

**Building Multilocal Belongings: A Comparative
Study of Somali Postcolonial Novels in English
and Italian**

Marco Medugno

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Abstract
Building Multilocal Belongings:
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This thesis provides a comparative study of contemporary novels written in English and Italian by authors of the Somali diaspora, including Nuruddin Farah, Garane Garane, Uba Cristina Ali Farah, Igiaba Scego, Afdhere Jama and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel. By reading them contrapuntally, this study offers an original framework for developing a multicultural and multilingual analysis, since it brings Anglophone and Italian literary studies together. The thesis demonstrates how the novels provide a more holistic understanding of Somali literature and an epistemological rethinking of the postcolonial paradigm. The first chapter analyses the representation of spatiality focusing on Mogadishu and Rome, as two fictionalised urban spaces at the centre of Somali diasporic literature. The chapter shows how authors deconstruct Western narratives of Mogadishu as a failed city engulfed in tribal wars and, also, analyses the strategies of re-appropriation and reterritorialisation of Rome, namely one of the centres of the diaspora. The second chapter shifts the focus on language, investigating Nuruddin Farah's late works. It claims that his use of Italian suggests a re-examination of the critical terminology employed to describe the relationship between colonisers and colonised; the chapter also proposes a new understanding of Somalia's civil war period by providing an intertextual reading between Farah's *Links* (2005) and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The following chapter, focused on Garane's *Il latte è buono* (2005), proposes an innovative approach towards orature: instead of relating it to a generalised African affiliation, the analysis grounds orature within the specificity of the Somali context. Finally, the fourth chapter charts the critically neglected influences of the Italian literary tradition on Somali Italian writers. The chapter illustrates how Italo Calvino's aesthetics, developed after fighting in the anti-fascist resistance movement (*la Resistenza*, 1943—45), offers fruitful parallels with that of Somali postcolonial writers. In doing so, the analysis moves away from the conventional reading of postcolonial novels in Italian as unrelated to the national culture and the literary canon. Accordingly, I show how their transnational features should be investigated according to their multiple literary networks, stretching from multilocal backgrounds to the Italian and English literary traditions. Taken together, these chapters propose an innovative multilingual and multicultural reading of Somali novels of the diaspora, inviting us to reassess the current critical approaches, mostly based on same-language analyses. Also, they show how the comparative investigation of Somali diasporic novels, from geographically and culturally distinct areas, advocates for a reassessment of the notion of literary tradition as based on the same nationality and language.

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Figure 2. “Mogadiscio.” *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*. Milano: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938.

List of abbreviations

- AFIS** *Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana della Somalia* or, officially, the Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian administration, was a United Nations Trust Territory situated in present-day north-eastern, central and southern Somalia, with Mogadishu as the capital city. Following the dissolution of the Italian Empire (1936—1943), Italy administered the Somali territory from 1950 to 1960. In 1960, the Trust Territory of Somaliland (the former Italian Somaliland) became independent, following in the footsteps of the briefly extant State of Somaliland (the former British Somaliland) which had gained independence five days earlier. As planned, on July 1 of the same year, the two territories united to form the Somali Republic.
- AOI** *Africa Orientale Italiana* was the territory made up of the Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa. It was formed in 1936 through the merger of Italian Somaliland, Italian Eritrea, and the occupied Ethiopian Empire that later became Italian Ethiopia.
- ICU** The Islamic Courts Union was a group of Sharia courts that united themselves to form a rival administration to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. Until the end of 2006, they controlled most of southern Somalia and the vast majority of its population, including most major cities such as Jowhaar, Kismaayo, Beletweeyne, and the capital Mogadishu.
- SNF** (Somali National Front) Armed front founded in March 1991 in opposition to the USC and especially active in the Southwest. The first goal of the SNF was to reinstate Siyaad Barre's regime and recapture Mogadishu.
- SNM** (Somali National Movement) Armed front founded in 1982, in London, in opposition to the military regime of Siyaad Barre and especially active in the Northwest.
- TFG** The Transitional Federal Parliament of the Somali Republic was the national parliament of Somalia from 2004 until 2012. The Federal Parliament of Somalia succeeded it.
- UIC** Another name for the Islamic Courts Union.
- UNITAF** The Unified Task Force was a United States-led, United Nations-sanctioned multinational force which operated in Somalia from 5 December 1992 until 4 May 1993.
- UNOSOM I** (United Nations Operation in Somalia I) was the first part of a United Nations sponsored attempt to provide, facilitate, and secure humanitarian relief in Somalia, as well as to monitor the first UN-brokered ceasefire of the Somali Civil War conflict in the early 1990s.
- UNOSOM II** (United Nations Operation in Somalia II) was the second phase of the United Nations intervention in Somalia, from March 1993 until March 1995, after civil war erupted in the country in 1991.
- USC** (United Somali Congress) A Hawiye-based armed front, founded in Rome in January 1989, in opposition to the military regime of Siyaad Barre and especially active in south-central and southern Somalia.

Note on transliteration

With regard to orthography, I have tried to follow the Somali writing conventions to transcribe names, both proper and common, toponymy, sentences and titles of books, poems and songs. This led to the use of ‘x’ as the aspirated ‘h’ (as in Ubax instead of Ubah), ‘c’ for the consonant ‘ayn’ (as in Caydiid instead of ‘Aidid), ‘q’ for ‘k’ (as in *qat* instead of *kebat*) and double vocals to long vowel sound (as in Siyaad instead of Siad). The same occurs in the case of geographic names, such as Weebi Shabeelle (Shebelle River) and Xamar Weyne (Hamar Weyne). In the case of authors’ names, I left the more conventional transliteration whether the latter was the only one provided or preferred by the authors themselves. This strategy led to different outcomes, as in the case of Ali Mumin Ahad, which falls in the first case, and Axmed Cali Abokor, which belongs to the second. Likewise, since Nuruddin Farah never appears as Nuuradiin Faarax in published works, here is written accordingly. In both cases, in the bibliography, I refer to Somali authors who have published using their grandfather’s name by that one as their last name. Finally, I left in quotation marks any nicknames, as the latter are often regarded as the person’s formal name. Since other sources use different conventions, the reader should be aware of some inconsistencies in terms of orthography between this thesis and other published texts.

Introduction

Those who use words well
must take history's point
to ink a beautiful literature.

–CAASHA LUUL MAXAMUUD YUUSUF, *Tabriib* (2017)

The protagonists of diaspora feel like a necklace that has been cut, whose beads have bounced away in several directions. I am trying to put the beads together again into a necklace.

–UBAX CRISTINA ALI FARAH, *Interview* (2007)

My connection with Somalia has always been through other places, other memories; even when I lived in Somalia I often asked myself questions that made me use Somalia as a metaphor; the strength of my writing –if there *is* any strong point– is that I have always seen myself not as someone *representing* reality but also *challenging* reality.

–NURUDDIN FARAH, *Interview* (1993)

This thesis is a comparative study of a series of novels written by Somali authors from the diaspora in English and Italian between 2005 and 2015. The common ground underpinning this transnational and multilingual production is how these writers fictionalise Somalia and Italy internally and externally, in effect occupying a space in-between multiple languages and cultures. As these authors have never been studied together, the converging and conflicting aspects of their diasporic narratives, as well as the influences and exchanges between the novels and authors, have remained unexplored topics. When taken together, they allow a more holistic understanding of both Somalia and its diasporic literature; collectively, they become part of what scholar Dionýz Ďurišin has called an ‘interliterary community’, i.e. a literary space in which diasporic authors share a number of specific features, such as their location outside their home country, the demystification of Western-centric discourses, the interplay between different cultures and languages, and the legacy of the colonial past on the neocolonial and globalised present.¹

¹ Specifically, the concept of ‘interliterary community’, theorised by the Slovak comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin instead of ‘national literature’, allows us to understand Somali literary production as a literary space that, through transnational and cross-cultural narratives, re-defines national identities and belongings. Dionýz Ďurišin, *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*, translated by Jessie Kocmanová. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1984.

Among these macro-thematic features, I aim to investigate how English- and Italian-speaking Somali authors relate to the tragic event of the civil war (1991—present), the consequent diaspora, after the collapse of the state, and its territorial fragmentation. In other words, I wish to explore how these authors address, in their novels, the complex and ever-changing idea of Somaliness from abroad, within different diasporic contexts, and how they engage with several interconnected issues, such as the making of nationhood in an unstable political setting, multiple belongings and composite identities. In particular, Somali novels from the diaspora seem to ask: How to re-build the nation after decades of colonialism, dictatorship and civil war? What impact have these latter events had on identity, but also on nationhood? What kind of rhetorical strategies do Somali authors employ to construct and represent their own definition of citizenship, identity and belonging across multiple countries, languages and cultures?

The starting point to answering these questions is the fact that the literary production of Somali authors, despite living in different countries and using different languages, shares specific themes, tropes and discursive practices. Even though they engage with a range of subjects and possess a personal, distinctive style, they also show parallels and convergences. These similarities are particularly noticeable in contemporary novels, which appear to be incredibly productive for investigating the diasporic experiences that Somali authors undertake. As a dialogic, polyphonic and protean genre, the novel is suitable for negotiating forms of resistance and syncretism, but it also enhances the hybridity between languages, cultures and identities so ingrained in the diasporic condition. In the literary history of Somalia, the novel is a relatively new genre, as it developed after the codification of the written language in 1972. The earliest novels showed their connections with poems and narratives of the oral tradition, both at the thematic (Dervish movement, 1899—1920) and stylistic level (poetry and traditional techniques of Somali oral literature).² However, during the mid-1970s, the novel, along with short stories and the theatre, started to grow, also due to the availability of periodicals and newspapers that spread and published the writings of emerging authors. Love and romantic affairs were the most common themes, but the background of these prose works covered both the recent past, immersed in national history, and the urban everyday life. This last feature, often regarded as a form of ‘realism’, was a novelty in Somali literature,

² B. W. Andrzejewski (2011) “The Rise of Written Somali Literature.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23:1, pp. 73-80, pp. 73-74, 78.

introduced in prose writings thanks to Axmed Cartan Xaange and Shire Jaamac Axmed in the mid-seventies.³

During the late 1970s and the 1980s, due to Barre's increasingly dictatorial rule, some authors left the country (among them, for example, Nuruddin Farah) and literary production went into decline, turning into forms propaganda.⁴ Later on, the civil war worsened the already compromised context, and "wipe[d] out most of the intellectual and material progress of the preceding thirty years."⁵ When Siyaad Barre's regime collapsed in 1991, the armed conflict that broke out caused a rupture in the history and lives of Somali people, producing displacements, expulsions, escalating violence and copious casualties among civilians and militaries. In addition, the power vacuum that resulted from the end of the dictatorship led to a long period of armed oppositions between different clans, firstly competing to gain control over the centralised state, then to consolidate their own fiefdom politically and geographically. This fragile context worsened over time, whereas several foreign interventions meddled in Somalia's internal affairs.

Somali literature then largely survived abroad, and diasporic authors, during a period of instability and fragile political institutions, started to write about their homeland in multiple languages from their host country, often weaving together the themes of exile, war, displacement and the idea of return and homelessness. In the diaspora, the novels in particular provide a space in which to discuss non-normative ideas of Somaliness and nationhood, with a sense of distant nostalgia but also criticism towards the post-independence period (when Somalia was constituted from the

³ The first publications appeared in instalments and in the newspapers *Xidigta Oktoobar* (October Star), *Waaga Cusub* (The new era), *Kacaan* (Revolution), *Hawl iyo bantawadag* (Work and Socialism). Beyond poetry and prose, it should be noted that theatre gained importance and relevance during the 1960s. Many dramas were written in verse, but some parts, in addition to the musical accompaniment, were in prose. Theatres were fundamental since they involved a high number of artists, and contributed, among other things, to spread a certain socialist idea based on principles of equality: "The audiences who frequent the theatre are not limited to any particular social group; the theatre attracts crowds of people, both men and women, and among them one can find members of the new educated elite just as easily as persons who have had no formal education. Plays are performed not only at the National Theatre in Mogadishu, but also in provincial centres, where the spectators include pastoralists and farmers from the surrounding areas." B. W. Andrzejewski (2011) "Modern and traditional aspects of Somali drama." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23:1, pp. 85-95; p. 84.

⁴ Cristina Ali Farah, *Il teatro popolare somalo. 1940-1990*. Rome: Roma TrePress, 2018, pp. 36-37.

⁵ Ali Mumin Ahad, "Italian Culture Influences in Somali. A reciprocity?" In: Morosetti Tiziana (ed.) *Quaderni del '900. La letteratura postcoloniale italiana. Dalla letteratura dell'immigrazione all'incontro con l'altro*. Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2004, pp. 13-24; p. 18: "In the fields of education and health, a sharp decline occurred, and only minimal services continued to exist. Because of the destruction of schools and supporting services, a whole generation of Somalis faced the prospect of a return to illiteracy. Many people who had fled to the cities initially because of the civil war sought refuge in camps elsewhere, often refugee camps outside Somalia. [...] In short, Somali had retrogressed to a collection of warring clans reminiscent of pre-industrial times."

unification of the former British protectorate and the Italian trusteeship administration in 1960). I argue that Somali novels bring to the fore the conflicts and the negotiations between simultaneous and often contrasting tendencies that, nonetheless, tie these narratives together. Nowadays, Somalis are reshaping and re-building their national identity in a complex skein that both rekindle and dismantle old social relations and political formations.

As a way of retrieving and discussing nationhood, literature emerges as the means that bonds Somali diasporic people, who look at Somalia from both an external and internal viewpoints. One of the aims of this thesis is to investigate how the novels, specifically, play a fundamental role from the diaspora in endorsing the discussion about the post-war nation and its possible futures. Therefore, I focus attention on the novel-form, as it suitably emphasises the transnational and multicultural features of Somali diasporic literature.⁶ For example, the protagonist of Farah's *Links*, Jeebleh, is pleased that Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, a real-life Somali Persian and Italian author, has written a book about the civil war from a 'Somali' perspective. This explicit reference between Farah and Fazel, both of them diasporic authors, strengthens the necessity to think collectively about restoring a sense of community and reworking the idea of nationhood. Also, it suggests looking at this production from a different perspective. Indeed, this common trope is shared by Cristina Ali Farah too, in her *Il comandante del fiume* (2014): according to Emma Bond, the novel "forges links with other stories, times, and places including the present that the author [herself] inhabits".⁷ Likewise, Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (2015) works along the same axis, as it tells the story of Zoppe's during colonialism and that of Adua, his daughter, in the present.⁸ In her novel, different periods are connected, so as to link individual experiences to the broader and national perspective of colonialism and contemporary displacement.

By bringing Anglophone and Italoophone Somali authors together for the first time, I present Somali contemporary literature as a multi-layered space of invention and intervention across linguistic and national divides. My aim is to investigate shared aesthetic and formal tendencies

⁶ For example, instead of the novels, the production of poems, both printed and online, may represent another starting point to look at the evolution of this genre across the diaspora and how it has endorsed the discussion around nationhood. Another perspective could take into consideration the literary forms in the Somali language, thus stretching the analysis to an even more inclusive and broader comparison. Lidwien Kapteijns has looked at poems with the abovementioned approach, in: "Making Memories of Mogadishu in Somali Poetry about the Civil War." *Mediations of Violence in Africa: Fashioning New Futures from Contested Pasts*, edited by Lidwien Kapteijns and Annemiek Richters. Leiden: Brill, 1993, pp. 24-75.

⁷ Emma Bond (2016) "Let me go back and recreate what I don't know": Locating Trans-National Memory Work in Contemporary Narrative." *Modern Languages Open*, pp. 1-21, p. 11.

⁸ Igiaba Scego [2015] *Adua*. London: Jacaranda Book, 2019.

across this multilingual, multicultural and cross-generational body of work. Consequently, Somali literature is contrast with nation-bound and same-language categorisations. From abroad, while trying to make sense of the national collapse, Somali authors also rethink and re-define new futures after the large-scale violence of the civil war.⁹ They attempt to deconstruct the colonial and neocolonial narrative about their country, but also to address the internal dynamics that led to the collapse of the state and the dismantling of the nation. In other words, their transnational view is oriented to a local perspective, as Somalia emerges as the main source of inspiration and as a topic to be examined in fictional form. However, the word ‘Somalia’ itself has become problematic, as it does not identify anymore with a shared or unitary entity in political, social, cultural and geographical terms. In this regard, I argue that Somalia itself should be understood as an “imaginary homeland”, intrinsically multilingual, culturally hybrid and built upon individual and collective memories.¹⁰

The idea that national identity is comprised of multiple narratives and languages informs most of the Somali novels of the diaspora, often characterised by contingent perspectives in order to overcome sectarian angles in favour of, as Farah observes, *tolerance*.¹¹ This perspectival emphasis, namely a mode of storytelling in which multiple and often discordant viewpoints are employed for representing and interpreting events, does not necessarily conclude with a final denouement or a neat resolution. Accordingly, Ali Jimale Ahmed notes that “Somali literature takes opposing views into consideration [...] a healthy sign indicative of the superstructure’s ability to compromise on certain issues which do not jeopardize the essence of the social system’s existence. The social system permits expression of the different views of its different components”.¹² By enriching their narratives with several views, combined with multiple languages and time-settings, Somali novels succeed, among other effects, in creating a multifaceted account of Somalia, open to discussion and in contrast with the interpretation that informs the dominant Western narrative.

While engaging with the re-assessment of nationhood, Somali people also deal with the resettlement in the host country and the identity-related issues that follow. Their effort is as arduous as it is laudable since, on the one hand, it engages with the several difficulties symbolically related

⁹ Nadifa Mohamed, “Nadifa Mohamed on Somali Writers.” *Asymptote*, April 2012, www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/nadifa-mohamed-on-somali-writers. Accessed 10 May 2020.

¹⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. New York: Viking, 1991.

¹¹ Armando Pajalich (1993) “Nuruddin Farah Interviewed by Armando Pajalich.” *Kunapipi*, 15:1, pp. 61-71, p. 63.

¹² Ali Jimale Ahmed, *Daybreak Is Near...Literature, Clans, and the Nation-state in Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, p. 44.

to a country (or homeland) without stable borders and made up of people scattered around the globe; on the other, it deals with a state that physically lacks centralised infrastructure and institutions, in which there is no public or political acknowledgement of the violent events that occurred during the civil war. As Alexander Weheliye explains:

Diaspora enables the desedimentation of the nation from the ‘interior’ by taking into account the groups that fail to comply with the reigning definition of the people as a cohesive political subject due to sharing one culture, one race, one language, one religion, and so on, and from the ‘exterior’ by drawing attention to the movements that cannot be contained by the nation’s administrative and ideological borders.¹³

Somali writers elected as their own these practices of narrating an imaginary homeland from both an internal and external perspective. In literary terms, this results in specific approaches and particular modes of representing the country, which should be analysed comparatively by looking at Somali literature as a composite outcome in which transnational and local influences converge.

In order to look at this literature more appropriately (or ‘interliterary community’, in Āurišin’s terms), I propose to analyse Somali literary production with a multilingual and multilocal approach. Instead of relying on same-language or nation-bound categories of evaluation, I proceed from comparative and transnational standpoints. The method employed here provides a flexible framework to study those “processes of *multi-locality across geographical, cultural and physical boundaries*” that denote diasporic Somali literary production.¹⁴ By placing multilingualism as the starting point of the following analysis, this thesis brings to the fore the need for an approach that ties together both local and cosmopolitan perspectives. In this regard, Francesca Orsini notes that “while approaches based on single-language archives often tend to reproduce the literary and social biases of each archive, a multilingual approach is inherently comparative and relativizing”.¹⁵ Accordingly, this thesis does not foster the hierarchy between global and local, but supports a less binary and dichotomous understanding of the two terms. Somalia itself can be understood as a space, both physical and imagined, in which a plurality of stories and languages coexists and contributes in producing a multilingual literature that is the outcome of interrelations and interactions between “the immensity of the global [and] the intimately tiny”.¹⁶ In the case of

¹³ Alexander G. Weheliye, “My Volk to Come: Peoplehood in Recent Diaspora Discourse and Afro-German Popular Music.” In: D. C. Hine, T. D. Keaton and S. Small (eds.) *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 161-80, p. 162.

¹⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London-New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 194.

¹⁵ Francesca Orsini (2015) “The Multilingual Local in World Literature.” *Comparative Literature*, 67:4, pp. 345-374, p. 346.

¹⁶ Doreen Massey, *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005, p. 9.

Somalia, I aim to show how cosmopolitan and local tendencies are negotiated and intertwined in the novels of diasporic Somali authors.

Therefore, this thesis charts convergences and divergences in the corpus of Anglophone and Italoophone authors in terms of both themes and aesthetic features, in the aim of exploring how Somali diasporic writers develop their own poetics, grounded in “a notion of national identity and culture rooted in transnationalism and dis-homogeneity”.¹⁷ They negotiate a sense of the nation that is both related to a territorial space (Somalia as the Somali Democratic Republic, a sovereign country with defined borders, one centralised government with Mogadishu as its capital city) and a symbolic one (the *idea* of Somalia as a collective, heterogenous socio-cultural community whose inhabitants identify themselves as Somalis). These writers understand Somalia as an entity that should be re-built starting from the social level, which is in contrast with other holders of symbolic power, such as clan and religious leaders, who foster an idea of community in which membership is based on the exclusiveness of blood and kinship.

The complexity of these processes of national identity reconfiguration fashioned a prose production quintessentially hybrid in terms of language, genre, and themes.¹⁸ Somali prose production, in other words, survived and flourished mainly outside the country, providing us with an extraordinary lens through which to look at it as both a transnational and local outcome. For example, Ismaaciil C. Ubax’s *Gaax* (2017) describes the struggle of living abroad, while Musa M. Isse’s bilingual tales, in Somali and Swedish, engage with the issue of multiple identities by focusing on children born in the diaspora from Somali parents. This tension is central also in Igiaba Scego’s Italian-language short stories, and Yasmeen Maxamuud’s novel *Nomad Diaries* (2009), written in English from the US.¹⁹ Recently, two award-winning novelists of the diaspora have emerged as distinctive voices in the literary landscape: Nadifa Mohamed, who writes in English from the UK, and Abdourahman Waberi, who writes in French from Djibouti.

