

## ARTICLES / SAGGI

### COLONIAL LEGACIES AND POSTCOLONIAL INTERRUPTIONS<sup>1</sup>

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#### Sommario

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

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Reflecting on the complexity of the term post-colonialism/postcolonialism, in *Post-Colonial Studies* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin remind readers how “the term was a potential site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation almost from the beginning” (2000:186-187)<sup>2</sup>. While the use of the hyphen came to distinguish the post-structuralist orientation of discourse theory from its absence in materialist oriented critiques<sup>3</sup>, it was the prefix itself that gave rise to an even more vigorous debate which, to this day, continues to prompt a range of questions of fundamental importance. When do colonialism and postcolonialism begin and end? Is it possible to trace a linear development from colonialism to the post-independent state formations that replaced colonial administrations? Has postcoloniality succeeded in overcoming coloniality? Can we truly speak of breaks and discontinuities between colonialism and its political aftermath or, as once again Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin remind us, are there “articulations between and across the politically defined historical periods, of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence culture?” (2000:187).

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

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

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

'exceptionality' of the Italian case<sup>4</sup>, but to highlight how its specificities and particularities have transcended – and continue to transcend – the teleology of historicism as well as the boundaries of spaces and territories in a complex configuration where multiple forms of colonialism and postcolonialism persist, intersect and imbricate with past and present-day migrations. I will then proceed to reflect broadly and, by necessity, summarily, on the cultural texts – both imaginative and scholarly – that postcolonial practices and postcolonial studies are enabling in their remapping of Italian culture at the crossroads of local, national, and transnational sites and locations. Lastly, I will conclude with a few comments of the political imports of these practices in a context where the historical, cultural, and social permeability of a multi-ethnic reality meets the resilience of essentialised constructions of *Italianità* and the identitarian politics that derive from them.

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

Almost at the outset of *La questione meridionale*, Antonio Gramsci, a thinker of great importance to postcolonial theory<sup>5</sup>, describes the legalised violence of Italy's first capitalist modernity and reminds us of the colonial genealogy of Italy's nation-state formation at the end of the *Risorgimento*. It is a genealogy that I here wish to recall<sup>6</sup> for the purpose of establishing the entanglement of Italy's colonial and migratory contexts at the founding moment of the nation-state but without suggesting or even implying an equation between the magnitude of the colonial and imperial violence of the Liberal and Fascist states that took place outside of Italy.

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

<sup>5</sup> For a recent discussion, see Bhattacharya and Srivastava (2012).

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

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

Giovanni Giolitti (1901-1914) and beyond. As the plight of Southern masses continued to worsen, there occurred two related phenomena of social unrest that would add new dimensions to Italy's internal colonial genealogy: rebellion and emigration. Riots and agitations became a common occurrence as did violent repressions. In 1866, for example, squads of peasants took over Palermo and held it for a week. General Cadorna responded to the uprising with a naval bombardment and the imposition of martial law. But destitute masses also fought against the Italian army in the so-called *brigantaggio*, a conflict that would claim more lives than all the battles of unification combined. By 1890, Sicilian peasants came together in organised associations but, once again, repression was the state's response. Fearing that a large scale revolution would spread across the region, Prime Minister Crispi did not hesitate to send 40,000 troops to Sicily to crush the rioters. Unable to make their voice heard and faced with utter destitution, disinherited masses chose the path of mass migration in a diasporic exodus that, between 1880 to 1915, saw the departure of 13,000,000 people, two-thirds of them from the South. In short, Italy as a postcolonial emigrant nation was born, as Choate (2008), Fiore (2012, 2017), Gabaccia (1998, 2001), Verdicchio (1997a, 1997b), and Viscusi (2010) have persuasively argued from their respective disciplinary perspectives. The Americas were a primary destination, but a significant number of individuals also left for Northern and Central Europe as well as non-Italian colonial holdings in Africa, such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. The establishment of Italian settlements in Goletta, Biserta, Monastir, Sfax and Gafsa testify to this<sup>7</sup>, as do the places of birth of important figures in the pantheon of Italy's national literary canon, such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, and Fausta Cialente.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ministry of Italian-Africa until 1953 and was granted the UN negotiated trusteeship over Somalia from 1950 to 1960. Unlike other European colonial powers, such as France, Great Britain and Belgium, Italian colonies had been lost following military defeats and in the absence of the struggles for independent state-formation that had occurred in many European colonial holdings (e.g. Algeria, Angola, Indochina, Indonesia, etc.). This had major consequences in the post-World War II era. Simply put, despite the fact that the modern Italian state that emerged from the *Risorgimento* had a history of having been colonial, imperial and postcolonial all along, the memories of internal and external colonialism, emigrant postcoloniality and demographic colonialisms struggled to coalesce and give rise to a vigorous and necessary process of decolonisation<sup>8</sup>.

