 2012.

meritocrazia più che nell'uguaglianza e negli stessi diritti per tutti).

Non poteva di certo sapere che Dan era impegnato come assessore in un'amministrazione di sinistra.

Ormai lanciato, continua su quanto si lavora in questo paese; e solo per pagare le tasse.

“Ti fai un culo come un negro e non riesci a sbarcare il lunario. È inaccettabile...”

Si accorge della gaffe.

Dan si mette a ridere... Lui, in crisi... nera. (Komla-Ebri, 2004:21-22)⁵

In its careful identification of the strands of anti-immigrant sensibilities, the writing of Komla-Ebri underlines Fanon's affirmation that “Europe has a racist structure, [...] for the myth of the bad nigger is part of the collective unconscious” (Fanon,

⁵ **The Blunder**

My Nigerian friend, Dan, is an engineer by profession and lives in Tuscany. A while ago he was appointed by the town council as technical advisor on behalf of a consulting firm. One of the other consultants was a middle-aged engineer from Leghorn. People from this city are unusual because of their often ironic spontaneity and it is said (in spite of all that is said about clichés) that they are used to dealing with people without prejudice.

To cut a long story short, the first phase of the job followed an initial telephonic exchange. Our friend from Leghorn only heard Dan's excellent, slightly Tuscan accented, Italian and didn't notice anything.

Two days later they met in Dan's office. They introduced each other and everything seemed ok: the man standing before him an architect 'of colour', and true to form, barely noticed the fact.

Dan, from his side, tried to put him at ease by chatting about social and political issues as well as, obviously, football.

The engineer from Leghorn asked where Dan had got his degree and made other enquiries on his professional experience. Now feeling reassured, he proffered many compliments and commented on Dan's vast grasp of Italian issues.

By this stage already almost friends, the engineer raved on how the left had ruined this country (he believed greatly in meritocracy rather than in equality and in equal rights for all).

There was no way that he could have imagined that Dan was a counsellor affiliated to a left-wing administration.

Having embarked on this topic, however, he continued complaining about the hard work one had to put in, in Italy, just to be able to pay your taxes.

“You sweat like a Negro and you don't manage to make ends meet, it's completely unacceptable...”

He realised his *faux pas*.

Dan started laughing, while the engineer sank into the darkest pit of shame!

1986:92). In the story "Paura doppia", the amusing vignette identifies this very serious racial prejudice in a light-hearted manner but one which, nonetheless, identifies the serious emotional violence associated with the notion of the feared 'Other':

Paura doppia

Vidi la piccola Francesca entrare in sala prelievi, terrorizzata, con i suoi begli occhioni azzurri gonfi di lacrime, stratonata dalla madre:

"Franci, non farmi fare brutta figura! Guarda che è gentile questo dottore ..."

Questo dottore ero io.

Povera bimba, da quando era nata l'avevano sempre ammonita: Se non fai la brava viene l'uomo nero che ti porta via!, oppure: Se non fai la brava chiamo il dottore che ti fa la puntura! E lì, di colpo, vedendo materializzarsi tutt'e due i suoi incubi in una volta sola, la sua paura non poteva che essere ... doppia.

Pensai di scherzare per metterla a suo agio:

"Francesca ... non aver paura, sai... ho già mangiato!"

Fu allora che scoppiò davvero in un pianto a dirotto. (Komla-Ebri, 2004:25-26)⁶

⁶ **Double Terror**

I saw little Francesca enter the room where blood samples were taken from patients, in a state of complete terror, her beautiful blue eyes swollen with tears, forcefully dragged along by her mother:

"Franki, please don't let me down! This doctor is kind."

I, in fact, was "this doctor".

Poor little girl! Ever since birth she had been threatened with such sayings as; "if you aren't good the black man will take you away!", or "if you aren't good I'll call the doctor to come and give you an injection!"

And there, all at once, seeing both her nightmares materialising in one go, her fear could be nothing but be ... doubled up.

I tried to joke with her to make her feel more comfortable;

"Francesca, don't be scared... I've already eaten!"

And then she really burst out in uncontrollable sobs.

Often, however, the difference is also couched in terms of power imbalance and not simply on the level of difference of appearance. In these instances, the 'inferiority' of the recipient of the prejudice is framed within the expectation imbedded in preconceived prejudice. In the following story, the irrationality of prejudice becomes the focus of an example of extensive societal disharmony:

Sindrome da "vù-cumprà"

Tornando da scuola, Gratus passò per il centro perché doveva comprare dei quaderni in una cartoleria.

Appena lui con il suo borsone entrò nel negozio, il commerciante gli venne incontro con mani e palme aperte dicendo:

"No, grazie, non compriamo niente!"

"Ok!" disse Gratus "ma io, posso comprare dei quaderni?" (Komla-Ebri, 2002:39)⁷

The style of narration, although filled with irony and humour, is aimed at providing amusement for the reader while also urging him or her to rethink their daily resident-cum-migrant relationships and their daily engagement with the 'Other'. The clash can also take the form of 'kindness' but is still prejudice for who is perceived to be 'Other' due simply to his skin colour. The story below is a case in point:

Aggiungi un posto a tavola

La famiglia di un'amica di Marzia, una donna molto, molto religiosa, vedeva spesso a messa un giovane "di colore" in piedi in fondo alla chiesa. Era ormai dicembre e i genitori della sua amica pensarono che sarebbe stato

⁷ **The "do you want to buy" syndrome**

On his way back from school, needing to buy some exercise books from the stationary store, Gratus went through the centre of town.

