

BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONI

DANIELE COMBERIATI & XAVIER LUFFIN (eds), *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti. Beyond the Language and the Territory*. Canterano, RM: Aracne, 2018.

The collection *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa*, edited by Daniele Comberiati and Xavier Luffin, aims to investigate literary and filmic contributions emerging from the Horn of Africa by employing a comparative approach. In doing so, it explores the relationship between texts and films beyond the monolithic idea of national literature and language. The first contribution of this collection thus lies in the multilingual, transnational and multicultural rationale, which avoids a monolingual and mono-national approach and suggests new directions for diasporic studies.

The underpinning idea of the seven interventions is, indeed, to consider the authors from the Horn of Africa and their artistic production as part of an “Interliterary Community” in which the links between the different literatures that compose it exceeds national, historical and ethnic bounds. The concept, theorised by Dionýz Ďurišin in replacement of “National Literature”, allows the authors of this collection to consider the Horn of Africa as a literary space in which writers can re-define national identities through their narratives (15). Due to their diasporic condition, their artistic production covers a wide geographical area, being at once national and transnational, global and local, multilingual and multicultural. Therefore, the interventions in this collection rely on the overlapping features of these narratives from the Horn of Africa, such as the hybridism of different languages and cultures, the link between colonialism and its legacy in present-day neocolonial practices and the re-interpretation of history by formerly voiceless subjects. The essays investigate the several intertwined layers that constitute the narratives of these authors, by exploring the relationship among them and the affiliation with their country of origin (or that of their relatives’) and their places of abode.

In the first intervention, for example, Sara Marzagora points out a disregarded aspect of the novel *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007) by Gabriella Ghermandi. Indeed, while the latter has been investigated for its contribution towards the rethinking of Italian colonialism and the decolonization of Italian literature its relationship to the Ethiopian literary tradition in Amharic has been overlooked. Marzagora instead sheds light on the complex and problematic connection between *Regina di fiori e di perle* and other texts of the Amharic tradition, such as Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gate* (2010) and *Addis Alām* by Hiruy Wäldä Sillase (1924). This comparative approach highlights the opposition between tradition and modernity in Ghermandi's novel and places them in relation to the Ethiopian intellectual scene since the beginning of the twentieth century, when writers and thinkers scrutinised the Ethiopian cultural heritage and the idea of Western modernity. In her analysis, Marzagora shows that, while on the one hand, Ghermandi undermines the discourse about Ethiopia and Ethiopian women fashioned by Italian colonialism, on the other, her novel idealises, romanticises and homogenises the complexities underlying the concepts of Ethiopian histories, culture and literatures. Marzagora convincingly explains how the novel overlooks the social, political and ethnical fractures, as well as gender relations and geographical richness of her country. As in the case of the representation of the female characters, Ghermandi aims to counterbalance the Italian stereotype of African women as oppressed by portraying them in a very progressive way (48). However, in doing so, she denies the efforts made by Amharic writers and intellectuals to highlight and challenge the discrimination against women in their society.

The nostalgia and the memories connected to Ghermandi's experience in Ethiopia during her youth, along with the distance from her country, acted in the way of simplification, thus leading to a romantic and conservative representation of her country, "in stark contrast with the reformist tendency that has characterised Amharic literature since its inception" (30).

Lorenzo Mari, in his contribution "Somalia is a Caribbean Island", suggests an innovative reading of two texts from authors coming from a diverse context: *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2010) by Somali author Nuruddin Farah and *The World is*

Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake (2013) by Haitian Dany Laferrière. The bond that brings these two texts together is inscribed in the South-South relationship as described by François Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi's locution "minor transnationalism". This term emphasises the links "between two or more postcolonial cultures without making reference to the culture of their former metropolitan centres" (52). Mari's transnational analysis is further supported by the concept of "failed-state fiction" theorised by John Marx to encompass all fictional accounts that aim to challenge the neocolonial notion of "failed nation". Starting from the latter definition, relabelled "failed-state literature", and the idea of the writer as an "unaccredited analyst", Mari explores how the accounts of the civil war and diaspora, in Farah, and the Haitian earthquake, in Laferrière, deconstruct the dominant discourse coming from the West with regard to the concept of "state failure".

The intervention by Alessandro Jedlowski compares the production of two contemporary Ethiopian directors, Tewodros Teshome and Dagmawi Yimer, in order to highlight the profound differences within the Ethiopian film production. The comparative analysis, in this case based on both the plots and the biographies of the directors, aims to underline the complexities of the film production and the tension in discussing that topic in Ethiopia. In this way, it fosters an artistic dialogue "between local and diasporic directors" (90). In this regard, Jedlowski starts from the different approaches employed by the directors to fictionalise the theme of migration.

The different outcomes of Teshome and Yimer are thus considered as "a direct consequence of their biographical experiences" (78). Where Teshome (director, producer and owner of a multiplex cinema in Addis Ababa) shies away from the representation of the political and economic causes behind migration, Yimer (a filmmaker who fled from Ethiopia to become an asylum seeker in Italy) focuses on political aspects and explicitly denounces the Ethiopian government. As a result, the former appears to be related to a local audience and aligned to the government's agenda or nationalistic sentiments; alternatively, the latter is personally involved in the topic of migration due to his direct experience, which allows him to be the subject who has his ideas about the causes that have led him to leave Ethiopia.