¹⁷ Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2014) “The Italian Postcolonial: A Manifesto.” *Italian Studies*, 69:3, pp. 425-433, p. 428.

¹⁸ In this analysis, the notion of hybridity is a concept, I argue, that is not strictly related to the transnational level, namely to a set of cultural and linguistic practices of subjects who, having left their homelands, reconfigure them in the new country. Forms of hybridity may occur, in other words, within the same nation or community, as well as multiculturalism and multilingualism are not, as such, to be understood only across national borders. According to Ashcroft *et al.*, hybridity can be understood “as a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth.” Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 183.

¹⁹ Ismaaciil C. Ubax, *Gaax*. Leicester: Looh Press, 2017. Yasmeen Maxamuud, *Nomad Diaries*. Encinitas, CA: NomadHouse Publishing, 2009. Musa M. Isse, *Bakayle iyo Yaxxaas*. Stockholm: Soma Books, 2018.

Among these writers, is the towering figure of Nuruddin Farah (1945—). For almost five decades, his novels have internationalised the Somali case and garnered him several prizes. Farah has opened up a way to other writers for narrating Somalia in English through the novel form. Similarly to Salman Rushdie in the case of India, this process of recognition of Somali fiction written in English at a global-scale has generated suspicion about authenticity and hindered the acknowledgement of both vernacular and oral production.²⁰ For a relatively long time, therefore, Farah has been the only Somali author known to an international audience, due to his use of English and the fact that his novels were (and still are) printed by renowned publishing companies and widely translated. Only more recently, other writers have joined him, stretching the linguistic borders of Somali literature with works written in Dutch (Sayadin Hersi, Yasmine Allas, Zeinab Jumale), French (Abdourahman Waberi), Italian (Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Garane Garane, Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, Kaha Mohamed Aden, Igiaba Scego) and German (Fadumo Korn). The memoir by Waris Dirie (the former model whose first autobiography, *Desert Flower*, came out in 1998 and became a movie in 2009) and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (Somali-Dutch politician and activist who published *Infidel: My Life*, in 2010) reached bestseller status.²¹ In the transnational and multicultural landscape of the diaspora, Anglophone writers of Somali origin or descent have a preponderant weight over the Italian, Dutch or German production, having gained over the years international acclaim, a wider audience and academic attention. This is the case with Nadifa Mohamed (winner of the 2010 Betty Trask Prize for *Black Mamba Boy* and the Somerset Maugham Award for *The Orchard of Lost Soul*, 2014), Sofia Samatar (finalist for both the 2014 Nebula and Hugo Awards and the British Science Fiction Association Award), and poet Warsan Shire (who was awarded the inaugural Brunel University African Poetry Prize in 2013).²²

Since the growing body of novels by Somali writers comprises a rich and multi-layered production of different languages and from different countries, we could only speak of Somali contemporary

²⁰ It should also be noted that Somali became a written language only in 1972. This does not imply an absence of novelists writing in Somali who published before Farah; we have the examples of Faarax Maxamed Jaamac Cawl (1937–1991) and Maxamed Daahir Afraax (1952–). As well, it should be mentioned that Ibrahim Ismaa'il's autobiography is the first Somali literary work in English, written in the late 1920s and published only five decades later. However, they have not reached the same prominence on the international scene as Farah's award-winning writings.

²¹ Waris Dirie, *Desert Flower*. London: Virago, 1998. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel: My Life*. New York: Free Press, 2010.

²² Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*. London: Harper Collins, 2009. Nadifa Mohamed, *The Orchard of Lost Soul*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2013. Sofia Samatar, *A Stranger in Olondria*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2013. Sofia Samatar, *Tender: Stories*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press, 2017. Warsan Shire. *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*. London: Flipped Eye Publishing Limited, 2011.

literature by also embracing those literary outcomes coming from outside Somalia, in European languages such as English, Italian, German, Dutch, and also in Arabic. Whereas, on the one hand, novels in Somali struggle to be read and spread outside Somalia due to the absence of a strong state and a developed publishing infrastructure to nurture and promote them, the novels from the diaspora, on the other hand, reach a broader audience but are considered, at the academic level, along a same-language or same-nation approach. In the latter case, tellingly, the ‘national’ trait denotes the host country of each author and not Somalia. For example, even though the group of Somali Italian writers is particularly prominent, there are only two academic works dedicated to them: Laura Lori’s *Inchiostro d’Africa* (2013) and Simone Brioni’s *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in Minor Italian Literature* (2015).²³ Neither of them, notwithstanding their important contribution in the field of Italian and postcolonial studies, examine Somali Italian authors as members of an interliterary community made up of relations, influences and shared features across languages, culture and other (Somali) authors. Their approach does not consider, for example, investigating forms and practices of multilingualism and transnationalism which are pivotal aspects of the multilocal context of Somali literature itself. Anglophone criticism has, in turn, produced numerous articles and essays about Nuruddin Farah, but has left little room for a comparative study with other diasporic voices and, above all, with the literature produced in the Somali language.²⁴

Another intervention of this comparative approach is to point out that Somali literature, both in English and Italian, plays a significant role in retrieving the forgotten memories of Italian colonialism and in deconstructing the dominant knowledge-production about Somali people. Somali novels can be compared beyond any fixed national belonging because they “are part of a multilingual diasporic postcolonial tradition with an urgent ethic of remembrance” with the aim of addressing “Italian colonial discourses and the history and stories of the victims of Italian imperialism.”²⁵ Specifically, I suggest that a conversation between literary and postcolonial studies still needs to be had in Italian academia. Whereas Somali writings have been studied according to

²³ Laura Lori, *Inchiostro d’Africa. La letteratura postcoloniale somala fra diaspora e identità*. Verona: Ombre corte, 2013. Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015.

²⁴ Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine, *World Authors Series: Nuruddin Farah*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999. Derek Wright (ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002. John Masterson, *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work of Nuruddin Farah*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013. Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014. One exception is scholar Emma Bond, who looked comparatively at Ali Farah and Nadifa Mohamed. In: Emma Bond (2016) “‘Let me go back and recreate what I don’t know’: Locating Trans-national Memory Work in Contemporary Narrative.” *Modern Languages Open*, pp. 1-21.

²⁵ Christopher Fotheringham, (2018) “History’s Flagstones: Nuruddin Farah and Other Literary Responses to Italian Imperialism in East Africa.” *Interventions*, pp. 1-20, p. 1.

their influence with other postcolonial writings from the Anglophone world and with the theoretical lenses of Anglo-American postcolonial studies only, little work has been done with regard to their position within the Italian literary tradition.²⁶ This latter approach, as conducted here, will reveal how Italian postcolonial literature has followed a remarkably different path from the Anglophone one, and it will emphasise the need for a more contextual evaluation. To date, the 'Italian' influence, which constitutes one of the multi-local sides of postcolonial Somali writing, has hardly been acknowledged, so that this production has been considered by the Italian studies as an exogenous literary outcome. This, along with an often uncritical use of Anglo-American analytical approaches, has prevented a thorough analysis of Somali diasporic writings in Italian and failed to look at the term diaspora "as a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, the distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement".²⁷ Due to this lack, it is necessary to explore local conceptualisations of notions such as 'nation' and 'national', in parallel with the transnational feature of diasporic literary productions.

I am not suggesting that the existence of one nation does not presuppose discordant narratives, nor that 'national identity' equates one national culture. Instead, it is argued here that with the dissemination of Somali people around the world and the lack of a functioning centralised government, other types of collective identity –clanic, regional, religious, ethnic– have overlapped, at times overcoming territory-bound identity formations.²⁸ From the diaspora, the discussion about nationhood and the investigation of the traumatic civil war still epitomise the albatross around Somali writers' necks. However, I claim that diasporic Somali authors, instead of rehearsing clanic narratives, internal regional divisions, and projecting one-sided 'official' memories into their fiction,

²⁶ In terms of literature written in Italian, for example, Libyan, Eritrean and Ethiopian authors are often studied together, as all related to the 'postcolonial' paradigm, the use of the Italian language and Italy as the host country. Articles and anthologies, therefore, often compare and gather together the writings by authors from the former colonies according to gender, ethnicity, and migration. For example, migration and 'otherness' (Armando Gnisci in *La letteratura italiana della migrazione*, Loredana Polezzi, "Description, appropriation, transformation: Fascist rhetoric and colonial nature"), margins vs. centre (Graziella Parati in *When the 'other' is black, Margins at the Centre: African Italian Voices and Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*) or race and diaspora (Alessandro Portelli, "Mediterranean Passage: The Beginnings of an African Italian Literature and the African American Example"); gender (Manuela Coppola, "Rented spaces": Italian postcolonial literature"; Loredana Polezzi, "Mixing Mother Tongues: Language, Narrative and the Spaces of Memory in Postcolonial Works by Italian Women Writers"; Sara Marzagora, "Re-writing history in the literature of the Ethiopian diaspora in Italy").

²⁷ James Clifford (1994) "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology*, 9:3, pp. 302-338, p. 308.

²⁸ Mohamed Haji Ingiriis (2016) "Many Somalia(s), multiple memories: remembrances as present politics, past politics as remembrances in war-torn Somali discourses." *African Identities*, 14:4, pp. 348-369. Lee Cassanelli (2009) "The Partition of Knowledge in Somali Studies: Reflections on Somalia's Fragmented Intellectual Heritage." *Bildbaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 9, pp. 4-17, p. 4.

attempt to explore, in their novels, alternative and more nuanced modes to define Somaliness, so as to foster a discussion about the future of the nation as a territorial collectivity.

Somali novels in Italian and English address this concern from the diaspora not in the sense of division, but by promoting a narrative of Somalia as a cohesive –though problematic– political and cultural entity. In other words, they look at Somalia and Somalis to find shared social attributes, norms and values that can re-enable a sense of nationhood after the civil-war period, so as to envision potential alternative for the future. Both Anglophone and Italoophone Somali authors try to fictionalise ideas of Somaliness that, even though fragmented and partial, represents an attempt at unity, nonetheless. In this process of re-imagining their nation from abroad, they challenge monolithically articulated concepts of individual and national identity.

For example, Somali Italian author Uba Cristina Ali Farah defines her characters as solely Somali, unbound from *qabyaalad* [clannism] or religious affiliation, thus removing forms of tribalism and fixed ideas of belonging as markers of her characters' Somaliness. In exploring this term, Somali authors discuss the problematic process of defining the collective 'we', its authority and composition. As Paul Gilroy underlines, diaspora offers "an alternative to the metaphysics of race, nation and bounded culture", and it "problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging".²⁹ Accordingly, Somali authors articulate the blurred line between inclusion and exclusion by addressing critical questions such as, "Who is empowered and who is disempowered in a specific construction of the 'we'? How are social divisions negotiated in the construction of the 'we'? What is the relationship of this 'we' to its 'others'? Who are these others?".³⁰ Nuruddin Farah's character Jeebleh, in *Links*, experiences trouble in the use of the pronoun 'we', underlining the split he perceives between himself and the clan-based organisation of Somali society.³¹ Most of Farah's characters, from the beginning of his career, line up against any idea of *qabyaalad*, represented as a narrow-minded, patriarchal and backwards practice.³² Igiaba Scego, in her novels,

²⁹ Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie, *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*. London: Verso, 2000, p. 123.

³⁰ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London-New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 184.

³¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, London: Duckworth & Co., 2005, p. 219.

³² In doing so, however, he omits to recognise their role in the diaspora, focusing only on their negative influence and responsibilities during periods of tension. "For example, the economy of the [...] unrecognised Somaliland Republic is virtually completely a remittance economy which depends precisely on kinship obligations to remain economically viable. Somalilanders in the diaspora support extended families at home. In other words, [...] the kinship obligations associated with clan are what keep the Somaliland economy afloat. More strikingly, it was precisely the traditional conflict resolution techniques which mediate clan relationships that allowed the fragile and regionally threatened stability of the Somaliland

rarely mentions clan affiliations and presents her characters as unattached to them, as well as Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, whose autobiographical account attempts to present the civil war as a *Somali* event. Garane Garane describes *qabyaalad* as a conundrum for the making of the Somali nation, and he is ambiguous in staging the future role of clans in the process of re-building the country.

It should be noted that in the process of reconfiguration and recollection, in what can be called an individual and collective ‘confluence of narratives’, constantly reproduced and transformed, the presence of Italy emerges as another shared theme in the writings of Somali authors.³³ Part of the actual social and political fragmentation of Somalia is the result of colonialism and, also, of political interferences that extended far beyond Italian occupation.³⁴ Italy played a prominent role in supporting Siyaad Barre’s dictatorial rule and offered no form of asylum to those escaping from war or dictatorship.³⁵ This reluctance in granting Somali people the status of political refugees, both during Barre’s regime (1969—1991) and the civil war (1991—), contributed to expanding the geographic borders of the diaspora, as Somali people, instead of choosing the former, hostile and unwelcoming metropole, mainly settled in African countries (Kenya, Ethiopia), in Europe (United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands) or in Canada and the US.

Although the ‘motherland’ showed little interest in welcoming its former colonised subjects, the legacy left by the Italians resonates in both Anglophone and Italoophone Somali authors’ novels, even though their limited (Nuruddin Farah) or non-existent (Nadifa Mohamed, Afdhere Jama, Abdi Latif Ega or Yasmeeen Maxamuud) experience in or of Italy.³⁶ By uncovering the baleful role played by Italy for decades, Somali authors have created a multilingual and intricate cultural

Republic to emerge in the first place [...] Kinship affiliations are also what allow Somalis in the diaspora to access capital for business ventures simply on the basis of the inbuilt identity checks the clan system allows and the trust created by clan affiliation.” In: Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2014, p. 132.

³³ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London-New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 183.

³⁴ We should also notice that the relationship with Italy after Somali independence, even though officially ended with the AFIS experience, did not cease. Quite the contrary, Italian governments played a significant role both during and after Barre’s dictatorship, even with some illicit traffic connected to hazardous waste dumping. Moreover, Major General Maxamed Siyaad Barre (1919—1995), a former member of the Italian colonial police during the 1930s and a cadet of the Carabinieri Training School in Florence in the 1950s, was in charge the bloodless takeover that occurred after the post-independence period. Angelo del Boca, *Una sconfitta dell’intelligenza*. Bari: Laterza, 1993, p. 14-37. Alfredo Chiapparoni, *Quanti denti ha il pescecane*. Milan: Mursia, 2009; Barbara Carazzolo et al. (eds.) *Ilaria Alpi: un omicidio al crocevia dei traffici*. Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2002. *Toxic Somalia: l’altre piraterie* (2010) [video] France: Paul Moreira.

³⁵ Angelo del Boca, *Una sconfitta dell’intelligenza*. Bari: Laterza, 1993, pp. 14-37.

³⁶ Alessandra di Maio (2017) “Postcolonial Intersections: Transnational Women Voices from Minor Italy.” *In Verbis. Lingue, Letterature, Culture*, 7:1, pp. 101-122, pp. 108-9. Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell’Italia del dopoguerra (1945—1960)*. Firenze: Le Monnier, 2017.

landscape. In Farah's 'Past Imperfect' trilogy, this milieu surfaces in the particular generation of characters who grew up during the AFIS (Italian trusteeship administration in Somalia, 1950–60) and experienced the influence of Italian culture in the post-war period. As Zoe Norridge notes, "Italian rule has left multiple legacies: from *spaghetti* lunches to Farah's preferred spelling of the capital as 'Mogadiscio'".³⁷ The case of Garane Garane, in this regard, is emblematic in showing the deep-rooted relationship between Italy and post-independence Somalia. In his semi-autobiographical short novel *Il latte è buono* (2005), Garane describes the Italian cultural influence on Somali subjects, emphasising how it did not relinquish after the Fascist rule.

The theme of the Italian influence on Somalia fills the divide between different geographic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds but also across generations.³⁸ However, I also identify other 'meeting points' among the Somali novels of the 2000s written in English and Italian from the diaspora. One of these is the urban setting. This spatial recurrence should not be considered incidentally, as it raises the question of why Somali writings, coming from locations around the globe and by authors of different origins, show a centripetal pull towards the urbanscape of Mogadishu. I argue that, even though ruined by the war and with frail political authority, the capital city still represents the centre of the imagined nation and the source to understand present-day Somalia's status. For example, looking more closely to Farah's literary production, Mogadishu emerges as the main setting in almost all his novels, from the first publication, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), to the latest trilogy, titled 'Past Imperfect' (2003—2011).³⁹ But Mogadishu appears also in other texts of the diaspora, such as the novels *Nomad Diaries* (2009) by Yasmeeen Maxamuud (born in Ceerigaabo, northern Somalia, actually residing in San Diego) and *Lido Beach* (2018) by Afdhere Jama (born and raised in Somalia, now lives in San Francisco); in the articles of *Guban's* author Abdi Latif Ega, and in the *memoir* by Mohamed Osman Omar, *The Road to Zero. Somalia's Self-destruction* (1992).⁴⁰

³⁷ Zoe Norridge, "Crossbones, by Nuruddin Farah." *The Independent*, 7 July 2012, par. 6, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/crossbones-by-nuruddin-farah-7917720.html. Accessed 10 May 2020.

³⁸ For example, Nuruddin Farah, born in 1945, belongs to a different generation than Igiaba Scego, 1974.

³⁹ Ali J. Ahmed labelled Farah as "primarily an urban writer". In: Ali Jimale Ahmed, *Daybreak Is Near...Literature, Clans, and the Nation-state in Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, p. 35. Farah himself, in an interview, stated: "I am a city person. I write, I am cosmopolitan; oral tradition, when you've put aside its ancient and current histories, is defective." In: Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock (eds.) *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Jackson-London: University Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Yasmeeen Maxamuud, *Nomad Diaries*. Encinitas, CA: NomadHouse Publishing, 2009. Mohamed Osman Omar, *The Road to Zero. Somalia's Self-destruction*. London: Haan Publishing, 1992. Abdi Latif Ega, "The Great Somali Apologia." *Africa Is a Country*, 31 March 2019, africasacountry.com/2019/03/the-great-somali-apologia. Accessed 10 May 2020. Abdi Latif Ega, "Meditating on youth in Mogadishu." *Africa Is a Country*,

Mogadishu also features in the novel by Somali Italian authors Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono* (2005), in Ubx Cristina Ali Farah's (born Verona, 1973) *Madre piccola* (2007) and Igiaba Scego's (born in Rome) *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) and *Adua* (2015); in the short stories by Kaha Mohamed Aden, *Fra-intendimenti* (2010); in the autobiographical works by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (1994), and in Mohamed Aden Sheikh's *Arrivederci a Mogadiscio* (1994). Even though each writer has a distinctive cultural background, different linguistic education, generation and location (some of them were not born in Mogadishu), the fictionalisation of Mogadishu seems to be one of the *Leitmotiv* that bonds this interliterary community.

The fictionalisation of Mogadishu combines, to paraphrase geographer Dustin Crowley, social and architectural aspects in ways that are reciprocally and inextricably formative.⁴¹ In order to explore these ways, we should bring to the fore the critical concept of spatiality. In what follows, spatiality denotes the sociopolitical and fictional dimension of space, and it can be read as the product of interrelations and interactions between individuals and groups with regard to one another and concerning their environment.⁴² Being focused on the interconnectedness between colonial space and social interactions, this study employs concepts, practices and theories from geocriticism, broadly conceived. In other words, the analysis (especially in Chapter 1) explores the overlapping territories between geography and literary studies, by placing its theoretical background in the works of critics who have investigated the bond between space and literature as related to colonialism and imperialism (Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Simon Gikandi to name a few), and those who have connected space to social practices (Yi-Fu Tuan, Doreen Massey, Edward Soja and Henry Lefebvre).⁴³

20 January 2019, africasacountry.com/2019/01/meditating-on-youth-in-mogadishu. Accessed 10 May 2020. Abdi Latif Ega, *Guban*. New York: Panafriklitpress, 2012. Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*. Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2015. Ubx Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*. Milan: Frassinelli, 2007. Igiaba Scego. *La mia casa è dove sono*. Milan: Loesher, 2010. *Adua*. Translated by Jamie Richards. London: Jaracanda Books, 2019. Kaha Mohamed Aden, *Fra-intendimenti*. Rome: Nottetempo, 2010. Mohamed Aden Sheik. *Arrivederci a Mogadiscio*. Rome: Edizioni Associate, 1994. Shirin Ramzanali Fazel [1994] *Lontano da Mogadiscio*. South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.

⁴¹ Dustin Crowley, *Africa's Narrative Geographies. Charting the Intersection of Geocriticism and Postcolonial Studies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p. 26.

⁴² Doreen Massey, *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005, p. 9.

⁴³ Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989. Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined-Places*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. Doreen Massey, *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Spatiality is applied here to the context of diasporic Somali novels as they unveil the connections between colonial power and the production of space. The novels analysed emphasise, in particular, how urban spatiality represents a pivotal aesthetic feature to unsettle the imperial hegemonic discourse, but also to reclaim the importance of the very same spatiality at the local level. In other words, the fictionalisation of Mogadishu becomes a fundamental means to retrieve, on the one hand, the colonial past and, on the other, to demystify the neocolonial detrimental narrative imposed upon the city more recently, regarded by the American media as “the world-capital of things gone to hell”.⁴⁴ Through the analysis of the fictionalised urban spatiality, we can investigate how Somali authors unravel their cosmopolitan understanding of national and self-identity, and enable a sense of community that simultaneously emerges as transnational, multilingual and cross-cultural.