As he entered the shop holding his big duffle bag, the store manager came towards him in an attempt to ward him off, saying:

"No thank you, we are not buying anything!"

"Ok!" replied Gratus, "that may be the case, but I need to buy some exercise books."

un gesto di cristiana carità invitare a pranzo quel ragazzo qualche giorno prima di Natale. Vedendolo sempre solo, in disparte, avevano “capito” che si trattava di uno di quei ragazzi africani venuti a frequentare la loro “prestigiosa” università (oh, fonte d’ogni sapienza!) e che quindi avrebbe sicuramente passato le feste di Natale pressoché solo.

Lo invitarono così a pranzo e lui accettò di buon grado. Quando furono tutti seduti attorno al tavolo, gli chiesero da dove veniva e cosa faceva in Italia. La risposta, semplice e senza ombra di rimprovero, fu: “Sono l’ambasciatore della Guinea Bissau in Italia.”

L’amica di Marzia non riuscì a contare i minuti di imbarazzatissimo silenzio che seguirono quella sconvolgente “rivelazione”... (Komla-Ebri, 2004:11)⁸

Therefore, the question arising out of “race and coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2007:171), in which the hierarchy based on ‘race’ is responsible for the categorisation of people on a network of power relations, is shown by Komla-Ebri as a day-to-day set of perceived hierarchies serving as a backdrop to dominant and subordinate social groups in their continued social interaction. Often, the condescension is far more trenchant and destructive, with the prejudice being categorisation into a seemingly irreversible power imbalance. In the following story, the social incomprehension that results from a

⁸ **Add a place at the table**

The family of a friend of Marcia’s, who is an extremely religious woman, often saw a young man ‘of colour’ who stood alone at the back of the church. It was now December and her friend’s parents felt that it would be a gesture of Christian charity to invite that young man for dinner a few days before Christmas. Seeing that he was always alone they had ‘gathered’ that he must be one of those foreign African students who attended the ‘prestigious’ university (alas, well of all knowledge) and would therefore have had to spend Christmas alone.

They therefore invited him and he accepted with pleasure. When they were all seated around the dinner table, they enquired where he came from and what he was doing in Italy. The answer, simply put and with no shadow of recrimination, was:

“I am the Ambassador of Guinea Bissau to Italy.”

Marcia’s friend couldn’t be sure of how many minutes ticked by in highly embarrassed silence following this amazing revelation...

Western, hierarchical vantage point of dominance over the African identity, which Quijano labels the “exotic” in Western framing, makes for the exchange to be belittling to the receiver while also demonstrative of deep ignorance from the part of the purveyor:

Intercultura e vergogna

La ‘signora maestra’ perorava con gli occhi fuori dalla montatura:

“Vede, in classe abbiamo un ragazzino di colore e vorremmo approfittare della sua presenza per fare dell’intercultura ma... niente da fare. L’altro ieri gli ho chiesto di dirci una parola in africano e lui, silenzio totale.”

Concluse sagacemente:

“Secondo me si vergogna delle sue origini!”

Può anche darsi, ma cara maestra mia, mi dica lei una parola in ‘europeo’! (Komla-Ebri, 2002:59)⁹

The hegemony both of social prominence and linguistic supremacy on the part of the Italian teacher is deflated and mocked, allowing the reader to identify the fallacy at the bottom of nationalistic perceptions that are so often taught uncritically to children. Related is Quijano’s “question of the production of knowledge” (172), in which the idea of the centrality of the ‘subject’ as “a category referring to the isolated individual” is set against the exteriorisation of the ‘object’ seen as “a category referring to an entity not only different from the ‘subject’ [...] but external to the latter by its nature” (172). This distinction is fundamental to the archetypal definition of the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’,

⁹ **Inter-culture and shame**

The school teacher scanned the room with her eyes, looking over the rim of her glasses.

“You see, we have a boy of colour in our class and we wanted to take advantage of his presence in order to pursue some intercultural comparisons...but nothing doing! Two days ago I asked him to give us an African word but he said nothing, complete silence.”

She concluded with great wisdom:

“I think that he is ashamed of his origins!”

Perhaps that is true. However, dear teacher, will you please say a word in ‘European’!

through which colonial organisation was able to structure its continuing social power dynamics. In the story “Ora di punta”, a familiar urban scenario is broken down into its constituent levels of racial prejudice in a way that is both identifiable and deeply shaming for the dominant cultural ideology at play in every Italian city:

Ora di punta

Stavo andando in autobus verso il centro in un'ora di punta.

Con un po' di fatica, trovai un posto in fondo, aggrappandomi alla maniglia dell'ultima sedia vicino alla macchina obliteratrice dei biglietti.

Ad una fermata, un gruppo di chiassosi giovinastri, si accingeva a scendere dalla porta posteriore, intralciando e spingendo così coloro che cercavano di entrare.

Irritato ed esasperato, un signore che cercava disperatamente di salire, li apostrofò, inveendo al loro scherno:

“Scemi! Si scende dal davanti! Idiotti! Imbecilli! Selvaggi!”

“Balu...ba!”

