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Italian Postcolonial Literature

Caterina Romeo

(translated by S.A. Smythe)

Introduction

Italian postcolonial literature has been one of the most historically relevant, culturally incisive, and artistically revitalizing phenomena to emerge in the past twenty-five years on the Italian cultural scene. It has provided a symbolic representation of the many social changes that have taken place in Italy during this period, encouraging society to rethink itself and to conceive of migrants to Italy and subsequent generations of new Italians in ways that go far beyond rejection and victimization. This essay is a tribute to the cultural and literary relevance of Italian postcolonial literature and to its crucial role as part of contemporary Italian culture. The survey I present here is not complete, nor does it aim to be. What it aims to do, first of all, is include a great number of writers who have contributed to shaping a literary context and tradition out of which postcolonial literature has developed and thrived. This tradition is of great importance since, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, masterpieces are never born in isolation: they need predecessors, they need continuity, they need a community. I start by posing the question of terminology, indicating why it is important to define this literature as “postcolonial” rather than “multicultural,” “intercultural,” or “translingual” (terms which concentrate on the co-presence of different cultures and languages without historically problematizing it). I then analyze how Italian postcolonial literature has developed since its beginning in the early 1990s, and examine how it has promoted new styles, imaginaries, and representations, introduced new themes, and opened up a new creative space in Italian culture. To this end, I offer a loose periodization of Italian postcolonial literature by dividing it into three different phases, analyzing the different trends and voices that have developed over the past (almost) thirty years. I argue that the literature these writers have created has contributed greatly to a questioning of Italian social and cultural norms, constituting a vibrant literary critique of the political and social status quo.

The expression “Italian postcolonial literature” still provokes controversy more than twenty-five years after this literature emerged in 1990, its generally accepted starting date. Using the appropriate terminology has been a central issue since it first became the topic of a critical debate initiated in Italy by Armando Gnisci and in the United States by Graziella Parati (neither of whom ever used the term “postcolonial”).¹ To argue about what term should define the literature created in Italian by migrants and by the descendants of migrants also means raising questions about the Italian literary and cultural canon, probing the issue of who can be considered Italian and interrogating the social—rather than simply cultural—role of these subjects. It means asking what constitutes *italianità*, Italianness, and to what norm—be it somatic² or cultural—one must

¹ See Graziella Parati, ed., *Margins at the Center: African Italian Voices*, special issue of *Italian Studies in Southern Africa* 7/2 (1995); Armando Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Rome: Lilit, 1998).

² With the expression “somatic norm,” Nirmal Puwar describes the implicit rules that regulate bodies’ access to certain spaces. See Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

conform in order to be included in this privileged category. Over the past twenty-five years, definitions of this literary corpus and the writers who have produced it have included “Italoophone,” “migrant,” “postmigrant,” “multicultural,” “migration,” “diaspora,” “second-generation,” and “postcolonial,” as well as a variety of expressions referring to countries and continents of origin (Alessandro Portelli used the term “Afroitalian,” and other terms were subsequently used such as “African Italian,” “of African descent,” “Italian Somali,” “Albanian Italian,” and so on).³

On the one hand, to continue to regard this corpus as a separate body of work over twenty-five years after it first emerged, rather than allowing it to be considered “simply” a part of Italian literature, may be deemed problematic. It could be identified as a kind of neocolonial maneuver wherein subjects coming from different histories, geographies, languages, and cultures are homogenized on the basis of their difference from mainstream culture, with this difference becoming the lowest common denominator of what is actually a profoundly heterogeneous literature. On the other hand, the label “migration literature” initially offered these writers a decisive edge in the publishing market, bringing their desire to tell their stories into alignment with the curiosity of the host society, and enabling their writings to emerge as part of a new cultural movement. Being grouped under one label and sacrificing internal differences has allowed migrant and second-generation writers a position *from which* to exercise a degree of cultural and political resistance, as they have been able to sensitize Italian readers to the kinds of marginalization migrants often endure and to affirm their right to migrate and settle legally in Italy.⁴ This kind of resistance seems more necessary today than ever before.

To define the writings of these authors as “postcolonial”⁵—as well as to apply this term to the status of contemporary Italy—has both cultural and sociopolitical implications.⁶ Although the

³ For a reflection on the question of terminology and the contributions different scholars have made to it, see Caterina Romeo, “Vent’anni di letteratura della migrazione e di letteratura postcoloniale in Italia: un excursus,” in *La letteratura italiana e l’esilio*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, special issue of *Bollettino di italianistica* 8/2 (2011): 381–407. Alessandro Portelli coins the term “Afroitalian” to create a parallel with African-American literature, to which Italian scholars at the beginning of the third millennium generally referred as “Afroamerican.” See Alessandro Portelli, “Le origini della letteratura afroitaliana e l’esempio afroamericano,” *L’ospite ingrato. Annuario del Centro Studi Franco Fortini* 3 (2000): 69–86.

⁴ Many critics have perceived the emergence of migration literature as a response—at least in part—to the killing of Jerry Masslo in Villa Literno in August 1989, as well as to the creation of the Martelli Law in 1990, the first legislation regulating immigration in Italy. In particular, Parati sees the first texts of migration literature as the response of migrant writers to legal texts, which, from that moment on, governed and regulated the access and length of stay of foreign citizens within Italian national territory. See Graziella Parati, “The Legal Side of Culture: Notes on Immigration, Laws, and Literature in Contemporary Italy,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 16 (1998): 297–313; ead., *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

⁵ The term “postcolonial” is employed to refer to Italian literature for the first time in 2004 in two publications by Sandra Ponzanesi and Tiziana Morosetti, to refer to what was up to that moment mostly called “migration literature.” See Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); Tiziana Morosetti, ed., *La letteratura postcoloniale italiana. Dalla letteratura dell’immigrazione all’incontro con l’altro*, special issue of *Quaderni del 900* 4 (2004).

⁶ To this end, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, “The Italian Postcolonial: A Manifesto,” *Italian Studies* 69/3 (2014): 425–33. An extensive overview of the texts published on the Italian postcolonial is presented in the essay by the same authors, “Paradigms of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy,” in *Postcolonial Italy*, 1–29, and then an update in “Il postcoloniale italiano. Costruzione di un paradigma,” in *L’Italia postcoloniale*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (Florence: Le Monnier-

repression of Italian colonial history became pervasive in Italian culture after World War II and lasted until very recently, writers originating in previously colonized countries have been helping that history resurface; they are rewriting it, contributing to the creation of new imaginaries, and forging new social and cultural scenarios for the future. To choose the term “postcolonial” to describe their work—rather than “migrant,” “of migration,” “intercultural,” “translingual,” and so on—means to connect the past to the present in order to show how the power relations produced by colonialism are being reproduced in contemporary postcolonial societies, and to reread and rewrite Italian history and culture in light of the contribution made by new subjects producing new epistemologies. This process calls into question a range of social and cultural privileges and acknowledges the need to question the very idea of a literary canon and its “colonial” function. Such a cultural and epistemological turn has become more and more urgent as a consequence of the profound social changes Italy has undergone in the past thirty years.⁷

The use of a postcolonial perspective brings to the analysis of Italian culture a sense of both temporal and spatial continuity. On the one hand, it brings to light the connection that exists between the present, the colonial past, and the great historical waves of international and internal emigration, examining how Italians have occupied positions of hegemony as well as subalternity at various historical junctures and in various geographical locations, and probing how these positions shift as a result of migratory movements. Such a perspective is crucial to understanding how a sense of Italian national identity emerged, at least in part, as the result of these events, and

Mondadori, 2014), 1–38. Some of the most recent texts on the postcolonial condition of contemporary Italy include Miguel Mellino, *Cittadinanze postcoloniali. Appartenenze, razza e razzismo in Europa e in Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2012); Franca Sinopoli, ed., *Postcoloniale italiano. Tra letteratura e storia* (Rome: Novalogos, 2013); Bruno Brunetti and Roberto Derobertis, *Identità, migrazioni e postcolonialismo in Italia. A partire da Edward Said* (Bari: Progedit, 2014); Annalisa Oboe, ed., *Postcoloniale e revisione dei saperi*, monographic section of *Aut Aut* 364 (2014): 125–93; Giulia Grechi and Viviana Gravano, *Presente imperfetto. Eredità coloniali e immaginari razziali contemporanei* (Rome: Mimesis, 2016). See also the *Postcolonialitalia* project, which was a research platform for postcolonial studies in Italy from 2012–15, whose PI was Annalisa Oboe at the University of Padua: www.postcolonialitalia.it, accessed June 1, 2017.

⁷ The intersection of Italian studies and postcolonial studies is steadily growing and thriving. In recent years, many significant texts on Italian postcolonial literature have been published, regardless of the definition adopted. Some of the most important are Parati, *Migration Italy*; Armando Gnisci, ed., *Nuovo Planetario Italiano. Geografia e antologia della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa* (Troina: Città Aperta, 2006); Daniele Comberiati, *La quarta sponda. Scrittrici in viaggio dall’Africa coloniale all’Italia di oggi* (Rome: Pigreco, 2007); Roberto Derobertis, ed., *Fuori centro. Percorsi postcoloniali nella letteratura italiana* (Rome: Aracne, 2010); Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell’altro. La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989–2007)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010); Romeo, “Vent’anni di letteratura della migrazione;” Fulvio Pezzarossa and Ilaria Rossini, *Leggere il testo e il mondo. Vent’anni di scritture della migrazione in Italia* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2011); Silvia Contarini, Giuliana Pias, and Lucia Quaquarelli, eds., *Coloniale e Postcoloniale nella letteratura italiana degli anni 2000*, double special issue of *Narrativa* 33–34 (2011–12); Rosanna Morace, *Letteratura-mondo italiana* (Pisa: ETS, 2012); Chiara Mengozzi, *Narrazioni contese. Vent’anni di scritture italiane della migrazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2013); Laura Lori, *Inchiostro d’Africa: La letteratura postcoloniale somala fra diaspora e identità* (Verona: ombre corte, 2013); Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013); Roberto Derobertis, “Da dove facciamo il postcoloniale? Appunti per una genealogia della ricezione degli studi postcoloniali nell’italianistica italiana,” *Postcolonialitalia: Postcolonial Studies from the European South*, February 17, 2014, accessed June 14, 2017,

http://www.postcolonialitalia.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56:da-dove-facciamo-il-postcoloniale&catid=27:interventi&Itemid=101&lang=it; Lucia Quaquarelli, *Narrazione e migrazione* (Milan: Morellini Editore, 2015); Maria Grazia Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola. La questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana* (Rome: Franco Cesati Editore, 2015); Mario Domenichelli and Rosanna Morace, eds., *Immaginari migranti*, special issue of *La modernità letteraria* 8 (2015); Simone Brioni, *The Somali within: Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015).

why there is such a strong resistance in Italy to extending the privilege of *italianità*—at the civic, social, and cultural level—to those who have arrived on Italian soil in recent years and to their descendants. On the other hand, the postcolonial perspective creates a sense of transnational spatial continuity with other European countries⁸ that either actively pursued the processes of colonization or participated in more diffuse colonial culture, corroborating the notion that diasporic communities are linked to each other through the common legacy of colonialism.⁹ Through their cultural production, Italian postcolonial writers are helping to open up colonial archives, denouncing contemporary racism as a legacy of colonialism, uncovering processes of racialization as the basis of national identity formation, casting light on existing power relations between and among Italian women, migrant women, and second generation women,¹⁰ and showing how Italians resist accepting the intersection of Italianness with blackness and Islam as viable in a society that has historically constructed itself as white and Catholic.

To consider these literary works as a *corpus*—however heterogeneous it may be—means to empower the counter-discourse they articulate and to legitimize the counter-histories they narrate. I employ the expression “Italian postcolonial literature” in this essay to describe a category that includes all of the literature produced by migrant and second-generation writers since 1990. I use the expression “migration literature” to designate a sub-category constituting the initial phase of this body of work, which was created around 1990 by diasporic subjects living in Italy and to which themes linked to migration, displacement, and uprooting are central.

I employ a loose periodization, dividing the production of Italian postcolonial literature into three phases that signal common trajectories and tendencies at specific points in time, although the sections I devote to the first and second phases are relatively brief, since I intend to focus my attention on the third phase and its complexity. The analysis of the third phase is organized into subsections: here I distinguish between direct and indirect postcolonial literature, reflect on how race and blackness are represented, and examine the work of prominent writers of the first and second generations. I devote a separate section to Albanian Italian literature, given the particular position Albania occupies in Italian history, both because of its colonial history (however brief) and because the Albanian community constitutes one of the most numerous in contemporary

⁸ For a reflection on the spread of colonial culture, even in countries that do not have a history of colonization, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Europe*, special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* 18/4 (2015). On processes of racialization and otherization in Europe and on how they have contributed to the process of shaping a European identity, see Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, eds., *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁹ Similar, for example, to what Paul Gilroy has suggested for black communities and cultures around the world, which is that, having originated in the common experience of diaspora, black communities have developed common characteristics and aesthetics in different geopolitical contexts. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ In this article, I employ the expression “second generation” both as an adjective and as a noun, both in the singular and in the plural (as a literal translation of the Italian “seconda generazione”), to designate groups of individuals who were born in Italy of foreign parents, or who came to Italy at a very young age and received their education in the country. See also Clarissa Clò, “Hip Pop Italian Style: The Postcolonial Imagination of Second-Generation Authors in Italy,” in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 275–91, and Jacqueline Andall, “Second Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28/3 (2002): 389–407. Employing this expression in the plural allows me to avoid the still often used expression “second-generation migrants,” which I find very problematic from a theoretical and political point of view: migration is not inherited, and marking second and subsequent generations as “migrants” means highlighting their foreignness rather than their belonging in relation to their destination country, and continuing to exclude them, symbolically as well as socially and politically, from the national body. On this, see also Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana*.

Italy (unlike communities coming from the former colonies in Africa).¹¹ A significant part of this essay is devoted to Italian postcolonial literature in the narrow sense, which I call “direct postcolonial literature”—a definition based on the conceptual contrast between “direct” and “indirect” colonialism and postcoloniality—conferring on writers whose origins lie in former Italian colonies a privileged status from a historical, linguistic, and cultural perspective.¹²

To define this literature as “postcolonial” legitimizes the re-appropriation of memory and the rewriting of history, processes that are currently underway in Italy and in many other European countries. Although Italian postcolonial literature is still marginalized in Italy through various strategies that include exiling it to the realm of testimonies and “non-literature” or relegating it to the category of foreign literature, it deserves to claim its rightful place in Italian literature. To this end, it is necessary not only to open up the notion of *italianità* through the inclusion of new social and epistemological subjects, but also to redefine the very notion of “literature.” Italian postcolonial literature is produced by new subjects who set in motion the dissemination of decolonizing imaginaries, promoting deep and meaningful sociocultural change and a new politics of inclusion that extends the privilege of *italianità* to new Italians living in Italy today.