The fourth intervention also relies on a transnational approach, since scholar Monica Jansen investigates how two texts by Somali authors, Kaha Mohamed Aden and her father Mohamed Sheikh Aden, foster “a notion of national identity and culture rooted in transnationalism and dis-homogeneity” (94). However, Jansen also shows how these two texts belong to different categories, even though they both rely on personal experiences and aim to subvert the main narrative of colonialism as seen by Italians. The categories are drawn upon Giuliana Benvenuti’s idea, which divides Italian postcolonial literature into two kinds of texts: those based on direct experiences that aim to restore the broken line between experience and narration; second, those that “foster narrations with a performative value, which simulate the reader to assume an active part of it” (96). The cross-reading analysis of the two texts, therefore, shows how Kaha’s *Fra-intendimenti* (2010) can be ascribed to the latter category, while her father’s *La Somalia non è un’isola dei Caraibi: Memorie di un pastore somalo in Italia* (2010) should be included in the former. The article, furthermore, analyses *Fra-intendimenti* in the light of “the social conflicts inherent to global capitalism”, in order to show how Kaha’s short stories perform an act of citizenship “for it intervenes and tries actively to modify dominant discourses on nationality and belonging” (101).

The fifth article is similarly grounded in the Italian postcolonial scenario. Teresa Solis examines the still overlooked production of the Italian-Ethiopian writer Carla Macoggi (1965–2013) focusing on her two autobiographical novels, *Kkeywa. Storia di una bimba meticcica* (2011), followed by *La nemesi della rossa* (2013). Solis’s main aim is to analyse the direct psychological consequences produced by colonialism on the author. The concepts of *métissage* and *nemesis* are key terms to highlight how Macoggi’s writings depict a split in the self of the subjects who have undergone Italian colonisation, along the axis of Frantz Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). The article, underlining this aspect, suggests that Macoggi’s novels represent a way of healing from the systematic negation of the self, perpetrated by the Italian Fascists to the detriment of the colonised subjects.

Emma Bond, in her essay, explores the relationship between two apparently distant texts, *Amiable with Big Teeth* (1940) by Jamaican-born and Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay and the

contemporary novels *Children of the Revolution* (2008) and *All our names* (2014) by Ethiopian-American writer Dinaw Mengestu. Bond, by employing a cross-reading of these novels, shows how they are connected by a transnational network of resistance and solidarity (123). In doing so, the article explains how American literature reveals transnational and multidirectional trajectories, due to the notion of resistance and solidarity that overstep their temporal and national confines. In particular, the historical experiences of conflict and resistance in Ethiopia (against the Fascist and, later, the Derg provisional military government) intermingle in the novels with the American civil rights movement, the experiences of refugees arriving in the US and the insurrection, described in *Children of the Revolution*, in response to illegal evictions in Washington.

The last intervention, by scholar Linde Luijnenburg, focuses on the Somali production in the Dutch language through the writings of three authors who live in the Netherlands: Sayadin Hersi, Yasmine Allas and Zeinab Jumale. Luijnenburg explores their novels with a comparative approach based on language and shared themes, but it also relates them to the context of the Dutch publishing industry and, more broadly, to the social and political scenario of the Netherlands. Even though the three authors display different strategies in terms of narrative style, they share their dislike about the label 'migrant authors', and their difficulties during the editing process, since they were asked to adapt their language to the standard Dutch in order to be published.

In conclusion, the collection *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa* provides a refreshing perspective on the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies. The emphasis on the relationships between different texts by authors within the diaspora and their importance in decolonising the Western (and Italian) discourse, encourages a new understanding of the contemporary postcolonial production from the Horn of Africa. Comberinati and Luffin's collection has the merit of looking at that geographic region as a literary space where authors are connected through several cognate features, investigated in each article.

On a minor note, the collection reveals several typos and small mistakes overlooked in the editing process, as well as, on occasion, footnotes that are not always clear (a recurrent oversight is the use of

the abbreviation *Ibid.* to refer to a note on the previous page, instead of a note on the same page, thus often leading to a misplaced reference).

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PAOLO PUPPA, *Altre scene. Copioni del terzo millennio.* Corazzano, PI: Titivillus, 2017.

Claudio Magris, citando Anton Čechov, afferma che mentre la narrativa commenta e analizza la vita, il teatro la mostra e che la scrittura teatrale ha un carattere notturno, ovvero consente di incontrare i propri fantasmi, i sosia. Queste riflessioni possono inserirci all'interno della raccolta, architettonicamente compiuta, di Paolo Puppa, *Altre scene. Copioni del terzo millennio*. Sin dal titolo si comprende la natura estemporanea delle otto drammaturgie, che si snodano su quattro forme dialogiche e quattro monologhi; la configurazione quasi assente della scena dà forma e consistenza a personaggi che, come bassorilievi, emergono dal nulla e al nulla sembrano tornare, con le loro storie che si perdono nella refrattaria realtà. L'autore sembra prediligere infatti l'indagine psicologica dei personaggi sebbene la narrazione sia priva di giudizi o di facili considerazioni. Il loro sostare quasi sull'orlo del delirio diventa la trama stessa del racconto, così come il dolore, l'inettitudine, il non detto, l'identità franta acquistano la stessa forza del gesto teatrale.

Il primo testo, *Casa con angolo Shoah* – titolo che fa riferimento, come spiega l'autore stesso nelle *Notarelle introduttive*, al lessico immobiliare – presenta nove personaggi, i quali tuttavia non compaiono mai sulla scena tutti insieme, spezzando dunque la dimensione polifonica a cui si pone, in controcanto, la solitudine delle voci che dialogano. Tutto si svolge nel perimetro stretto di una casa, uno spazio quasi claustrofobico come lo è quello interiore dei personaggi limitati dalle proprie ossessioni, dalle proprie irrazionali paure, dai propri desideri inconfessabili. Nessun personaggio appare intero, ma sempre franto e senza nessuna via di scampo. Una piccola famiglia borghese nasconde nella propria soffitta i vicini, ebrei in