Nel pronunciare quest'ultimo epiteto, il suo sguardo cadde su di me. Nel silenzio gelido passò un angelo con le ali imbrattate di vergogna e le gote rosse d'imbarazzo.

Chissà cosa avranno mai fatto quei... “Baluba”? Non parliamo poi degli “Zulù”! (Komla-Ebri, 2002:11)¹⁰

¹⁰ **Peak hour**

I was travelling on the bus during peak hour, heading towards the centre of town. After considerable effort, gripping the overhead strap with some difficulty, I finally found a seat right at the back of the bus, next to the ticket machine.

At one of the stops, a group of rowdy school children was clustering around the back door, waiting to disembark, thereby pushing and shoving those trying to get onto the bus.

Exasperated and very irritated, a gentleman who was vainly trying to get onto the bus, turned on them, accusingly:

“Fools! You must get off from the front! Idiots! Imbeciles! Savages! Balu...bas.”

In pronouncing the latter epithet, his gaze fell on me. In the chilly silence that followed this outburst, an angel, his wings besmirched with shame and his cheeks red with embarrassment, flew by.

Who knows what those “Balubas” had done? Let's not even mention the “Zulus”!

The reversal of the dichotomy of cultured west pitted against 'dark Africa' polarises the attitudes and, like all parody, focuses on the absurdity of the hegemonic view. Likewise, Quijano's definition of the Western notion of "totality in knowledge" (Quijano, 2007:174) in which the comparison of society to the human body suggests the correlation between the disparate parts as essential for the functioning of the whole, is brought into play. In this metaphoric framing, the brain, associated with the dominant power, maintains a stronghold over the limbs, or subservient nations, which provide the muscle. The levels of inequality, disguised as constituent parts of the human totality, are exposed in the expectations described in the following story, in which the immigrant's automatic inferiority in mental ability is exposed as a default position on the part of the Italian *carabiniere*:

Questione di QI

Quando mi fu concessa la cittadinanza italiana, il maresciallo della stazione locale dei carabinieri, nel complimentarsi con me, puntualizzò:

"Ora dovrà fare il servizio militare."

"Maresciallo, io sono contro la guerra... tutte le guerre!"

"Ma no! E solo pro forma. Vista la sua età, dovrà solo presentarsi per la visita."

Tirai un profondo sospiro di sollievo e il giorno convenuto mi recai alla caserma militare.

Mi trovai un po' a disagio in mezzo a tutti quei giovanastri con la peluria nascente che purtroppo dovevano assolvere quest'assurdo impegno: imparare a uccidere altri esseri umani.

Fummo subito introdotti da un giovane militare (sergente? Non ricordo) in una grande aula per rispondere a un questionario.

Durante l'appello egli ci minacciò:

"State buoni e calmi se no ve la vedrete con me!"

Con pazienza compilai l'assurdo questionario a risposte multiple, che mi chiedeva cose del tipo: Hai mai sentito una voce che ti diceva: "Alzati e vai a salvare la patria"? Oppure: Credi che senza la paura di una sanzione, la gente sarebbe naturalmente onesta? e altre domande ancora più allucinanti.

Il giovane ritirò il "compitino" per portarlo alla psicologa.

Mentre eravamo tutti in fila, con addosso solo gli slip e in attesa della visita medica per la "palpazione", mi sentii chiamare dalla voce tonante del nostro giovane militare:

"Koossi Koomm..."

"Sono io" risposi per evitargli di torturare impietosamente il mio cognome.

"Si risponde: presente!"

"Presente!" ripetei docilmente.

"Cosa c'è?" chiesi incamminandomi dietro di lui in quella tenuta.

"Ti vuole vedere la psicologa!"

"Ah?"

"Sì, perché... sicuramente tu non conoscere bene l'italiano: hai risposto a caso ed è venuto fuori che tu avere un QI superiore alla media... quindi devi rifare il questionario."

"Ah! Bene!" dissi e per un attimo mi parve di scorgere nel cortile un angelo nero sghignazzante, in gonnella di paglia con un ossicino nel naso, che ballava lancia in mano, a suon di tamtam attorno a un pentolone sul fuoco. (Komla-Ebri, 2004:5-6)¹¹

¹¹ **A Question of IQ**

When I obtained my Italian citizenship, the officer at the police station, while congratulating me, pointed out the following:

"You are now going to have to do military service."

"Officer, I am against war, any sort of war!"

"No. It's only symbolic. Due to your age you will only have to go for the regulation medical examination."

I heaved a sigh of relief and on the required day I headed for the military barracks.

The ironic distancing implied by this mode of writing enables the individual to become a 'type' and therefore to assess his or her attitude with critical distance. The author says: these encounters are underscored by subliminal attitudes that expose the general public's thick layering of preconceived notions, either latently or unconsciously racist, but nonetheless still potentially negatively impacting on the enablement of long-term social harmony¹². Is the choice of Komla-Ebri's writing style and narrative content another way of not simply bridging the divide between the immigrant and the native Italian, but also a means for the production of awareness that redefines the social relationship in a manner that will alleviate ignorance towards the many 'alternative' diasporas that find themselves in Italy today?

I felt ill at ease amongst those pubescent lads who were, to their misfortune, required to perform the absurd task of being trained to kill other human beings.

On arrival we were taken by a young military officer (a sergeant perhaps, but I don't rightly remember) to a large hall where we were instructed to fill in a questionnaire.