The comparative close reading of the novels will reveal that the recurrent presence of cosmopolitan, urban and polyglot characters underpins the “struggle over different articulations of the structure of social relations, or different narratives of the forms of subjectivity, gender relations, sexuality, social order, and so on, appropriate for the present- into-the-future of the Somali people and nation”.⁴⁵ The nation, as I will show, derives directly from a cosmopolitan and urban ethos, which that can be broadly described as ‘multilingual local’, and that avoids any grounding in same-blood belongings, patriarchal or clan-based identity and non-secularised ideologies.⁴⁶ It is clear then that Mogadishu embodies the centre of colonial, transnational and cosmopolitan dynamics, but also local practices and the natives’ understanding of territoriality. This flexible and variable relation between spatiality and identity suggests looking at particular fictionalised spaces, recurrent and significant in the novels of the diaspora. In particular, I identified two *loci*, both important for the plot and the analysis: airport and train station. Whereas the dominant critical approach considers these places as universal or global, I argue that, on the contrary, Somali novels point out how the latter, labelled *non-lieux* [non-places] by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, are re-shaped and re-worked according to their locale.⁴⁷ This geocritical approach offers a focal point for understanding the way Somali writers resist Western-centric relations and propose alternative

⁴⁴ Garth Myers, *African Cities. Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*. London-New York: Zed Books, 2011, p. 138.

⁴⁵ Harry Garuba (2017) “Teacherly Texts: Imagining Futures in Nuruddin Farah’s *Past Imperfect* Trilogy.” *Boundary 2*, 44:2, pp. 15-30, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Francesca Orsini (2015) “The Multilingual Local in World Literature.” *Comparative Literature*, 67:4, pp. 345-374.

⁴⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995.

visions of spatiality and space-connections, which foster in their turn a cosmopolitan sense of nationhood, historicity and local traits.

The focus on spatiality also allows us to examine the impact of the Italian colonial era, a period of almost a century in which urban plans, cartography, architecture and spatial forms of ghettoisation moulded and shaped Mogadishu and its inhabitants. By retrieving the vestigial colonial presence in toponymy (Villa Somalia, Albergo Croce del Sud, Lido, Stadio Coni, Cinema Impero) and socio-cultural references (*spaghetti all'amatriciana*, *parmigiano*, Fiat 500), Somali authors describe a multi-layered urban spatiality in which Somali social practices are juxtaposed to Italian customs. The Italian refurbishment of Mogadishu in Garane's novel *Il latte è buono* reveals how the colonial presence was still at play in the late 1960s. The colonial production of space emerges in Garane's novel as a social and political act led by power dynamics. The author, through his protagonist Gashan, shows how the dominant interference of colonial discourse disrupted the *genius loci* –the 'spirit' of the place– and provided it with new meanings and identity articulations. "The café culture, cuisine (pasta became a staple Somali diet) and the unhurried Mediterranean tradition of evening strolling to shop, see and be seen" were adopted in Somali every-day life, suggesting that the influence of the built form was not confined to the architectural level, but linked to cultural and social practices.⁴⁸ By physically alienating colonised subjects through the imposition of new names in a foreign language, and by tangibly modifying the local habits, "colonialism [brought] with it a sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language now used to describe it, a gap between the 'experienced' place and the descriptions the language provides".⁴⁹ This gap, particularly evident in Mogadishu, represents a key feature in the narrative of the diaspora, and it allows us to unravel the various way in which Somali people have experienced colonialism, how the latter shaped the making of their national identity, and how they dealt with the process of decolonisation under the aegis of the Italian rule (1950—1960).

The attempt to re-imagine a lost community and, thus, an entire nation, is particularly evident in Somali Italian authors. They seek to negotiate multiple identities and belongings (between Somalia, Italy and other European nations) by telling and re-telling their personal histories in relation to both the narrative of the diaspora and the lost spatiality of Mogadishu (erased during the civil-war). The grand narrative of the collapse of Somalia looms in their novels, as Somali Italian authors try to find a shared memory in which the idea of the nation is both interrogated and saved from sinking

⁴⁸ Rashid Ali and Andrew Cross, *Mogadishu Lost Moderns*. London: Mosaic Rooms 2016, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007, p. 161.

into oblivion. The starting point to re-tell their stories is the domestic spatiality of Mogadishu, which keeps the memories of their youth or their parents' or relatives' recollections. At the same time, Somali Italian authors reinvent a sense of community in the unwelcoming society of the host country: Rome, then, becomes the centre of the displacement and, appropriately, the other focus of my geocritical urban-based analysis. Being the city where Somali people collide and different stories of the diaspora unravel, Rome is paralleled with Mogadishu in Garane's, Ali Farah's and Scego's novels (but, interestingly, also in Farah). The two capital cities epitomise the long-lasting influences and relationships which have characterised the history of Italy and Somalia, from colonialism to diaspora throughout the civil war.

The close relationship between spatiality and memory implies, then, the association between materiality and narrative. The process of remembering, indeed, is enabled and empowered by the act of writing. Nuruddin Farah explicitly expresses this relation by asserting his aim to "keep [his] country alive by writing about it".⁵⁰ Again, the concept of spatiality is productive in incorporating several notions intertwined one another: social relations, dynamics of power, construction of memory, architecture and writing processes. They are all connected to the representation, the re-appropriation and the re-imagination of space. Somali novels, specifically, become themselves imaginary spaces of the same 'interliterary community', where often fragmented, inconclusive and on-going perspectives coexist.

The dialectic process between different positions about nationhood, multiple belongings, colonialism and neocolonialism, is articulated through the polyphonic character of the novel form. In this regard, Somali novels of the diaspora allow us to question fixed assumptions about both literature and language. They also lead to a re-examination of the notion of literary tradition as founded on forms of nativism, such as nationality, language and the authors' origins. In Somalia, for example, historical and cultural overlapping layers can be retrieved within the same locale, such as the pre-colonial Arabic influence in the North, the Portuguese presence on the coastal towns of the South, included Mogadishu, the Italian colonial occupation, the Ethiopian coexistence along the Western borders of the Ogaden Region, the British and French administration, the linguistic protectionist laws during Barre's dictatorship and the deep-rooted oral literary tradition. All these intersecting networks have created a complex linguistic texture that cannot be only described

⁵⁰ Maya Jaggi, "Nuruddin Farah: A Life in Writing." *The Guardian*, 21 September 2012, par. 2, www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/sep/21/nuruddin-salah-life-in-writing. Accessed 10 May 2020.

through the power relation between coloniser and colonised, nor with the relationship between the colonial language (Italian) and the vernacular one (Somali).

This thesis then challenges Western-oriented understandings about Somalia and its literature that ignore indigenous languages as either ancillary or inferior to the colonial ones. The purpose of this study is, conversely, to break down previous theoretical assumptions by analysing which strategies Somali novels employ towards English, Italian but also Somali, without assuming the latter's "dependence and subordination from the putative metropolitan centres".⁵¹ In doing so, I suggest examining three main aspects related to language, which may be considered epitomes of the literary postcolonial approach: the dichotomy of colonial vs. vernacular language, the use of intertextuality and the influence of orature. Language, then, becomes the second 'meeting point' of Somali contemporary novels. I aim to show, against any assumption of linguistic hegemony, the "interwoven aesthetics and politics of [Somali] postcolonial novels" in English and Italian, "and how they have been in dialogue with each other" and with local forms of expression, not necessarily related to the colonial presence.⁵² In other words, I aim to show how Somali novels are both globally influenced and locally produced, without supporting the idea of the latter as a synonym for 'provincial' and hierarchically inferior to the former.

On the contrary, the analysis will illustrate how, for example, Somali novels in Italian are affected by and related to their local Italian background (in the case of Ali Farah and Scego) and also to their Somali one (as in Garane's novel). Also, the analysis will demonstrate, through the close reading of *Links*, how Farah unsettles the binary hierarchy between languages in a postcolonial context, by showing how it breaks down when a specific setting (Somalia) allows two colonial languages to compete (English and Italian) and the vernacular one (Somali) to be the expression of dictatorship. Garane's *Il latte è buono*, in turn, shows how the concept of orature has been applied uncritically in Italian postcolonial studies, without addressing its specificity within the Somali literary context. While described as typically 'African', orature has been disconnected from its context, thus suffering from an a-historical universalism. The latter generalisation allowed, in other words, Italian scholars to employ it as an all-purpose critical tool to denote the 'Africanness' of the

⁵¹ Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini (2018) "Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature." *Journal of World Literature*, 3:3, pp. 290-310, p. 293.

⁵² Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini (2018) "Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: For a Ground-up and Located Approach to World Literature." *Modern Languages Open*, 1:19, pp. 1-8, p. 4.

texts.⁵³ Ultimately, concerning intertextuality, this thesis explores the complex network of intra-textual and intertextual references to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* in Farah's *Links*. My analysis suggests that, on the one hand, Farah employs Dante's narrative poem to address and represent the civil-war context of Somalia from the protagonist's point of view, by placing it in relation to a well-known text as the *Comedy*. On the other, he subverts and re-contextualizes *Inferno* to generate new meanings and to distance his novel from Dante's literary antecedent.

It is important to show how the novels interact with the linguistic background of the place in which they are produced, the country of birth of the author and the latter's knowledge of the language employed for literary purposes; also, the interrelation between Somali and Italian culture and literary tradition should be addressed as well. For example, through the examination of orature and intertextuality, this thesis shows how the novels are connected with multilocal literary contexts, such as the Italian and the Somali backdrop. To paraphrase Foucault, this analysis aims to disturb the tranquillity with which leading theoretical approaches are acknowledged and to "question [...] those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset".⁵⁴ By taking multilingualism and multilocality into account, this thesis proposes a multilevel perspective on postcolonial writing and postcolonial language-related analyses. I argue that Somali novels, in particular, represent "at once carriers of national and familial traditions and emblems of cultural and personal identity", but also "identity-grounding homes under conditions of displacement and means of intervention into identity-fixing cultural agendas".⁵⁵ This definition brings together the concepts of diaspora, identity and nationhood as intertwined with language, and leads us to the two last aspects explored in this thesis, namely the representation and interpretation of historical events (dictatorship and the civil war) and the idea of literary tradition.

Accordingly, one of the arguments of Chapter 4 is how to analyse the interplay between the multiple locales of Somali novels and, more specifically, how to relate Somali Italian writings to the canon of Italian literature, which still "takes the nation (and national language) as foundational, and

⁵³ Similarly, Derek Wright has emphasised how orality plays a less romantic and more problematic role in Nuruddin Farah's novels. Farah avoids enhancing the oral tradition, like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* or Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, by showing "how indigenous traditions, oral as well as domestic, have themselves been implicated in the new political tribulations and terrors of the independent state." Derek Wright, *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah*. Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University, 1994, p. 52.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault [1969] *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2008, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Angelika Bammer (ed.) *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. XVI.

any idea of area as culturally autonomous.”⁵⁶ In doing so, I propose reading Somali Italian production and ‘Letteratura della Resistenza’ (Italian Resistance Literature) together.⁵⁷ This comparative approach aims to overcome any strictly nation-based theorisation of literary tradition, namely a homogenous and monolingual corpus of literary works in which only Italian-born (and white) authors should be included. Locating Somali Italian writers’ works within the broad continuum of Italian studies restores a neglected ‘Italian’ dimension by providing a significant critical context for the ideas that inhabit their novels and comparing them within the literary historicity of which they are part. At the same time, the novels by Somali authors have contributed to changing Italian literature itself, which should be opened up, accordingly, to a more transnational dimension of analysis and in favour of the more inclusive idea of ‘interliterary community’.

Furthermore, Somali Italian authors, in their writings, bring to the fore a twofold enquiry connected with identity. On the one hand, they engage with the “complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’ and make them the immanent subject” of their novels.⁵⁸ In other words, they discuss the idea of the Somali nation after the historical event of the civil war, addressing the role played by patriarchy and *qabiilism* but, also, they negotiate their feeling of belonging towards the former colonial metropole. On the other hand, Somali Italian authors also challenge the supposed sameness of the Italian society by placing themselves in dialogue with the Italian literary tradition, and arising questions such as “Who are the Italians?” and “What does it mean to be Italian?”.⁵⁹ In this sense, their novels work along transnational axes but, at the same time, they operate between and across different local realities within the same literary space.

By comparing these novels with canonical texts of the Italian literary canon, this thesis aims to retrieve underexplored interrelations and exchanges between post-war Italian writers (Italo Calvino, Luigi Meneghello, Beppe Fenoglio) and postcolonial Somali authors writing in Italian. These two literatures are united by their attempt to reassess the concept of national identity after the civil war (the Italian, between 1943 and 1945, and the Somali, from 1991 to present day) and

⁵⁶ Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini (2018) “Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature.” *Journal of World Literature*, 3:3, pp. 290-310, p. 297.

⁵⁷ Italian Resistance Literature is an umbrella term to define the post-war literary production (novels, short stories, poems, songs, memoirs) connected to the partisan fight and the liberation of Italy from Nazi-Fascism.

⁵⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 201.

⁵⁹ Giuliana Benvenuti (2012) “L’italianità nel tempo della letteratura della migrazione.” *Moderna*, 14:1-2, pp. 207-218.

dictatorship (Mussolini and Barre). This comparison also reveals thematic similarities and shared aesthetic practises in the way writers represent and imagine historical events such as the civil war and dictatorship and the new nation (Italy as well as Somalia) that emerged after them.

It should be clear, at this point, that Somali novels reflect upon social and cultural relations across different geographic locales, investigating at the same time how Somalia's sociopolitical formations and those of the host country have influenced and shaped individual and national identities. The aim here is to examine diachronically the ambiguous and often ill-fated impact of European occupation in comparison with the cultural background and sociopolitical constructs pre-existing and succeeding colonialism. According to Brah's assumption that "diasporas are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure", I argue that one distinctive feature of Somali contemporary authors is the challenge to position themselves in relation to Somalia.⁶⁰ In order to address the responsibilities of both external forces (such as colonialism and American interventions during the civil war) and internal logics (pre-colonial state formations, religion and blood affiliation), they examine the events that have led to the collapse of the nation-state. Accordingly, instead of focusing attention predominantly on the issue of migration, belongings and relations to the host countries, I suggest looking at the way in which Somali authors from the diaspora relate to their locales, linking the idea of the nation to both global and local dynamics.

Somali intellectuals who live far from Somalia inhabit a 'diaspora space', to use Avtar Brah's notion, in which their experiences are internally related and connected to the realities of the host country but, also, to Somalia and to the people and places they left.⁶¹ In this regard, Nuruddin Farah states that "stories are never told simply about the characters alone, but about a whole nation, which is the more important story".⁶² In the Somali case, the urge to write stories about the nation goes along with the need for writing the history of the nation itself, as the latter has collapsed after the civil war. Scholar Annie Gagiano emphasises that "like Fanon, too, Farah's oeuvre illustrates his awareness that 'the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise

⁶⁰ James Clifford (1994) "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology*, 9:3, pp. 302-338, p. 193.

⁶¹ Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora space should be understood as a conceptual category that is "inhabited not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are contracted and represented as indigenous." Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London-New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 181, 209.

⁶² Nuruddin Farah (1989) "A combining of gifts: an interview." *Third World Quarterly*, 11:3, pp. 171-187, p. 186.

that the truth of a nation is in the first place its realities”⁶³. This statement can also be applied to Somali novels more broadly, since they share ideas of Somalia and Somaliness that appear exceptionally coherent considering the different background and generation of the authors. The emergence of a national perspective (is there a Somali nation?), instead of any sectarian narratives (are there independent ethnic groups only?), is evident in the way in which Somali writers place the nation at the centre of their fiction.

This reflection on the meaning of Somalia as a nation, which involves the ‘sense of place’, collective and individual memories, religious, ethnic and clan belongings, and language, is characterised by overlapping, competing and contrasting tendencies.⁶⁴ As Edward Said has noted, “from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory [...] is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to an insider’s understanding of one’s country, tradition, and faith”.⁶⁵ In this notion of memory as a historical and social enterprise, ‘invention’ has played a central role in the making of Somali identity. For example, Italian colonial discourse fashioned the invention of Somali people as a community hierarchically divided into nomads (free men) and sedentary farmers (slaves), so to maintain control by breaking the pre-existent concentration of power into pieces.⁶⁶ Also, the identification of Somalis as warlords and pirates was a practice used by mass media and Western political leaders as a neocolonial practice to stigmatise Somali people and justify acts of wars. In this sense, the title *The Invention of Somalia* (1995) of the collection of essays edited by scholar Ali Jimale Ahmed is telling in emphasising the pivotal necessity to withdraw from dominant Western discourses and to reassess or discard them.⁶⁷

It is then fruitful to examine Somali contemporary novels precisely because they investigate the question of what becomes the sense of home not only in a diasporic context, but also in the case

⁶³ Annie Gagiano (2006) “Surveying the Contours of ‘a Country in Exile’: Nuruddin Farah’s Somalia.” *African Identities*, 4:2, pp. 251-268, p. 253.

⁶⁴ Lately, Somali historians from the diaspora are trying to look at the several narratives of the nation’s past, made up by contrasting memories, different cultural roots, disputed qabiil affiliation [clan] and languages. This on-going debate about national history is, eventually, related to the idea of a collective identity. Far from being settled, the issue of national identity has ultimately become the prerogative of Somali scholars, after almost a century in which the production of cultural and historical information about Somalis was tied to European discourses. Safia Aidid, “Can the Somali speak?” *Africa Is a Country*, March 2015, africasacountry.com/2015/03/can-the-somali-speak-cadaanstudies.

⁶⁵ Edward Said (Winter, 2000) “Invention, Memory, and Place.” *Critical Inquiry*, 26:2, pp. 175-192, p. 176.

⁶⁶ Ali Mumin Ahad, “The ‘Historic Sins’ of Colonialism in Somalia.” *Journal of Somali Studies*, 6:1, 2019, pp. 9-40.

⁶⁷ Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

of a state-less situation. They also investigate how *homeness* can be related, simultaneously, to a geographical place, an imaginary and bygone idea of the nation, and to the hybrid, fluid, travelling and movable cultural identity of the diasporic subjects. Somali literature stages this tension, which can be called, in Stuart Hall's terms, "the double consciousness of the exile, of the migrant, of the stranger who moves to another place, who has this double way of seeing it, from the inside and the outside".⁶⁸ This inside and outside perspective of diasporic contexts, emphasised also by Alexander Weheliye's explanation previously quoted, emphasises the shared themes of Somali writings and allows us to reflect more closely on what can be considered distinctive or specific in the Somali literary case.⁶⁹

However, this thesis does not propose arbitrary categories to define or classify a growing body of novels written by authors of Somali background. The aim, then, is to recover and investigate a series of neglected or underexplored aspects of this diasporic literary production, frequently organised and studied along geographic or linguistic criteria, or within the same theoretical field (Anglo-American postcolonial studies or Italian postcolonial studies) without any attempt to consider the cross-fertilisation of ideas between different but cognate disciplines. For example, the way in which contemporary Somali authors employ Italian differs tangibly from the use of English as a former colonial language, as described in the literary postcolonial landscape. Also, the fictional representation of space, frequently centred in the capital city and recurrent key-places, emerges as part of a shared aesthetic apparatus in the transnational and multilingual contexts in which Somali authors write.

Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1, "Fictionalised Urbanscapes: Mogadishu and Rome", investigates the fictionalisation of both Mogadishu and Rome in the novels by Nuruddin Farah, Garane Garane, Afdhere Jama, Fadumo Korn, Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, Igiaba Scego and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel. The stories told in these novels blend into Mogadishu and Rome, as if these capital cities are the centres of both centripetal and centrifugal diasporic movements. Concerning Mogadishu, the way in which it is fictionalised underlines the necessity, for Somali writers, to retrieve the cosmopolitan and

⁶⁸ Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996, p. 381.

⁶⁹ Alexander G. Weheliye, "My Volk to Come: Peoplehood in Recent Diaspora Discourse and Afro-German Popular Music." In: D. C. Hine, T. D. Keaton, S. Small (eds.) *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 161-80, p. 162.

secularised past of their native city and to keep it alive by writing about it, as Farah suggests.⁷⁰ Of particular relevance in this chapter is the focus on specific physical places of the two cities, recurrent in the narrations of the diaspora. Each section of the chapter is then focused on these key places, accordingly: the airports of Mogadishu and Rome (*Links*, *Crossbones*, *Il latte è buono*, *Liido Beach*, *Il comandante del fiume* and *Born in the Big Rains*), and Termini train station in Rome (*Il latte è buono*, *Madre piccola*, *Lontano da Mogadiscio*, *Oltre Babilonia* and *La mia casa è dove sono*). These spatialities foster an analysis about the conflict between identity and belonging, as experienced by diasporic Somali characters (the airport) and the estrangement of living in the former motherland (Termini station). The latter place emerges as a hub that tells several stories of immigration, racism and also resilience. It will be shown how Termini represents the site where Somali refugees and exiles attempt to build a new sense of community and, at the same time, it arises as a place of exclusion and ghettoisation.⁷¹ These cities represent, to appropriate Édouard Glissant's argument, *loci* where the past can be found.⁷² By developing an archaeological notion of time, he suggests that the past is visible in the traces it leaves on landscapes and languages, that is, on different spheres of reality that are all records of past events. I proceed to offer a comparative reading between a colonial guidebook from the 1930s and the fictional descriptions of the city made in the novels. Drawing this connection allows us to reflect on the legacy of Italian colonialism and its power, through cartographic practices, mapping and organisation of space, in shaping the formation of the individual self in post-independence Somalia. To this end, the analysis emphasises how Somali authors bring to the fore the social and historical complexity of Mogadishu, in stark contrast to the simplified, a-historical and dehumanised representation provided by the mass media. Therefore, the first geocritical focus addresses the role played by spatiality in shaping Somali identities, exploring the tension between the enduring physical presence of Italian toponymy and architecture and the Somali context of independence after the colonial period. In doing so, the novels by Garane (*Il latte è buono*) and Jama (*Liido Beach*) will be analysed, as they highlight the bond between the architectural form and the hybrid identity of the protagonists.

Chapter 2, entitled “The Question of Language: The Italian Presence in Farah’s *Links*”, engages with the question of language and, more specifically, with the use of Italian in Farah’s *Links*. I argue that Farah takes an unconventional path in the way in which he employs the Italian language; rather

⁷⁰ Maya Jaggi, “Nuruddin Farah: A Life in Writing.” *The Guardian*, 21 September 2012, par. 2, www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/sep/21/nuruddin-salah-life-in-writing. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

⁷¹ Nick Mdika Tembo (2017) “Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah’s *Little Mother*.” *Scrutiny*2, 22:2, pp. 65-81, p. 67.