Italian Postcolonial Literature: A Diachronic Analysis¹³

The First Phase: Migration Literature (1990–94)

The date generally ascribed to the origin of migration and postcolonial literature in Italy is 1990, that is, the year in which three important autobiographical texts were published: *Io, venditore di elefanti* by Senegalese writer Pap Khouma in collaboration with Oreste Pivetta; *Immigrato* by Tunisian writer Salah Methnani in collaboration with Mario Fortunato; and *Chiamatemi Alì* by Moroccan writer Mohamed Bouchane, edited by Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione.¹⁴

¹¹ See *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2017* (Rome: Idos, 2017). Out of a total population of 5,047,028 foreign residents in Italy in 2016 (8.3% of Italian residents), Albanians represent the second most numerous community with 448,407 people. Romanians are the largest community, with a population of 1,168,552 (p. 437). As for communities from Italian ex-colonies in Africa, only 2,028 people are from Libya (p. 461), 8,228 from Somalia, 7,772 from Ethiopia, and 9,394 from Eritrea (p. 462).

¹² For a reflection on the direct and indirect nature of Italian postcoloniality and the way it is also connected to forms of direct and indirect colonialism, see Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “The Italian Postcolonial: A Manifesto,” and, by the same authors, “Italy’s Postcolonial ‘Question’: Views from the Southern Frontier of Europe,” in *Postcolonial Europe*, eds. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* 18/4 (2015): 367–83. See also Teresa Fiore, “The Emigrant Post-‘Colonia’ in Contemporary Immigrant Italy,” in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 71–82.

¹³ Due to space limitations, this article cannot give poetry, children’s literature, or theater the attention they deserve. I therefore limit myself to providing some information and bibliographical notes on these topics. It is interesting to note that magazines such as *Caffè*, *Sagarana*, and *El-Ghibli* dedicate specific sections to poetry. The same is true of the Eks&Tra Prize for Migrant Writers. Poetry collections that introduce the poetry of postcolonial and migrant writers include: Mia Lecomte, ed., *Ai confini del verso. Poesia della migrazione in italiano* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2006); ead., *Sempre ai confini del verso. Dispatri poetici in italiano* (Paris: Chemins de tr@verse, 2011); Mia Lecomte and Luigi Bonaffini, eds., *A New Map: The Poetry of Migrant Writers in Italy* (Ottawa: Legas, 2011); *Il “posto” degli scrittori migranti nella narrativa per ragazzi* (Rome: Sinnos, 2010). And finally, for sources on theater, see Marie-José Hoyet, “Voci afroitaliane in scena. Per una prima ricognizione,” in *Nuovo Planetario Italiano*, ed. Gnisci, 499–517, and especially Maria Cristina Mauceri and Marta Niccolai, *Nuovo scenario italiano. Stranieri e italiani nel teatro contemporaneo* (Rome: Edizioni Ensemble, 2015).

The prevailing genre throughout the first half of the 1990s was the collaborative autobiography,¹⁵ which, in the first phase of migration literature, seemed to satisfy both the authors' desire to recount their impressions of Italy and the curiosity of Italians to learn something about what migrants were experiencing in their country. Other autobiographies that emerged in the same period include *La tana della iena. Storia di un ragazzo palestinese*, by Palestinian Hassan Itab (written in collaboration with Renato Curcio),¹⁶ *Volevo diventare bianca*, by French Sahawari Algerian Nasser Chohra (edited by Alessandra Atti Di Sarro), and *Con il vento nei capelli. Vita di una donna palestinese*, by the Palestinian writer Salwa Salem (in collaboration with Laura Maritano).¹⁷ The autobiography of Brazilian Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque, *Princesa*, was also published in the early 1990s and is unique among these works. Created inside Rome's

In 2009, Lecomte founded the Society of Poets, which includes about twenty female poets who live in Italy and have shared experiences of migration. See <http://www.compagniadellepoete.com/>, accessed June 1, 2017. The *I Mappamondi* (or *Globes*) series from Sinnos Publishing is central with regard to children's literature. It was founded in 1990 in the Roman prison of Rebibbia, which has always promoted a strong social commitment. This series was created for schools in 1991 and promotes knowledge of other places in the world (all authors are either foreigners or the children of foreigners writing about their country of origin) and mutual understanding between Italians and new Italians. The more than twenty volumes in this series include an introductory text by Tullio De Mauro. They also include parallel text translations, accompanying drawings, and a section called "Mappapagine" at the end of each book, with information on the community presence in Italy of the country that each text discusses. For an example, see Ribka Sibhatu, *L'esatto numero delle stelle e altre fiabe dall'altopiano eritreo*, illustrated by Luca De Luise (Rome: Sinnos, 2012). For an analysis and a substantial bibliography of migration literature for children, see Lorenzo Luatti, "La 'nuova' letteratura migrante per ragazzi. Somiglianze e differenze con quella rivolta agli adulti" *El-Ghibli* 7/30 (2010) http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=07_30§ion=6&index_pos=13.html, accessed June 1, 2017, and id., *E noi?*

¹⁴ Pap Khouma (in collaboration with Oreste Pivetta), *Io, venditore di elefanti. Una vita per forza tra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* (Milan: CDE, 1990; repr. Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2006); Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani, *Immigrato* (Rome: Theoria, 1997; repr. Milan: Bompiani, 2006); Mohamed Bouchane, *Chiamatemi Ali. Un anno a Milano nella vita di un clandestino venuto dal Marocco*, ed. Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione (Milan: Leonardo, 1990). For a compelling analysis of the practice of storytelling in autobiographical texts by African authors in Italy, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop, "Selling/Storytelling: African Autobiographies in Italy," in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 217–38.

¹⁵ The term "collaborative autobiography" usually defines any kind of autobiography that is the result of a collaboration between a narrator/author and an editor/author, often described as an "editor," "contributor," or "co-author." It is important to remember that the collaborator's input is usually not only linguistic and it is not only necessary because of an inadequate level of linguistic knowledge or competence in the language adopted by the narrator. The collaborator in these texts also acts as a cultural mediator, helping with the clarity and readability of the text and helping the storytellers make contact with the publishing market. It is also necessary to remember that the role of the editor is never transparent and that all collaborations imply a power relationship that is part of the work's origin and characterizes the work itself. See Caterina Romeo, "Meccanismi di censura e rapporti di potere nelle autobiografie collaborative," *Between*, 5/9 (2015): 1–28.

¹⁶ Hassan Itab (in collaboration with Renato Curcio), *La tana della iena. Storia di un ragazzo palestinese* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 1991). The publishing house Sensibili alle foglie was founded in 1990 and directed by Renato Curcio, an ex-Red Brigadier, with the purpose of promoting activities and publishing texts on different experiences of reclusion. See www.sensibiliallefoglie.it, accessed June 14, 2017.

¹⁷ Nasser Chohra, *Volevo diventare bianca*, ed. Alessandra Atti Di Sarro (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1993), and Salwa Salem (in collaboration with Laura Maritano), *Con il vento nei capelli. Vita di una donna palestinese* (Florence: Giunti, 1994). After the initial phase of migration literature and with the advent of second-generation writers, the need for both linguistic and cultural mediation is replaced by the authorial individual, while the genre of autobiography gives way to that of the novel and the short story. But there are some collaborative autobiographies that have been published in more recent times, among which it is worth mentioning Wendy Uba (with Paola Monzini), *Il mio nome è Wendy* (Bari: Laterza, 2007), and Feven Abreha Tekle (with Raffaele Masto), *Liberia. L'odissea di una donna eritrea in fuga dalla guerra* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2005).

Rebibbia Prison, it is the result of a collaborative effort between the subject Fernanda and Maurizio Iannelli, a former member of the Red Brigades serving time in jail, as well as an incarcerated Sardinian shepherd named Giovanni Tamponi, who functioned as an intermediary between the two.¹⁸ In a mixture of Portuguese, Italian, and Sardinian, Fernanda first recounted her story to Tamponi, detailing her early life in Brazil as Fernando, her transition from male to female, her experience as a sex worker, and her migration, right up to her incarceration in Rebibbia for attempted murder. Surrounded by the senseless and unchanging routines of prison life, the co-writers forged their own language and found a way to transcend the narrow confines of their prison by reinventing the world from which they were banned through the power of storytelling.¹⁹

Autobiographical experience is also central to some novels written collaboratively with Italian co-authors during those same years, such as *La promessa di Hamadi* and *La memoria di A.* by Senegalese Saidou Moussa Ba (in collaboration with Alessandro Micheletti) and *Pantanella. Canto lungo la strada*, written in Arabic by Tunisian Mohsen Melliti and translated into Italian by Monica Ruocco.²⁰

All of these autobiographical narratives, which shape the first phase of Italian postcolonial literature, present stories about the difficult lives, both individual and collective, of immigrants in Italy, narrated for the first time not *by* Italians but *to* Italians by migrants themselves. The commonplace strategy used by these migrant writers of evoking their countries of origin in their stories serves not only to reinstate the bonds that migration has severed, but also to represent the full complexity of their lives before their arrival in Italy. Such complexity comes from having a

¹⁸ Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Iannelli, *Princesa* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 1994). The project “Princesa 20” was started in 2015: it was designed by Ugo Fracassa, directed by Fracassa and Anna Proto Pisani, and funded by the Department of Humanities of the Roma Tre University (with co-financing from the Centre d’Etudes Romanes Aixois [CAER] at Aix-Marseille University). In this extraordinary multimedia project, available at <http://www.princesa20.it/> (accessed June 14, 2017), the text of *Princesa* interacts with other narratives: the eponymous song (lyrics and music) that Fabrizio De André dedicated to Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque’s story (1996); the documentary *Princesa. Incontri irregolari*, dir. Carlo Conversi (RAI, 1994) made for the Anna Amendola series *Storie Vere*, broadcast by RAI in 1994; the documentary *Le strade di Princesa. Ritratto di una trans molto speciale*, dir. Stefano Consiglio (RAI, 1997); and the film *Princesa* by Brazilian director Henrique Goldman (Italy and Great Britain: Parallax and BIM Distribuzione, 2001). In addition to the complete text of the book, the project made a collection of new materials available online, such as a part of the original manuscripts and of the correspondence between the author-collaborators. The site also contains a collection of critical materials about the text. The fact that Fabrizio De André referred to Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque’s book in 1996 signals an interesting phenomenon grossly overlooked in Italian academia: exchanges between “canonical” Italian culture—in this case music—and the cultural production of migrant and postcolonial authors have taken place in both directions, and major Italian intellectuals were already engaging the work of migrant and postcolonial writers decades ago.

¹⁹ This information is taken from Maurizio Iannelli’s introductory notes to *Princesa*, “Brevi note di contesto,” in which he describes the context in which their encounter took place and provides interesting details about how the text reached its final form. There is a striking similarity between the narrating settings in this book and in Hector Babenco’s film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (HB Films and FilmDallas Pictures, 1985), based on Manuel Puig’s novel *El beso de la mujer araña* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976)]. In the film, Valentin Arregui (Raúl Juliá), a political activist, is incarcerated in a South American prison, where he shares a cell with Luis Molina (William Hurt), a flamboyant gay man. Every time Valentin comes back to their cell after having been tortured by the police, Luis soothes his wounds both through physical care and storytelling.

²⁰ Saidou Moussa Ba (in collaboration with Alessandro Micheletti), *La promessa di Hamadi* (Novara: De Agostini, 1991); id., *La memoria di A.* (Turin: Ega Editore, 1995); Mohsen Melliti, *Pantanella. Canto lungo la strada*, trans. Monica Ruocco (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1992). Mohsen Melliti is also the author of *I bambini delle rose* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1995), his first text written directly in Italian, and director of the film *Io l’altro* (Milan: Tree Pictures, 2007).

history, a past, and a dense network of relationships and feelings—in stark contrast to the monolithic perception of undesirability usually projected onto migrants by the host society.

The Second Phase (1994–2000)

The first phase of Italian migration literature in the early 1990s was thus characterized, on the one hand, by a type of socio-anthropological interest that facilitated the creation of an editorial space and led to the publication of the first collaborative autobiographies. On the other hand, there was marked reluctance on the part of Italians to acknowledge these works as literary texts because—as often happens in the case of so-called minority literatures—they were considered too personal and thus insufficiently universal.

The first phase of migration literature, then, was characterized by a certain homogeneity, as the needs of the new writers were aligned with the demands of the publishing market. In the transitional phase that lasted from 1994 to 2000, this homogeneity gave way to a greater diversity, paving the way for a subsequent phase that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century, characterized by a variety of styles and themes and by a strong criticism of different aspects of Italian culture and society. The writers active in the latter half of the 1990s were still for the most part actual migrants (rather than second-generation authors), and themes closely related to migration as both a material and psychological experience were still powerfully present in much of their work. Nevertheless, during the same period, a more pronounced attention to stylistic elements became evident in their texts, along with the appearance of a wider range of themes that became characteristic of the writings published in the subsequent decade, especially following the emergence of second-generation writers. The late 1990s also saw the creation of literary competitions as well as the earliest magazines specializing in migrant literature, while additional prizes and magazines were established and founded in the new millennium.

In 1995, the literary competition Eks&Tra was established for migrant writing, appealing in particular to “migranti, figli di migrante e di coppie miste” [“migrants, children of migrants, and mixed couples”].²¹ Its purpose was to give voice and visibility “a coloro che vengono spesso considerati come corpi estranei da emarginare e ghettizzare o anche da espellere” [“to those who are often perceived as foreign bodies to be marginalized, ghettoized, or even expelled”].²² Over the course of the years, this literary contest facilitated the emergence of writers who went on to dominate the field of postcolonial and migration literature. A winner of the first edition, for example, was the Albanian poet Gëzim Hajdari²³ who was to win the Montale Prize in 1997. Another winner was Brazilian Italian Christiana de Caldas Brito with her story “Ana de Jesus,” which subsequently became a cult text in Italian postcolonial literature.²⁴ The undisputed protagonists of the collection in which this tale appears are immigrant women imbued with an acute sense of isolation. De Caldas Brito’s work gives voice to women like these, in sharp contrast to media representations that present them merely as members of the workforce rather than as individual subjects. In her fiction, their voices are raised in protest against the

²¹ <http://www.eksetra.net/concorso-eksetra/>, accessed June 14, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by S.A. Smythe.

²² Ibid.

²³ I speak of Gëzim Hajdari in more detail in the section dedicated to Albanian Italian literature, below.