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

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

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



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

threat to racial, political and cultural hierarchies and were eventually prohibited<sup>9</sup>. This had grave consequences not just for Northern and East African populations but also for Jewish communities, since the Fascist anti-Semitic legislation built upon the 'apartheid' practices in the African Empire. Considering this context of silencing and concealing of memories, Italy's colonial and imperial past struggled to become part of the larger cultural field of the 50s and 60s. It comes perhaps as no surprise, then, that despite the location of the "Second Congress of Intellectuals and Writers of Africa and the African Diaspora" in Rome in 1959, with exponents of the Négritude movement of the likes of Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Gontran Damas in attendance, and the publications and translations in Italy of works by Frantz Fanon and Senghor in close proximity to the same Congress<sup>10</sup>, a number of Italian intellectuals and artists – from Parise and Pontecorvo to Visconti, Bertolucci, Moravia, Fago and Pasolini – gravitated towards French, Spanish, British and Portuguese colonialisms, rather than the Italian one. In this turn towards *terzomondismo* lies perhaps another example of the persistence of Italy's colonial legacies and, by implication, the protracted deferral of the nation's conscious engagement with its history of colonialism and imperialism.

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

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

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<sup>9</sup> See Sorgoni (1998) and Barrera (2005).

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of this period, see Cantone (2016).

communism; the economic and political upheavals of many former European colonies in the Middle East and in Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa; the rising prosperity levels of traditional out-migration countries and the concomitant need for low wage jobs increasingly shunned by natives (King, 2001). Yet, as migratory movements began to take place through and within Italy from Eastern Europe (Albania, Rumania), Ukraine, followed by Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal) and Asia (China, the Philippines and India), Italians perceived – and continue to perceive – the unprecedented arrivals of large numbers of individuals as a foreign invasion threatening a presumed Italian homogeneity of culture and way of life (Triandafyllidou, 2001). Early episodes of violence and brutality, such as the murder of Jerry Masslo in Villa Literno in 1989, brought to light the racist and ethno-phobic responses that in-migration was eliciting. Newspapers from *L'Unità*, *Corriere della sera*, *La Repubblica*, and *L'Espresso* and nationally televised broadcasts (e.g., *Nonsoloneo*, *Un Mondo a Colori*, *Shukran*) sought to inform public opinion of the necessity to come to term with this new reality. But as the new migrants reconfigured the labour markets, the *piazze*, train stations, and neighborhoods of Italian cities and suburbs – as had been the case with the internal migration of two million Southerners to the Northern Industrial triangle of Milano-Turin-Genoa between 1951 and 1971 – they also claimed a signifying role and began to tell other stories. Recording their past and present circumstances in documentary and imaginative cultural texts, they contributed in fundamental ways to the recovery of a buried archive by way of the reactivation of a vast receptacle of direct and indirect colonial memories<sup>11</sup> – that is, memories from former Italian colonies as well as from territories colonised by other imperial nations. Among the voices of direct postcoloniality were those of writers from the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, whose works I wish to recall here for their exemplary role in bringing back to light key moments of the often forgotten Italian colonial past.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wish to recall the indirect postcolonial testimonies of what is now known as the first generation of migrant writers of the 1990s: Mohamed Bouchane, Pap Khouma, Salah Methnani, Moussa Ba and Nassera Chohra, who co-authored works in Italian, even though for many of them French was their primary language, having come from France's colonial holdings. While the practice of co-authoring raised legitimate questions of linguistic agency and symbolic empowerment<sup>12</sup>, these works were of fundamental importance since they "create[d] multifaceted alternative portrayals to the essentialised and homogeneous definition of 'the immigrant' created by prejudice and racism in Italy" (Parati, 1999:13). The 1990s generation was rapidly followed by a second generation of writers which includes sophisticated and highly accomplished authors, such as Fatima Ahmed, Adrian Nazareno Bravi, Viola Chandra, Christiana de Caldas Brito, Amara Lakhous, Amor Dekhis, Kossi Komla-Ebri, Ron Kubati, Tahar Lamri, Carmelo Quijada, Laila Wadia, Barbara Serdakowski, Yousef Wakkas, Geneviève Makaping, Ornela Vorpsi, Ingy Mubiayi, and Mohammed Lamsuni, to name but a few. Many of them highly educated and politically engaged<sup>13</sup>, they emerged from a condition of linguistic subalternity that, to some critics, characterised earlier co-authorships with Italian writers, through powerful acts of symbolic self-assertion and empowerment. To tell it with Wright, the works of the writers of the second decade evolved into a "performative space of auctoritas" (Wright, 2004:99) that has often extended to the production and distribution of their distinct voices and specific narrative spaces through digital platforms<sup>14</sup>. I should also note that while the vast majority of these authors' cultural production deploys itself in