⁷² Édouard Glissant [1996] *Poetica del diverso*. Translated by F. Neri. Rome: Meltemi, 1998.

than considering it as a mere colonial means of power, he nuances the role of the Italian language, which becomes a literary medium that gives to the main characters an emotional and nostalgic denotation; however, it becomes also an interpretative tool to better understand Somalia's realities. This latter aspect is emphasised by the analysis of Dante's "Inferno" in relation to *Links*. By analysing the quotations from the poem, this chapter wishes to show how the *Comedy* informs the novel at various levels, from the paratext (since Dante's tercets from "Inferno" are chosen as an epigraph) to the text itself (since "Inferno" appears to be deeply constitutive of *Links*). The analysis then suggests that, on the one hand, Farah employs Dante's poem to address, represent and understand the civil-war context of Somalia from the protagonist's point of view. On the other, he subverts and recontextualises "Inferno" to create new meanings and to distance his novel from Dante's literary antecedent. Therefore, by studying the practices of intertextuality between the two texts, this essay aims to investigate both the converging and conflicting strategies enabled in the novel.

Chapter 3, "The Spoken Word Meets the Script: *Il latte è buono* and the Role of Somali Orature" explores the employment of Somali orature in Garane's *Il latte è buono*. The latter has been generally overlooked in Garane, despite being a crucial aspect of Somali tradition. Scholar Maria Grazia Negro notes that it has been studied according to a generalised 'African' logic, with little attention to the local Somali framework.⁷³ Accordingly, the chapter aims to retrieve the specificity of Somali oral tradition and analyses how it is used by Garane in the written form.

Chapter 4, "A Poetics of Resistance: Somali Postcolonial Literature and *Letteratura sulla Resistenza*", aims to analyse the works by Somali Italian writers –Igiaba Scego and Uba Cristina Ali Farah– in order to trace their relationship with the so-called 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' [Italian Resistance Literature]. I suggest that a connection exists between the latter, which flourished after –and from– the experience of World War II and the collapse of Fascism, and Italo-phonetic Somali writings.⁷⁴ In particular, the chapter will show how certain aesthetic principles of 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' –mainly defined by Italo Calvino– present similarities with the formal features of the postcolonial

⁷³ Maria Grazia Negro, "«Un giorno sarai la nostra voce che racconta»: la questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana." In: F. Sinopoli (ed.) *Postcoloniale italiano. Tra letteratura e storia*. Aprilia, IT: Nova Logos, 2013, pp. 55-75, p. 58.

⁷⁴ The Italian resistance movement (*Resistenza italiana* or *la Resistenza*) is an all-encompassing term for Italian resistance groups during World War II. It opposed both the forces of Nazi Germany as well as the local regime, the Italian Social Republic, especially after the German military occupation of Italy between 1943 and 1945. The movement rose among Italians of various social classes, and it is also known as the Italian partisan fight (*lotta partigiana*). The modern Italian Republic was declared to be founded on the struggle of the Resistance.

production of the 2000s –in particular with Scego and Ali Farah. Therefore, this convergence invites a comparison between these two literary outcomes, which have never been associated in academic studies. This chapter charts the significant –yet critically neglected– relation with the Italian literary tradition thus challenging the idea that postcolonial writings in the Italian language are unrelated to the development of the canonical literature or what is generally referred to as ‘national’ literary tradition. On the contrary, I aim to show the fluidity of the influences between texts and paradigms so as to expand the concepts of both ‘postcolonial literature’ and Italian literature beyond their traditional categorisation. By comparing the particular historical and literary background of the post-war period with postcolonial productions, it turns out that these narratives share a similar approach to language, to the concept of nation in relation to identity and, above all, to the representation of civil war contexts. This latter aspect has been critically neglected, but it emerges as the primary historical bond between Italy and Somalia: both nations underwent dictatorship (Benito Mussolini and Siyaad Barre as leaders of one-party government) and civil war. Despite the vast differences between these two historical periods, I aim to show that the two literary productions which followed these events share aesthetic and thematic features and, moreover, suggest a fruitful perspective for reassessing the theoretical approach both to the Italian literary tradition and postcolonial writing from Italy.

Chapter 1.

Fictionalised urbanscapes: Mogadishu and Rome

Sicinius. What is the city but the people?
Citizens. True, the people are the city.

–SHAKESPEARE, *Coriolanus*.

“My theory is, the greatest casualty of the civil war is that the idea of cosmopolitanism is the one that has died. What destroyed Somalia is this clan business.”

–NURUDDIN FARAH, *Interview* (2015)

A recurring trope within the novels by Somali authors of the diaspora is the representation of urban spaces. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mogadishu exerts a gravitational pull on Anglophone authors, while Italophone writers also elect to position Rome, along with the capital city of Somalia, at the centre of their narratives. However, despite the prominence of these two cities in Somali diasporic fictions, the way in which they are represented and how they connect authors of the diaspora have received little attention by critics.¹ Even less has been said about the relationship, the representation and the legacy of colonial toponymy when connected with Somali cityscape or landscape.² What follows is then a comparative account of the fictionalised spatiality of both Mogadishu and Rome.

Specifically, this chapter aims to show how the representation of both cities is strictly related to the making of Somali national and self-identity in the post-independence and post-war period. The starting point of the following analysis is that the fictionalisation of the two cities is not limited to

¹ As already mentioned, the works of Liberatore and Kapteijns look at direct testimonies and poems, respectively. Only one section of Kapteijns’ book, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia*, analyses two novels, Abdirrazak Y. Osman’s English-language *In the Name of the Fathers* (1996) and Faysal Axmed Xasan’s Somali-language *Maandeeq* (2000). Even though these two authors, unlike those considered here, “are not afraid to “speak clan” and mention specific clan names throughout their narratives”, they also agree in considering clan affiliations as a dangerous and imposing framework in which to inscribe the idea of the nation. Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia. The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, pp. 55-60.

² For notable exceptions to this rule, see Daniele Comberiati (2017) “Inchiostro indelebile. Passeggiate letterarie nella Roma riscritta dalla comunità somala (1998-2003).” *In Verbis. Lingue, Letterature, Culture*, 8:1, pp. 153-168. Laura Lori, “Rome: The Former *Caput Mundi* Between Postcolonialism and Cosmopolitanism”, *New Scholar: An International Journal of The Humanities, Creative Arts and Social Sciences*, 4:1, pp. 77-88.

the physical and architectural but involves social and relational connections as shaping factors in the ‘mapping of’ identity formation of Somalis and their nation. This approach underlines the need to consider urban settings as cross-cultural sites, which serve as reservoirs and channels for new meaning and processes of invention.³

Links (2005) and *Crossbones* (2012) by Nuruddin Farah and *Il latte è buono* (*Milk Is Good*, 2005) by Garane Garane are the primary sources of the analysis below. Their works are explored alongside other Anglophone, Italoophone and German novels, including *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (*Far from Mogadishu*, 1996) by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel (born in Mogadishu, now lives between Italy and the UK), *Madre piccola* (*Little Mother*, 2007) and *Il comandante del fiume* (*The River Master*, 2014) by Ubax Cristina Ali Farah (born in Verona, grown up in Mogadishu and now based in Brussels), *Oltre Babilonia* (*Beyond Babilonia*, 2008), and *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My House Is Where I Am*, 2010) by Igiaba Scego (born in Rome). From the Anglophone group: Abdirazak Y. Osman’s *In the Name of our Father* (1997, born in Mogadishu and now based in Denmark) and Afdhere Jama’s *Lido Beach* (2018, Mogadishu-born author who lives in San Francisco). From the German-writing group: Fadumo Korn’s *Born in the Big Rains: A Memoir of Somalia and Survival* (2006, born in Somalia and resettled in Munich).

This chapter aims to investigate, first of all, why Somali postcolonial novels elected Mogadishu as their fictional urban hub and why Rome emerged as another centre of the diaspora. In two different ways, Mogadishu and Rome connect a wide-ranging set of identity-related experiences, being respectively the native city of several authors and one of the main destinations after the outbreak of the civil war. Taken together, they arise as two complex centres of meaning, to paraphrase the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, and as literary places of tension between multiple positions.⁴ Their fictional representations, accordingly, challenge any characterisation of spatiality as singular or essentialist, in favour of a multidirectional understanding of the urban setting, grounded in the cognitive perspectives of its residents. The latter, globally depicted either as victims or pirates, reclaim their role of protagonists, grounding their stories in the “subjective cartographies of the urban space they occupy”.⁵ This aspect should be emphasised, since the idea of the city as a polymorphic object, which cannot be reduced to the sum of its single parts, has been confined to the urban settings of the Western episteme.

³ Alan Blum, *Imaginative Structure of the City*. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003, p. 52-53.

⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 173.

⁵ John Thieme, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 178.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the fictionalisation of urban spatiality is tightly bound to the development of history, from colonialism to the diasporic present, and Somaliness.⁶ Moreover, it aims to show how the literary spatiality of Mogadishu and Rome play a key role in the poetics of Somali authors, as these cities provide a far-reaching understanding of the kaleidoscopic Somali realities in relation to diaspora, identity, community, and nation-making. Mogadishu and Rome are, to rephrase Édouard Glissant's concept, *loci* where the past can be found: developing an archaeological notion of time, he suggests that the past is visible in the traces that it leaves in both landscapes and languages, that is, in different spheres of reality that are all records of past events.⁷

According to Glissant's archaeological notion of *locus*, the structure of this chapter ideally follows the historical development of Mogadishu from the 1930s to 2000s, investigating this development through the urban representation in Garane's *Il latte è buono* and Farah's *Links* and *Crossbones*. My aim is to recover the history of the city and its role in the narrative of the diaspora, arguing that Mogadishu has produced forms of postcolonial expressions and identity but also paved the way for new and broad understandings about the present-day conditions. By looking at the evolution of the city diachronically and by reading the novels of Somali authors, the violence of the civil war becomes connected to a broader timeline (pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence periods) and contrasting ideologies (clan, cosmopolitanism, modernity and traditions) that need a reconfiguration process.⁸ In doing so, the first section focuses the attention on Mogadishu's complex history, thus retrieving its role and representation during the post-independence period. In describing the city, Garane's *Il latte è buono* fictionalises, on the one hand, the so-called 'post-colonial event', namely "the sum of events experienced by the native peoples after independence [as] witnesses, actors and sometimes victims".⁹ On the other, he relates different historical layers

⁶ The same attempt to resist deconstruction and restore the memories of the past by linking the individual to the collectivity can be found in two recent photographic books, both focused on Mogadishu: *Mogadishu Then and Now* (2012) by the photojournalist and writer Rasna Warah (with the contribution of Mohamud Dirios and Ismail Osman), and *Mogadishu Lost Moderns* (2014), edited by the architect Rashid Ali and the photographer Andrew Cross, which both trace back the recent history of Mogadishu. While *Mogadishu Then and Now* deploys frequent quotations by Nuruddin Farah and engages directly the misrepresentation given by the media using literary texts and films (above all Ridley Scott's unfair *Black Hawk Down*), *Mogadishu Lost Moderns* relies on images (colonial and contemporary pictures) and texts, including a short story written by Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, with the aim to document the eerie destruction of the city and to suggest the possibility of a future reborn.

⁷ Édouard Glissant (1996) *Poetica del diverso*. Translated by F. Neri. Rome: Meltemi, 1998.

⁸ Annie Gagiano (2006) "Surveying the Contours of a Country in Exile: Nuruddin Farah's Somalia." *African Identities*, 4:2, pp. 251-268, p. 263.

⁹ Alessandro Triulzi, "African cities, historical memory and street buzz." In: Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds.) *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 78-91, p. 79.

to the development of both the city and the country, in order to highlight continuities and ruptures between the past and the present. The large-scale violence of the civil war, called by Lidwien Kapteijns a ‘key shift’ in Somali history, has affected Somali people, completely altering the course of national development and also influencing social articulations.¹⁰ From the diaspora, Somali authors then look back at the capital city as a site for investigating colonialism, the national collapse, and exploring possible futures.¹¹ Indeed, Mogadishu had been the port city of the Ajuran Sultanate from the thirteenth to the late seventeenth-century; it traded with other major cities of that time, from Cairo to Damascus, and managed to defeat the Portuguese Empire in 1542. Later, Mogadishu became the capital city of Italian Somaliland from 1905 to 1943. It has witnessed the birth of the first freedom movements and Somali political parties in the late 1940s, under the British administration; finally, it was the centre of power during the dictatorship (1969—1991) and experienced a long-lasting civil war. This rich history has been shaped by European (Portuguese, British, Italian), Arabian and African influences, which have left traces of a non-Eurocentric cosmopolitan culture at the spatial level, and in terms of architecture, toponymy and urban plans in particular. However, the prevalent images of Mogadishu conveyed from the early 1990s by Western media are connected to destruction, armed conflict and ruins, so that the city emerged worldwide as an emblem of African warfare.

This diachronic and comparative approach, which does not engage with colonialism alone but also with the ways in which Somali fictions interpret the civil war, is set against ‘established’ approaches that label the city as a ground zero. The discursive dimension of Mogadishu’s spatiality, when viewed through a transnational and multilingual analysis, allows us to underscore how the capital city operates as a so-called *lieu de mémoire* [site of memory], a concept that resonates with Glissant’s concept of *locus*.¹² Thus, the analysis that follows considers the city as a complex urban reality shaped over centuries, and with a history that dates back to Medieval times. In particular, I aim to explore how the city changed and influenced Somali people’s self and national identity through the descriptions made by Garane and in parallel with maps and documents from the 1930s. In doing

¹⁰ Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia. The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p. 2.

¹¹ Winfried Speitkamp, *Breve storia dell’Africa*. Turin: Einaudi, 2010, pp. 29-39. Garth Myers, *African Cities*, pp. 146-47.

¹² Scholar Lidwien Kapteijns explains that a “*lieu de mémoire* is a site of collective memory around which individuals and groups generate memories in such a way that these recollections make sense to them and ‘work’ for them, for example by allowing them to see themselves in a particular way or by allowing them to persuade others of something.” Kapteijns investigates the role of Mogadishu in Somali poetry, thus leaving room for further analysis focused on prose. Lidwien Kapteijns, “Making memories of Mogadishu in Somali poetry about the civil war.” In: Lidwien Kapteijns and Annemiek Richters (eds.) *Mediations of violence in Africa: Fashioning New Futures From Contested Pasts*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010, pp. 25-74, p. 35.

so, I proceed to offer a comparative reading between a colonial guidebook from the 1930s and the fictional descriptions of the city made in Garane's novel, which shows how Fascist architecture, though recontextualised after the end of colonialism, still played a fundamental role in the 1960s in shaping the protagonist's identity and his idea of Somaliness. Drawing this connection allows us to reflect on the legacy of Italian colonialism and its power in shaping the formation of the individual self in post-independence Somalia. Therefore, the first geocritical focus addresses the role played by spatiality in relation to cartographic practices, mapping and spatial organisation, thus exploring the tension between the enduring physical presence of Italian toponymy and architecture and the Somali post-independence context.

The making of a fictionalised Mogadishu foregrounds the need to engage with history for a better understanding of the diasporic present; Somali authors reassess the history of their nation to re-establish a sense of community in which clan affiliations are neither valid nor useful categories to the making of national identity. Accordingly, Somali characters in these novels are never alien to more significant historical events, which have led them to their present of displacement. In different ways, they are intertwined with the events of their country and, at the same time, their personal stories are associated with global migration movements. Mogadishu, then, embodies the "most powerful and unifying symbol" of postcolonial Somali writings: the concept of homeland.¹³ The protagonists' love vs. hate relationship with the city finds its fulfilment in the complex and unique affiliation with its spatiality, namely with social relations established between fellow citizens and the physical location.

In order "to overturn predominant readings of Africa", the following analysis "identifies sites within the continent, entry and exit points not usually dwelt upon in research and public discourse, that defamiliarise common-sense readings of Africa".¹⁴ Particular places, emblematically important at both narratological and symbolical level, reappear often in the novels of the diaspora, both in Anglophone and Italoophone writings and I have identified them in the airport and the train station. Their recurrence also allows us to link Mogadishu to Rome and look at these two cities comparatively, as two *loci* of the diaspora. Both the airport and the station do not merely embody transient and atemporal places, but they function socially, historically and textually. The close and comparative reading of different novels, Farah's *Links* and *Crossbones*, Garane's *Il latte è buono*, Jama's

¹³ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) "Beyond «Culture»: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:1, pp. 6-23.

¹⁴ Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) "Writing the World from an African Metropolis." *Public Culture*, 16:3, pp. 347-372, p. 352.

Lido Beach, Korn's *Born in the Big Rains* and Ali Farah's *Il comandante del fiume*, will show how airports are transformed from ahistorical *lieux* into places deeply grounded in history, in their local context and influenced by social practices. I aim to show that, in the present day of migrations, transient places such as airports, shopping malls or hotel rooms become sites where identities and belonging are questioned. Also, the multi-layered spatiality of the train station of Termini in Rome will be analysed in terms of how it epitomises the struggle to build a sense of community in the host country. Through the accounts of Garane, Scego, Ali Farah and Fazel, but also Farah, who emphasises the plurality of diasporic experiences across different times and languages, this section aims to underline the importance of spatiality for Somali characters of the diaspora in building themselves an ideal homeland, re-establishing social practices and cultural activities, experiencing exclusion and ghettoisation, and retrieving a sense of community along the lines of nationality.¹⁵ I will show then how Somali people of the diaspora, who arrived in Rome during the mid-1990s, reconfigure Termini, one of the supposed *non-lieux* like the airports. This physical and material process is also a literal and textual one, as Somali authors show specific discursive modes of representation, such as linguistic re-appropriation and reterritorialisation, which aim to domesticate the former Italian language and signal their presence in the unwelcoming motherland. In doing so, their novels present a continuous space-time crossing between Rome and Mogadishu, between the colonial past and the diasporic present.

1.1 Architecture and the legacy of the colonial encounter

The second chapter of *Il latte è buono* (2005), entitled 'Mogadiscio la noiosa' ['Boring Mogadishu'], is set during an unspecified period, roughly between the end of the AFIS phase (1950—60) and the beginning of Siyaad Barre's regime (1969). Garane describes Mogadishu from two conflicting viewpoints, personified in the characters of Gashan (the protagonist, a fictional alter-ego of the author) and Shakhlan (queen of the Ajuran people and Gashan's putative grandmother). I argue that this bifocal representation of urban spatiality allows us to investigate the multiple and often conflictual trajectories in the process of nation-building and in the making of the Somali self.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nick Mdika Tembo (2017) "Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother*." *Scrutiny*2, 22:2, pp. 65-81, p. 67.

¹⁶ Garane's fictionalisation of Mogadishu is unique because the presence of the city in that period is absent in literature. About the AFIS and the following Independence period there are reportage, journal articles and personal accounts, but no literary works (*A Naked Needle* [1976], the first novel by Farah entirely based in Mogadishu, described the post-revolutionary Somali life in the mid-1970s). For historical and journalist accounts of that period, see Mohamed Aden Sheikh, *Arrivederci a Mogadiscio*. Rome: Edizioni Associate, 1994. Mohamed Osman Omar, *The Road to Zero: Somalia's Self-Destruction*. London: Haan Associates Publishing,

Accordingly, in the 1960s, the government tried to bury clannism to pursue nation-building practices soon after the unification of Somalia Italiana and British Somaliland. This endeavour, however, clashed with other dynamics, such as “the distance between the north and the capital in Mogadishu” in terms of political and economic interests, but also different linguistic and cultural affiliations that worked against the realisation of a shared idea of nationhood.¹⁷ Accordingly, the novel digs into the post-independence period, when national identity was still subjected to contrasting trends and paradigmatic oppositions between colonialism, pre-colonial sociopolitical formations and the pull towards sovereignty. The following analysis will show how Garane reads this period as a conflict between two nations in the same country, addressing some of the main issues connected to the making of nationhood after the unification, such as clan ideology, South-North conflict, and the Italian political and cultural influence.

In this socio-historical context, architecture emerged as “a way for the country to assert its identity” after the Fascist urban plans of the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸ Accordingly, architect Rashid Ali suggests that architecture itself “tells the story of Somalia’s journey from traditional African nation, via colonisation and post-colonialism, to emergent independent state”.¹⁹ In other words, the urban transformation of the 1960s, as well as the Italian plans of the 1930s, provide a specific visual identity of the city that can be explored through its literary representation. The novel also reveals how the practices of the colonial discourse were not confined to the collection of narratives, statements, and opinions dealing with colonised subjects, but they also involved urban planning, architecture and, more broadly, the organisation of space. Inevitably, the influence of the latter “was not confined to the built form”, but also shaped “local cultural practices”.²⁰ These two aspects are both present in *Il latte è buono* and revolve around toponymy and the personal geographies of the characters. Through their strolls along the city streets, the two protagonists perceive and comment on the on-going renovation of Mogadishu and express their distinctive points of view. The description of the cities is essential in this context to conveying the tensions and the negotiations between their opposing perspectives.

1993. Pietro Petrucci, *Mogadiscio*. Turin: Nuova Eri Edizioni RAI, 1993. Antonio Cappelli, *Somalia. Il sangue e l'incenso*. Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2011.

¹⁷ Said S. Samatar (1993) “Historical setting: From Independence to revolution”. In: Helen Chapin Metz (ed.) *Somalia: A country study*, Washington: Library of Congress, p. 27. Ian Spears, *Civil war in African states: The search for security*. Boulder: FirstForumPress, 2010, p. 128.

¹⁸ Rashid Ali, Andrew Cross, *Mogadishu Lost Moderns*. London: Mosaic Rooms, 2016, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 15.