During the roll call he warned us:

"Be calm and attentive otherwise you'll have to deal with me!"

I patiently filled in the absurd multiple choice questionnaire filled with absurd questions like: *Have you ever heard a voice telling you to "Rise and save your fatherland"?* Or *"Do you believe that without the fear of consequences people would be naturally honest"?* and other even more unbelievably inane conundrums.

The young man collected the "essay" in order to take it along to the psychologist.

As we stood in the queue, waiting for the medical examination, wearing only our boxer shorts, I heard my name being loudly called out by the young officer:

"Koossi Koomm..."

"That's me," I answered, hoping to stop him from cruelly torturing my surname any further.

"You are supposed to say: 'Present'!"

"Present" I replied with docility.

"What's wrong?" I asked him as I followed in my getup.

"The psychologist wants to see you!"

"Oh?"

"Yes, because...surely you do not know Italian well enough: you answered randomly and it worked out that you have a higher than average IQ ... so you must redo the questionnaire."

"Oh! Fine", I replied and for a moment I thought I saw a sniggering black angel in the courtyard, wearing a grass skirt and sporting a little bone in his nose, who was dancing to the sound of the jungle drum around a cauldron on top of a fire, brandishing a spear in his hand.

¹² I thank Dr. Komla-Ebri for this notion.

In the following story the gradations of language determine not only the competence of the African immigrant but also his unstated hierarchical status in the host society. Echoing Fanon's claim that the "negro [...] will *come closer to being a real human being* – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (1986:18), the following exchange exemplifies the notion in all its absurdity:

Aspettando l'autobus

Un'amica eritrea e un signore italiano erano ad aspettare tutt'e due l'autobus n° 25.

"Quest'autobus è sempre in ritardo!"

"È vero! Meno male che oggi non piove."

E per venti minuti andarono avanti a parlare del tempo e della scomparsa della mezza stagione poi lui s'informò:

"Lei parla italiano?"

Lei rimase esterrefatta:

"Mi scusi signore, ma in che lingua abbiamo parlato fino adesso?". (Komla-Ebri, 2004:15-16)¹³

The two collections offer many correlations between decolonial theory and the demands levelled by foreign communities in most modern Western societies, in which inequality has lost its clearly defined outline due to the ambivalence of the 'purity' of their postcolonial achievements. These works, therefore, should have a very important place in Italian culture by virtue of the fact that they

¹³ **Waiting for the bus**

An Eritrean friend and an Italian gentleman were both waiting for bus No.25

"This bus is always late!"

"Very true! Thank goodness it isn't raining today."

And for the next twenty minutes they chatted about the weather and the disappearance of the mid-season when he suddenly enquired:

"Do you speak Italian?"

She was flabbergasted.

"Excuse me, sir, but what language have we been speaking till now?"

deal with the meaning of identity in the face of cultural diversity. Speaking of literary writing as something that:

[...] does not only restrict itself to being an instrument of knowledge about others but which is also an instrument of self-knowledge. Our identity is not a static phenomenon; it is not something that we keep frozen in the freezer. Identity changes with the environment. It changes with the culture where we are immersed. Our identity changes with the education we receive at home, at school, with our friends and relationships.¹⁴

In this sense his books postulate a foundation for what can be defined an essential human need – the ability to live together without the divisory barriers of race. In dissecting the notions of identity in Italy today, Komla-Ebri's writing has the power to imaginatively and creatively popularise the emotional and political themes that define decoloniality for the average Italian reader, the one who would not attempt the more specialised readings of these highly politicised theorists, who by their very nature, remain on the 'outside' of the popular Italian discussion forum.

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BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONI

LUIGI GUSSAGO, *Picaresque Fiction Today: The Trickster in Contemporary Anglophone and Italian Literature*. Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2016.

It is unusual for a literary scholar to address the messy, undefinable multiplicity that characterises contemporary life by combining archetypal, social, political, and literary elements. Luigi Gussago's invitation to inhabit the "topsy-turvy perspective of an outcast with a sharp eye" (281) offers a new way of navigating this complexity, as stated in the back cover of his recent *Picaresque Fiction Today: The Trickster in Contemporary Anglophone and Italian Literature*. The author investigates the formation of a 'rogue narrative' for present times from a comparative standpoint, with examples drawn from and Italian literatures over the period from the early 1990s to the 2010s. Beginning with the impact of early picaresque works in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain – starting from Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599), through the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), to Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615) – Gussago's book is divided into four chapters, each one dissecting a pair of novels through a close reading of their picaresque protagonists.

Picaresque Fiction Today illustrates the strategies these literary tricksters adopt when trying to make sense of themselves, of others, and of the reality surrounding them, often through a language that makes extensive use of rhetorical devices. The key point that links together the different writers and works under discussion is found in Gussago's characterisation of the rogue as "the petty criminal, the vagabond *taking up the role of servant of many masters and, by consequence, of none*, the swindler, the unsuccessful social climber, and so forth" (3; my emphasis). Admittedly, the relationship the protagonists of a picaresque novel have with the concept of power and authority, in both a material and metaphorical sense is fascinating. Rogues, Gussago writes, occupy "a twilight zone between social convenience and intolerance of power" (6), in whose interstices lays a space for critique and for refashioned notions of identity, the self, and its relations with others. Their particular positioning – as neither here,

nor there – exemplifies their “distinctive attitude to reality and its aberrations, observed from the outside but often also dissected from the inside” (3).