²⁴ Christiana de Caldas Brito, “Ana de Jesus,” in *Le voci dell’arcobaleno*, ed. Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1995), 59–61, republished in Christiana de Caldas Brito, *Amanda Olinda Azzurra e le altre* (Salerno-Milan: Oèdipus edizioni, 2004), 37–41.

exploitation meted out to immigrant women, not only by men but also by Italian women, in a way that calls into question the notion of “universal sisterhood” cherished by Italian feminism. As observed by Franca Sinopoli, De Caldas Brito’s work is characterized by the kind of stylistic lightness that Italo Calvino hoped could be achieved in twenty-first century literature.²⁵ This quality results in part from the writer’s linguistic experimentation with “portuliano,” the mixture of Portuguese and Italian spoken by Brazilian immigrants in Italy, which the author codifies in her writing, thereby authorizing this form of linguistic hybridization.²⁶

Other stories that won the Eks&Tra award in 1995 were “Io marocchino con due kappa” by Syrian Yousef Wakkas, who was writing from prison, in an extreme state of marginalization, and “Solo allora, sono certo, potrò capire,” by Algerian Tahar Lamri, which focuses on the impossibility of migrants’ recuperating their original identities.²⁷ The year 1996 saw the publication of *Racordai. Vengo da un’isola di Capo Verde*, a text where Italian appears alongside the Portuguese creole typically spoken in Cape Verde, by Cape Verdean writer Maria de Lourdes Jesus in the “I Mappamondi” (“Globes”) series produced by publishing house Sinnos.²⁸

In the new millennium, specifically in 2005, Daniela Finocchi established the national literary competition *Lingua Madre* for foreign and second-generation women writing in Italian who aimed to “approfondire il rapporto fra identità, radici e mondo ‘altro’” [“deepen the relationship between identity, roots, and ‘other’ worlds”].²⁹ It was created specifically to “dar voce a chi abitualmente non ce l’ha, cioè gli stranieri, in particolare le donne” [“give voice to those who usually do not have a voice, namely foreigners, and particularly foreign women”].³⁰ The contest also implicitly promoted creative partnerships between Italian women and foreign women insofar as it accepted the submission of collaborative writings.

The mid-1990s also saw the emergence of the first important literary magazines dedicated (almost) exclusively to migrant and postcolonial writing. These continued to develop in the new millennium, highlighting the ways in which forms of artistic expression linked to the representation of immigration were changing. In 1994, the first magazine focused exclusively on migration literature, *Caffé. Rivista di letteratura multiculturale*, was founded by intellectuals, individuals actively involved in immigration issues, and migrant writers.³¹ In 1997, Armando Gnisci created the *Database of Immigrant Authors Writing in Italian* (BASILI),³² which was

²⁵ Franca Sinopoli, “Introduzione,” in Christiana de Caldas Brito, *Amanda Olinda Azzurra e le altre* (Rome: Lilit Edizioni, 1998), 7–9. This introduction is replaced by a new introductory text by Brito in the 2004 edition.

²⁶ De Caldas Brito is a very prolific writer who later published several books, including the collection of short stories *Qui e là* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2004); the novel *500 temporali* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2006); and the creative writing guide *Viviscrivi. Verso il tuo racconto* (San Giovanni in Persiceto: Eks&Tra, 2008).

²⁷ Yousef Wakkas, “Io marocchino con due kappa,” in *Le voci dell’arcobaleno*, 105–42; Tahar Lamri, “Solo allora, sono certo, potrò capire,” in *Le voci dell’arcobaleno*, 43–58. Other notable works from these two authors include Yousef Wakkas, *Terra mobile* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2004); id., *La talpa nel soffitto. Racconti metropolitani* (Bologna: Edizioni dell’Arco, 2005); id., *L’uomo parlante* (Bologna: Edizioni dell’Arco, 2007); and Tahar Lamri, *I sessanta nomi dell’amore* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 2006).

²⁸ Maria de Lourdes Jesus, *Racordai. Vengo da un’isola di Capo Verde* (Rome: Sinnos, 1996).

²⁹ See <http://concorsolinguardia.it/il-concorso/>, accessed June 1, 2017. This contest is sponsored by the Region of Piemonte and the International Book Fair in Turin.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See <http://www.archivioimmigrazione.org/caffe.htm>, accessed June 14, 2017.

³² The database, once located at <http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/kuma/kuma.html>, was closed from 2014 to 2017. In April 2017, the database under the new name BASILI&LIMM (*Banca dati degli Scrittori Immigrati in Lingua Italiana e della Letteratura Italiana della Migrazione Mondiale*) became accessible again at <http://basili-limm-el-ghibli.it/>, accessed May 22, 2017. Armando Gnisci’s introduction to this new edition of the database, “Ritorna la

accompanied in 2000 by the magazine *Kúma. Creolizzare l'Europa*, also steered by Gnisci. Another group, *Scritti d'Africa*, based at the Casa delle Culture in Rome, was also founded in 1997. It included writers such as Ubax Cristina Ali Farah and Jorge Canifa Alves, among others, and aimed at familiarizing the Italian public with different African cultures mainly through exposure to literary works written both by African authors and Italian authors of African descent.³³ The online magazine *Sagarana*, edited by Brazilian writer Julio Monteiro Martins, was founded in 2000. It was hosted by the eponymous school of creative writing, which, from 2001 onwards, has offered the *Seminari degli Scrittori Migranti* (Migrant Writers Seminars).³⁴ *El Ghibli. Rivista online di letteratura della migrazione*, the first magazine whose editorial staff was composed of migrant writers (in the broadest sense of the term), under Pap Kouma's editorship, was created in 2003.³⁵ The journal *Scritture migranti. Rivista di scambi interculturali* was founded by members of the Department of Italian Studies at the University of Bologna in 2006. As the website announces, "La rivista si propone un lavoro critico sulle scritture generate dai processi migratori, esplorando le tematiche limitrofe dell'esilio, della diaspora, del viaggio, ed i complessi movimenti transculturali innescati dalla condizione postcoloniale" ["The magazine presents a critical work on writings focusing on migratory processes, exploring the themes fringing on exile, diaspora, the journey, and the complex transcultural movements triggered by the postcolonial condition"].³⁶ This publication takes as its starting point an awareness that globalization and transnational migrations (phenomena closely related to decolonization) have radically changed the way we think about culture and the very concept of "nation," promoting methodologies similar to those of cultural and postcolonial studies. Also created in 2006 and published by the University of Padua, was the magazine *Trickster. Rivista del Master in Studi Interculturali*, which similarly places the condition of migrants at the center of social and cultural issues in contemporary Italy.³⁷

* * *

During the same period, literary work by writers of Eastern European origin also began to appear in Italy. A figure who stands out in this context is Jarmila Očkayová, a Slovak migrant who arrived in Italy in 1974 and published three novels in Italian in the late 1990s: *Verrà la vita e*

banca dati BASILI nella nuova versione BASILI&LIMM. Dal primo BASILI al nuovo BASILI&LIMM," is available at <http://basili-limm.el-ghibli.it/intro.html>, accessed May 22, 2017. BASILI&LIMM, currently under the supervision of Maria Cristina Mauceri, now includes also the work of second generations (originally not included in BASILI).

³³ See <http://www.scrittidafrica.it/>, accessed May 22, 2017.

³⁴ See <http://www.sagarana.it/>, accessed June 1, 2017.

³⁵ See <http://www.el-ghibli.org/>, accessed May 22, 2017. The site *LettERRANZA* is also dedicated to migrant literary production in Italian. In addition to providing a bibliographic database, it includes reviews, interviews, and information on events: <http://www.letteranza.org/>, accessed June 14, 2017. I would also like to point out the website of the cultural association "Il gioco degli specchi: Migranti, cultura, società," <http://www.ilgiocodeglispecchi.org/>, accessed May 20, 2017. This association, founded in 2009 and based on a project by the same name, has over the years organized numerous cultural events related to migrations, literature, and cinema, as well as Italian language courses for foreigners.

³⁶ http://www.mucchieditore.it/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.product_details&category_id=23&product_id=2010&Itemid=4&lang=it, accessed December 15, 2017.

³⁷ The journal is no longer being published, but some information is still available at <https://logosunipd.wordpress.com/2008/11/18/trickster-la-rivista-del-master-in-studi-interculturali/>, accessed June 14, 2017.

avrà i tuoi occhi, *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, and *Requiem per tre padri*.³⁸ These texts are highly introspective first-person narratives, where the themes of diversity and displacement are linked both to the issue of involuntary migration and to a more deeply existential experience. They contain distinctive echoes of psychoanalysis. Dream-like narration occurs extensively in the second novel, and the personal dimension constantly intersects with the historical. In *Requiem per tre padri*, for example, which focuses on the Prague Spring and is dedicated to Jan Palach, historical events are narrated from the intimate perspective of the protagonists.

The late 1990s saw the publication of *La straniera* by Iraqi writer Younis Tawfik, who had previously produced numerous Italian translations of Arabic texts and of non-fiction writings on Muslim culture.³⁹ In his novel, which was awarded the Grinzane Cavour Prize in 2000, the past that emerges in the protagonists' memories and the pull exercised by Arab tradition come together against the backdrop of contemporary, multicultural Turin. In some ways, *La straniera* could be considered an unconventional migration narrative since the protagonist ("the Architect") enjoys an elevated social position and an enviable degree of "integration," unlike the characters appearing in narratives written during the initial autobiographical phase of migration literature. The novel, however, does not abandon earlier conventions and stereotypes in its depiction of the main female character Amina. The author oscillates between exoticizing images (reinforced by the orientaling image of an Arab woman on the book cover) and a discourse of victimization. The immigrant woman, unlike the Architect, lives on the margins of society as a prostitute and is sacrificed at the end of the narrative, thus reinforcing the stereotype that deprives migrant women of all forms of agency and relegates them to roles such as caregivers or sex workers.

In the same period, Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, who was born in Brazzaville, Congo, and moved to Italy at the age of four, appeared on the literary scene. At a time when migration literature was still dominated by first-generation writers, Gangbo was an exception, as he is part of a second generation whose first language is Italian. Gangbo is a very atypical figure in the realm of postcolonial literature, both for the subject matter of his work and for the writing style and types of narrative presented. In his first novel, *Verso la notte bakonga*, Gangbo uses the classical form of the *Bildungsroman*, which is centered on the existential malaise of the protagonist Mika and his desire to find his own path. The relationship between the individual and society in this novel, however, is rearticulated around the alienating effect produced by the protagonist's blackness.⁴⁰ The second novel, *Rometta e Giulio*—which marks Gangbo's transition to a major publisher—is highly experimental, both in its language and formal structure.⁴¹ To some extent a rewriting of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the novel recounts

³⁸ Jarmila Očkayová, *Verrà la vita e avrà i tuoi occhi* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1995); ead., *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1997); ead., *Requiem per tre padri* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1998). Očkayová is also the author of, among other texts, *Occhio a Pinocchio* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2006), a book which, starting from Collodi's famous text, reflects on themes that are recurrent in her literary production, such as a sense of identity and belonging, individual and cultural roots, and family relationships.

³⁹ Younis Tawfik arrived in Italy in 1979 and studied Literature and Philosophy in Turin. He writes for several national newspapers and teaches Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Genoa. In addition to *La straniera* (Milan: Bompiani, 1999), Tawfik has published numerous novels, including *La città di Iram* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002); *Il profugo* (Milan: Bompiani, 2006); and *La ragazza di Piazza Tahrir* (Siena: Barbera Editore, 2012). The first novel was made into a film of the same title, *La straniera* (CG Home Video, 2009), directed by Marco Turco.

⁴⁰ Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, *Verso la notte bakonga* (Portofranco: Fossa, 1999). It is important to note that this novel was published when most second-generation writers had yet to make their appearance on the literary scene.

⁴¹ Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, *Rometta e Giulio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001).

the romance between a female Italian student and a Chinese pizza deliveryman through a metanarrative that operates as a continuous reflection on the writing process. Using a mixture of street slang and the language of Shakespeare (and including stage directions in the text), the author implements a linguistic experiment that signals the transition to a new generation of Italians who feel free not only to reorganize and change the language from within, precisely because of their familiarity with it, but also to experiment with literary genres. Such strategies, utterly new in the Italian literary and cultural context, suggest that shifting social conditions require new tools of literary expression and new forms of creativity. The same type of linguistic experimentation is found in the story “Com’è se giù vuol dire ko?,” where the author exposes the type of police violence directed at young immigrants and black Italians.⁴² The two teenage characters speak in rap style, mixing Italian street slang and Bolognese dialect, which underlines the “glocal” character of the space they inhabit. (Although they specifically reside in the geographical area of Bologna, they share the uneasiness of immigrants’ children in other urban contexts around the world.)⁴³ The title of Gangbo’s most recent novel, *Due volte*, foregrounds the theme of duality, which is often highlighted as central to the life and literary production of immigrant and second-generation writers and which, in this novel, is not limited to a binary opposition of Italian/immigrant or of black/white.⁴⁴ The protagonists are ten-year-old twin boys who have immigrated from Benin and are sent to a children’s home run by a religious order after being abandoned by their father. They feel torn between a sense of belonging to their father’s culture and a desire to integrate into the new society in which they live, while their difficulties are intensified by the other kinds of hardship experienced by all the socially marginalized children who live in the institution.

The second phase of Italian postcolonial literature is characterized by diversity and transitionality, but also by a certain degree of institutionalization through the creation of literary awards and journals devoted exclusively (or almost exclusively) to migration literature. Crucially, this transitional phase marks a growing variety among the narratives produced and the themes developed (including social diversity, processes of racialization, and the complexity of national identity in contemporary Italy), which become prominent in the third phase.

The Third Phase (2001–present)

The new millennium, as previously stated, heralds a phase of production that is both more literary and more discernibly postcolonial. Among the topics that began to emerge and develop over time during this third phase were racism, the processes of racialization enacted by Italian society both past and present, the difficulty of attaining Italian citizenship for second generations, the construction of an Italian identity for immigrants and for their children, and the ways in which migratory processes help to redefine a sense of *italianità*.⁴⁵ This phase was thus

⁴² Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, “Com’è se giù vuol dire ko?” in *Italiani per vocazione*, ed. Igiaba Scego (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005), 137–85.

⁴³ For a brilliant analysis of this short story, see Clò, “Hip Pop.”

⁴⁴ Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, *Due volte* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2009).

⁴⁵ My periodization differs from that of Grazia Negro, who classes as “postcolonial literature” only the work produced by authors from the Horn of Africa, which I define in this essay as “(direct) postcolonial literature.” In her view, in fact, a new phase began around 2005, and not at the beginning of the century. This disparity in periodization can be attributed to our differences in definition, which are not simply descriptive but rather based on distinct focuses and priorities. Negro’s linguistic analysis necessitates the differentiation between writers originating from Italian ex-colonies and those coming from the ex-colonies of other European countries. My study instead

characterized by the emergence of new writers and by a process of consolidation witnessed in the work of those who were already influential in the cultural scene. Among the new writers were a group of authors more directly linked to Italy's colonial history, whose emergence and acknowledgement enabled the development of an Italian literary and cultural phase that can be properly termed "directly" postcolonial. Last but not least, this phase also saw the advent of a second generation of writers who are the product of a type of postcoloniality that is both direct and indirect.

After analyzing the work of some prominent writers since the beginning of the new millennium (who do not come from Italian ex-colonies), I will dedicate a brief section to works that address race as a central question in Italian literature and culture. This will be followed by a section dedicated to Albanian Italian literature, which boasts a rich, complex and diverse vein of production; then a section on Italian postcolonial literature that has its roots in the Horn of Africa, followed by a section specifically dedicated to Igiaba Scego, Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, and Gabriella Ghermandi, whose contributions have been and continue to be crucial to the Italian cultural context in many ways. Finally, I present a reflection on a few anthologies that clearly mark the emergence of second-generation writers.