Garane, who narrates the conflicting aspects of the transformation that occurred in Somalia during the post-independent period, allows us to compare his novel with texts of the colonial period in which colonial discourse was at work. In this regard, *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana* (*Guide to the Italian East Africa*, 1938, referenced as *Guida* hereafter), a widespread leisure-oriented guidebook published during the Fascist period, emerges as a useful tool to underline how colonial discourse operated in Somalia and, also, how, in the time-setting of *Il latte è buono*, its legacy still endures, even after independence.²¹

It should be noted that Somalia achieved independence and national sovereignty throughout negotiations, and not through armed national liberation struggles as in the case, for example, of Mozambique, Algeria or Cameroon. Independence, instead of being the result of anticolonial wars, had been the outcome of diplomacy and protracted, if not ambiguous, processes of decolonisation.²² It was an Italian administration, namely a United Nations Trust Territory, that ruled the country after the war and guided Somalia to independence from 1950 to 1960. Also, it was meant to provide Somali people with the opportunity to gain experience in political education and self-governance. However, this coexistence between local and old colonial forms of government was shadowed by the presence of Fascist colonial practices. Historian Calchi Novati observes that the AFIS “hindered the creation of a modern Somali nationalism by repressing any radical progress in the fields of economy and education”.²³ Historians Michele Pandolfo, Angelo del Boca and Antonio Morone have a far more negative opinion regarding the AFIS, as they emphasise how previous Fascist institutional roles were reconfirmed by simply changing their denomination.²⁴

Somalia’s historical passage from the Italian rule to independence is grounded in exogenous forms of administration that have imposed themselves upon local pre-colonial state structures, both

²¹ It is reasonable to consider the *Guide to the Italian East Africa* as a widespread publication, since the first edition was printed in 500,000 copies between 1938-39, and sent to just as many Italian families. *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*. Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938, p. 6.

²² Matteo Guglielmo, *Il Corno d’Africa*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 20-21.

²³ Giampaolo Calchi Novati, “National Identities as a By-Product of Italian Colonialism: A Comparison of Eritrea and Somalia.” In: Jaqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds.) *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005, pp. 47-74, p. 65.

²⁴ Also, it should be pointed out that Italian remained the official language from 1950 to 1960 and that the Somali national anthem was the same of the metropole, “Inno di Mameli”. Michele Pandolfo (2013) “La Somalia coloniale: una storia ai margini della memoria italiana.” *Diacronie*, 2:14; Angelo del Boca, *Una sconfitta dell’intelligenza*. Bari: Laterza, 1993; Andrea Naletto, *Italiani in Somalia. Storia di un colonialismo straccione*. Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2011. Antonio Morone, *L’ultima colonia. Come L’Italia è tornata in Africa 1950-1960*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011.

political and religious. In terms of society, the newly autonomous country experienced dichotomizing processes based on opposing tendencies: ‘traditional’ (*qabiil*) versus modern (socialism); agrarian versus urban communities; oral (poetry) versus written (newspaper, novels, plays) culture; finally, emblems of the past (colonial architecture) versus new planning (modernism).

In Mogadishu, these aspects are mixed together and Garane describes them from the point of view of Somali characters, who live in a capital city where, at the time of the story, the clan-based system has vanished, at least superficially, and the social directives that regulated the relationship between Italians and Somalis during Fascism are cleared, as well as former hierarchies are reorganised. Accordingly, Somali people live together in the urban environment without knowing their own blood affiliation, playing *kalscio* (namely ‘football’, a loanword from the Italian *calcio*) and spending their free time eating and strolling. Along via Roma (a street in the city centre, in the Xamar Weyne district), there are clothing stores and ice cream shops. The “long, wide thoroughfares previously used for ceremonial marches become appropriated for new local forms of social, economic and cultural practices”.²⁵ Even though Mogadishu is living its first moments of independence, the presence of Italian colonisation remains ubiquitous, above all in toponymy, which still marks off the legacy of Fascist urban plans. Whereas in the 1930s Italian places had been used for “celebrating the triumph of the Fascist state” and designed with the aim of excluding and controlling the local population, the same places were reorganised by Somali residents during the 1950s and the 1960s.²⁶ However, Somali people also embraced cultural and social colonial practices, such as “the café culture, cuisine (pasta become a staple Somali diet) and the unhurried Mediterranean tradition of evening strolling to shop, see and be seen”.²⁷ In *Il latte è buono*, Garane describes how the post-independence period is marked by this ambiguity:

Mogadiscio era una «Little Italy». Le vie, i negozi, le scuole, i cinema erano all’italiana. Molti nuovi nomi erano diventati parte della cultura somala: via Roma, Corso Italia, Cinema Centrale, Liceo Scientifico Leonardo da Vinci... Garibaldi era più importante dell’Imam, anche se tutti e due avevano avuto la stessa ideologia di tutti i capi. Shakhlan Iman intravedeva il futuro, pieno di morte e di catastrofe. A Mogadiscio, ogni casa, ogni filo elettrico, ogni persona, ogni albero faceva parte di un linguaggio, di un popolo, che riportava Shakhlan alla gloria del passato. La differenza stava nel fatto che qui, a Mogadiscio, agli antenati si erano aggiunte le luci elettriche, il chiasso delle Fiat e il *climatiseur*: la pelle nera voleva trasformarsi in pelle bianca, l’africano in europeo. Vedeva facce imbiancate con una maschera nera.²⁸

²⁵ Rashid Ali and Andrew Cross (eds.) *Mogadishu Lost Moderns*. London: Mosaic Rooms, 2016, p. 10.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 12.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 13.

²⁸ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 45. All the translations of Garane’s *Il latte è buono* are my own.

Mogadishu was a «Little Italy». The streets, the shops, the schools and the cinemas were Italian-like. Many new names had become part of the Somali culture: via Roma, Corso Italia, Cinema Centrale, Liceo Scientifico Leonardo da Vinci... Garibaldi was more important than the Imam, even though both had had the same ideology as all leaders. Shakhlan Iman glimpsed the future, full of death and catastrophe. In Mogadishu, every house, every electric wire, every person, every tree was part of a shared language, of one people, which took back Shakhlan to the glorious past. The difference was that, in Mogadishu, electric lights, Fiat cars' noise and the *climatiseur* joined in with ancestors: the black skin wanted to turn white, the African into European. She saw whitened faces with a black mask.

The city appears in all its bustling transformations but while colonial toponymy provides Gashan with a sense of belonging (as the embodiment of Italian's culture and prestige), Shakhlan Iman (as the incarnation of the precolonial past) experiences what scholar Harry Garuba defines 'postcolonial alienation'.²⁹ Garuba uses this concept to describe "the alienation that results from *the wholesale transference of rural norms into the space of the city*."³⁰ Accordingly, the character of Shakhlan Iman, the Queen of semi-nomadic warrior tribes, notices that the first fracture within Somali society consists of the coexistence between rural and urban norms.³¹ At the time of the story, the line that marks out two different spatialities, rural (nomad pastoralist) and urban (sedentary), has become blurred and caused a sense of bewilderment in the Somali people who have lived, as nomads, outside the city.³² This aspect is also briefly addressed by Igiaba Scego, in her novel *Adua* (2015). One of the protagonists, Zoppe, who lives in a small town of anglers, expresses his uneasiness in visiting the capital city, as "in Mogadishu he felt like a foreigner. Someone from down south, a yokel from Magalo, whom the residents looked at snobbishly and even with a certain pity".³³

The formal structure of the passage abovementioned from of *Il latte è buono* mirrors this fracture experienced by Somali people coming from pastoral areas. In terms of cultural references, Garibaldi

²⁹ Harry Garuba, "No-Man's Land: Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and the Space of Postcolonial Alienation." In: Attie de Lange, Gail Fincham, Jeremy Hawthorn and Jakob Lothe (eds.) *Literary Landscapes. From Modernism to Postcolonialism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, pp. 180-197.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 181.

³¹ In this sense, a character in *Links* stresses this same point of view: "Soon after his arrival, someone has said to him: "Our people are restless nomads in search of city-based fulfilment." In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 330.

³² Nuruddin Farah, "Of Tamarind & Cosmopolitanism", p. 11: "The pastoralist Somalis, who are by nature urbophobic, saw the city as alien and parasitic, and because it occupied an ambiguous space in their hearts and minds, they gradually accumulated hostility towards the city until they became intent on destroying it." This aspect is also present in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (1969), a coming-of-age novel in which Ebla, an eighteen-year-old orphan, runs away from her nomadic and rural environment and escape to Mogadishu hoping for a better life. However, in the city, she finds herself as powerless and dependent on men as she was before.

³³ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Translated by Jamie Richards. London: Jacaranda, 2019, p. 161.

(an emblem of the colonial foreign culture) finds his place along with the Imam (an embodiment of the social and religious structure of the pre-colonial period). The opening paragraph includes the recent Italian influence, while the second underlines the veiled persistence of what Shakhlan calls the “glorious past”, namely traditional cultural and social practices of nomadic people. Lastly, the final paragraph makes the contradiction manifest by bringing to the surface conflicting and concomitant elements: the cult of the ancestors and the electric lights dwell alongside the Fiat and the air-conditioners. In this passage, three other aspects are worth mentioning: first, the alarming allusion –right in the middle of the two paragraphs, as an imaginary glimpse of the future between past and present– to the imminent civil war, foreseen by Shakhlan as the result of the unsolved contradictions of that time. Second, the reference to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, slightly distorted into “whitened skin, black masks”, underlines the epistemic violence of colonialism in the making of colonised subjects’ identity.³⁴ Lastly, it should be noted the evident presence of Italian toponymy, which marks both a sense of belonging (Gashan) and estrangement (Shakhlan).

The use of colonial place names should be looked at with attention, because it both suggests the possibility of a continuity from past to present, and connects *Il latte è buono* with other novels of the Somali diaspora. For example, the same toponymy recurs in Farah’s production, in particular the trilogies ‘Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship’ and ‘Blood in the Sun’, which are set, respectively, in the Mogadishu of the 1970s and 1980s. In *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), for instance, two characters, Loyaan and Margaritta, dine at the restaurant ‘Cappuccetto nero’ and visit the De Martini hospital.³⁵ At the end of *Gifts* (1993), a scene is set at the restaurant and hotel Croce del Sud, also present in Scego’s *La mia casa è dove sono*.³⁶ In *Close Sesame*, the protagonist walks “in the direction of Via Roma, with Mirwaas Mosque to his left and Super Cinema and the Indian-owned shops to his right”.³⁷ ‘Ufficio del Governo’ e ‘Baar Novecento’ also appear in the Italian-related landmarks of Mogadishu in the same novel.³⁸ By using architecture as the repository for the

³⁴ In this case (and in many other passages of the novels), Garane gives a critical perspective of Italian colonialism that, according to historians such as Del Boca, Naletto and Labanca, has been unsystematic, brutal and with a particular inclination to practice without organisation and lack of competence. Italian colonialism changed the very reality of the Somalis, forcing them toward disintegration, erasing clan hierarchies and internal order and differences between nomads and farmers.

³⁵ Nuruddin Farah [1979] *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992, p. 129, 143.

³⁶ Nuruddin Farah [1993] *Gifts*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 235. Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*. Turin: Loescher, p. 30.

³⁷ Nuruddin Farah [1983] *Close Sesame*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992, p. 106. ‘Via Roma’ features also in Scego’s *La mia casa è dove sono*, where it is described at length. Igiaba Scego, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

³⁸ Ivi, pp. 96-97.

legacy of the Italian dominion, Somali authors pay attention to the importance of the colonial past and its influence far beyond the historical period of colonisation.

Through the references to a colonial toponymy, they retrieve the neglected colonial past, often stigmatised as a brief, flippant and Fascist-related period. Farah refers directly to the 1920s-30s Fascist occupation in *Close Sesame*:

[...] pacify a 30,000 population of indigenous extraction so that 300 Italians could live as masters (1930, there were 300 Italians in Mogadishu of whom 40 were women, 230 men and 30 children; of these 84 worked for private business, 70 in the army, and 78 in the civil service; the Somalis of Mogadiscio: 30,000). History (in the 1920s, the years of the Fascist rule) gave to Mogadiscio “*tre buoni ristoranti e tre alberghi così così; tre circoli con ampie sale da ballo,*” two cafes, one cinema hall and six hundred motor-cars”.³⁹

The vernacular use of the Italian language (*così così* [so and so] should have a grave accent) and the overall didactic, documentary tone of the passage is notable. It is useful to compare this description, which mocks the ethnographic style of colonial dispatches and reports, with a guidebook edited by the Consociazione Turistica Italiana (the major and the oldest Italian national tourist organisation, founded on 1884), and entitled *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*. This comparison allows us to investigate Garane’s toponymy, as it clarifies the epistemic violence of the colonial discourse and reveals the enduring influence of the Italians’ ethnographic descriptions in representing Somali people. Also, this contrapuntal reading aims to heuristically emphasise the effects, or the *long durée*, of the colonial encounter, but also to recover the strategies of the hegemonic, Western colonial discourse to represent the African ‘other’ through texts and maps. The *Guida* emerges as a useful source to exhume the colonial production of knowledge, occurred through the mapping of the conquered territories and the stigmatisation of the colonised via real-life ethnographic observations.

The *Guida*, which aims to lead Italian tourists through the towns and landscapes of Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, employs maps, pre-set itineraries, detailed spatial descriptions, calculation of distances, and ethnographic analysis. The guidebook’s purpose was, according to colonial agenda, to control the foreign land and domesticate it, as if it was an extension of the metropole, regulated and functioning according to European values and directories. By “making the world intelligible as a systematic order”, the *Guida* transformed the former colonial territory into a “hierarchically ordered whole”.⁴⁰ This production of knowledge about space arises as an exercise of power over

³⁹ Nuruddin Farah [1983] *Close Sesame*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992, p. 96.

⁴⁰ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge, US: Blackwell, 1994, p. 36.

the people, who were either ignored or subjugated to the hierarchical process of textualizing and mapping their spatial reality. In this regard, the guide advises about the natives' behaviour and custom, so as to help the tourists to familiarise themselves with the environment. For example, Somali are described as “generally smart, generous, but also very often indolent and dissembler”.⁴¹ In this process, native peoples underwent stigmatisation, stereotypization and generalisation, three symbolical practices functional to achieve control over the lands and justify colonial violence.

The following extract from the *Guida*, even if short, is nonetheless useful for remarking upon several features that denote how profoundly Italian colonisation has affected Somali culture and society, as well as Mogadishu's cityscape, especially during the Fascist period. The spatial references of the extract, moreover, will sound familiar to the reader since they are the same that we found in the previous passage of *Il latte è buono* (p. 45). In the latter, toponymy clearly points out the legacy of Fascism and how the colonial planimetry of the city remained untouched during the 1960s, when Garane's novel is set:

Dalla piazza Giama, per la tortuosa e stretta *via Roma*, ci s'interna nel vecchio quartiere AMARUINI, pittoresco dedalo di viuzze senza nome, piazzette e sottopassaggi tra alte, massicce case.

Nelle viuzze laterali, spesso si osservano ancora i tessitori *Rer Hamàr*, emergenti dalla cintola in su dalla buca nella quale si accovacciano innanzi ai loro telai primitivi, da cui escono le policrome «fute (marò) Benádir» anticam. rinomate in tutto l'Oriente.

La *via Roma*, fiancheggiata da numerosi piccoli negozi di arabi, indiani, ebrei e somali (assai poco rimane della produzione locale), discende sulla *via Principe di Piemonte*, che collega il *viale Federazioni* al *Corso Vittorio Emanuele III*.⁴²

From piazza Giama, through the curvy and narrow *via Roma*, one enters the old Amaruini district, a picturesque maze of tiny streets with no names, little squares and underpasses between high and thick houses.

Along the secondary tiny streets, one can still notice the *Rer Hamàr* weavers rising above the belt from the dip where they crouch, before their primitive looms, which produce the polychrome «futa (marò) Benádir», once renowned in the whole Orient.

Via Roma, lined by numerous small shops of Arabs, Indians, Jews, and Somalis (very little remains of local production) descends to *via Principe di Piemonte*, which links *viale Federazioni* to *Corso Vittorio Emanuele III*.

At a stylistic level, the language of the passage is emblematic to recognise how colonial discourse operates: the adjective *pittoresco* [picturesque] is widely used in *Guida* to describe most of the local settlements; similarly, diminutive forms (*viuzze* or *piazzette*) are employed to denote ancient Somali

⁴¹ *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*. Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938, p. 20 (my translation).

⁴² Ivi, p. 570 (my translation).

or Arabs buildings. The use of diminutives promotes a process of infantilisation that aims to downgrade the colonised subject and reiterate his supposed ontological inferiority (see, for example, the use of the adjective ‘primitive’ and the remarks on the lack of a native toponymy). Geographer Emanuela Moreschi notices that the foreign land, unfamiliar and unknown as in this case, was often classified as exotic, picturesque and primitive.⁴³ As shown here, the *Guida* represents no exception, since it employs all these three tools of categorisation to depict Mogadishu. Furthermore, to help the tourist to orient himself within the urban foreign context, the street-level description of the city centre is enhanced and complemented by maps. In the *Guida*, cartography plays a comparable role to that of language, as it partakes in those strategies of knowledge production enabled by the the Italians to dominate and define Somali subjects.

As the Foucauldian scholar J. Brian Harley suggests, maps are always ideological, and they encompass the cultural, social, economic and political milieu of their time. Moreover, they represent a “spatial panopticon” through which colonised subjects can be controlled and subjugated, since maps reorganise space both physically and symbolically, without allowing indigenous people to take part in this process.⁴⁴ The colonised subjects, if present at all, are external elements of their own environment. Accordingly, Harry Garuba affirms that “physical containment was necessary to circumscribe the natural mobility of the body (in space) and discursive containment served to define the limits of the cultural (identity) mobility available to the subject”.⁴⁵ In this regard, Italian colonialism, similarly to the British and French one, through cartography and ethnographic studies aimed to celebrate the African conquest, the achievements of the new-born Empire (1936) and the goals of the civilising mission undertaken by the Italians. A passage of the *Guida* emphasises these aspects distinctly:

In generale, tutti coloro che sono venuti in contatto con gl’Italiani riconoscono la nostra superiorità e i vantaggi della nostra civiltà; e soprattutto i giovani accolgono con gioia le novità che l’Italia porta dovunque, imparano con sorprendente rapidità l’italiano e sono pronti a lavorare e progredire. Gli Italiani, con il loro carattere umanissimo e con l’istintiva penetrazione psicologica, hanno già stabilito un equilibrio nei rapporti con gl’indigeni: non altezzosità e separazione assoluta, ma superiorità e comprensione.⁴⁶

⁴³ Emanuela Casti Moreschi, “L’altrove negato nella cartografia coloniale italiana: il caso Somalia.” In: Emanuela Casti Moreschi and Angelo Turco (eds.) *Culture dell’alterità. Il territorio africano e le sue rappresentazioni*. Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1998, pp. 269-304, p. 272.

⁴⁴ J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map.” In: Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (eds.) *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor*. London-New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 231-47, p. 244.

⁴⁵ Harry Garuba (2002) “Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative.” *Alternation*, 9:1, pp. 87-116, p. 87.

⁴⁶ *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*. Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938, p. 20 (my translation).

In general, all those who came into contact with the Italians, recognise our superiority and the advantages of our civilization; above all, the young people joyfully welcome the innovations that Italy carries everywhere, they learn Italian surprisingly fast and are ready to work and develop. The Italians, with their very compassionate character and instinctive psychological understanding, have established a balance in their relations with the natives: neither arrogance nor absolute separation, but superiority and compassion.

In order to further foreground these practices of ‘civilisation’ and ‘physical containment’, I suggest reading the maps attached to the *Guide to Italian East Africa*. I aim to show how they have been cognate in serving colonial political ends and, by analysing the colonial spatial organisation they provide, I will point out how power relations were put into practice.⁴⁷ Moreover, we can underscore how “the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality.”⁴⁸ Following the description of the itineraries across the city, the guidebook presents a supporting map (Figure 2) that reproduces the coloniser’s aim to control and contain Somali people.⁴⁹ By physically altering and reordering the spatial structure of the urbanscape, thus producing segregation and separation, colonial cartography symbolically mirrors these two main practices. Safia Aidid underlines that “the presence of a large Italian community in Mogadishu [...] circumscribed the mobility of urban Somalis through enforced practices of segregation, which prevented native access to certain neighbourhoods, restaurants, theatres and even sidewalks”.⁵⁰ By looking to a previous map (Figure 1), provided by the Italian Geographical Society in 1912, we can notice that the urban plan to control and separate was at work in Somalia during the Italian Liberal State (1861—1922).⁵¹ The comparison between the two maps aims to emphasise how colonial cartographic practices were already functioning before Fascism, at the beginning of the colonial enterprise, during the post-unification Italian Liberal State.⁵²

The first map dates back to 1912, when the city, which had become the capital in 1908, was ruled by the Italian governor of Somaliland Giacomo De Martino (1910—1916); the second map, attached to the *Guide to Italian East Africa*, was drawn after the Fascist urban plan started in 1928,

⁴⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 178.

⁴⁸ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:1, pp. 6-23, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*. Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938, p. 570.

⁵⁰ Safia Aidid (2011) “*Haveenku Wa Garab* (Women are a Force): Women and the Somali Nationalist Movement, 1943–1960.” *Bildhaan*, 10, pp. 103-124, p. 107.

⁵¹ Michele Checchi (1912) *Somalia italiana: Mogadiscio, pianta dimostrativa delle nuove costruzioni eseguite ed iniziate al 1. ottobre 1912*, [Map], 23454 AFRICA R 8 VIII C 5, Società Geografica Italiana, Rome.

⁵² Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, *L’Africa d’Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale*. Rome: Carocci, 2011. Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism, 1860—1907: Europe’s Last Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

which involved one of the most famous architects of that time: Carlo Enrico Rava (1903—1985).⁵³ As Garane shows in *Il latte è buono*, the Fascist urban plans of the 1930s, imposed on Mogadishu spatiality, affected the identity of Somali people even after Somali independence (1960).