History in-the-Making

The “Introduction: A Journey Around the Picaresque Novel” offers a point of entry into four distinctive aspects of picaresque fiction: the protagonists’ replacement of reliable, verifiable ‘historical’ accounts with first-person “mock autobiographies” (3); their obsessions with traveling without predefined purpose; their ambiguous relationship with masters, viewed as “figure[s] of authority [...] but also [...] as father or mother figure[s]”; and what appears a resilient sense of the ‘unfinished’, whereby they never learn from their actions and experiences (4). These aspects recur throughout Gussago’s study, especially when relating the rogue figures’ deeds to ‘big themes’ of history, memory, love, and politics.

The juxtaposition of the official lives of historical personages with the potentialities of revised historical accounts “through the eyes of a notorious impostor, leading to unexpected outcomes” (16) is the subject matter of Chapter 1, “History through Roguish Eyes”. As forgers of a different sense of the historical, the literary rogues Baudolino (in Umberto Eco’s *Baudolino*, 2000) and Parrot (in Peter Carey’s *Parrot and Olivier in America*, 2009) break down history with the Capital ‘H’ (and its social, cultural, and political bias) in typical postmodern fashion, to pinpoint the impossibility of closure. In Eco’s novel, Baudolino tells about his step-father Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa and his death, whereas in Carey’s, Parrot recounts his master Olivier de Garmont’s (a stand-in Alexis de Tocqueville) story and their journey to the United States. In both novels, history is never singular: it is “constructed through language” (51) just like any act of narration. The *pícaro* thus calls into question the artificial boundary-making practices reiterated in every act of cataloguing and recording dominant events, experiences, and narrations – itself a radical act against the authority of a ‘master’. Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin, Roman Jakobson, Jurij Lotman, and Michel Riffaterre, in particular, the latter’s conceptualisation of “dual sign irony”, Gussago discusses a series of figures of speech – including the use of “historical irony”,

deictic markers to refer to time and space, and metonymy – to confirm a trickster’s re-making of the past, their skilled “transforming [of] story into history” (34).

On Centres and Margins

The claim that “[t]he picaresque has carved out a niche at the boundary of official literature” (71) since as early as the Renaissance, which works as metaphor of the ‘centre’, provides a useful point of entry into Gussago’s critique of centre and margins in Chapter 2, “Alienation and Counter-culture”. The author takes Cesare De Marchi’s *Il talento* (1997) and Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow or the Nature of Offence* (1991) as examples of contemporary picaresque narratives whose rogue protagonists “simulate the chaos of real life” (67). Specifically, while the counter-cultural performances of the alienated Carlo Marozzi (in De Marchi’s novel) and the Nazi doctor Odilo Unverdorben (in Amis’s own) acknowledge the dominant culture, they uncover its dualistic nature, unmasking the constitutive outside upon which it is structured: “Carlo and ‘Odilo’, much like their picaresque predecessors, do not fit in a ‘normal’ society, but society itself does need them, in order to justify its own presumed normality” (82). They can only exist on the margins of “the ‘official’ culture”, and as “strangers” (68). The sense of alienation felt by these outcast figures is mirrored back onto society and its articulations, from the strategic location of the *pícaro*: that of “external ‘disorganization’”, a term Gussago takes from semiotician Yuri Lotman, who with phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels provides the theoretical backing for his analysis in this chapter.

The stranger has many functions: feeling alienated, a stranger is unable to act (De Marchi’s protagonist is so estranged from society that he is unable even to commit suicide); strangers are figures (and bodies) irredeemably out-of-place; as Sarah Ahmed (2010) powerfully reminds us with regard to the racialised body, strangers trouble space. Post-structuralist critic Jacques Derrida is fittingly acknowledged in this discussion of the “asymmetry between self and stranger” (79), for his contribution to understanding the centre in combination with its outside (1966, 292) is still a powerful attempt at the foundations of Western metaphysics. “With a paroxysm of irreverence and outrage”,

Carlo and Odilo question the centre-margin dichotomy finally to reveal the inconsistency of its dualistic nature: “they confirm the existence of the centre, but their radical impact on the self is subtler: the self has gained its identity, but should this identity be univocal? Are the terms of this identity indisputable?” (78). The remaining of the chapter is thus dedicated to a detailed analysis of circumlocution, euphemism, synecdoche, the dualism acting vs. improvising, and rhetorical questions as strategies through which the two contemporary *pícaros* manage to live, through synonyms, with ‘the stranger inside themselves’.

For those readers who are sceptical about Amis’s treatment of the Holocaust through the character of Odilo, Gussago’s references to the works of Primo Levi, on which he has written previously, offer a series of compelling arguments regarding the uses of memory in contemporary fiction.

How Queer is the Picaresque?

Writing about British feminist writer Angela Carter’s novel, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Italian critic Paola Bono highlights “excess” as recurring trope in the writer’s works (1991:36). Carter is often cited for the role played by the carnivalesque in her writing, and for (re)shaping the picaresque tradition through a markedly feminist lens. In Chapter 3 of his book, “Women on the Edge: Sexuality and Gender Dissent” Gussago acknowledges Carter’s contribution to contemporary picaresque fiction (in *Wise Children*, 1991), while also offering a rather unconventional counter-narrative of gender, sex, and sexuality that opens with a revisionist account of the classics: Apuleius’ “The Tale of Cupid and Psyche”, contrasted to the ideals of Platonic love.