The Third Phase: Some Prominent Writers (Indirect Postcolonial Literature)

One of the leading figures to emerge on the cultural and literary scene at the beginning of the twenty-first century (and who has recently died) was Brazilian writer Julio Monteiro Martins. After publishing numerous books in his home country and teaching creative writing at American, Brazilian, and Portuguese universities, he arrived in Italy in 1995. He then taught literary translation and Portuguese at the University of Pisa for several years. In 2000, he founded the Sagarana School in Lucca, for which he directed the Master's Workshop in fiction writing and, as previously mentioned, edited the online magazine of the same name. A multifaceted author, Monteiro Martins experimented with various genres including short stories, novels, poems, essays, and plays.⁴⁶

Algerian Amara Lakhous, one of Italy's most internationally renowned postcolonial authors, made his Italian literary debut in 1999 with the novel *Le cimici e il pirata*.⁴⁷ His breakthrough came in 2006, however, with the publication of *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza*

focuses on the modes in which colonial mechanisms of the past are brought back to life in the present, and therefore considers issues such as the processes of racialization and citizenship. As such, in my analysis it is important to consider how authors from the Horn of Africa dialogue with African Italian writers from countries that were once colonized by other European powers. Geneviève Makaping's text *Traiettorie di sguardi* (to which I return later) provides a specific reflection on the themes of race and citizenship, as does Igiaba Scego's short story "Salsicce." These texts are from 2001 and 2003 respectively, and so precede 2005. For this reason, I locate the beginning of the third phase of postcolonial literature at the start of the twenty-first century. See Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola*; Geneviève Makaping, *Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi?* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2001); Igiaba Scego, "Salsicce," in *Pecore Nere*, ed. Flavia Capitani and Emanuele Coen (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 23–36.

⁴⁶ Julio Monteiro Martins, *Racconti italiani* (Nardò: Besa, 2000), and id., *La passione del vuoto* (Nardò: Besa, 2003). Martins also published *Madrelingua* (Nardò: Besa, 2005), and another collection of short stories, *L'amore scritto. Frammenti di narrativa e brevi racconti sulle più svariate forme in cui si presenta l'amore* (Nardò: Besa, 2007).

⁴⁷ Amara Lakhous, *Le cimici e il pirata*, trans. Francesco Leggio (Rome: Arlem, 1999). The novel, published in Arabic with parallel text in Italian, was reprinted after the Arab Spring under the title *Un pirata piccolo piccolo* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2011).

Vittorio (*Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*), for which he received in the same year the Flaiano Prize and the Racalmare-Leonardo Sciascia Prize and was included in the *Corriere della Sera*'s ranking of the most widely read Italian books in Italy.⁴⁸ As has been observed repeatedly, the text is influenced in equal parts by Italian film comedy (*commedia all'italiana*) and Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (*That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana*),⁴⁹ while the autobiographical elements so pervasive in the writings of other migrant authors are entirely absent. Other aspects typical of postcolonial literature are instead present in the novel, such as the multicultural make-up of society, linguistic plurality, and narrative polyphony. The characters do not merely provide information to help the investigation of the police commissioner, who must solve a murder that occurred in an apartment building near Piazza Vittorio inhabited by people from around the world, but also offer an analysis of the multicultural society they embody. The text very centrally ironizes the assumption that clashes are inevitable where different cultures coexist. In narrating the events, the use of different registers is accompanied by linguistic and cultural contamination. The author's fascination with the linguistic plurality that is manifest in Italy through the use of dialects is also central to his subsequent novel, *Divorzio all'islamica a Viale Marconi* (*Divorce Islamic Style in Viale Marconi*).⁵⁰ The novel's protagonist, Christian, is a Sicilian who speaks a version of Italian that is enriched by many expressions and sentence constructions informed by dialect (as seen, for example, in his abundant usage of the preterit tense) and who is also completely fluent in Arabic. He goes undercover and infiltrates the Muslim community, which is allegedly planning an attack. As in *Scontro di civiltà*, where no one, until the time of the murder, ever suspected that "Amedeo the Italian" was actually "Ahmed the immigrant," so, too, in this novel, Christian's physical appearance and knowledge of Arabic easily enable him to pass as a Tunisian, underscoring the fact that immigrants and "normative" Italians are not so different or incompatible after all. Lakhous ironically takes on themes such as the incompatibility between cultures and the notion of the Muslim peril obsessively touted following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The subsequent novels by Lakhous, *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario* (*Dispute over a Very Italian Piglet*) and *La zingarata della verginella di Via Ormea* (*The Prank of the Good Little Virgin of Via Ormea*), are modeled on some of the central aspects of the first two.⁵¹ The city that provides the setting for these novels—as is hinted in the title—is Turin, where Lakhous lived from 2011 to 2014, after which he moved to the United States. The urban fabric in which the novels unfold is strongly characterized—as in the earlier books—by the coexistence of different cultures, a consequence of Italy's historic internal migrations and its more recent experiences of transnational migrations. As a whole, these novels show, with a levity that is typical of Lakhous's style, how urban contexts have changed in Italy and how they

⁴⁸ Amara Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2006), is the Italian rewriting by Lakhous of a text he had written in Arabic and published under the title *Come farsi allattare dalla lupa senza che ti morda* (Algiers: Edizioni Al-ikhtilaf, 2003). *Scontro di civiltà* was also published in English as *Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Editions, 2008) and in 2010 the novel was made into the eponymous film directed by Isotta Toso (Emme, in collaboration with RAI Cinema).

⁴⁹ Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (Milan: Garzanti, 1957).

⁵⁰ Amara Lakhous, *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2010), translated as *Divorce Islamic Style*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Editions, 2012).

⁵¹ Amara Lakhous, *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2013), translated as *Dispute over a Very Italian Piglet*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Editions, 2014), and id., *La zingarata della verginella di Via Ormea* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2014), translated as *The Prank of the Good Little Virgin of Via Ormea*, trans. Anthony Shugaar (New York: Europa Editions, 2016).

will continue to change in the future, representing the conflicts that the coexistence of different cultures can trigger, while raising the possibility that such coexistence might unfold peacefully, proving itself to be an enriching factor in various Italian cities and beyond.⁵²

The Third Phase: Representations of Race and Blackness

A separate discussion is warranted for some authors and texts that directly address the issue of race and, given that Italians have historically constructed their identity as white, critique the “impossible” intersection between blackness and Italianness.⁵³ These texts are of great importance for their specific postcolonial approach, as they connect colonial racism to processes of racialization in contemporary Italy.

An entirely anomalous text, unique in the panorama of Italian postcolonial literature, is *Traiettorie di Sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi?* by Geneviève Makaping, an anthropologist originally from Cameroon.⁵⁴ In this extraordinarily important essay initiating a discussion on race advanced by black writers in Italy, Makaping turns the colonial model of ethnographic observation on its head, enacting a process of othering Italian society (a premise made clear by the subtitle’s provocative, “What if *you* were the others?”), in a manner that denounces the intersection of racism and sexism. This text, which was the first analysis of significant theoretical weight of issues of race and color in contemporary Italy written by a black intellectual, paves the way for a serious, systematic reflection on these topics by other African-Italian writers and intellectuals.⁵⁵

In 2009, Igiaba Scego aired a program on Rai Radio Tre titled “Black Italians,” in which she reconstructed the life stories of black Italians who had been successful in different fields—for example, in sports, Egyptian-Italian athlete Ashraf Saber and Congolese Italian boxer Leone Jacovacci; in politics, MP Jean Leonard Touadi; in cinema, actress Ester Elisha; in music, pop singer Saba Anglana. She also featured partisan resistance fighter Italian Somali Giorgio Marincola and, representing Italy’s urban culture, the black Italian youth group “Comitiva

⁵² Among the many writers I exclude from this digression for reasons of space, I wish to acknowledge Adrian Bravi, an Argentinian of Italian origin. His work is remarkable not only for its literary qualities but also because it represents a new phenomenon within migratory movements towards Italy, namely the return migration of the descendants of Italian emigrants. For writers like Bravi, Italy is in a certain sense their homeland. At the same time, however, these writers often have a relationship of deep estrangement from the country and the Italian language. Among the books published in Italy by Adrian Bravi are *Restituiscimi il cappotto* (Ravenna: Fernandel, 2004); *La pelusa* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2007); *Il rapporto* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2011 (finalist for the 2012 Comisso Prize); and *L'albero e la vacca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2013). On return migration and the way in which “return emigrants” can be inserted into the discourse on the Italian postcolonial due to the double meaning of the word “colony,” see Fiore, “The Emigrant Post-‘Colonia’.”

⁵³ Only a few authors are mentioned here for reasons of space, but I refer you to my reflections in “Racial Evaporations: Representing Blackness in African Italian Postcolonial Literature,” in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 221–36. On the construction of whiteness for Italians, see, among others, Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani* (Florence: Le Monnier-Mondadori, 2013).

⁵⁴ Makaping, *Traiettorie di sguardi*.

⁵⁵ Racism is also at the center of two humorous books by a writer of Togolese descent, Kossi Komla-Ebri, *Imbarazzismi. Quotidiani imbarazzi in bianco e nero* (Milan: Edizioni dell'Arco-Marna, 2002), and *Nuovi imbarazzismi. Quotidiani imbarazzi in bianco e nero...e a colori* (Milan: Edizioni dell'Arco-Marna, 2004). In 1997, Komla-Ebri won first prize for fiction in the literary competition Eks&Tra with his story “Quando attraverserò il fiume,” in *Memorie in valigia*, ed. Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1997), 55–66.

Flaminio.”⁵⁶ Through the celebration of these black Italians, Scego created an ideal community and underlined their contribution to Italian history and culture. By asserting their right to visibility, she reverses negative perceptions of people of color while simultaneously questioning the presumed racial homogeneity of Italianness both in the past and in the present.

In *Noi italiani neri. Storie di ordinario razzismo* (2010),⁵⁷ Pap Khouma condemns the allegedly impossible intersection of blackness and Italianness as well as the resistance to including people who do not conform to the Italian “chromatic norm” among those identified as Italian.⁵⁸ Twenty years after publishing his first book, his narrative shifts from the autobiographical “I” of the titular *I Was an Elephant Salesman* (where his story is still a singular and individual one despite its affinity with the experience of other migrants) to the collective “we” of *We Black Italians*, where he is no longer a recently migrated individual, but rather part of a community of new Italians discriminated against for being black. Khouma examines episodes of everyday racism and the way in which such episodes are systematically minimized, also arguing that State racism is produced by and articulated through discriminatory legislations.

Written in the form of a letter to a friend, Cheick Tidiane Gaye’s work, *Prendi quello che vuoi ma lasciami la mia pelle nera*, is, as one could perhaps glean from the title (*Take All You Want, but Leave Me My Black Skin*), a reflection on the manner in which migrants’ racial difference is perceived in Italy.⁵⁹ The author denounces the racial harassment that he and other immigrants from Africa are obliged to suffer, remembering at the same time that in Italy racism had been from the outset intra-national, and that Italians themselves were (and, I would add, have again become) a nation of emigrants.

These texts are of great importance to the Italian cultural and literary landscape because they further discussion of the processes of racialization, everyday racism in mainstream culture, racism’s colonial matrix, the supposedly impossible intersection of blackness and Italianness, and especially the link between contemporary racism and colonial racism, Italian and otherwise.⁶⁰ These authors come from former Italian colonies as well as from other African countries, showing how colonialism was based everywhere, as Frantz Fanon reminds us,⁶¹ on processes of othering and deeming colonized populations inferior precisely because of the color

⁵⁶ Igiaba Scego, *Il Terzo Anello - Fantasmi: Black Italians*, Rai Radio Tre 2009, <http://www.storiemigranti.org/spip.php?article643>, accessed 16 October 2017.

⁵⁷ Pap Khouma, *Noi italiani neri. Storie di ordinario razzismo* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2010).

⁵⁸ As I have stated elsewhere, my notion of “chromatic norm” is informed by Puwar’s definition of “somatic norm,” but considers only issues of race and color as relating to matters of visibility in public spaces. See Romeo, “Race Evaporations.”

⁵⁹ Cheick Tidiane Gaye, *Prendi quello che vuoi ma lasciami la mia pelle nera* (Milan: Jaka Book, 2013).

⁶⁰ Although I do not include films in this survey for reasons of space, I would like to acknowledge the seminal work by Ethiopian Italian filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer, on the journey of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to Italy across Africa and the Mediterranean, on their reception in Italy, and on contemporary racism. See, among others, *Come un uomo sulla terra*, dir. Andrea Segre, Dagmawi Yimer, and Riccardo Biadene (Rome: Zalab & Asinitas Onlus, 2008); *Soltanto il mare*, dir. Dagmawi Yimer, Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco (Rome: Archivio delle memorie migranti, Sandro Triulzi e Marco Guadagnino, 2011); *Va’ pensiero. Storie ambulanti*, dir. Dagmawi Yimer (Rome: Archivio delle memorie migranti, 2013). I would also like to acknowledge the importance of the work on Italian blackness and its presence in Italian cinema conducted by Italian scholar Leonardo De Franceschi and by second-generation Ghanaian Italian director Fred Kuwornu, among others. See Leonardo De Franceschi, *L’Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2012), and *Blaxploitalian: 100 Years of Blackness in Italian Cinema*, dir. Fred Kuwornu (USA: Blue Rose Films and New York: Do The Right Thing, 2016).

⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

of their skin, and how these mechanisms of power are now replicated in contemporary postcolonial Europe.

The Third Phase: Albanian Italian Literature

The works of Albanian writers in Italian, one of the most interesting strands in Italian postcolonial literature, deserve a separate discussion. The relationship between Italy and Albania has long-standing roots (one must remember, at the very least, the Arbëreshë communities in Southern Italy), going back long before the great waves of migration that began in 1991 after the collapse of the communist regime. From 1939 to 1943, the two countries maintained a clearly colonial relationship that has had a profound impact on Albania's history. Later, at the end of the 1970s and especially after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985, Albania's geographical proximity to Italy enabled the reception of Italian television by Albanian audiences, which provided them access to the "Western world" in the final years of the communist era's media censorship and information restriction. This opening to the West, with its emphasis on the welfare of the individual subject as opposed to state-sanctioned communities, greatly contributed to shaping Albanians' desire for freedom, for materialism, and eventually for emigration.⁶² Thus, although Italian colonialism in Albania was short-lived, the relationship between the two countries can be considered postcolonial not only by virtue of the colonial relationship in the past, but also because of a more recent form of cultural colonialism that strongly informed the Albanians' desire to migrate, resulting in a robust flow from Albania to Italy over the past twenty-five years. Since the images of ships overloaded with immigrants (the *Vlora*, primarily) that began to arrive in 1991 on the coast of Apulia were first imprinted in the collective imaginaries of both Albanians and Italians,⁶³ the Albanian community has come to constitute the second-largest immigrant group in Italy.