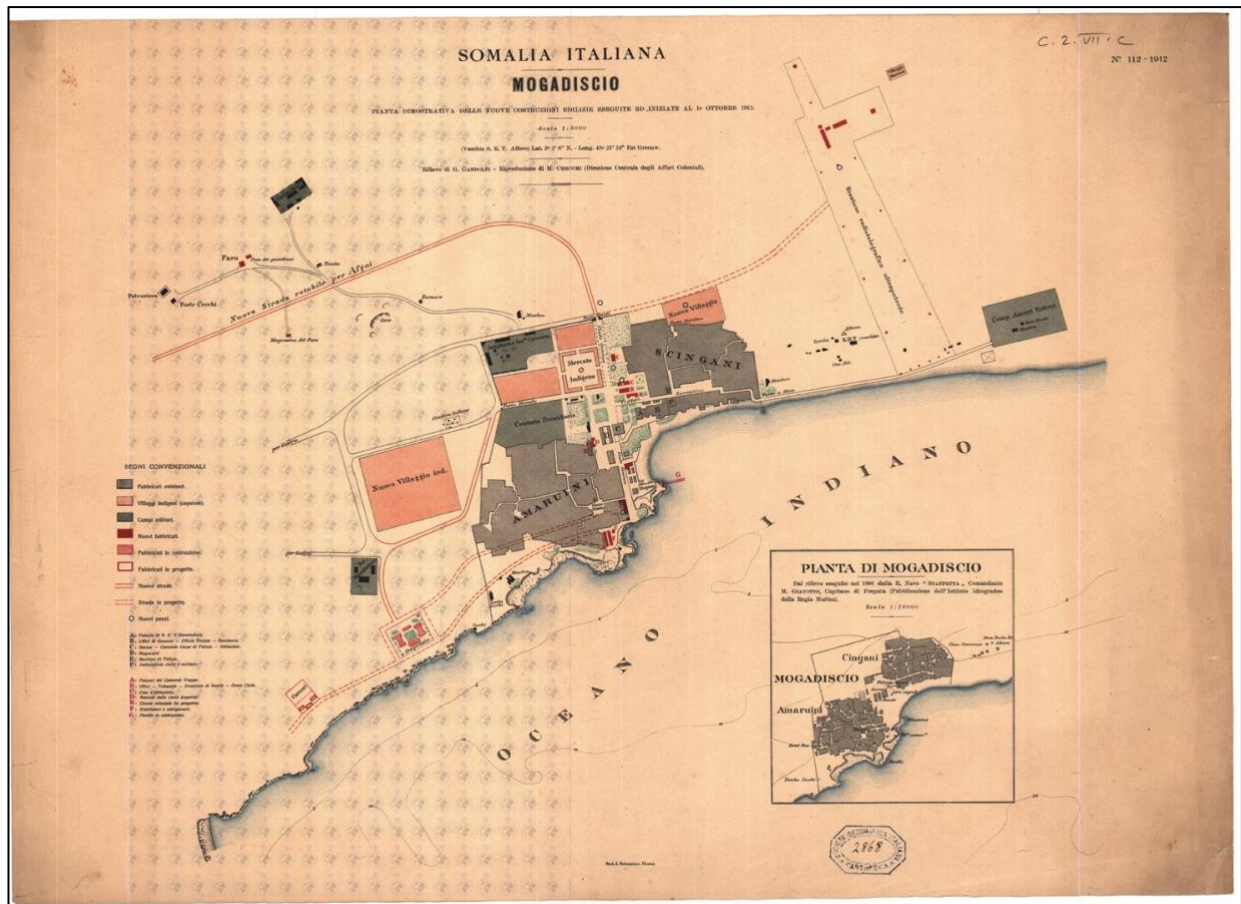


Figure 1: “Somalia Italiana: Mogadishu” (*Società Geografica Italiana*, 1912).

In Figure 1, the toponymy of the pre-existing districts of Xamar Weyne and Shangaani in the old historical centre of Mogadishu highlights the process of linguistic appropriation, as the two districts are Italianised in Amaruíni and Scingani (or Cingani) according to their pronunciation. The rational effort to split Italian colonisers from Somali residents is already clear, since the map marks the two indigenous historical quarters with a different colour and flags them as *fabbricati esistenti* [construction already present]. Also, on the North-East side of the map, far from the arbitrary borders of Mogadishu, we can find the military camp of the Eritrean *askari*, namely the local

⁵³ About Enrico Rava’s colonial architecture: Mia Fuller, “Carlo Enrico Rava. The Radical First Formulations of Colonial Rationalism.” In: Attilo Petruccioli (ed.) *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre 1-2*, Rome: Dell’oca Editore, 1994-1995, pp. 150-159. Brian McLaren, “Carlo Enrico Rava. “Mediterraneità” and the Architecture of the Colonies in Africa.” Attilo Petruccioli (ed.) *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre 1-2*, Rome: Dell’oca Editore, 1994-1995, pp. 160-173. Brian McLaren (2008) “*Casa mediterranea, casa araba* and primitivism in the writings of Carlo Enrico Rava.” *The Journal of Architecture*, 13:4, pp. 453-467.

soldiers serving in the Italian colonial army in Africa. In the same isolated far-off position, but on the opposite site to the *askari*'s camp, South-East, there is the jail building. While Italian offices and headquarters rise up in the ancient city centre (A to F in figure 1 legend), the indigenous villages are pushed beyond the border and occupy the periphery. Borders, as Avtar Brah notes, “are territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others”.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the exclusion and the displacement of indigenous people from the centre can be understood as a system for controlling and physically enabling hierarchies of power. In this regard, in the article “Citizens of Sorrow” (2002), Farah highlights the long-term effects of ghettoisation by writing that “Italian colonists in Mogadiscio lived apart from their subjects, in far more sumptuous circumstances. There were non-channels of communication, no places or occasions for encounter”.⁵⁵ This segregation, already operating during the liberal Italian state period, produced distinct and separate subjectivities, thus reducing Somalis to foreigners or, to borrow Farah’s words, “indigenous noncitizens in their own country”.⁵⁶

Figure 2 points out a recrudescence of the disjunctive and segregated spatiality of the earlier phase and, furthermore, emphasises the utter result of the process denoted as ‘making by naming’. The toponymy of the Somali districts is relegated in the background (the previous labels of Amaruíni and Scingani are barely detectable), leaving no traces of the natives’ presence. In doing so, the map erases the specificity of the two areas and ignores the *genius loci* [the spirit of a place].⁵⁷ The map thus paradoxically resembles any other city built in the metropole under Fascist legislation. This process of homogenisation, as Emanuela Moreschi notes, matches the inherent regulatory purpose of the colonial map, namely to exclude ‘the other’ and delate its specificity for the sake of order

⁵⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 198.

⁵⁵ Nuruddin Farah (2002) “Citizen of Sorrow.” *Transition*, 81-82, pp. 10-20. It should be noted that Farah himself draws a parallelism –in terms of spatiality– with the current Somali diasporic condition of those who live in Italy: “Things are not so different today. Although the Italians ceded their territory in Somalia at independence, in 1960, somewhere between twelve and fifteen thousand Somalis now live in Italy today [...] Until recently, all Africans in Italy were called *Marocchini*, Moroccans” (p. 10). However, they struggle to find their place, as already analysed in Chapter 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ In the novel *In the Name of Our Father*, the author brings to the fore the spatiality of Hamar Weyne (Amaurini) district, that is described as a distinctive and historic-economic prominent area of Mogadishu: “Hamaris were the people who lived in the very oldest stone-build part of the city called Hamarweyne. They were not involved in politics and were not known for their fighting spirit like the rest of the Somalis. They hated violence [...] They were well-known for business. Most of them, if not all of them, were engaged in commercial activity. They owned most of the shoe shows, sweet shops, and tailoring businesses in the city. They were light-skinned and could easily be recognised, if not by their complexion, then by their dialect.” Abdirazak Y. Osman, *In the Name of Our Father*. London: Haan Publishing, 1996, pp. 75-76.

and control.⁵⁸ However, in this map, homogenised according to the Italian colonial agenda and Fascist plan, it should be noted the presence of the notations marking two mosques along the Southern coastline (sectors B2 and C2). Although they are incorporated in the colonial grid and deprived of their names, they stand out as the only ruptures to the overall Italianisation of the city conveyed by the map. They stand out as two unexpected forms of resistance or, according to Jose Rabasa, as ‘blind spots’.⁵⁹ Graham Huggan, who recently reused the concept, defines them as previous configurations that represent a form of counter-discourse to Eurocentrism.⁶⁰ Their presence challenges and eschews the superimposed homogeneity and the Italian-related toponymy of the colonial map. Therefore, the exact reproduction, both physical and symbolical, of the replica of an Italian city in Mogadishu is slightly hampered by the presence of the two mosques, the only markers of the native context.

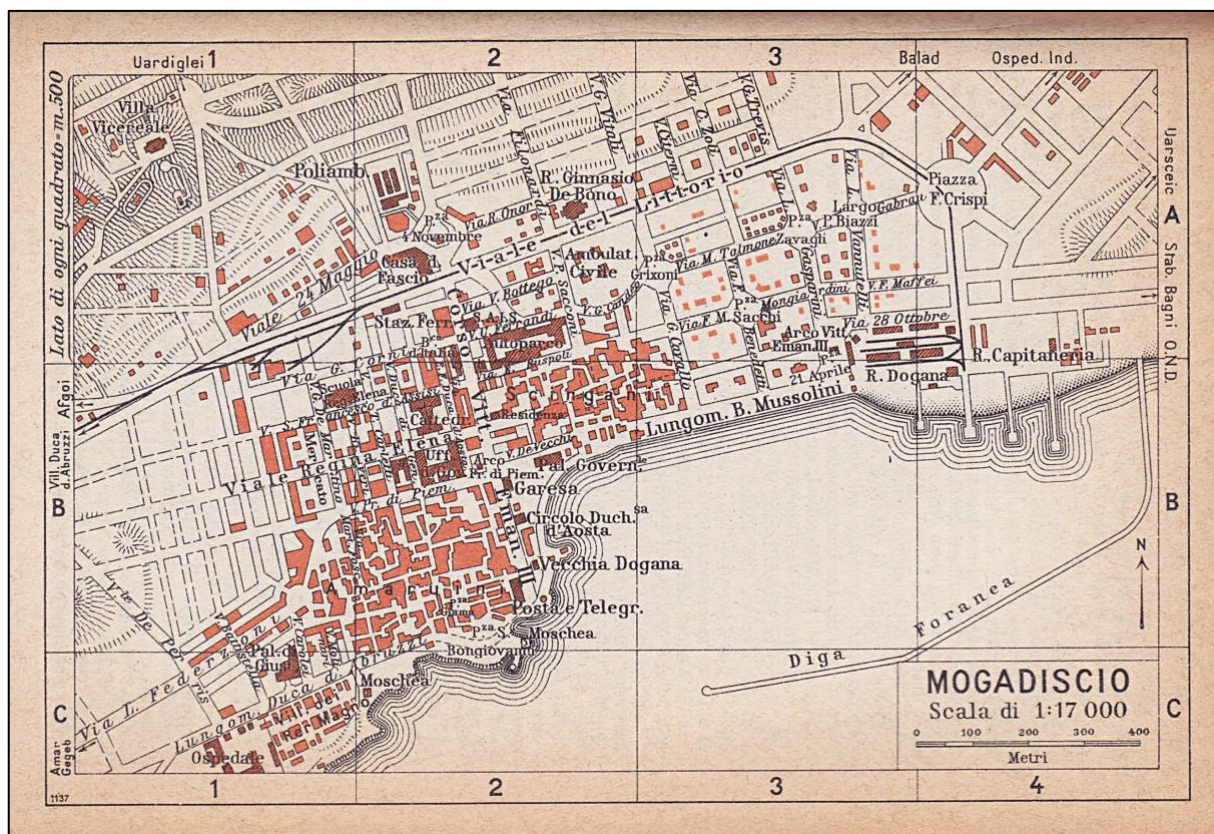


Figure 2: “Mogadiscio” (*Guide to Italian East Africa*, 1938).

⁵⁸ Emanuela Casti Moreschi, “L’altrove negato nella cartografia coloniale italiana: il caso Somalia.” In: Emanuela Casti Moreschi and Angelo Turco (eds.) *Culture dell’alterità. Il territorio africano e le sue rappresentazioni*. Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1998, pp. 269-304, p. 281.

⁵⁹ Jose Rabasa (1985) “Allegories of the *Atlas*.” In: F. Barker *et al.* (eds.) *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1984*, II. Colchester: University of Essex, pp. 1-16, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, p. 118-119.

Mogadishu of the 1930s, as well as Asmara or Addis Ababa, represented in cartography through the colonisers' perspective, conforms to and underpins a Eurocentric vision and organisation of space. As Graham Huggan states, "the coherence of cartographic discourse is historically associated with the desire to stabilize the foundations of a self-privileging Western culture".⁶¹ As a result, the imperial Mogadishu is crossed by roads with names drawn from Fascist rhetoric and with references to the political and historical context of the 1930s, such as Viale del Littorio, Lungomare Mussolini [Mussolini promenade] or Viale Regina Elena [Queen Elena Avenue]. Street names, triumphal arcs, statues, *piazzze* [squares], cinemas, theatres, but also advertisements, were used to enforce and promote colonial discourse. The function of both architecture and map in the production of power and subjectivities is embodied, in *Il latte è buono*, by the protagonist Gashan. Garane describes Gashan's relation to his *luoghi prediletti* [favourite places] in Mogadishu, those that epitomise his belonging to the Italian culture. By admiring them, Gashan himself explains his sense of familiarity towards an image of Italy conveyed by (colonial) architecture: "It was like flying, passing close to the Somali Parliament, told to be built by the Fascist with special stones carried on purpose from Italy, because it was believed that the Duce would have visited Mogadishu".⁶² It should be noted that Mussolini never visited Mogadishu and that, in fact, the Somali Parliament was Casa del Fascio (1938), a masterpiece of Fascist architecture.⁶³

Before leaving his native country, Gashan imagines Rome to be the original (and better) version of Mogadishu. While he considers Mogadishu as a "jungle" or as a "sandy land of dunes" dwelled by "barbarians" –*boscagliosi*, in the text– he looks at the colonial architecture with awe and admiration.

Questi erano i suoi luoghi prediletti, perché portavano nomi gloriosi: Sacro Cuore, Liceo Scientifico, Scuola Elementare, Stadio Coni, Fiat... Lo Stadio Coni gli ricordava il calcio italiano, gli ricordava Facchetti, Mazzola, Gianni Rivera, Boninsegna, Gigi Riva... Non pensava a Said Duale, a Killer, a Garille, a Scott, a Geilani...

These were his favourite places, because they held glorious names: Sacro Cuore, Liceo Scientifico, Scuola Elementare, Stato Coni, Fiat...Stadio Coni reminded him of Italian

⁶¹ Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, p. 118.

⁶² Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 61: "Era come se volasse, passando vicino al Parlamento somalo, si dice costruito dai fascisti con pietre speciali portate apposta dall'Italia, perché si credeva che il Duce si sarebbe fermato a Mogadiscio."

⁶³ Casa del Fascio was an imposing building in red bricks, with a tower (called "Torre Littoria") of thirty meters high. The hall of entrance was in marble, so as to remind of Florence's Renaissance buildings. Marco De Napoli, "La trasformazione italiana di Mogadiscio tra le guerre. Piani e progetti per una visione europea della capitale somala (1905—1941)." In: Francesca Capano, Maria Ines Pascariello and Massimo Visone (eds.) *La città altra*. Naples: Federico II University Press, 2018, pp. 349-358, p. 354.

football; it reminded him of Facchetti, Mazzola, Gianni Rivera Boninsegna, Gigi Riva...He did not think about Said Duale, Killer, Garille, Scott, Geilani...

As Brioni states, the attention to football players, singers and food (*cappuccino* and Italian pastries) implies “not merely a corporeal but also cultural nutrition of colonialism”.⁶⁴ In the case of Gashan, colonialism has brought him into a conflicting attitude, suspended between belonging (to an imagined Italianness) and estrangement (towards his fellow Somalis). At the time when he arrived in Italy, as other Somali refugees or exiled, toponymy provides him with a sense of familiarity: via Roma, corso Umberto, *licei* and *scuole* were the same of those he was accustomed to in Mogadishu.

Andava a piedi dappertutto. Da Wardhigley a Shangani, passando per Via Somalia. Andava al Liceo Scientifico Leonardo da Vinci, passando di fronte alla Scuola Elementare Guglielmo Marconi. Ne guardava le mura con gli occhi pieni di ammirazione [...] Passava vicino al Sacro Cuore, dove giocava a calcio. Poi davanti alla Fiat e allo Stadio Coni, gli altri due centri della passeggiata attraverso la “giungla” di Mogadiscio.⁶⁵

He walked everywhere. From Wardhigley to Shangani, passing through via Via Somalia. He walked to the Liceo Leonardo da Vinci, passing in front of Guglielmo Marconi Elementary School. He looked at its walls with eyes full of admiration [...] He passed near the Sacro Cuore church, where he played football. Then, he passed in front of the Fiat workshop and the Coni Stadium, the other two centres of his walk through the “jungle” of Mogadishu.

In this passage, Garane pinpoints the role of the Italian influence by marking the continuity and the legacy of Italian rule, and emphasising the importance of Italian toponymy in shaping Gashan’s identity: Corso (or Via) Somalia is the former Corso Vittorio Emanuele II during the Fascist era (B2 in Map. 2); the Coni Stadium, later renamed Benádír Stadium, was built on the same ground of the small stadium erected in the 1930s and it was a donation of the Italian government to the Somali people in 1956.⁶⁶ These places, along with hotel Croce del Sud, Scuola Guglielmo Marconi or the restaurant ‘Cappuccetto nero’, actively contribute to making Italy Gashan’s inner homeland.⁶⁷ As Christopher Fotheringham suggests, “Mogadiscio was the site of the strongest

⁶⁴ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ Luciano Sauli, “Il nuovo stadio di Mogadiscio.” *Corriere della Somalia*, 14 October 1954, p. 2.

⁶⁷ The hotel Croce del Sud, emblematic place to stress the presence of the Italians, also appears in Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*. Milan: Frassinelli, 2007, p. 143; in Nuruddin Farah [1993], *Gifts*. London: Penguin, 1999, p. 235; Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*. Milan: Loescher, 2010, p. 30. Moreover, the Scuola Guglielmo Marconi recurs also in Scego’s *La mia casa è dove sono* (pp. 28-29) as well: “The Guglielmo Marconi was my elementary school. Later, with the dictatorship of Siad Barre, they called it Yaasin Cusman”.

Italian influence in Somalia and became in many ways just that, a province of Italy.”⁶⁸ Accordingly, in a passage from *Little Mother*, Cristina Ali Farah recounts the influence of the Italian presence through the words of Taageere, a Somali expatriate. The latter puts at the centre of his interest for the Italian culture his fascination for the language and for a place in particular: the Italian Cultural Centre in Mogadishu.⁶⁹

This importance conferred on the Italian-related building emerges occasionally also in the novel by Afdhere Jama *Liido Beach*, set in the 1980s. In one scene in particular, the two protagonists are having lunch in a restaurant tellingly called *Mama Roma*. One of them, Farah, a Somali man who lives in London and has returned to Mogadishu, explains that “[The Italians] built beautiful buildings here, old arches and churches, and they even got train system”.⁷⁰ His friend (and future lover) Hanad, born by Somali parents met and married in Italy, listens to Franco Battiato, Renato Carosone, swears using Italian curse words and shows an Italian flag hanging outside his window.⁷¹ His relationship with the former colonial culture is similar to that of Gashan, as Italian music and language becomes part of his cultural horizon. Hanad himself states: “I longed to follow my parents back to Italy. I spent my first six years there and still dreamt in Italian. Somalia was home, but it was dirty, corrupt and dysfunctional”.⁷² His feelings towards Mogadishu, the city of his every-day life, contrasts with his idea of Rome, a city he describes with a colonial flavour: “He wondered what it would be like to walk around the city of his birth again and see all the beautiful places he had read about. He wondered what it would be like to visit all the landmarks he had seen in those movies”.⁷³ Jama’s novel addresses, once again, the contamination between Italian and Somali culture and language by challenging placed-based forms of belonging.

⁶⁸ Christopher Fotheringham (2018) “History’s Flagstones: Nuruddin Farah and other literary responses to Italian imperialism in East Africa.” *Interventions*, pp. 1-20, p. 12.

⁶⁹ “I remember when I joined the Italian Cultural Center in Mogadishu. My book bought with lots of shillings, a thick package of wastepaper. In order to learn Italian! Going around like a student, with my notebook and the pen in my pants pocket. What use was Italian to me? It was the idea that attracted me; the fact that it was spoken by proper gentlemen, with good jobs at the ministry, in a school, in the army. All classy man, fluent in Italian, so fluent that it pops up here and there when they speak Somali. Here and there, often. I want to speak like that as well, every third word an Italian one, I thought. It’s elegant. Will it come so naturally to me too? I never found out; war made me give it up.” Ubox Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 73.

⁷⁰ Afdhere Jama, *Liido Beach*. Oracle Self-Publishing, 2018, p. 16.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 7, 11, 32, 84 respectively.

⁷² Ivi, p. 6.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 130.

1.2 The airport: from *non-lieu* to metonymic place

Anthropologist Marc Augé, in his *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, notably labelled as *non-lieux* [non-places] those places like motorways, hotel rooms, airports and shopping malls, that, according to his reading of contemporary society, embody the postmodern or supermodern, in his terms *supermodernité*.⁷⁴ Since its first appearance in 1992, the term has reached prominence in academic studies across disciplines, spanning from anthropology to geography; due to its semantic flexibility, it has been a prolific and equally debated term, often used to denote a qualitatively negative aspect of a particular place. In his work, Augé proposes the theorisation of two kinds of place, which coexist in the Western world: the ‘anthropological’ and the ‘supermodern’. The former can be considered as a place that empowers identity by giving people a sense of community, shared social references and aggregation. More importantly, in Augé words, in ‘anthropological’ places, “identities, relationships and a story can be made out”.⁷⁵ On the other side of the spectrum, the ‘supermodern’ places are those of “circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion”.⁷⁶ In practical terms, the ‘anthropological places’ comprise historical villages or towns, where a sense of history and community is made clear. The archetypical ‘supermodern places’ are, instead, the so-called *non-lieux*, such as motorways, airports, shopping malls, theme parks and hotels. In these transient places, the subject becomes a user, since most of them are consumption-related. Moreover, one experiences the ubiquitous familiarity of their spatiality, as they reproduce almost the same design and outline, thus universalising the postmodern West on a global scale.