Carter’s *Wise Children*, which tells the story of twin sisters Dora and Nora Chance is paired with Italian writer and translator Aldo Busi’s *Vendita galline km 2* (1993), focussing on Delfina Unno Pastalunghi’s vicissitudes and contrast with her very rich family. What does the application of notions of gender, sex, and sexuality questioning the fiction of ‘nature’ tell us about the picaresque? This question pervades Gussago’s analysis of a series of interrelated themes, from the parent-child complex, to transvestism and

androgyny, aspects that will particularly appeal to scholars and critics interested in gender and feminist studies. As part of her broader dismantling of gendered norms of conduct, behaviours, and of morality the *pícaro* shows that “the representation of gender very often downplays many certainties about definite categories or groups” (124). A case in point is the treatment of the androgynous as “double gender role within oneself”, as illustrated by the following quotation:

Along with a sense of rebellion against the puritanism of social conventions and a kind of retaliation of the carnivalesque chaos against the external strain imposed by religion and morality, the androgynous within oneself is also a provocative message aimed at Plato’s doctrine of the twin souls. In the cynical picaresque view of a socially manipulated intimacy, the only twin soul is to be found within oneself. (130)

The creative and critical writing available on transvestism and androgynousness is extensive; yet, what is no doubt new about the subject of this chapter is the ‘queer effect’ created by an exploration of the picaresque through a sex/gender lense (Carter) compared with one through the eyes of a gay man writing about a lesbian’s life, as is the case respectively for the writer and protagonist of *Vendita galline km 2*.

In a passage about the threat posed by the lesbian to the heteronormative reproduction imperatives of the social order, Gussago highlights that, (not only) for Delfina’s Family – with capital ‘F’ –, “a lesbian does not deserve any identification of her role in society other than the one expressed by her unproductive gender: [...] sexuality, seen as an exclusively natural propensity, impinges on the socially valued construct of gender dignity” (159). A key theoretical source informing Gussago’s analysis is Erving Goffman, the feast of Stone in his comparative literature approach to gender, sex, and sexuality. “Goffman emphasises the primacy of the social frame in sexual behaviour and gender identity: although the natural objective frame is often uninfluential in gender relationships, it is simply exploited as an excuse to justify an inherent male/female differentiation” (140). I find it interesting that Goffman’s conceptualisations of gender are never

related to the work of queer gender theorists and the notion of gender as performance; however, in the attempt to defy readers' and critics' urge to pinpoint omissions, the book seems rather to achieve its opposite. I have in mind the many ways in which, here and elsewhere in *Picaresque Fiction Today*, the queer is over-present as "verb, suggesting the work of queering, of acting in relation, opposition, or resistance to the norm" (Jakobsen 1998:517) – which creates a variety of productive parallels with the tricksters of contemporary picaresque fiction, still awaiting investigation.

"The world wants to be deceived; therefore, let it be deceived" (1)

The *pícaros'* relationship with politics, national, and world history contained in the first chapter of Gussago's book re-emerges alongside the workings of irony, satire, and parody in the fourth and final Chapter, "Humour and the Muffled Voice of Reason". In addition to exploring the different uses of humour in Stefano Benni's *Saltatempo* (2001) and Roddy Doyle's *A Start Called Henry* (1999), the author's task is to look at "how the Age of Reason has contributed new directions to the comic in contemporary picaresque literature" (195), involving, among others, the criticism of Descartes and Locke and a reflection on the concepts of individualism, common good, and the general will (see the section titled, "The Enlightened Grin":238-264).

Lupetto and Henry are Gussago's chosen examples of outsiders to narratives of the Nation (a particularly debated subject with regard to Doyle's re-construction of Ireland's Republic in *A Start Called Henry*), and as rogues, they also feel "alienated from the great advances of world history" (213). As noted convincingly by the author, a pairing of the Italian and the Irish writer does not rule out the differences between them. Doyle's production spans novels, short stories, children books, plays, and screenplays; his characteristic "sense of place" and "sense of language" (see Fantaccini 2008), rooted in North Dublin has been a primary source informing his *oeuvre* since the internationally acclaimed *The Barrytown Trilogy* (*The Commitments*, 1987; *The Snapper*, 1990; *The Van*, 1991). It could be argued that Benni's alleged "one-sided social optimism" (215) has undermined interest in his work as contemporary writer, from critics and scholars alike. Yet, both writers have contributed to a

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ANITA VIRGA, *Subalternità siciliana nella scrittura di Luigi Capuana e Giovanni Verga*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2017.

“Di libri inutili su Verga continuano a uscirne regolarmente” (Pellini 2012)¹, scriveva qualche anno fa Pierluigi Pellini, commentando piuttosto causticamente sullo stato presente degli studi verghiani, caratterizzati, secondo il critico, da una produzione vasta ma una qualità e una rilevanza esegetica non sempre adeguate. Il terreno degli studi su Capuana, invece, seppure in ripresa anche a seguito del centenario dalla scomparsa dello scrittore mineolo (2015), non sembra avere mai registrato la prolificità che ha caratterizzato e caratterizza i ‘Verga studies’ – soprattutto in termini di ‘libri’, cioè di monografie – in linea con la tradizione che ha sempre voluto, e forse ancora vuole, l’uno ancillare dell’altro: Capuana minore illustre ma insomma pur sempre minore.