The strong Italian influence on Albanian history and culture is present in the literary output of writers of Albanian origin, some of whom are "transmigrants" (after migrating to Italy, these writers have moved to other countries).⁶⁴ An important presence on the literary scene is Albanian poet Gëzim Hajdari, who left his homeland in 1992 for political reasons and, once in Italy, began writing in Italian.⁶⁵ In 1995 he won the Eks&Tra Prize and in 1997 he was awarded the Montale Prize for an unpublished collection of poetry, the core of which was later published as *Corpo presente* in 1999. In spite of these and other important literary acknowledgments, he still remains somewhat at the margins of the Italian literary scene. Central to his poetry are themes of exile,

⁶² See Russell King and Nicola Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

⁶³ This can be seen in two documentaries, *La nave dolce*, dir. Daniele Vicari (Italy-Albania: Microcinema, 2012), and *Anija la nave*, dir. Roland Sejko (Rome: Istituto Luce – Cinecittà, 2013).

⁶⁴ For a definition of "transmigrant," see Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68/1 (1995): 48–63.

⁶⁵ Gëzim Hajdari has to his credit the publication of many volumes of poetry, most of which are in both Italian and Albanian. Among these volumes are *Ombra di cane/Hije qeni* (Frosinone: Dismisuratesti, 1993); *Sassi controvento/Gurë kundërerës* (Milan: Laboratorio delle Arti, 1995); *Antologia della pioggia/Antologjia e shiut* (Rimini: Fara Editore, 2000); *Spine Nere/Gjëmbe të zinj* (Nardò: Besa, 2004); *Poema dell'esilio/Poema e mërgimit* (Rimini: Fara Editore, 2005); *Peligòrga/Peligorga* (Nardò: Besa, 2007); *Poesie scelte 1990–2007* (Nardò: Besa, 2008); *Corpo presente/Trup i pranishëm*, (Tiranë: Botimet Dritëro, 1999; repr. Nardò: Besa, 2011); *Evviva il canto del gallo nel villaggio comunista/Rroftë kënga e gjelit në fshatin komunist* (Nardò: Besa, 2013); and *Poesie scelte 1990–2015* (Nardò: Besa, 2015).

isolation, and foreignness. In his poems, images of his native country emerge from memory, together with a past from which he cannot and does not want to break free.

Ron Kubati, who arrived in Italy during the exodus in 1991, has a relationship with Italian language and Italian culture that is very pronounced and complex. He received his first doctorate in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the University of Bari and began his work as a writer in Italian at the same time. He later moved to the United States where he earned a second doctorate in Italian Studies at the University of Chicago. In his first two novels *Va e non torna* (2000) and *M* (2002), autobiographical elements coexist alongside history and literary fiction.⁶⁶ If the hopes of a generation struggling with their new life permeate the first two novels (centering on the possibilities of migration in the first, and the issue of integration into an already heavily multicultural society in the second), such hopes disappear in the gloomy atmosphere of his third novel, *Il buio del mare* (2007).⁶⁷ In *La vita dell'eroe* (2016), the most recent novel by Kubati and the first written in the United States (but still in Italian), the personal stories of the characters intersect with the history of Albania, especially with the fascist occupation of Albania from 1939 to 1943, the resistance of the National Liberation Army, and the establishment of Hoxha's communist regime.⁶⁸

Ornela Vorpsi was included among the 35 best European writers in the 2010 anthology *Best European Fiction*,⁶⁹ the volume inaugurating a series that identifies writers of note from various European countries every year. Vorpsi arrived in Italy in 1991, studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, and then moved to Paris where, in addition to being a writer, she also trained as a photographer and visual artist. Though her work has been translated into many languages, Vorpsi has always written her novels in Italian, and has only very recently shifted to French as her preferred written language. She made her debut in Italy in 2005, when she released her first novel, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, which was written in Italian, as was the subsequent novel *La mano che non morde* (2007), but was first published in France in the French language and only later in Italian.⁷⁰ Her writing style, both spare and incisive, is reminiscent of Agota Kristof's, while her stories often revolve around female characters, their social positions, and their sexuality. The first novel, *Il paese dove non si muore mai*, takes place in Albania and focuses on power relations between the sexes and the ways in which women's sexuality is socially regulated. Personal stories also merge with official ones in the second novel, *La mano che non morde*, in which a trip to Sarajevo—a place that is not the protagonist's homeland but with which she maintains a relationship of proximity and contiguity—brings back memories of the Albania left behind long ago and causes the protagonist to reflect on her own sense of displacement. The fourteen stories in *Bevete cacao Van Houten* (2010) are animated by their protagonists' dreams and desires of migration. These narratives are recounted from the point

⁶⁶ Ron Kubati, *Va e non torna* (Nardò: Besa, 2000), and id., *M. Romanzo* (Nardò: Besa, 2002).

⁶⁷ Ron Kubati, *Il buio del mare* (Florence: Giunti, 2007).

⁶⁸ Ron Kubati, *La vita dell'eroe* (Nardò: Besa, 2016). Kubati, who currently lives in Princeton in the United States, is in a bilingual phase (Italian and English) when it comes to his writing (he wrote his American doctoral thesis in both Italian and English and uses both languages in his academic writing) but does not know how this phase will evolve. As for creative writing, Kubati also released the latest novel in Italian, but in the future could change his language of publication. Thanks to Ron Kubati for providing me with this information in a series of emails exchanged in June 2016.

⁶⁹ Aleksandar Hemon, ed., *Best European Fiction* (Chicago and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2010).

⁷⁰ Ornela Vorpsi, *Il paese dove non si muore mai* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), and ead., *La mano che non morde* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007). These two novels have received numerous literary prizes, among which are (the first) Grinzane Cavour Prize for Best Young Author and the Viareggio Prize European Cultures. In between the two novels, Vorpsi published *Vetri rosa* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2006).

when desire becomes reality, each unfolding toward a different, sometimes tragic, end.⁷¹ The latest novel *Viaggio intorno alla madre* (2015) marks Vorpsi's passage from writing in Italian to writing in French. It is an intimate and courageous work—as her novels often are—that places the protagonist's sexual desire at the center of the narrative, seriously questioning the traditional roles of wives and mothers to which women are still often relegated.⁷²

Elvira Dones left Albania in 1988 before the fall of the communist regime, and, having lived in Switzerland for seventeen years, now resides in the United States where she has worked as a writer, screenwriter, journalist, and documentary filmmaker. Her literary output includes six novels published in Italy, the first four written in Albanian and the others, published in 2007 and 2011, in Italian.⁷³ Her works often focus on societal norms, with special attention to the exploitation of women and the social construction of gender. At the center of the novel *Sole bruciato*, for example, is the trafficking of Albanian girls who are brought to Italy at a very young age and are forced to enter the sex trade. Dones has also filmed a documentary on this issue (with Mohamed Soudani) entitled *Cercando Brunilda* (2003), a reflection on both the dangers of the journey of undocumented migrants and the condition faced by female victims of sex trafficking.⁷⁴ In her novel *Vergine giurata*, the events develop partly in northern Albania and partly in the United States, where the protagonist Hana/Mark migrates to begin a new life. The transition occurs not only at a social, cultural, linguistic level, but also at the level of gender identity. Hana's body is placed at the center of the narrative. In order not to submit to her Albanian village's patriarchal rules and marry against her will, she resorts to the ancient law of the Kanun and becomes a "sworn virgin."⁷⁵ This social role requires a woman to swear to remain a virgin forever. At the same time, she is authorized by society to assume a masculine appearance and lead life as a man, with all the privileges that result from this change of status. Yet the transition brings with it all the limitations entailed in the denial of one's original gender identity and one's assumption of another. The motivation to migrate coincides with Hana/Mark's desire to reclaim her earlier identity and to inhabit that earlier sexuality, dismantling the patriarchal laws that her home village would never have allowed her to break. With extraordinary deftness, Dones narrates Hana's gradual rediscovery and acceptance of her female body and her exploration of sexual desire, letting the profound deconstruction of the male/female binary that these transitions between gender identities entail foment in the background of the story, though they are always present. Even more than the novel, the eponymous film

⁷¹ Ornella Vorpsi, *Bevete cacao Van Houten* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010). Vorpsi later also published *Fuorimondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

⁷² Ornella Vorpsi, *Viaggio intorno alla madre*, trans. Ginevra Bompiani and Benedetta Torrani (Rome: Nottetempo, 2015); Ornella Vorpsi, *Tu convoiteras* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014).

⁷³ Elvira Dones, *Senza bagagli*, trans. Alma Molla (Nardò: Besa, 1998); ead., *Sole bruciato*, trans. Elio Miracco (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001); ead., *Bianco giorno offeso*, trans. Elvira Dones (Novara: Interlinea, 2004); and ead., *I mari ovunque*, trans. Rovena Troje (Novara: Interlinea, 2007). All of these were originally written in Albanian, whereas *Vergine giurata* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007) and *Piccola guerra perfetta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011) were written directly in Italian.

⁷⁴ *Cercando Brunilda*, dir. Elvira Dones and Mohamed Soudani (RSI – Radiotelevisione Svizzera Italiana, 2003) (finalist for the "Ilaria Alpi" Journalism Prize, 2004). Also for RSI, Dones and Fulvio Mariani made the documentary *I ngujuar (Inchiodato)* (RSI – Radiotelevisione Svizzera Italiana, 2005) on the blood feud in northern Albania, which in 2005 was awarded the "Fipa d'Argent" in the "Grands Reportages et faits de société" during the eighteenth edition of the Festival International de Programmes Audiovisuels at Biarritz in France.

⁷⁵ On this issue, Elvira Dones filmed a documentary called *Vergini giurate* (RSI – Radiotelevisione Svizzera Italiana and Dones Media, 2006), which won the award for best documentary at the Baltimore Women's Film Festival in 2007.

adaptation—and the first feature film by director Laura Bispuri—shows the lack of connection between sex and gender performance, providing a visual and thus even more eloquent representation of gender performativity.⁷⁶

Anilda Ibrahimî worked as a journalist in Albania until 1994, when she moved to Switzerland and then to Italy in 1997, where she currently lives and works. In her first novel, *Rosso come una sposa* (2008), which, like her other works, was written directly in Italian, the theme of migration is almost absent and appears only towards the end of the text.⁷⁷ Here, the history of Albania—from ancient times to the beginning of the twentieth century, the Fascist and later the Nazi occupation, communist and post-communist society—is interwoven with the stories of a family, especially the genealogy of its women, their strengths, and the traditions that govern their lives. Ibrahimî's narration takes in the tone of an epic novel in the style of Helen Barolini's *Umbertina*, which took on epic status for Italian American literature and culture.⁷⁸ The construction of an official history via personal stories is a constant feature in the works of this author. The setting for her second novel, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo* (2009), is still the Balkans, and the personal stories of two families, one Serbian and the other ethnically Albanian from Kosovo, are also interwoven with historical events.⁷⁹ In Ibrahimî's third novel, *Non c'è dolcezza* (2012), the intimate sphere is privileged, although Albanian history is still present as a backdrop. The deep friendship between Lila and Eleni, their status in Albanian society, their personal and professional desires, and the status of motherhood, attained by one of these women with the help of the other, are at the center of a narrative in which the rural and urban, modern and traditional intersect.⁸⁰ Ibrahimî's most recent novel, *Il tuo nome è una promessa* (2017),⁸¹ tells the story of a family of German Jews who flee to Albania during WWII, showing the fractures that history produces and observing how those who survive have to come to terms with its legacy.

⁷⁶ Laura Bispuri's film *Vergine giurata* (Cinecittà Luce, 2015) is loosely based on Elvira Dones's novel. The film differs substantially from the book, but Hana/Mark's struggle with her body and the discovery of a new sexuality remains central in both texts. (In the novel, the protagonist migrates to the United States, but in the film to Italy. In the novel, Hana reclaims ownership of her gender identity on the plane that will take her to the United States, while in the film Hana arrives at her sister's home in Italy as Mark.) The scenes where the protagonist stands in front of the mirror to look at her own long-denied and rejected body are very powerful demonstrations of a Lacanian process of individual identity construction.

⁷⁷ Anilda Ibrahimî, *Rosso come una sposa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008). This novel has received numerous literary prizes, such as the Edoardo Kihlgren Prize, the Corrado Alvaro Prize, and the Città di Penne Literary Prize.

⁷⁸ Helen Barolini, *Umbertina* (New York: Seaview Books, 1979; repr. New York: The Feminist Press, 1999); Italian translation, *Umbertina*, trans. Susan Barolini and Giovanni Maccari, intro. Laura Lilli (Cava de' Tirreni: Avagliano, 2001). I compare the Ibrahimî novel to Barolini's because for both the definition of "epic" is very different from the traditional meaning. The epic features of these narratives are to be found in the tradition that the women from the two families, at different times and places, create for themselves and for the generations to come, and in the daily lives of women who are able to determine the course of their personal history and that of their country. The authors represent women—Albanian and Italian-American—with features that go far beyond the stereotypes relegating them to the role of victims of patriarchy. The figure of the grandmother is also a defining one in both novels (*Umbertina* in the eponymous novel and Saba in Ibrahimî's novel): not only do the two women embody the origin of a genealogy of women, but they also act as a point of reference for subsequent generations in an era of change and migrations.

⁷⁹ Anilda Ibrahimî, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

⁸⁰ Anilda Ibrahimî, *Non c'è dolcezza* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

⁸¹ Anilda Ibrahimî, *Il tuo nome è una promessa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2017).

*The Third Phase: Italian (Direct) Postcolonial Literature*⁸²

Italian (direct) postcolonial literature refers to the body of texts that is the outcome of Italy's direct postcoloniality,⁸³ that is, literature written by authors from the Horn of Africa and Libya, places where Italian colonization was extensively present and has thus left lasting effects. As we know, postcolonial studies are not limited to investigating the relationship between a former motherland and its colonies, but rather reflect on the power relations that colonial systems have brought into being and the way in which these relations are kept in circulation in modern times, especially through the production of illegality, racialization processes, and lack of access to citizenship.

In Italy's case, late-twentieth and early twenty-first century immigrants do not take the routes of colonizers in reverse—that is, the inhabitants of former Italian colonies are not those primarily driven to Italy—but rather they involve diverse points of origin and destination, as they are the outcome of global capitalism and the economic and political systems inherited from colonialism. At the same time, there is a “privileged” relationship between a nation and the territories it once colonized, and in Italian culture this is depicted through Italian postcolonial literature in the strict sense of the term: a body of literature produced mostly by women who come from former Italian colonies in Africa, the outcome of direct postcoloniality. Even though these writers are from different generations, come from different countries, and have even more different backgrounds, they share a familiarity with the history, culture, and language of Italy, elements that are in various ways derived from the colonial relationships their countries had with Italy. This relationship is represented in the writings of these authors through an explicit meditation on the historical link between Italy and their own countries, through the rewriting of official histories and through reflection on the memorialization of past events in present times. Another important contribution that these authors make to Italian postcolonial literature in dialogue with writers who are not from former Italian colonies is a reflection on how the processes of racialization from colonial societies are reproduced in contemporary Italy, and the way in which the allocation or non-allocation of citizenship serves to create and implement systems of marginalization. Although writers originating from the former Italian colonies in Africa do not constitute the majority of postcolonial writers,⁸⁴ they have provided, and continue to provide, a crucial contribution to contemporary Italian culture.