The paradox, according to Augé, is that the feeling of homeness is both re-invented and overturned in the non-places, as they are equally alienating to every subject or user around the world. In practical terms, Augé explains that, when travelling to a foreign country, the most familiar and therefore homely aspect of that destination will be the non-places, as they replicate, through architectural qualities, logos and global brands, a universalising feature. The aim to universalise building-forms matches the purpose to homogenise a set of social relations (producer-consumer), to the detriment of specific cultural and social values. In other words, *non-lieux* are built and

⁷⁴ Mark Augé [1992] *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995; Mark Augé (1996) “Paris and The Ethnography of the Contemporary World.” In: Michael Sheringham, *Parisian Fields*. London: Reaktion, pp. 175-181; Mark Augé, *Fiction Fin de Siècle, Suivi de Que se Passe-t-il?* Paris: Fayard, 2000a; Mark Augé (2000b) “Airports, Roundabouts, Yellow Lines.” In: Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, *City A-Z*. London: Routledge, pp. 8-9, 207-6, 297-8.

⁷⁵ Mark Augé (2000b), p. 8.

⁷⁶ Mark Augé (1996), p. 178.

organised without any references to the surroundings or the so-called *genius loci* [the spirit of a place].

However, Augé himself states that places and non-places never exist in pure forms and thus they do not represent opposed polarities. Rather, “the first [are] never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.”⁷⁷ The aim here is, accordingly, to explore this ambiguity and show how *non-lieux*, airports specifically, do not represent only transient, atemporal, homogenised and intrinsically global places but, quite the reverse, in the postcolonial context of Somali literature they are mingled with history and informed by contextual specificity. Also, I aim to show how, at the narrative level, they carry out an important function in the development of the plot.

If we consider Farah’s *Links* and *Crossbones*, airports are the starting points of different stories and they have a significant weight and specific connotation in the plot. Their presence is not confined to the works of Farah, but involves other Somali novels, which engage with the same complex spatiality of the airports in relation to the particular experiences of diasporic subjects. For example, *Transit* (2003) by Djiboutian author Abdourahman Waberi, bookends Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris and narrates the story of two characters seeking to come back home from Djibouti (former French Somalia). Somali Italian authors, such as Garane and Ali Farah, also set a part of their novels in airports, as well as Somali German author Fadumo Korn, who describes her arrivals in Rome in the 1970s: in their novels, airports seem to metonymically represent the host country.⁷⁸

Likewise, in Farah’s novels, the airport suggests a supposed specificity of his countrymen, as if that particular spatiality conveys a distinctive summation of Somalis’ traits.⁷⁹ For example, in *Links*, Jeebleh underscores the ethos of his fellow citizens by addressing them as outsiders: “He knew that Somalis were of the habit of throwing *despedida* parties to bid their departing dear ones farewell, and of joyously and noisily welcoming them in droves at airports and bus depots when they

⁷⁷ Mark Augé (1995), p. 78.

⁷⁸ In her autobiographical account, entitled *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), London-based Nigerian author Noo Saro-Wiwa commits the whole prologue to telling the behaviours of her fellow citizens in the departure lounge at the Gatwick airport. Interestingly, she notices that, “Only in Nigeria could you see machine guns, tuxedos, army fatigues and evening frocks together at the airport. The insane aesthetic summarised my country’s vanities and bathos more clearly than anything else, and it depressed me.” In the description, she implies that airports encompass the specificity of a particular society by accentuating the latter’s foremost features through aesthetics. Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*. London: Granta, 2012, p. 4.

⁷⁹ In *Links*, chapter 1 (pp. 3-19). In *Crossbones*, chapter 2 (pp. 11-23) and chapter 9 (pp. 91-95).

returned from a trip”.⁸⁰ By using an almost documentary tone, Jeebleh distances himself from the description, and confines the Somalis in the realm of otherness: he *knows* them (he can understand them), but he also emphasises his non-involvement. The following passage of novel, set when Jeebleh is at the passport check, proposes again Jeebleh’s dual approach regarding his fellow countrymen:

Somalis never defer to the authority of a uniform in the way the Germans do, Jeebleh thought. We will defer only to the brute force of guns. Maybe the answer lies in the nation’s history since the days of colonialism, and later in those of the Dictator, and more recently during the presence of U.S. troops: these treacherous times have disabused us of our faith in uniformed authorities —which have proven to be redundant, corrupt, clannish, insensitive, and unjust.⁸¹

History, divided into three phases (colonialism, dictatorship and neocolonialism), has complicated Somalis’ attitude towards authority. By clarifying that, Farah implies that airports are not exclusively transient, but deeply related to their background.⁸² In his novels, through conveying images of disorder and brutality, airports function as stylistic devices to describe the context in which the story is inscribed; on close inspection, they provide accurate and specific insights about the lives of Somali diasporic people and the sociopolitical situation of Mogadishu. This attention to locating airports at the crossroads of historical and personal events suggests a different interpretation from Augé’s analysis, as the airports become ‘vernacular’ site, influenced by the socio-historical and geographical context, rather than atemporal *non-lieux*.

We can observe this feature at work in the following passage of *Links*, in which Farah, through the internal focalisation on Jeebleh, introduces the airport’s time-space configuration as follows:

He was in great discomfort that the Antonov had landed not at the city’s main airport —retaken by a warlord after the hasty departure of the U.S. Marines— but at a desolate airstrip, recently reclaimed from the surrounding no-man’s land between the sand dunes and the low desert shrubs, and the sea.⁸³

⁸⁰ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 3.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 5.

⁸² Accordingly, Martin KiMani, in his “Airport Theatre, African Villain”, describes how African people who move abroad, inevitably clash with the Western paranoia for security and illegal immigration. He ends his story asserting that, after the frustrating events occurred at the document check, “This airport show is not divorced from the world.” KiMani emphasises, in opposition to the idea of non-places, that airports cannot be considered as unrelated both to the environment and the time-setting; space and time both play a role in shaping them, so to allow us to read them as literary places, with their symbols and meanings. Martin KiMani (2011) “Airport Theatre, African Villain.” In: Edgard Pietrese and Ntone Edjabe (eds.) *African Cities Reader* 2. Cape Town: African Centre for Cities, pp. 24-29, p. 29.

⁸³ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 3.

This brief description of the airport, charged with the contingencies of time and people's relations, opens up to a series of speculations about the geo-political background of Somalia. For example, the detail that the airport is a mere runway located forty kilometres north of the capital reveals the distinctiveness of the context in which the story is set; besides, the presence of a warlord (a term that has become an ill-defined marker for the Somalis) introduces us in the civil-war scenario; as well, the departure of the Marines signals the end of the so-called UNOSOM II mission, namely the United Nations intervention in Somalia (1993—1995).⁸⁴ Furthermore, these details indicate several non-operational features of the city itself, which Jeebleh's will experience later in the plot: similarly to the city, chaos and lack of facilities prevail in the airport over order and security.⁸⁵

In the description that follows of Jeebleh's arrival, the overall condition of the airport matches the prospective degradation and inefficiency of the capital city: for example, the passengers wait to collect their luggage directly, near the plane, and instead of the distinctive neat and well-ordered atmosphere of airports, unruliness and confusion abound in Casillay. At the beginning of the novel, the repeated use of the verb 'to push', associated with the persistence of the noun 'crowd', underlines the messy condition in which Jeebleh finds himself, pressed by rowdy mobs of passengers "pushing, shoving, and engaged in acrimonious dispute."⁸⁶ Before even exiting the airport, Jeebleh is confronted with unwelcoming circumstances, far different from those experienced during his youth, in more peaceful times.⁸⁷ His juvenile recollections echo the description of the airport made by the author of *Lido Beach* (2018), Afdhere Jama (1980—). Since the novel is set in the 1980s, it represents a suitable literary precedent to remark upon airports' temporality and, once again, to challenge their designation as transient places, unrelated to their context.

⁸⁴ After the withdrawal of UN troops, a warlord has taken back control of the Mogadishu International. It should be noted here that Mogadishu airport was established in 1928, during Italian colonialism, with the name Aeroporto Petrella. The first facility to be opened in the Horn of Africa, the airport began offering civilian and commercial flights in the mid-1930s. After a period of continental flights, in 1936, Ala Littoria launched an intercontinental connection between Mogadishu-Asmara-Khartoum-Tripoli and the centre of the Empire, Rome. Federico Caprotti (2011) "Profitability, Practicality and Ideology: Fascist Civil Aviation and the Short Life of Ala Littoria, 1934–1943." *The Journal of Transport History*, 32:1, pp. 17-38.

⁸⁵ "Who, then, were the men inside, since they had no uniforms? What authority did they represent, given that Somalia had had no central government for several years now, after the collapse of the military regime that had run the country to total ruin?" In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Ivi, pp. 16-17; pp. 18-19.

In *Liido Beach*, Farah, a young Somali man coming from London to Mogadishu for the first time, watches “with shock all of these eager Somali travellers that are already standing up to the aisles and opening the overhead compartments, as the plane makes its way on the tarmac”.⁸⁸ This particular scene, already described in Farah’s *Links*, signals the behaviour of Somali people with regard to airport-related social practices, making them specific and contextual. Moreover, through the eyes of the protagonist, the author describes the airport as follows:

Mogadishu’s International Airport is in much better shape than Farah had imagined. It is bigger and cleaner. Despite the chaotic passengers he and his mother are able to smoothly go through passport control. Soon they are picking up their bags and are sitting in a taxi. Somalia and its people have been independent for nearly thirty years. Although they had been living under a military dictatorship, which Farah notices through all of the posters of the president around them since they landed in the airport, the Mogadishans seemed a lot more cosmopolitan than what he had expected.⁸⁹

Before the civil war, the airport looks mostly neat and functional. It reveals its local-based specificity by showing the posters of the regime’s propaganda and, at the same time, embodies the cosmopolitanism of the city. We can assume that this description corresponds to Jeebleh’s memories of Mogadishu’s airport before leaving for the US, since he fled Somalia roughly in the late 1970s. However, in *Links*, this memory clashes with the reality of the new war-torn context, in which both the anthropic and natural environment exhibits the consequences of the civil war.⁹⁰ In this regard, the occurrence of ‘dust’ and ‘sand’ highlights the unconventional state in which the airport lies, as if the disruptiveness of nature has vanquished any human attempt of order.⁹¹ Accordingly, Jeebleh first look at the city from a distance is described as “a fine sea of sand billowing behind a minaret”.⁹²

⁸⁸ Afdhere Jama, *Liido Beach*. Oracle Self-Publishing, 2018, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Ivi, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁰ In *Links*, animals wander untended in the city, such as “sick-looking goats” and cows that cough “like someone with a chest ailment”, which feed on pebbles, shoes, and plastic bags; famished and emaciated dogs following Jeebleh hoping for scraps (p. 133, p. 196). Telling of the endemic violence, however, is the constant presence of wild animals, such as “crows, marabouts, and other carrion birds” (“Had these birds learned to show up as soon as they heard shots, knowing that there would be corpses?”, p. 18). Death inhabits the city, so that it is no longer “abnormal to see scavengers of carrion at a four-star hotel, looking as though they are well placed to choose what they eat and where they go. They look better fed than humans” (p. 66). Moreover, “they are no longer afraid if you try to shoo them away [...] the crows and the vultures were so used to being on the ground foraging, they were like tourist pigeons in a Florentine plaza” (p. 65).

⁹¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, pp. 8-15.

⁹² Ivi, p. 14.

This state of things can be compared with the airport description made in *Crossbones*, as it appears similar in terms of keywords. Even though this time Jeebleh arrives at the Mogadishu International, and not at the airstrip in Casillay, his first impression functions as a harbinger for the subsequent description of Mogadishu:

[...] billows of dust mixed with the midday heat and humidity whip up at him in an agitated vigour, the sea breeze from a mere half kilometre away hardly affecting the gooeyness of the amalgam. In addition, an irritating scrimmage of human traffic crowds the bottom of the stairway as posters squeeze through the descending passengers to their services.⁹³

The passage conveys a time-related specificity and signals a change: whereas in *Links* the main airport was inoperable because of the civil war, in *Crossbones* it came back to its original function, thereby suggesting an apparent normality. This return to the *status quo*, however, is subtly hampered by the recurrent presence of ‘dust’ as ominous, which has already marked the civil-war scenario of *Links*.⁹⁴ The sand from the desert, not far from Mogadishu, contrasts antithetically with the supposed neatness that is usually connected to airports and stresses the precarious conditions of both the city and the airport itself, which lack the elaborate and ordered procedures related to security protocols. More broadly, sand and dust underscore the enduring degree of lawlessness in present-day Somalia by connecting two different periods: 1996 and 2006.⁹⁵ Airports, in both cases, far from being neutral and a-historical places, arise as markers of a precise time-setting and, specifically, underscore both the changes and the continuities between two phases in the history of Mogadishu and Somalia.⁹⁶

⁹³ Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 11.

⁹⁴ “The clouds of dust stirred up by successive armies of destruction eventually settled back to earth, finer than when they went up.” Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 15. Also: “Outside, there was a faint whirling of sand. And there was life as Jeebleh might have imagined it in its continuous rebirth, earth to dust, dust to earth, wherein death was avenged.” *Links*, p. 22.

⁹⁵ The presence of dust as the signpost of the new context can be compared to the description of the city that Farah makes in his personal account about the years spent in Mogadishu during his youth. In that period of peace, dust appears as a typical feature of the city, but its presence is natural more than ominous: “There was an epic dustiness to the pre-monsoon storms, as the sea raged and the minarets blared, praying for rain.” In: Nuruddin Farah (2008) “The Family House.” *Transition*, 99, pp. 6-16. In Farah’s case, the potential referent is the symbolism of decay and lifelessness that Joyce conferred to dust in his *Dubliners*. However, the symbolic weight connected to ‘dust’ is here physically recontextualised in a waste land that emerges as real, rather than allegorical; the Joycean paralysis in the case of Farah is not caused merely by the lack of movement or by stagnation, but by destruction and desolation. Matthew Brown (2008) “*Knots* by Nuruddin Farah.” *Harvard Review*, 33, pp. 203-205, p. 204; Michael Andindilile (2014) “English, Cosmopolitanism and the Myth of National Linguistic Homogeneity in Nuruddin Farah’s Fiction.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 50:3, pp. 256-74.

⁹⁶ Accordingly, later in *Crossbones*, Jeebleh states: “Since his 1996 visit, most of the youths have grown beards and donned those white robes, save for the odd youth in military fatigues or an ill-matched uniform assembled from various post-collapse loyalties. The general collapse is still the same, though.” Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 27.

Furthermore, the airports do not only signal a specific time and setting to the reader, but they also interact with the protagonists. In *Links*, the airport conveys one of the main themes of the novel, namely the distance between Jeebleh and his fellow citizens, by showing the impossibility for the protagonist to grasp the meaning of a language that, in such places, should be considered universal and collective. This misunderstanding, immediately pointed out by Farah with the airport scene, underpins the whole novel.⁹⁷ Later in the story, Jeebleh's friend, Bile, argues that, "In Somalia the civil war was language", stressing his feeling of estrangement toward the new situation ("I didn't speak the new language").⁹⁸ In this respect, the first line of the novel straightforwardly remarks on the unusual and alarming atmosphere of the airport, later retrieved in the city:

"GUNS LACK THE BODY OF HUMAN TRUTHS!"

Barely had his feet touched the ground in Mogadiscio, soon after landing at a sandy airstrip to the north of the city in a twin-engine plane from Nairobi, when Jeebleh heard a man make this curious statement. He felt rather flatfooted in the way he moved away from the man, who followed him. Jeebleh watched the passengers pushing one another to retrieve their baggage lined up on the dusty floor under the wings of the aircraft. Such was the chaos that fierce arguments erupted between passengers and several of the men offering their services as porters, men whom Jeebleh would not trust.⁹⁹

The scene discloses the subsequent war-torn scenario of anarchy that rules Mogadishu, an anarchy that has affected also the language. Emblematically, Jeebleh recognises the word 'gun' as a distinctive indication of a new semantics: he himself labels it as part of the new "civil war vocabulary".¹⁰⁰ Jeebleh mentions the presence of a war-related jargon in another passage of the novel, so as to explain the meaning of the local expression 'house-sitting'.¹⁰¹

The airport, therefore, enables a reading of violence as normalised: the civil war has ignited a process through which behaviours that fall outside the social norms come to be regarded as ordinary. This aspect is further stressed when Jeebleh experiences a traumatic event a few moments after his arrival, an event that appears to be ordinary in the present-day situation but that stands out as appalling for Jeebleh: a ten-year-old child is shot dead while waiting with her mother for

⁹⁷ This theme will be explored in Chapter 2 (pp. 100-101 of this thesis) with the in-depth analysis of the relationship between Jeebleh and the Italian language and between *Links* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

⁹⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 119.

⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ "[...] 'house-sitting meant' the taking possession of houses belonging to the members of clan families who had fled, by members who had stayed on." In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 13.

their flight.¹⁰² This first-hand and near-death experience becomes even more daunting because of the general indifference of the bystanders. The dreadful episode extends its resonance through the whole novel, reaching *Crossbones* as well, since, soon after his second return to Mogadishu, Jeebleh still remembers with shock what happened ten years earlier.¹⁰³ Also, the astonishment in witnessing his fellow countrymen's lack of empathy remains etched in Jeebleh's after a decade and further complicates his feeling of belonging to Somali people and society. It leads him to question his sense of belonging and his role of citizen and human being in the war-torn context.¹⁰⁴ The overall lack of empathy recurs as a problematic issue in the novel, particularly with regard to Jeebleh, who ends up by calling his fellow people schizophrenic.¹⁰⁵

In this sense, the whole novel represents an attempt to balance, or negotiate, Jeebleh's idea of Somaliness with that based on clan social formations. This friction is firstly disclosed, through spatiality, at the airport, where Jeebleh faces a challenging experience at the document check. When he shows his Somali passport, giving it to a man "neither in uniform nor bearing a gun", he causes a paradoxical misunderstanding because of the lack of a visa.¹⁰⁶ Jeebleh himself remarks upon this Kafkaesque situation with a sarcastic comment: "When has it become necessary for a Somali to require a visa to enter Mogadiscio?".¹⁰⁷ His sense of belonging is interrogated, and Jeebleh's Somali identity mistrusted and questioned from the very beginning. At the narrative level, the airport then represents an important setting for staging the tension between the two polarities ingrained in the condition of diasporic subjects: the often-deluded feeling of belonging after the return, and the sense of estrangement towards the new realities of the homeland.

The co-protagonist of *Crossbones*, Ahl (Malik's brother and Jeebleh's son-in-law) experiences the same feeling of estrangement when he arrives in Somalia to look for his stepson Taxiil, who has been recruited from Minnesota as an al-Shabaab fighter. Farah uses the same keywords ('mob', 'sand', 'authority') for describing Ahl's arrival in the northern coastal city of Bosaso (Boosaaso), in Puntland. Predictably, the airport arises as a metonymy for the whole region:

¹⁰² Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 17: "Jeebleh was shocked that no one in the crowd of people still milling about had been willing to confront the gunman, to try to stop them from playing their deadly games."

¹⁰³ "A boy not yet in his teens had been killed before Jeebleh even left the airport, as he and his mother boarded their Nairobi-bound flight." In: Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Such indifference becomes more manifest when Jeebleh notices a crowd doing nothing to help a man who has suffered a seizure. When he steps in to intervene, they are immediately suspicious of him: "We do not bother with people we do not know!" In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, pp. 198-9.

¹⁰⁵ The question of Jeebleh's identity and his Somaliness, which surfaces here, will further analysed in Chapter 2, especially in relation to language.

¹⁰⁶ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ivi, p. 12.

The airstrip [...] has no barrier to fence it in; nothing to restrict unauthorised persons from walking straight onto the aircraft and mixing with the passengers as they land. A mob gathers at the foot of the stepladder, joining the man in a yellow vest, flip-flops, and the trousers with holes in them who guided the aircraft to its parking position.¹⁰⁸

It is again through the description of the airport that the novel expresses a precise image of the context. Indeed, the airport is presented as an airstrip, but Farah states with irony that ‘airstrip’ “is a misnomer for the sandy pit on which Ahl’s plane lands”.¹⁰⁹ It should be noted here that Puntland, at the time of the story, is internationally recognised as an autonomous region of Somalia (unlike the secessionist region of Somaliland, which tried to obtain international recognition as a separate nation). Though Ahl’s account expresses a calmer situation than the one in Mogadishu, the overall atmosphere of shabbiness and precariousness discloses the subsequent representation of Boosaaso. If compared to the following description of Mogadishu airport, the airstrip in Boosaaso hardly differs, as the passage shows:

The airport opened to traffic only a couple of months earlier, for the first time in sixteen civil war years. The repair job on the hall is not quite done, the scaffolding criss-crossing and impeding one’s movements, nor is the work on the archways anywhere complete. A rope is strung across the middle of the hall, separating arrivals and departures. In the departures area, some fifty or so cheap white plastic chairs are clustered in the corner, presumably for the use of passengers waiting to board their flights. [...] With no luggage carousels or carts, no trained personnel at Immigration and Customs, there is no knowing how things might pan out, not knowing what these robed, bearded men might or might not do.¹¹⁰

At a stylistic level, negations denote the Mogadishu International, which Farah filters through his protagonist’s eyes, so as to remark an absence, a deficiency from a standard.¹¹¹ Mogadishu and

¹⁰⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 91.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 13.