Se non è certo questo il luogo per entrare nel merito del giudizio di valore formulato da Pellini, si può forse prendere spunto dall’aspetto quantitativo del suo commento per avvicinare l’ultima fatica accademica di Anita Virga, dedicata a Verga e Capuana. In questa luce, quel che mi pare proprio non manchi a *Subalternità siciliana nella scrittura di Luigi Capuana e Giovanni Verga*, è ‘l’utilità’ esegetica. Concepito ‘al centro’ (all’università del Connecticut) e portato a termine ‘ai margini’, presso la mandeliana Witwatersrand University nell’iconica Johannesburg – luoghi entrambi gravidi, almeno agli occhi dell’Occidente, del simbolismo di sguardi e tensioni postcoloniali – *Subalternità siciliana nella scrittura di Luigi Capuana e Giovanni Verga* propone di rileggere il ‘canone’ verista con gli occhi piacevolmente nuovi, almeno per quel che riguarda l’Ottocento verista italiano, dei *Postcolonial Studies*.

L’innovatività del volume di Virga incomincia dalla distribuzione degli spazi testuali, in uno studio che dedica uguale attenzione a Verga e Capuana narratori, e inverte così la menzionata e pluridecennale tendenza a trattare il lavoro di Capuana, soprattutto quando le due

¹ Il commento di Pellini era contenuto in una sua recensione – per la rivista on-line *Between* (II.4) – di un volume verghiano di Alessio Baldini (2012) – che, *ex negativo*, Pellini procedeva poi invece a categorizzare fra i lavori ‘utili’ sull’autore, e di cui illustrava i molti meriti.

corone veriste appaiono assieme, da didascalia alla pratica narrativa verghiana.

Dopo avere delineato, in introduzione, la storia della penetrazione ed espansione del *framework* postcoloniale in ambito italianistico e avere isolato, all'interno di esso, le schneideriane sottocornici del colonialismo interno e dell'auto-orientalizzazione, entro cui lo studio si colloca, *Subalternità siciliana* si concentra, per un centinaio di pagine per autore, sull'analisi dei testi.

Per quel che riguarda Capuana, l'analisi di Virga incomincia da alcune fiabe, passa per la narrativa per ragazzi e culmina con l'analisi delle strategie controdiscorsive ne *Il marchese di Roccaverdina* (1901) e di come esse veicolino la presenza del subalterno. La tesi di Virga è che la doppia e simultanea appartenenza di Capuana al mondo dei colti colonizzatori borghesi del continente e a quello periferico della Sicilia rurale 'colonizzata' con l'Unità – il mineolo Capuana aveva vissuto e studiato a Firenze, Milano e Roma ed era un unitarista convinto, cavouriano prima, crispino poi – renda i suoi testi aperti a spinte e tensioni contrastanti. Vi sono, da un lato, quelle restringenti e normative provenienti dalla cultura egemone, nazionale, borghese e, dall'altro, quelle resistenti – seppur inconsapevolmente – dei subalterni, la cui ineliminabile presenza costantemente disturba e inquieta il potere e il 'centro'.

Nell'analisi del *Marchese*, forse la più coinvolgente nella porzione capuaniana di questo studio, c'è tutta la tradizione storico-filologica pre- e post-madrignanea – da Annamaria Pagliaro (1997) e Paul Barnaby (2000), alla Christina Petraglia de "Il *marchese-contadino*" (2010). Soprattutto, c'è l'analisi sofisticata de – verrebbe da dire con l'Alex Wolock di *The One vs the Many* (2003) – il 'sistema dei personaggi minori' che circondano il decaduto aristocratico e attentano alla solidità del suo potere. Il marchese è egemone, è 'centro' di potere per chi lo circonda ma è anche parte della periferia colonizzata della nuova Italia unificata. Il suo potere si incrina perché disturbato da molteplici forze contrastanti: il progresso dell'agricoltura continentale minaccia il benessere economico degli arretrati possedimenti del nobiluomo; il vecchio frate Don Silvio, che morirà d'inedia, disturba l'intoccabilità del nobile ricordandogli – quando questi uccide per gelosia – come anche egli sia soggetto alla legge di Dio, se non a quella degli uomini, molti dei quali, in Sicilia,

gli sono sottoposti per lignaggio e censo; il contadino Santi Dimaura, il quale si suiciderà per disperazione, disturba la preminenza dell'aristocratico quando rifiuta di cedere il minuscolo appezzamento di terreno che (ir)rompe fastidiosamente (nel)la monotona tranquillità del latifondo Roccaverdina; il *factotum* Rocco Criscione – che il marchese assassinerà a fucilate – ne disturba e mina l'autorità contravvenendo (o provando a contravvenire) al suo ordine di matrimonio bianco con l'ex-amante di lui, la contadina Agrippina Solmo, affidatagli dal marchese stesso per salvare le apparenze.