Before moving on to an overview of the most acclaimed voices from the Horn of Africa, I will briefly discuss the existence of other groups of texts which, although by writers from former Italian colonies in Africa, and/or dealing with topics concerning Italian colonial history, the history of now decolonized former Italian colonies, and the present of postcolonial Italy, cannot be included in the group I have called “Italian (direct) postcolonial literature” for various reasons that I analyze below.

* * *

⁸² The overview I present here is not meant to be exhaustive. My intention is rather to trace some useful trajectories for understanding how postcolonial literature written by authors originating from former Italian colonies makes an important contribution to Italian culture and the decolonization of its literary canon and of Italian society. For a comprehensive overview of authors who have a direct link with Italian colonization, refer to Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola*.

⁸³ See note 12.

⁸⁴ See note 11.

Erminia Dell’Oro and Luciana Capretti, both of whom were born and lived in former Italian colonies (Dell’Oro was born and raised in Asmara and moved to Milan in adulthood, always maintaining close contact with Eritrea; Capretti was born in Tripoli and moved to Rome with her family at an early age in 1967) belong to one such group. The Dell’Oro novels tell stories of colonial occupation and the eventual abandonment of the colonies (*Asmara addio*); of interracial relations in the Eritrean colony and the destiny to which children born out of such unions were condemned (*L’abbandono*).⁸⁵ In 2016, Dell’Oro published *Il mare davanti. Storia di Tsegehans Weldeslassie*, in which she transcribed the experiences of the protagonist who fled from Eritrea, crossed the Sudanese and Libyan desert, and then crossed the Mediterranean on one of those precarious boats that are shipwrecked on a daily basis.⁸⁶ In the novel *Ghibli*, Luciana Capretti relies on documents and testimonies to reconstruct “the exodus of twenty thousand” Italians whom Colonel Gaddafi forced to leave Libya, denying them the right to carry their belongings with them or to claim any of their possessions.⁸⁷ While these novels are important within the context of Italian postcolonial literature, there is a significant difference in the positions occupied by these two writers compared to those discussed later in this section. Their social identity was that of white settlers and not of colonized subjects, and the colonial world, as noted by Frantz Fanon, is a polarized world in which the two parties are in no way complementary, but are in fact irreconcilable.⁸⁸

A second group comprises novels with a setting that is in some sense colonial, such as those written by Carlo Lucarelli (*L’ottava vibrazione*, 2008; *Albergo Italia*, 2014; *Il tempo delle iene*, 2015), Andrea Camilleri (*La presa di Macallè*, 2003; *Il nipote del negus*, 2010), and Enrico Brizzi (*L’inattesa piega degli eventi*, 2008),⁸⁹ texts that “adopt vividly exoticized colonial settings shrouded in nostalgic and quasi-elegiac atmospheres where their (for the most part male) protagonists reenact major events of colonial history (in Camilleri and Lucarelli), or imagine a

⁸⁵ Erminia Dell’Oro, *Asmara addio* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1997); ead., *L’abbandono. Una storia eritrea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991). See also her novel *La gola del diavolo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), a colonial history told through the eyes of a young girl.

⁸⁶ Erminia Dell’Oro, *Il mare davanti. Storia di Tsegehans Weldeslassie* (Milan: Piemme, 2016).

⁸⁷ Luciana Capretti, *Ghibli* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004). Luciana Capretti is also the author of *Tevere* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014), a novel in which the personal story of the protagonist, Clara Faiola, a woman who disappeared in Rome in 1975 and was never found, moves along trajectories that interweave Italian history with themes of family abuse and mental illness. Most recently, Capretti published an essay on Islamic feminism, *La jihad delle donne. Il femminismo islamico nel mondo occidentale* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2017).

⁸⁸ See Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004). To understand the difference between literature written by the descendants of the colonizers and those of the colonized, I recommend a comparative reading of three novels that take place in different countries, presenting the theme of interracial marriages in colonial times and depicting the fate of children of these unions: Dell’Oro, *L’abbandono*; Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull’equatore. Gli italiani dimenticati: Una storia* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010); and Carla Macoggi, *Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcina* (Rome: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2011). Eritrea is the setting in the first case, Somalia in the second, and Ethiopia in the third. Although Dell’Oro is very critical of the behavior of Italian men in the colony, who often consider their African families as belonging to a parenthesis in their lives, the writer also punishes Selas, the protagonist, by making her a victim and depriving her of agency, so that by the end of the narrative she has no choice but to succumb. See also Carla Macoggi’s *La nemesi della rossa* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 2012), in which the protagonist of her earlier novel arrives in Italy and faces racism and discrimination.

⁸⁹ Carlo Lucarelli, *L’ottava vibrazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008); id., *Albergo Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2014); id., *Il tempo delle iene* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015); Andrea Camilleri, *La presa di Macallè* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003); ead., *Il nipote del negus* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2010); Enrico Brizzi, *L’inattesa piega degli eventi* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2008).

different postcolonial future (in Brizzi).⁹⁰ These texts appear to ensure that the Italian colonial past becomes part of the nation's common knowledge—considering the prominence of the writers. However, the strong presence of sexist and racist elements, the utter lack of a critical view of colonialism, and indeed the exotic and aesthetic fascination with times and places past show that this literature performs no oppositional function, but rather reinforces colonial stereotypes.⁹¹

Finally, there is a third group of texts that includes Meti Birabiro's book, *Blue Daughter of the Red Sea: A Memoir* (2004) and Maaza Mengiste's novel, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010), works published in English in the United States, which connect the colonial past to the postcolonial present through different transnational trajectories.⁹² The two women authors are part of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States (although Birabiro first spent a period in Italy) and write in English; thus, they cannot technically be counted among the Italian postcolonial writers. However, the first of these texts is partially set in contemporary postcolonial Italy, where the protagonist's diversity triggers processes of Othering, while the second speaks of the Menghistu dictatorship in Ethiopia, establishing lines of continuity with the period of Italian colonialism. Although in a subtler way than other works considered here, these texts also shed light on Italy's colonial past—and the consequences that it has wrought for the colonized countries in the aftermath of their decolonization—and postcolonial present.

* * *

Italian (direct) postcolonial literature emerged, like the literature of migration, in the early 1990s. Indeed, Ethiopian Italian writer Maria Abbebù Viarengo's memoir was published in 1990.⁹³ This brief memoir is unique in that it represents the way the female author's blackness was perceived in 1960s Turin, during the years of the great internal migration in which Otherness in Northern Italy was primarily embodied by Southern immigrants. But the extraordinary importance of this text lies also in the fact that, along with Ribka Sibhatu's *Aulò* and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's *Lontano da Mogadiscio*, it is one of the first texts in Italian where the history of colonialism is rewritten by the colonized, thus initiating the important process of the decolonization of memory.

⁹⁰ Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, "Paradigms of Postcoloniality," 9.

⁹¹ See Alessandro Triulzi, "Hidden Faces, Hidden Histories: Contrasting Voices of Postcolonial Italy," in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 103–13.

⁹² Meti Birabiro, *Blue Daughter of the Red Sea: A Memoir* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Maaza Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (New York: Norton, 2010) and ead., *Lo sguardo del leone*, trans. Massimo Ortello (Verona: Neri Pozza, 2010).

⁹³ Maria Abbebù Viarengo, "Andiamo a spasso?," *Linea d'Ombra*, n.s. 54 (1990): 74–76. The full text of the memoir from which this excerpt was taken has never been published. As Sandra Ponzanesi has pointed out, the author was very unhappy about the fact that the excerpt was significantly changed for publication, including the title, and that those changes were never authorized by her. See Sandra Ponzanesi, "Daughters of Empire: Metissage and Hyphenated Identities: Erminia dell'Oro and Maria Abbebu Viarengo," in *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 143–66. However, a longer excerpt was published in English with the original title in Oromo. See Maria Abbebù Viarengo, "Scirscir N'Demna?" ["Let's Go for a Stroll"], in *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, ed. Graziella Parati, trans. Nathalie Hester (Madison, WI and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 69–78.

In 1993, Ribka Sibhatu published *Aulò. Canto poesia dell'Eritrea* with the facing text in Tigrinya.⁹⁴ The title immediately underlines the strong oral component of the narrative (the *aulò*, explains Sibhatu, is a popular genre in Eritrea consisting of a set of verses that are recited or sung on various occasions, such as weddings and funerals), in which the autobiographical story is combined with the description of Eritrean customs and traditions as well as with fables, proverbs, and little history lessons.⁹⁵ In 2004, Sibhatu published a text very different from her first, *Il cittadino che non c'è*, in which she presents the results of research conducted from 1999 to 2001 on how immigrants are represented in the Italian media.⁹⁶

In 1994, Fazel published *Lontano da Mogadiscio*, an autobiographical text recounting her life in Somalia, her escape to Italy, her many other migrations around the world, and her subsequent return to Italy.⁹⁷ A central element of these early (direct) postcolonial texts is their condemnation of the forgetfulness that has enveloped Italian colonial history in Italy. The narrator of *Lontano da Mogadiscio* speaks Italian, which she learned in school during the Italian trusteeship and the first years of independence. Once in Italy, she quickly realizes that such knowledge is not mutual and that Italians do not even know how to locate Somalia on the map, though they identify it as a generically backwards and primeval Third World country. A revised and expanded bilingual (Italian and English) version of this text, titled *Lontano da Mogadiscio/Far from Mogadishu*, was released in 2013. The text thus became available to an English-speaking public, marking the growing global interest in the Italian postcolonial.⁹⁸ In 2010, Fazel published a new novel, *Nuvole sull'Equatore*, where the racialization of Africans central to *Lontano da Mogadiscio* returns from a historical perspective.⁹⁹ Through the story of Giulia, a mixed-race child entrusted to the missions in the period of Somalia's governance under Italian trusteeship, Fazel describes the social stigma to which the children of mixed marriages were subjected.

⁹⁴ Ribka Sibhatu, *Aulò. Canto-poesia dall'Eritrea* (Rome: Sinnos, 1993). In 2010, Simone Brioni, Ermanno Guida, and Simone Chiscuzzu made the documentary *Aulò* with Ribka Sibhatu, in which she recites some *aulò* while talking of Italian colonialism in Eritrea and how immigration redefines the concept of national and local identity. See *Aulò. Roma postcoloniale*, dir. Simone Brioni, Ermanno Guida, and Graziano Chiscuzzu (Rome: Kimera Film, 2012), available with Ribka Sibhatu, *Aulò! Aulò! Aulò! Poesie di nostalgia, d'esilio e d'amore / Aulò! Aulò! Aulò! Poems of Nostalgia, Exile and Love*, intro. Graziella Parati, trans. Andre Naffis-Sahely (Rome: Kimerafilm, 2012).

⁹⁵ Although in this article I primarily discuss works of fiction and autobiographical texts, it seems important to recall the work of historian Ali Mumin Ahad. In 1993, he published the article "I 'peccati storici' del colonialismo in Somalia," *Democrazia e diritto* 33/4 (1993): 217–50. See also his article "Corno d'Africa: L'ex-impero italiano," in *Nuovo Planetario Italiano*, ed. Gnisci, 241–93.

⁹⁶ Ribka Sibhatu, *Il cittadino che non c'è. L'immigrazione nei media italiani* (Rome: EDUP, 2004). As mentioned earlier, Sibhatu returns to children's literature in 2012, with the publication of *L'esatto numero delle stelle*.

⁹⁷ Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (Rome: Datanews, 1994). From the same author, see the story "La spiaggia," *Scritture migranti* 1 (2007): 9–14, in which the theme of European neocolonialism in Africa—which makes up the story's background—is combined with that of exoticization and commodification of black bodies (in this case of men), but also with that of the gendered power dynamics in relationships.

⁹⁸ Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio/Far from Mogadishu* (Milan: Laurana Editore, 2013). The volume also includes a lengthy bilingual afterword by Simone Brioni, in which Brioni analyzes the importance of Fazel's work within the landscape of Italian postcolonial literature and reconstructs the history of critical essays written about the book. See Simone Brioni, "'Un dialogo che non conosce confine né di nazionalità, né di razza, né di cultura'. Temi, impatto e ricezione critica di *Lontano da Mogadiscio*" and "'A Dialogue that Knows No Border between Nationality, Race, or Culture': Themes, Impact and the Critical Reception of *Far from Mogadishu*," in *ibid.*, 168–94, and 354–81, respectively.

⁹⁹ Fazel, *Nuvole sull'equatore*.

The period between 2005 and 2012 witnessed the publication of a number of texts that have made a crucial contribution to the rewriting of Italian colonial history with the aid of both archival research and personal memories. 2005 saw the release of two texts that prompt a historical reflection on the role of Italians in the colonial territories, and also (in the case of the first) on the way in which the racialization and Othering of colonized subjects are reproduced in contemporary Italy. In Garane Garane's *Il latte è buono*, the main character, Gashan, is part of the Somali generation that grew up mythologizing Rome and Italy, the country whose language and culture he knows.¹⁰⁰ However, the protagonist's encounter with the actual culture, once he arrives in Italy to study, is very different: Gashan immediately realizes that the continuity that he felt between himself and Italians—by virtue of his perfect knowledge of the Italian language and culture and his strong desire to be part of the latter—is not shared by the Italians, who consider him to be the same as all African immigrants arriving in Italy. The Italians are completely unaware of the historical relationship between Italy and Somalia, and they perceive Gashan's perfect knowledge of their language with diffidence: if migrants are expected to imitate the linguistic behavior of Italians (mimicry), this process must always remain incomplete and signal an approximation that never becomes total identification (“almost the same, but not quite”).¹⁰¹ When Gashan arrives at Fiumicino airport in Rome, his “excessive” mimicry (his Somali passport is in Italian, he speaks perfect Italian) is soon regarded with suspicion: Italians fear that an excessive proximity might blur physical, social, and political borders, ultimately depriving them of their privileges.

Another text of great importance regarding the rewriting of Italian colonial history is Martha Nasibu's *Memorie di una principessa etiopie*.¹⁰² Daughter of the *dejatch* (prince) Nasibù Zamanuel, a member of the Ethiopian nobility and one of the most valiant army commanders who tried to repel Mussolini's invasion of 1935–36, Martha Nasibù tells the story of her family before, during, and after the war that reduced Ethiopia to a territory of the Italian Empire. This autobiographical text has great historical value (as evidenced by Angelo Del Boca's preface), as it offers insight into the life of the Ethiopian nobility before the Fascist invasion, narrating the story of the conflict and the Ethiopian defeat through the systematic use of mustard gas banned by the Geneva Convention, and finally the eight-year exile of Dejatch Nasibù's family to Italy. This text shows a page of history, that of the Ethiopian resistance, that remains largely unknown to Italians.