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<sup>12</sup> See Wright (2004).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of these writers, see Scego (2004).

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



narrative, other media, from poetry and drama to films, videos, documentaries and music have also become increasingly common<sup>15</sup>. Poetry<sup>16</sup> counts among its most significant voices the Albanian migrant Gëzim Hajdari, but also Hasan Al Nassar, Anahi Baklu, Mihai Mircea Butcovan, Thea Laitef, Egidio Molinas Leiva, Julio Monteiro Martins, Ndjock Ngana Yogo Ndjock, Heleno Oliveira, Lidia Amalia Palazzolo, Candelaria Romero, Barbara Serdakowski, Božidar Stanišić and Spale Miro Stevanović. Drama companies have also been active all over Italy (and beyond) and include *Compagnia del Lazzaretto*, *Cooperativa Teatro Laboratorio*, *Koron Tlé*, *Palcoscenico d'Africa* and *Teatro delle Albe*<sup>17</sup>. As far as the cinematic scene is concerned<sup>18</sup>, a small but growing number of migrant directors are now active and include Rachid Benhadj, Edmond Budina, Moshen Melliti and Mohamed Zineddaine. Directors of short and documentaries are becoming more and more numerous and mention should be made of Adil Tanani, Hugo Munoz, Razi Mohebi and especially Dagmawi Yimer, the director of the acclaimed *Come un uomo sulla terra*, (2008; with Riccardo Segre and Riccardo Biadene), the story of his experience as a student from Addis Ababa who traversed the desert between Libya and Sudan to reach the Mediterranean shore from where he embarked for Rome. Other important works by Yimer are *C.A.R.A Italia* (2010), *Soltanto il mare* (2010; with Fabrizio Barraco and Giulio Cederna) and *Benvenuti in Italia* (2012), a documentary that he directed along with four other migrants (Aluk Amiri, Hamed Dera, Hevi Dilara, Zakaria Mohamed Ali) to record their respective

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<sup>15</sup> For a larger panorama, see Bouchard & Ferme (2013).

<sup>16</sup> See Lecomte (2006); Martianacci and Minore (2010); and Bonaffini and Lecomte (2011).

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

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

lives in the Italian cities of Venice, Milan, Portici, Naples, and Rome. Whether conceived from the point of view of the settler colonists in Italian colonial territories, the former colonised subjects of Italy or of other colonising European states, these works have created and effectively disseminated through an effective network of publishing houses, dedicated journals, televised programs and social media a counter-memory of colonialism in an Italian context. This is a memory that has undeniably played a significant role in facilitating a revisiting of the national past on the part of, for lack of better words, autochthonous voices<sup>19</sup>, that is, writers and artists, such as Andrea Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli, Raffaele Nigro, Giosuè Calaciura, Susanna Tamaro, Paola Capriolo, Melania Mazzucco, Enrico Brizzi, Vincenzo Consolo, Erri De Luca, Wu Ming's 2 and Antar Mohamed, Gian Antonio Stella, Gianni Amelio, Matteo Garrone, Silvio Soldini, Carmine Amoroso, Emanuele Crialesi, and so on, whose works bring to light experiences of colonialisms and migrations in practices that promote recognition between yesterday's and today's experiences.

### **Postcolonial Italian Studies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Towards Coming Communities?**

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

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

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

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

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