Ma è solo la presenza della doppia subalternità spivakiana della bella e docile Agrippina che riesce a scalfire definitivamente l'involucro di potere e privilegio del nobile Antonio Scirardi, e a portarlo dalla morbosa gelosia alla delirante pazzia e alla morte. Insomma, detto con Virga:

Nella rappresentazione che Capuana ci offre di questo personaggio si concentra la dualità del mondo subalterno che, sebbene marginalizzato ed escluso dalla narrativa principale, tuttavia esiste e tramite la presenza, tramite quell'*esserci* continuamente negato a livello ufficiale, opera. (98)

L'analisi della sezione verghiana si apre con una lettura postcoloniale di alcune novelle, nella quale la studiosa siculo-piemontese contrappone ad una narrativa capuaniana oltremodo – forse troppo – cauta nel lasciare emergere le tracce controdiscorsive del subalterno, una prosa verghiana più esplicita e spregiudicata. Il criterio usato dalla studiosa per far luce sulla pratica controdiscorsiva verghiana è l'idea dell'indebolimento, operato progressivamente da Verga, della rappresentazione pittoresca del subalterno, che era invece costantemente promossa dagli operatori culturali – si pensi all'*Illustrazione italiana* di Treves – per 'commercializzare il prodotto' di una Sicilia misteriosa ed esotica al pubblico del continente.

La presenza e la voce del subalterno affiorano in Verga – secondo la studiosa – a livello caratterologico, linguistico e stilistico in maniera sempre più prominente. Nella *Nedda*, primo lavoro nel quale, attraverso una protagonista non borghese, Verga introduce i subalterni

siciliani al pubblico continentale colto, la descrizione del contadino siculo rimane tutto sommato esterna e alterizzante; e tuttavia il successo di *Nedda* spinge l'autore avanti nella propria ricerca artistico-letteraria legata alla rappresentazione della Sicilia, verso le otto novelle di *Vita dei campi* (1880). In esse la condizione ibrida verghiana – non subaterna e non completamente integrata nella logica produttiva della nuova borghesia del continente: “doppia esclusione basata su una parziale appartenenza” (116) – emerge con più vigore in quanto l'alterizzazione e pittoresca bozzettizzazione della Sicilia rurale si riducono. La collezione *Vita dei Campi* non canta i piaceri dell'idillio rusticano; è popolata di orfani e vedove sofferenti: non riproduce acriticamente la retorica familista del *nation-building* ma al contrario lascia intravedere – seppur non senza contraddizioni – l'inquietudine e il trauma di un popolo colonizzato, figurativamente orfano, regione/nazione bambina abusata dal genitore-invasore, di cui pure ha in fondo bisogno per ‘crescere civilmente’. Dei valori cardine di tale discorso – famiglia, onore/virtù e patria – la collezione si (ri)appropria in maniera problematica: Turiddu muore per onore, ma non per la patria. Data la coinvolgente natura di questa analisi – che si snoda esaustivamente da *Fantasticheria* a *La lupa* – il lettore si trova a desiderare che un po' più di attenzione fosse stata dedicata agli ultimi tre titoli: *L'Amante di Gramigna*, *Pentolaccia*, *Guerra di santi*, magari discutendo (fosse anche per scartarla come ipotesi) il potenziale di resistenza insito nella parodia che caratterizza questi testi, a cui l'autrice accenna solo cursoriamente.

Come per Capuana, anche il capitolo conclusivo su Verga (“*I Malavoglia*, la traccia del subalterno nel testo”) è il più complesso e probabilmente il più soddisfacente dal punto di vista dell'applicazione metodologica, quello in cui l'originale prospettiva postcoloniale meglio si combina alla tradizione degli studi storico-filologici maggiori. Nell'analizzare *I Malavoglia* (1881) Verga si concentra sull'evoluzione del romanzo dalle prime bozze fino alla versione data alle stampe e su come questa evoluzione dispieghi progressivamente l'incontrollabilità e insopprimibilità delle tracce di resistenza del subalterno nel testo. La tesi virghiana è che anche qui l'autore progressivamente si adopera per rimuovere, intervenendo su lingua e stile, la patina di rasserenante riduzione del subalterno alla dimensione dell'idillio arcaico e quasi-mitico.

Nella versione definitiva della collezione, la “volontà di imitare i modi del parlato” (Virga 2017:142) – l’uso dei proverbi, che Verga impiega, con rarissime eccezioni, non segnalati nè spiegati – disturba l’omogeneità della prosa borghese, impedendo di fatto, al fruitore settentrionale, da un lato la piena identificazione di ciò che legge con ciò che conosce ma anche, dall’altro, la completa comprensione del linguaggio dell’alterità subalterna. Ugualmente, l’indiretto libero e l’uso della punteggiatura contribuiscono, per Virga, a creare una “zona fluida” (156) all’interno del paragrafo, in cui il mondo subalterno non è nitidamente alterizzato dall’uso di marcatori linguistici ma neppure completamente assimilato – in forma distorta, s’intende – nella prassi discorsiva egemone.

Mi pare, per concludere, che *Subalternità siciliana nella scrittura di Luigi Capuana e Giovanni Verga* non solo si affianchi a buon diritto alla crescente produzione legata agli studi postcoloniali italiani ma s’imponga – attraverso una bibliografia bilanciata e un’analisi testuale approfondita e puntuale – all’interno di questo panorama in espansione, come uno dei testi a cui fare riferimento per il secondo Ottocento di area verista.

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INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS / INFORMAZIONI PER I COLLABORATORI

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