In a series of autobiographical stories, Kaha Mohamed Aden's *Fra-intendimenti* intertwines the history of Somalia—from colonialism, the Italian administration of Somalia, Siad Barre's dictatorship, and civil war—with the story of the Somali diaspora and therefore also with Aden's own personal history. The book's twelve chapters contain the author's contemporary reflections on Pavia—her own relationship with the Somali community, the racism of Italians, the precariousness linked to the lack of citizenship—along with memories of Somalia, in particular her own life and her family's life (before she was born) in Mogadishu.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.

¹⁰² Martha Nasibù, *Memorie di una principessa etiopie* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005).

¹⁰³ Kaha Mohamed Aden, *Fra-intendimenti* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2010). Kaha Mohamed Aden is the protagonist of the documentary *La quarta via: Mogadiscio, Italia*, dir. Simone Brioni, Ermanno Guida, and Graziano Chiscuzzu, written by Kaha Mohamed Aden and Simone Brioni (Rome: Kimerafilm, 2012) [available with Simone Brioni, ed., *Somalitalia: Quattro vie per Mogadiscio/ Somalitalia: Four Roads to Mogadishu*, trans. Alberto Carpi (Rome: Kimerafilm, 2012)].

Also focused on colonial memory is the otherwise very different text *Timira. Romanzo meticcio*, the result of a collaboration between Wu Ming 2¹⁰⁴ and Antar Mohamed. Mohamed is the son of Isabella Marincola (known in Somalia as Timira Assan), who is presented as the narrator of this text.¹⁰⁵ The narrative, “una storia vera... comprese le parti che non lo sono” [“a true story, including the parts that are not”],¹⁰⁶ offers a mix of the first co-author’s personal reflections on Isabella Marincola’s diary pages, archival documents, memories, intertwining stories, and official history. Marincola’s memories serve to reconstruct a piece of colonial Italian history through the story of a woman born to an Italian father and a Somali mother, taken from her mother and her motherland while still a child and raised in Italy where she was constantly racialized and perceived as Other because she did not conform to the chromatic norm of Italianness. This project very clearly seeks to anchor the narratives within history, yet at the same time to class personal stories as “history,” in order to promote a “bottom-up” idea of historiography. Nevertheless, it is problematic that Isabella Marincola, effectively the story’s narrator, is excluded from authorial recognition, reduced to the status of a discussion topic, even though her photograph appears on the book cover. This indicates the problematics of power relations in collaborative authorship, particularly, as in this case, when one co-author is a famous writer.¹⁰⁷

The Third Phase: Igiaba Scego, Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, and Gabriella Ghermandi

The writers analyzed in this section, Igiaba Scego, Ubax Cristina Ali Farah,¹⁰⁸ and Gabriella Ghermandi, are different from those discussed earlier, since, in the realm of direct Italian postcolonial literature, they represent the emergence of the second generation (although, strictly speaking, Ghermandi belongs to generation 1.5, since she was born in Addis Ababa and moved to Italy when she was 14 years old). What follows, then, is that Italian is the first language of these writers and Italian culture is their culture. A specific section is dedicated to these writers because of their absolutely pivotal leading role in contemporary Italian literature and culture.

Igiaba Scego was born in Rome to Somali parents who fled the dictatorship of Siad Barre. She entered the Italian literary scene in 2003, when she won the Eks&Tra competition for migrant writers with the short story “Salsicce” (“Sausages”). In the same year, she published her first book, *La nomade che amava Alfred Hitchcock*, an autobiographical text at the center of

¹⁰⁴ Wu Ming is the name of a collective of writers active since January 2000. The group originally included five writers, who worked collectively and individually (in which case they employed the names Wu Ming 1, Wu Ming 2, etc.). There are three writers who still work under the name of “Wu Ming,” and their identities are known to the public. The name “Wu Ming 2” designates writer Giovanni Cattabriga.

¹⁰⁵ Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ See the epigraph of *Timira*, 3–5.

¹⁰⁷ On the power dynamics of collaborative autobiographies and the ways that authorship is indicated, see Romeo, “Meccanismi di censura.” The reason given for ousting Isabella Marincola from the co-authorship role is her death during the drafting of the text, a justification that seems rather weak.

¹⁰⁸ When Ali Farah published her second novel, *Il comandante del fiume* (Rome: 66thand2nd, 2014), she changed the way she writes her first name from Ubax to Ubah (the final *x* is read with an aspiration). This choice was made in order for her to be consistent with the way she writes the Italian transliteration of her family name, Ali Farah, which in Somali is Cali Faarax. In this new transliteration, then, Ubah Cristina Ali Farah signals that the last letter of her first and last name is the same in Somali and is pronounced in the same way, with an aspiration. For sentimental reasons, here and elsewhere I employ the original transliteration. I thank Ubax Cristina Ali Farah for providing me with this explanation in a private email exchange in March 2017.

which lies her mother's nomadic culture.¹⁰⁹ The story "Salsicce" is written in response to the Bossi-Fini law, the 2002 immigration law, which established that immigrants must leave their fingerprints when they apply for a residence permit. The protagonist wonders whether or not to get in line in front of the police station to have her fingerprints taken since, although she is an Italian citizen, her physical appearance does not fit the Italian chromatic norm, and she resembles much more closely the crowds of people who come to request their residence permits. In this story, it is precisely that chromatic norm that must be questioned in a society where the juxtaposition of blackness and Italianness is generally considered an oxymoron. Scego's debut novel, *Rhoda*, was released the following year and presents some of the characteristics that would become typical of her tales, such as story fragmentation that relies on a plurality of narrative voices (almost exclusively female).¹¹⁰ While the central character constitutes a somewhat stereotypical representation of the immigrant black woman—a sex-worker (out of self-destructive choice rather than necessity), for which the narrative demands sacrifice in the end—the other first- and second-generation Italian-Somali women are able to build a positive destiny for themselves through a process of integration in which they maintain strong ties with the Somali community in the diaspora. The second novel, *Oltre Babilonia*, weaves an intricate web of themes that go well beyond migration, bringing together people and places from different parts of the world.¹¹¹ The narratives in this novel are built around the history of Somalia—from colonization to decolonization, to the Italian trusteeship's administration, to the dictatorship of Siad Barre—as well as around Argentina and the *desaparecidos*. These threads are woven together, at different times and in different ways at an Arabic school in Tunis and a contemporary multicultural school in Rome. Although colonial history was almost absent from Scego's previous texts, from this work onward it becomes a constant presence in her literary and cultural production in the broadest sense. In *Oltre Babilonia*, it invades the narrative with all of its violence in a scene where the rape of a Somali woman (and, in this case, also of a man) is not only a physical violation, but also a metaphor for the penetration of the African territories by Italian colonizers.¹¹² The conservation and dissemination of personal and collective memory are central themes of the novel, whose events unfold in contexts that are simultaneously transnational and local. In this novel, as in *Rhoda*, in her story "Il disegno," and in her memoir *La mia casa è dove sono*, Rome is a place where many cultures coexist, where Roman dialect is spoken as much by Romans as by the children of immigrants, and where colonial history is alive at every corner.¹¹³ In *La mia casa è dove sono* many personal and family memories are intertwined with the history of Somalia. At the same time, each chapter (except the first and last) bears the name of a place in the city of Rome (e.g., "Teatro Sistina," "Piazza Santa Maria sopra Minerva," "la stele di Axum") in which the life of the author's family and that of the Somali

¹⁰⁹ Igiaba Scego, *La nomade che amava Alfred Hitchcock* (Rome: Sinnos, 2003); ead., "Salsicce." The English translation of this story was also published as "Sausages," trans. Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Offredi Poletto in *Metamorphoses: The Journal of the Five College Faculty Seminar on Literary Translation* 13/2 (Fall 2005): 214–25.

¹¹⁰ Igiaba Scego, *Rhoda* (Rome: Sinnos, 2004).

¹¹¹ Igiaba Scego, *Oltre Babilonia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008).

¹¹² On representations of the territories to be colonized akin to women's bodies and the connection between colonial and erotic imagery, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

¹¹³ Igiaba Scego, "Il disegno," in *Roma d'Abissinia. Cronache dai resti dell'Impero: Asmara, Mogadiscio, Addis Abeba*, ed. Daniele Comberiati (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010), 23–40. A reworked version of this story becomes the first chapter of Scego's memoir *La mia casa è dove sono* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010), which won the Campiello Prize in 2011 for work by an Italian author.

community intersect with the lives of the native Italian population. The text concludes with a meditation on the fragmentary nature of memory and the need to transmit it to subsequent generations.

The volume *Roma negata*, with text by Scego and photographs by Rino Bianchi, goes precisely in a direction intended to meet those needs.¹¹⁴ The author goes in search of places, buildings, and other landmarks that are linked to the history of Italian colonialism, showing these connections to Italians who are oblivious to their history. Rino Bianchi photographs the descendants of those who once suffered various forms of colonization—either by Italians or by other Europeans—portraying them in these places and emphasizing the indissoluble link between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. This link is also the common thread of the latest novel with the eloquent title *Adua* (the first victory of an Italian army over a European army in 1896, Adwa in English), where Scego investigates the relationship between Italians and Somalis during colonial times—in all its ambivalence—beginning with a personal history, corroborating the idea that official History is grounded in the stories of individuals.¹¹⁵ The novel alternates between memories of the past (narrated by a father named Zoppe) and stories from the present (narrated by his daughter, Adua) that show how African immigrants in Italy (even if they have had a close relationship with Italy, as in the case of the Somalis) continue, in fact, to embody otherness. The novel simultaneously brings into view conflicting race and gender relationships, not only between Italians and immigrants, but also within the Somali community.

Ubax Cristina Ali Farah was born in Verona to a Somali father and an Italian mother, moved to Mogadishu at a very young age, fled to Hungary in 1992 with the eruption of the civil war, and finally returned to Italy, first moving to Verona and then, in 1997, to Rome. She has published several short stories in books and magazines, including the extraordinary “Rapdipunt” (“Punt Rap”) in 2004, loosely inspired by the story of the Comitiva Flaminio, a group of young African Italians who met at Piazzale Flaminio in Rome.¹¹⁶ The story’s title merges “Puntland,” the ancient name of Somalia, with rap, a part of hip-hop culture, which has become an expression of the circumstances of black and brown youth from the urban peripheries. The Somali Italian characters, like the second-generation characters in Scego’s works, speak more Roman dialect than Italian and live in a local dimension that is at the same time strongly transnational. The element that seems to unite the group is a sense of displacement and an awareness, sometimes shot through with pride, of their blackness and of their African origins. The disorientation that Ali Farah represents masterfully here is, in fact, characteristic of second generations, who feel Italy is their own country but constantly perceive their diversity with respect to more traditional embodiments of Italianness. At the conclusion of the tale, there is an image of an incense plant that comes from Somalia but has found a home in the Trastevere Botanical Garden: the young protagonists’ encounter with it makes them feel an unexpected sense of belonging and strong ties with the past.

Ali Farah’s debut novel, *Madre piccola* (*Little Mother*), was released in 2007 and is one of the most significant texts of Italian postcolonial literature.¹¹⁷ Focused on memory and its

¹¹⁴ Rino Bianchi and Igiaba Scego, *Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (Rome: Ediesse, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (Florence: Giunti, 2015).

¹¹⁶ Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, “Rapdipunt,” in *La letteratura postcoloniale italiana*, ed. Morosetti, 127–30. This story was also published in English: “Punt Rap,” trans. Giovanna Bellesia and Victoria Offredi Poletto in *Other Italies/Italy’s Others*, ed. Pandiri, 276–80.

¹¹⁷ Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola* (Rome: Frassinelli, 2007), and ead., *Little Mother: A Novel*, trans. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto, intro. Alessandra Di Maio (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

preservation and transmission, this is the novel of the Somali diaspora *par excellence*. The text contains historical references to Siad Barre's dictatorship and its demise, to the civil war and the diaspora it unleashed, but there are also references to the consequences of Italian colonization and the Italian trusteeship of Somalia. Like the novels of Scego, this too is a polyphonic text. Told through the first-person narratives of two cousins, Barni and Domenica Axad, as well as the latter's husband, Taageere, and featuring the presence of a plurality of other characters in their stories, the novel recounts the tale of the Somali community in various parts of the world. Highly poetic and visual, the narrative does not follow a chronological sequence and is never linear. It also presents marked characteristics of oral narration, such as digressions, narrative heterogeneity, direct dialogue with the listener, and strategies to maintain rapt attention. The use of orality, as Ali Farah affirms, comes from the Somali tradition, but is also an attempt to bring the author closer to the social function that has been lost by writers in the "West." As she asserts: "Considero la letteratura come una melodia a più voci che lo scrittore orchestra in maniera funzionale nella società, nel senso che lo scrittore restituisce alla società quello che da lei riceve" ["I consider literature to be a melody of many voices that the writer orchestrates in a functional way in society, in the sense that the writer returns to society what she gets from it"].¹¹⁸ The imprint of orality is also visible in chapters presented as dialogues with voiceless interlocutors.

The centrality of urban spaces characterizing the story "Rapdipunt" is also present in the second novel by Ali Farah, *Il comandante del fiume*, in which the undisputed protagonist is the city of Rome. More than the diaspora, still an ever-present feature in this novel as it was in *Madre piccolo*, the history of Somalia is central to *Il comandante del fiume*. There is a particular concern with war—the trauma that it produces, the way it is inscribed in people's bodies, and the way in which people preserve its memory. This novel is not only a reflection on how the civil war ravaged Somalia for decades, but also on the devastating effects of Italian colonialism, fascist racism, and the period of the Italian trusteeship. The difficult process of building an identity for second generations—with a comparative view of the Somali diaspora in Italy and in England—is tied as much to their troublesome relationship with the country of origin as it is to their ambivalent relationship with Italy. The belonging of these young African-Italians in Italy is constantly challenged by the authorities, and at the same time sought after and rejected by the subjects in question.

Italian colonial history and the war in Ethiopia are central to the novel by Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (*Queen of Flowers and Pearls*) published in 2007.¹¹⁹ Born in Addis Ababa to an Eritrean mother and an Italian father, Ghermandi moved to her father's hometown, Bologna, after his death and now lives and works in the city. Rather than being simply the author of one novel and several short stories, Ghermandi is above all a storyteller. This activity has for her both a high artistic value and a social function.¹²⁰ Her novel revolves

¹¹⁸ Daniele Comberiati, "Nodi che non si sciolgono. La narrativa di Cristina Ubx Ali Farah," in *La quarta sponda*, 64 (my translation).

¹¹⁹ Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), and ead., *Queen of Flowers and Pearls: A Novel*, trans. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

¹²⁰ Included among the many stories by the author are "Il telefono del quartiere," in *Parole oltre i confini*, ed. Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1999), 73–82, which won the Eks&Tra Prize for Migrant Writers in 1999; "Quel certo temperamento focoso," in *Il doppio sguardo. Culture allo specchio* (Rome: Adnkronos, 2002), 23–39, which won Ghermandi her third prize in the same competition in 2001; and "All'ombra dei rami sfacciati, carichi di fiori rosso vermiglio," in *Roma d'Abissinia*, ed. Comberiati, 59–72, a

around the character of Mahlet, a little girl who is destined by her ancestors to become the *cantora* (storyteller) of her people.¹²¹ The stories that Mahlet hears, both in Ethiopia and in Italy, narrate the Ethiopian resistance to the Fascist invasion of 1935–36; the racial laws and the consequences that they produced in the African colonies; the use of the deadly gases prohibited by the Geneva Convention to defeat the resistance; the noble woman warrior Kebedech Seyoum who, after her husband's death, took command of his troops and continued to fight with a newborn child secured on her back. It is through all of these personal and private stories that Ghermandi rewrites official history, conferring dignity and authority on the oral stories of her people.¹²² The novel ends with an adult Mahlet who, after listening to many accounts, begins writing to keep the promise she made to Elder Yacob years before to tell his story. But, in the last sentence, the narrator directly addresses Italian readers, reminding them that this is also *their* story, thus establishing a strong connection between the Italian colonial past and the contemporary plural and multicultural society, and especially urging Italians to know their own history beyond national borders.

In recent years, Ghermandi has become a singer in addition to being a writer and storyteller. She has designed and implemented an important musical undertaking called the Atse Tewodros Project, which brings together Ethiopian and Italian musicians, restoring an important cultural contact between the two cultures that is very different from that of the colonial past, but does not erase that past or the consequences that it has produced.¹²³

Memory is a central feature in the works of Uba Cristina Ali Farah, Gabriella Ghermandi, and Igiaba Scego because it serves to rewrite the personal history of individuals and the collective history of communities. The way in which events are publicly remembered (or forgotten) shapes how a nation builds its own historical memory and identity: once these writers have opened the archives of memory, the past can no longer be relegated to oblivion as memorialization becomes an increasingly public process. Closely related to this is the issue of language, which is crucial to postcolonial studies and to its investigation of how the imaginary is permeated by the language of the colonizers, and how any genuine decolonization cannot take place without the process that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has described as a decolonization of the mind.¹²⁴ The women writers discussed here implement a powerful linguistic resistance through the use of words, poetry, and expressions from their language of origin for which translation is typically not provided.¹²⁵ Using a language known to readers of Italian but mixing it with unfamiliar terms, these writers produce an alienating effect on readers who are decentered in their own language and culture.

story which was written to be narrated as a performance. The text and some audio clips of the performance are available on Ghermandi's website, *Gabriella Ghermandi: Music—Writing* (<http://www.gabriella-ghermandi.it>).

¹²¹ Part of this novel is also a performance that Ghermandi has staged around Italy and the world, which can be seen on her website (see previous note).

¹²² The theme of authority here is intertwined with that of authorship. In the acknowledgments at the end of the book, Ghermandi says that she limited herself to collecting stories, which she then included in the text, thus attributing the authorship of the stories that she tells to those individuals who have told the stories to her, and giving them the authority to speak on behalf of their own Ethiopian people.

¹²³ See <http://www.atsetewodros.org/>, accessed June 1, 2017.

¹²⁴ See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

¹²⁵ For a complex linguistic analysis of the works of Scego, Ali Farah, and Ghermandi, see Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola*.

The Third Phase: Second Generation Writers and Anthologies

Together with the Italian writer of Egyptian-Congolese descent, Ingy Mubiayi, Igiaba Scego edited the volume *Quando nasci è una roulette*, a volume in which seven Italian youths of African descent tell their stories.¹²⁶ Second-generation communities are acquiring a central role in Italy, not only from a social, but also from a cultural—and literary—point of view.¹²⁷ Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, second generations are beginning to create new forms of expression, closely linked to hip-hop and popular culture, which represent a rapidly changing, multicultural Italian society, while simultaneously denouncing the legal mechanisms that resist the inclusion of those at the margins.¹²⁸ A particularly successful expression of this creativity and these hardships is the anthology by the (questionable) title *Pecore nere* (2005), stories by and about second-generation authors, written by Scego, Laila Wadia, Ingy Mubiayi, and Gabriella Kuruvilla.¹²⁹ Although the eight stories included in the collection are very different from each other, they have in common issues and features (some already evident in the texts of Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo and Ali Farah): harsh criticism of the way the Italian state regulates the flow of migration and the acquisition of citizenship (Scego and Mubiayi); young people's use of slang and dialect (Scego and Wadia); processes of racialization and the perpetration of racism (Scego, Mubiayi, and Kuruvilla); and the sense of belonging and not-belonging to the society in which they live.¹³⁰ The authors' skillful use of irony often combines with the irreverent manner in

¹²⁶ Ingy Mubiayi and Igiaba Scego, eds., *Quando nasci è una roulette. Giovani figli di migranti si raccontano* (Milan: Terre di mezzo, 2007). See Rete G2, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/41820491538/>, accessed 15 October 2017.

¹²⁷ The tenth edition of the Eks&Tra competition in 2004 was dedicated to second generations, as was the film *18 Ius soli* (Independent Distributor, 2011) by Italian director of Ghanaian origin, Fred Kuwornu.

¹²⁸ The mechanism by which one acquires Italian citizenship is still heavily based on *jus sanguinis*, that is, on the bloodline, which produces the paradoxical effect that it is easier to acquire citizenship for the children of emigrants than it is for the children of immigrants. A new law on citizenship currently under discussion in the Italian parliament would facilitate the granting of citizenship to second-generation individuals through the principle of *jus soli temperato* combined with *jus culturae*. The principle of *jus soli temperato* sets some conditions on how second-generation applicants gain citizenship (for instance, at least one of the parents needs to have a legal residence permit, citizenship needs to be requested, it is not acquired automatically), unlike the principle of the *jus soli*, which establishes that a person who is born in a country is automatically a citizen of that country. The *jus culturae* extends the right to request Italian citizenship to children who arrived in Italy before turning thirteen and who have attended the Italian school system for five consecutive years. Thus, the acquisition of Italian citizenship as regulated by the new law—if the law is finally passed—will combine a sense of geographical and cultural belonging.

¹²⁹ Of the four women writers included, only Laila Wadia is not a second-generation author (she was born in India to Indian parents and moved to Italy in adulthood), but her stories included in this collection concern the meeting and clash between the first and second generations. Gabriella Kuruvilla was born in Milan to an Italian father and Indian mother, while Ingy Mubiayi was born in Cairo to an Egyptian mother and a father from Zaire, coming to Italy while still a child. Three of the stories in this anthology were awarded Eks&Tra prizes, including Scego's already mentioned "Salsicce" (2003); "Documenti, prego," by Ingy Mubiayi (2004); and "Curry di pollo," by Wadia (2004). See Ingy Mubiayi, "Documenti, prego," in *Pecore nere*, ed. Capitani and Coen, 97–107; Laila Wadia, "Curry di pollo," in *Pecore nere*, ed. Capitani and Coen, 39–52. Laila's short story was also translated into English: "Chicken Curry," trans. Monica Hann in *Other Italies/Italy's Others*, ed. Pandiri, 150–57.

¹³⁰ Wadia, Mubiayi, and Kuruvilla have a very lively presence on the Italian cultural scene. Among their works are Laila Wadia, *Il burattinaio e altre storie extra-italiane* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2004); ead., *Amiche per la pelle* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2007); ead., *Come diventare italiani in 24 ore* (Siena: Barbera Edizioni, 2010); Viola Chandra (a pseudonym of Gabriella Kuruvilla), *Media chiara e noccioline* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2001); Gabriella Kuruvilla, *È la vita dolcezza* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2008); ead., *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2012); Gabriella Kuruvilla, ed., *Milano d'autore* (Milan: Morellini Editore, 2014); ead., *Roma d'autore* (Milan: Morellini Editore, 2015); ead., *Monaco d'autore* (Milan: Morellini Editore, 2016); ead., *Bologna d'autore* (Milan:

which these four women writers treat Italian culture and the language of Dante. Yet, unlike the first generation, they are no longer intimidated by them (for example, on the door of the prefecture where Italian citizenship has to be requested, the protagonist of Mubiayi's "Documenti, prego" writes, "lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate" ["Abandon all hope ye who enter here"]). Through linguistic and stylistic experimentation, second-generation writers often call into question both their culture of origin and that of arrival. This anthology has, therefore, the merit of bringing together decidedly literary texts that experiment at the level of content and language, texts written by Italian women authors who do not conform to the chromatic norm or to Italian naming patterns, asking instead that these categories become more flexible so as to reflect the changes that have taken place in Italian society following the arrival of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These texts mark the substantial transition from the first phase of migration literature to a literature that portrays the diversity and complexity of Italian postcolonial society.¹³¹

Conclusion

The postcolonial and global migrations of recent decades have radically changed the composition of Italian society, which becomes more diverse and pluralistic every day. These profound changes have seen new cultural subjects arriving on the scene since 1990, which has given rise to migration literature and postcolonial literature. This literature is rooted in the experience of migration and marginalization within Italian society, and, together with the Italian cultures of emigration, it questions and redefines the concept of national literature and culture.

In the initial phase of this literary production, which developed in the first half of the 1990s, autobiographical narratives prevail, arising from the migrants' need to tell their own stories in the first person, primarily in response to the ways in which they were being represented by legal texts and the media. This need was combined with the curiosity of Italian readers who wished to hear direct testimonies about some aspects, which were almost unknown to them of the social reality in which they lived. This phase, which also involved the participation of small and medium-sized publishing companies, was characterized by a certain uniformity with regard to the types of writers who emerged (recent immigrants who needed the help of cultural and

Morellini Editore, 2016);); ead., *Genova d'autore* (Milan: Morellini Editore, 2017); Mubiayi and Scego, ed., *Quando nasci è una roulette*.

¹³¹ Anthologies of migration and postcolonial literatures in Italy deserve an extensive discussion that I did not have space for here. Therefore, I will limit myself to providing some bibliographic information: from 1995 to 2004, an anthology was published almost every year presenting a selection of texts that were entered into the Eks&Tra Competition. From 1995 to 1999 came Sangiorgi and Ramberti, eds., *Le voci dell'arcobaleno*; id., *Mosaici d'inchiostro* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1996); id., *Memorie in valigia*; id., *Destini sospesi di volti in cammino* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1998); id., *Parole oltre i confini*; from 2001 to 2002 came Erminia Dell'Oro et al., *Anime in viaggio. La nuova mappa dei popoli* (Rome: Adnkronos, 2001) and *Il doppio sguardo* (Rome: Adnkronos, 2002); in 2003, two collections were published: *Pace in parole migranti* (Nardò: Besa, 2003) and *Impronte. Scritture dal mondo* (Nardò: Besa, 2003); in 2004 came Roberta Sangiorgi, ed., *La seconda pelle* (San Giovanni in Persiceto: Eks&Tra, 2004). A special mention also goes to Scego, ed., *Italiani per vocazione*. Other anthologies of note include Armando Gnisci, ed., *Allattati dalla lupa* (Rome: Sinnos, 2005); Flavia Capitani and Emanuele Coen, eds., *Amori bicolori: Racconti* (Bari: Laterza, 2008); all of the anthologies from the national literary competition "Lingua Madre," published every year from 2006 to 2017 under the editorship of Daniela Finocchi as *Lingua Madre. Racconti di donne straniere in Italia* (Turin: Edizioni SEB 27, 2007–17). In the US, two anthologies were published in English, the first one very early on: Parati, ed., *Mediterranean Crossroads*, and Marie Orton and Graziella Parati, eds. *Multicultural Literature in Contemporary Italy* (Madison, WI and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

linguistic mediators to write and publish their texts), in terms of what motivated them to write (the need for self-definition and the desire to acquire authority through authorship), and also with respect to the kind of narratives they produced (autobiographies and novels with a strong autobiographical component).

This phase was followed by a defining period in the second half of the 1990s, understood by many to be a transitional time, which progressed from the era of collaborations and testimonies of (allegedly pure) socio-anthropological interest to the more distinctly literary epoch that opened up at the beginning of the new millennium. The greater mastery of language and familiarity with Italian society acquired by these writers made the figure of the mediator obsolete, and even the narratives had substantial differences compared to the previous period. While still often focused on issues of migration (because the writers were still mostly first generation), they were in fact starting to concentrate on the more intimate social sphere, on identity and existential explorations. The texts produced during this phase, mostly brought out by small publishers, represented a wide variety of writing subjects (ranging from the occasional writer to the intellectual), of literary genres explored (with a preponderance of novels, short stories, and poems), and of main themes proposed. In this period, journals specifically dedicated to the literatures and cultures of migration also began to emerge, the earliest literary competitions were established and the first anthologies published. All of this demonstrates that in this transitional phase, there was a growing awareness that Italian migration literature was not a passing phenomenon but rather the initial manifestation of a form of cultural expression that was becoming part of Italian culture, literature that demanded proper attention, for which specific spaces had to be developed to facilitate its growth and expansion.

The twenty-first century ushered in a new stage of literary diversity in postcolonial literature. Within this heterogeneity, new trends have emerged. Among these it is important to highlight the work of authors who read processes of racialization and contemporary racism in continuity with state and colonial racism, thus showing how the colonial systems of power find new incarnations in contemporary Italy. In this phase there is, furthermore, a cultural consolidation of Italian postcolonial literature in the strictest sense, that is, literature produced by authors from countries and regions with which Italy maintained a direct colonial relationship—such as Albania and the Horn of Africa—and that have therefore undergone Italian influence from both a linguistic and cultural point of view. This literature demands a reconsideration of how Italian history has been written and historical memory handed down, while at the same time it offers new perspectives on contemporary Italian society and culture, and suggests the need for a comparative, transnational analysis of postcolonial literatures in Europe and around the world. Emerging parallel to this in Italy is the literature of second generations, written by Italian citizens who come from non-Italian families and construct their own sense of identity at the intersection of their community of origin, Italian society, and phenomena linked to the globalization of trade and culture. Since they are familiar with Italian language and culture, these authors promote linguistic hybridization by including street language, their languages of origin, Italian dialects, and multimedia languages in their texts. They also “hybridize” literary genres, mixing together “high” and popular culture, literary forms of their countries of origin and destination, in search of forms of expression that give voice to changing social and cultural conditions.

By questioning the concept of national identity and by contributing daily to its rewriting, migrant and postcolonial writers participate in a crucial and vital way in the production of contemporary Italian literature and culture. In the coming decades, we will need to follow the development of this literature and observe the relationships of continuity and discontinuity that

will be created with respect to “traditional” Italian literature, a phenomenon that is already under way. Whether the presence of foreigners and their descendants will be considered an asset rather than a threat, both socially and culturally, will depend very much on whether Italy manages to think of itself as the multicultural society that it effectively has been since ancient times. It will also depend on how the “traditional” cultural and intellectual elites take these new literary voices into account, framing their output not as foreign or comparative literature, but as part of contemporary Italian literature and culture.

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Come un uomo sulla terra. Directed by Andrea Segre, Dagmawi Yimer, and Riccardo Biadene. 2008.

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Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio. Directed by Isotta Toso. 2010.

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