¹¹¹ In *Crossbones*, Farah expands the range of his usual setting beyond Mogadishu, including Boosaaso in the plot. In doing so, he builds on the comparison between two regions of Somalia, probably giving the first ever fictionalised account of the situation in Puntland. This double setting results in a geographical shift: one story is set in Mogadishu and deals with the invasion of Ethiopia, the constant presence of American drones and the violent censorship and repression by the Court; the second story questions the misinterpreted piracy condition in Puntland and tackles the issue of international terrorism. Maya Jaggi, “Nuruddin Farah: A Life in Writing.” *The Guardian*, 21 September 2012, par. 16, www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/sep/21/nuruddin-salah-life-in-writing. Accessed 10 May 2020: “The novel suggests those up the food chain, and abroad, take their cut. “Nobody wants to talk about illegal fishing or the destruction of the environment –the marine life and coral reefs. What we talk about is the

Boosaaso become emblems of the multiple geopolitical realities which Farah seeks to capture, thus fictionalising the latest progress in Somalia's national development. Even though Mogadishu has lost its central role and the country itself appears fragmented into clan-states and self-governing regions, Farah tries to represent Somalia as a whole, debunking the reports of towns that got rich thanks to piracy and after the secession. He visited Puntland himself, stating laconically about the situation: "I did not see that wealth".¹¹²

At this point, having shown how *non-lieux* functions as spatial forms that "reflect the sociopolitical and economic realities of the country", it is useful to introduce the concept of metonymic spatiality to explain their narratological role.¹¹³ Scholar Benedict M. Ibitokun has theorised the latter concept for those places that "emphasize the spiritual ties that exist between the protagonist and the soil".¹¹⁴ For example, in the case *Links*, through the descriptions of the airport Farah conveys the broader environment of Mogadishu and the problematic issue of belonging or, in Ibitokun's terms, of Jeebleh 'spiritual ties'. In *Crossbones* too, Farah suggests a likeness between Southern and Northern Somalia, via the representation of Bosaso airport, against the narrative that fashions the former as riotous and underdeveloped, while the latter as safe and wealthy.

While, on the one hand, airports represent places intermingled with their locale, on the other hand they function as sites that epitomise the troubles related to being a Somali in the post-civil war. Though visas, passports, dual citizenships, immigration and anti-terrorism laws, they have become the testing ground for diasporic identities moving to the West. In this sense, airports are not just anywhere, but they embody the framework in which they are inscribed and the different social relations established within their locale: they are well defined in terms of spatiality, and they can be described as relational and time-bound, challenging the definition that considers them as atemporal and globally standardised.¹¹⁵ The argument advanced here is that airports, through their fictionalisation, emerge as vernacular places, influenced and domesticated by their localities and by social relations. Also, at the narrative level they function as symbolical places: more precisely, in the case of Farah and Jama, they work as anterooms of their neighbouring cities. They emerge as

consequences of this destruction. There's enough UN information about nuclear and chemical waste dumped on the shores of Somalia –the tsunami unearthed it. Entire communities in Puntland have children born with deformities."

¹¹² Ibidem.

¹¹³ Benedict M. Ibitokun (1991) "The Dynamics of Spatiality in African Fiction." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37:3, pp. 409-426, p. 415.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹¹⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. New York-London: Verso, 1995, pp. 77-96.

microcosms where the whole ethos of a people is encompassed and where characters experience the problematic (often bureaucratic) hybridity of their diasporic identity.

Somali Italian writers also share these aspects, mostly related to their multiple citizenships. For example, in *Il latte è buono* (*Milk Is Good*) by Garane Garane, a scene is set in an airport –Fiumicino in Rome– and the protagonist is a Somali guy, Gashan, arriving from Mogadishu. Like Farah’s *Links*, Garane’s novel stages the document check of the protagonist not as merely uneventful. After Siyaad Barre’s late oppressive dictatorial rule, Gashan is sent to Italy, the former motherland and a country he deeply admires for its culture, food and music. After years of colonial education, he embodies the mimic man, as Frantz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul have put it: the colonised subject who, feeling inferior, enables strategies of identification towards the coloniser, thus reproducing and mimicking colonial cultural practices.¹¹⁶ However, as soon as he lands in Rome, Gashan understands his role of a colonised subject, marginalised and hierarchically inferior within the Italian society:

Di colpo, all’aeroporto [...] era africano. Era della stirpe dei nomadi. Sentiva come se sua nonna gli sussurrasse qualcosa:
“Sei un nobile. Sei Gareen.”
Cominciò a camminare col passo svelto e in un modo pomposo.
“Sapranno chi sono”, si diceva. “Sono somalo, il più intelligente, il più bello in Africa e nel mondo. Siamo conosciutissimi.”¹¹⁷

All of a sudden, at the airport [...] he was African. He belonged to the ancestry of nomad people. He felt his grandmother whispering to him:
“You’re an aristocrat. You are Gareen.”
He started to walk with a quick and pretentious stride.
“They’ll know who I am”, he mutters to himself. “I am Somali, the most intelligent, the most beautiful in Africa and in the whole world. We are the most renowned.”

A subsequent dialogue, between Gashan and the police officer, plunges the former into a state of disbelief and bewilderment; by trusting to be recognised as Italian, being deeply rooted in the Italian culture, Gashan is reluctant to show his passport. The document, written in Italian, leaves the police officer sceptical, and Gashan’s use of language, namely a Florentine accent, fosters his uncertainty. Both are startled: the protagonist by the evident difference between reality and expectations; the police officer by the fact of having before him a (black) foreigner who is reclaiming his Italian

¹¹⁶ Frantz Fanon [1961] *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin, 2001, pp. 16-18; 251-55. This aspect and the reading in Fanonian terms of *Il latte è buono* is examined in the next chapter, in relation to toponymy. V. S. Naipaul [1967] *The Mimic Man*. London: Picador, 2011.

¹¹⁷ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 64.

citizenship. The fact of being black *but* fluent in the Italian language shows the lack of awareness, by the Italians, about Somalis as former colonised subjects; besides, it reveals the fascist legacy of colonialism through the racist attitude of both the police officers at the document check and the whole of the Italian society.¹¹⁸

Gashan turns out to be the embodiment of the colonial uncanny.¹¹⁹ The ‘uncanny’ experience of the (former) colonised subject may occur when one’s home is reduced to an unfamiliar place or questioned as such; in other words, the colonised experiences a double, contrasting impression: the homeness of being in a place supposed to be familiar in terms of cultural references, such as Italy and Rome for Somalis, but also the feeling of being ‘out of place’, as that same place is marked by his or her exclusion.¹²⁰ For example, when Gashan finally arrives in Rome, he is bewildered by the indifference toward Somalia and by the impossibility of gaining recognition from the Italian society. This exclusion appears even stronger considering how much he knows about the Italian culture, from music to football, from literature to history, in comparison to the total ignorance showed by the Italians towards Somalia. He experiences, to use Mia Fuller’s words, a “sense of out-of-place familiarity”.¹²¹ This feeling prompts the sense of exclusion and bewilderment, strengthened by the eerie impression of being at home elsewhere.

At the same time, uncanny also describes the feeling of the coloniser once he faces the neglected existence of former colonised people, who claim their belonging to the same culture and community of the coloniser. In the case of *Il latte è buono*, the protagonist’s use of the Italian language triggers the uncanny: Gashan, an unexpected voice from the dismissed colonial memory, claims for recognition and inclusion by employing the same (spoken) language of the coloniser and by exhibiting his belonging through the passport, printed in the same (written) language. In *Il latte è buono*, at the airport, Garane shows both Italians’ lack of awareness of their colonial past and the

¹¹⁸ In the novel, Gashan is the subject of racist remarks and he realises that Italian people are ignorant about Somalia. Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, pp. 67-68, 76-79. Also, Garane emphasises this fact when Gashan reads for the first time *la Repubblica*, an Italian daily newspaper. After relating the title of the newspaper [republic] to the proper name of several African countries, he claims that *la Repubblica* was rich in information, but poor in African-related matter. Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 75.

¹¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London-New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 199-244.

¹²⁰ According to Garane, Gashan “conosceva l’Italia attraverso i libri, i film, i nomi delle vie” (“knew Italy through books, films, street names”). Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 63. Likewise, the protagonist of Igiaba Scego’s *Adua* states: “I already pictured myself in Rome, a city I knew from books. In my head I recited the names of its streets and its squares [...] How wonderful!” In: Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Translated by Jamie Richards. London: Jaracanda Books, 2019, p. 118.

¹²¹ Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism*. Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 219.

“indeterminacy of the diasporic identity”.¹²² In doing so, on the one hand, at the desk of the police officer, the relocation and the re-inscription of Gashan’s identity begin. On the other, Italians are ironically depicted with the same common traits, aesthetic practices and exaggerations that colonisers used to represent the Somalis.¹²³

Also, the description of the airport conveys the idea of the Italian society as homogenous in terms of language (Italian), religion (Catholic) and ethnicity (white). The scene at the airport stages the unfamiliarity, deeply rooted in the Italian society, towards the existence of former colonised subjects and the consequent racist attitude against Gashan:

Per lui tutti gli italiani all’aeroporto si assomigliavano. Non riusciva a fare distinzioni. Era cresciuto in una società dove il multietnicismo era di norma: a Mogadiscio ce n’erano di tutti i colori, dall’indiano al cinese, dall’egiziano al siriano allo yemenita. Eppoi c’erano i cenci bianchi, gli italiani. C’erano, anche se in minor numero, americani, sovietici, canadesi, francesi.

Indho yar, indho weyn, san yar, san weyn, midgaan, gaal, gibil cad... Erano tutti a Xamar Cadde. Ma qui era diverso: tutti avevano la pelle come quella degli arabi. Tutti uguali. Si sente che si è diversi, che si viene da un’altra galassia.¹²⁴

To him, all the Italians in the airport were similar. He could not make any distinction. He has been raised where a multi-ethnic society was the norm: in Mogadishu, there were people of all colours, from the Indian to the Chinese, from the Egyptian to the Syrian and the Yemeni. And then there were the deathly pale: the Italians. There were also, even if fewer, Americans, Soviets, Canadians, French.

Indho yar, indho weyn, san yar, san weyn, midgaan, gaal, gibil cad...

All of them were in Xamar Cadde. But here it was different: everybody’s skin looked Arabic. All the same. One feels different, as if one is coming from another galaxy.

In Italy, after the war and the collapse of Fascism, “there were neither trials nor anti-colonial wars of independence underway, and thus it was easier, but no less historically inexact, for the Italians to fashion themselves as *brava gente*” [good people].¹²⁵ As a consequence, the faults and crimes perpetrated by Fascists in the African campaigns were easily self-absolved during the post-war period, due to the lack of any public condemnations or trials. Besides, the absence of significant migrations from the colonies, as well as the lack of extensive movements of independence capable

¹²² Homi Bhabha (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 322.

¹²³ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, pp. 64-66.

¹²⁴ Ivi, p. 64.

¹²⁵ Nicola Labanca (2005) “History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today.” In: Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds.) *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 29-46, p. 41.

of exceeding the borders of the former colonies and reach the motherland, prevented Italian society from becoming aware of the complexities of that historical period.¹²⁶ The fact of ignoring the colonial past in Africa, dismissing it as inferior to the British and the French ones, have deeply afflicted Italian culture, history and politics for decades and, at the same time, have fostered Italians to reimagine themselves through a process of self-fashioning. Consequently, Ethiopia, Libya, Eritrea and Somalia have been considered to be marginal and unrelated to the history of Italy, as if the colonies (and the relationship between colonised and coloniser) were irrelevant to the political agenda of nation-building in late nineteenth-century, but connected only to Fascism (1922—1943).¹²⁷

This period of collective amnesia about colonialism, from after the war to the early 1990s, made Italian society ill-equipped to face the arrival of the formerly colonised people (or, more broadly, Africans) within the national borders.¹²⁸ Moreover, the lack of public and political discussion allowed fascist ideas about African people to endure and resurface decades later, thus allowing former colonial practices, such as fetishisation, stigmatisation and dehumanisation, to produce categories in which to inscribe the ‘other’. Garane represents this socio-cultural context when he describes the arrival of Gashan at Fiumicino, roughly in the late 1980s. What strikes him most is the fact that, while he knows everything about Italy, Italians ignore almost completely the existence of Somalia. As the extract below shows, Garane uses irony to bring to the surface the protagonist’s naïve thoughts but, at the same time, the author hyperbolically addresses typical Italian commonplaces about African people. Garane satirises the colonising centre as the pinnacle of civilization by revealing how the Rome imagined by Somali people clashes with the real one. In illuminating this divide, Garane debunks the colonial production of knowledge by exaggerating and distorting, in turn, the colonisers’ features. In doing so, the airport’s spatiality enables a reading of Italy in which both colonial discourse and the ideal portrayal made by Italians themselves are

¹²⁶ In this regard, the lines of the character Mr Sisodia from the novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie can be useful for understanding Italian relations with its colonies: “The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don’t know what it means.” Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*. London: Viking, 1988, p. 343

¹²⁷ Recent studies are instead retrieving the narrative of colonialism since its first inception in the Italian political agenda, namely the end of nineteenth century. Giovanna Tomasello, *L’Africa tra mito e realtà*. Palermo: Sellerio, 2004. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.) *L’Italia postcoloniale*. Milan: Mondadori, 2014. Antonio M. Morone (2018) “Gli italo-somali e l’eredità del colonialismo.” *Contemporanea*, 2, pp. 195-221.

¹²⁸ Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

dismantled.¹²⁹ As in the case of Farah's novels, the description of the airport allows us to regard the latter as the metonymy of Italy itself. Garane, indeed, ironically emphasises the homogeneity of the whole of Italian society ("everybody had a look-alike Arabic skin. All the same") as opposed to the multi-ethnic feature of his homeland.

In contrast to the experience of Gashan, we can analyse the first visit in Rome as described by Somali scholar and author Ali Mumin Ahad in his account "Da un emisfero all'altro" ("From one hemisphere to another", 2015). The airport again arises as one of the key-places where Somali diasporic identities are confronted. This passage also signals the dialogue between authors within the diaspora, a literary space in writers from different background are tied together through their transnational and cross-cultural narratives.¹³⁰

Sono contento che il mio primo incontro con Roma non sia stato qualcosa anche lontanamente somigliante all'arrivo all'aeroporto di Roma del personaggio-protagonista di *Il latte è buono* di Garane Garane. Né quella volta né di lì a un anno, nel 1988, di ritorno da Mogadiscio per quella che sarebbe stata l'ultima volta che vidi la Somalia. Gli agenti dell'aeroporto di Roma erano gentili e professionali.¹³¹

I am glad that my first encounter with Rome was not anything even remotely resembling the arrival of the character-protagonist of *Il latte è buono* at the airport in Rome. Neither that time, nor later in 1988, returning from Mogadishu to what would be the last time I saw Somalia. The police officers at the airport in Rome were kind and professional.

The encounter is dissimilar: the police officers are described as *gentili* [kind] and *professionali* [professional]. There are no traces of misunderstandings about the relationship between colonisers and (former) colonised, nor racist behaviours. Perhaps, the arrival of Gashan was reasonably meant to be more effective for the plot, thereby emphasising the lack of understanding between Italians and Somalis –remarked in other episodes of the novel– and the lack of decolonisation in the Italian society.¹³² More similar to the arrival of Gashan is, instead, the description of Fadumo Korn's arrival in Rome. In one passage in particular, quoted here from her autobiographical novel *Born in the Big Rains* (2004), she lands in Fiumicino from Mogadishu. Fadumo's first impression of the Italians resembles that of Gashan, as both of them recognise the sameness of the Italian society

¹²⁹ Simone Brioni also notices that, in the novel, "Gashan interrogates the essentialist terms through which Italians define immigrants as a homogeneous group. [...] In addition, Gashan compares Italy to Africa and often represents Italians as Africans, challenging and reversing the dominant stereotypical and racist representations of immigrants as well as the Fascist idea of Italian ethnic purity." In: *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature*, p. 65.

¹³⁰ Dionýz Ďurišin, *Theory of Literary Comparatistics*, translated by Jessie Kocmanová. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1984.

¹³¹ Ali Mumin Ahad (2015) "Da un emisfero all'altro." *Kómáç Transculturazione*, n. 1, p. 8 (my translation).

¹³² Garane Garane, pp. 69-70, 76-77 and 82-86.

and its homogeneity: “Millions of people seemed to be shouting, yelling, shrieking. And all of them looked like Signor Lavera [an Italian in Mogadishu]” and, later, “All of them –men, woman, children– were pale-skinned [...] I wondered if the colour would come off if I rubbed it”.¹³³ Fadumo, as well, describes the document check:

At customs, uniformed men looked at our passports. Some documents were handed right back with a nod, while others were retained and thoroughly thumbed through, observed with stern, tight expressions. My passport was among those carefully studied. Were they aware that a twelve-year-old Somali girl could not yet obtain a passport? Did they know that my uncle had had to print one for me in his shop?¹³⁴

A certain degree of ignorance emerges here in the description of the Italians, who seem sceptical about the validity of the documents and, evidently, unaware of the role of Somalia as a former colony. While heading outside the airport, Fadumo draws a parallel between Mogadishu and Rome: “Here, too, streets were chaotic and noisy”.¹³⁵ Besides, she remembers a comment about the Italians made by her aunt, who brings to the fore the Fascist rule and suggests how, in the 1970s, colonialism was still a recent memory: “When they were in Somalia, they paved the streets with Somalis so they wouldn’t have to dirty their shoes”.¹³⁶ As in Gashan, this remark upon colonialism and its wrongdoings contrasts with the lack of awareness of the Italians about the same period and, above all, it conflicts with the narrative of *brava gente* [good people] self-fashioned by the Italians.

Along with the same comparative approach, it is possible to consider one passage of the novel *Il comandante del fiume* (*The Commander of the River*, 2014) by Somali Italian author Uba Cristina Ali Farah. The protagonist, the eighteen-year old Yabar, lives in Rome with his mother and sister, and belongs to the so-called second generation (namely, the children of the first-generation of immigrants). While returning from London, at the document check at the Fiumicino airport in Rome (the same airport of Garane’s and Fadumo’s texts) Yabar states:

Potrei tatuarmi il passaporto italiano sul petto e non smetterebbero comunque di farmi a pezzi, la lingua da una parte, le mani e gli occhi dall’altra. Sentendo la parola «razzisti»,

¹³³ Fadumo Korn [2004] *Born in the Big Rains. A memoir of Somalia and survival* [Geboren im großen Regen] Translated from the German by Tobe Levin. New York: The Feminist Press, 2005.

¹³⁴ Ivi, p. 82.

¹³⁵ Ivi, p. 84.

¹³⁶ Ivi, p. 82.

i poliziotti hanno cominciato ad agitarsi e uno di loro, forse il più anziano, forse il più alto in carica, mi fa: «A ragazzi', datte 'na calmata, ma 'o sai chi so' io?».¹³⁷

I could tattoo my Italian passport on my chest and this would not, in any case, stop them from tearing me apart, with the tongue on the one hand, and my hands and eyes on the other. After hearing the word «racist», the police officers got nervous and one of them, perhaps the oldest, perhaps the one in chief, says: “Calm down, kid, don't you know who I am?”

This scene fictionalises the suspicious behaviour of police officers towards the Italo Somali Yabar: his blackness –in a country that “firmly holds to the fiction of a national identity constructed on” Christian religion and white skins– leads the police officers to believe him a non-Italian citizen and sparks the suspicion that Yabar could be an illegal immigrant.¹³⁸ In other words, Yabar enables the stereotype tied up with African people more broadly, that of being criminal and dangerous. Both Yabar and Gashan's inclusion within the Italian borders is continuously questioned in the rituals for security purposes and never taken for granted, despite the documents that legitimise their Italian citizenship.¹³⁹ The incessant sense of being controlled and suspected, in a panoptic environment as the post-9/11 Fiumicino airport, fosters feelings of fear and anger in subjects like Yabar, who are scrutinised and treated as worthless beings.¹⁴⁰ As shown in the case of Garane, the stigmatised understanding of black subjects by Italian people derives from the “earlier removal and denial of the Italian colonial chapter”.¹⁴¹ Nuruddin Farah stresses the same unfamiliarity towards the Somali people in his article “Citizen of Sorrow” (2002), in which he emphasises the Italians' lack of

¹³⁷ Uba Cristina Ali Farah, *Il comandante del fiume*. Rome: 66thand2nd, 2014, p. 101. The airport of Fiumicino features also in *Gift* by Nuruddin Farah, who describes the habit of Somali people to reach the airport in large numbers whenever a Somali Airline flight arrived or departed. Nuruddin Farah [1993] *Gift*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 174.

¹³⁸ Manuela Coppola (2011) “Rented Spaces: Italian Postcolonial Literature.” *Social Identities*, 17:1, pp. 121-135, p. 123.

¹³⁹ Dal Lago (2004) *Non-persone: L'inclusione dei migranti in una società globale*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004, pp. 219-20. Also, the short story of Martin KiMani vividly underlines this aspect: “The best way to understand this system is to follow an African through it as he labours under seemingly automatic suspicion of being a criminal element; of carrying drugs up his anus; of malintent to fleece the social welfare system; and/or of contributing to the further soiling of a pure Western culture with his odd religions and smelly foods. For the African, the security theatre has no façade, whether it is practiced in an embassy or on the streets of any Western city. He is the first to suffer the indignities that are inherent in the oppressive and suppressive practices of the West.” Martin KiMani (2011), “Airport Theatre, African Villain.” In: Edgard Pietrese and Ntone Edjabe (eds.) *African Cities Reader 2*. Cape Town: African Centre for Cities, pp. 24-29, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Annie Gagiano has developed this reading in relation to migrants in the novel *Little Mother*, by Uba Cristina Ali Farah. Somalis, in Gagiano's understanding, are “not only dehumanized, but redefined as discardable, even as pollutants needing to be cleaned from society.” Annie Gagiano. *Dealing with Evils: Essays on Writing from Africa*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2014, p. 298.

¹⁴¹ Sandra Ponzanesi, “Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices.” In: Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds.) *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 165-190, p. 185.

knowledge about their past: “For better or worse, Somalis did not earn a name for themselves in Italy until 1991, when their country fell apart.”¹⁴²

As the analysis has shown, the airport is a recurrent literary place, useful to portray identity-related issues connected with diaspora. Also, it emerges as a textual *topos* with a metonymic value. For Alastair Gordon, airports form and shape identities, but are themselves shaped both by global and local dynamics.¹⁴³ As a metonymy for Mogadishu itself and the whole of Somalia, as well as for Rome and Italy, airports stage and embody, in a nutshell, the ethos of a society. According to this perspective, the airports here analysed show how fundamental human agency is in defining and shaping them, and how their representation moves away from the too narrow definition of non-places.¹⁴⁴ In the experiences narrated by Garane, Farah, Ali Farah, Korn and Jama, airports emerge as deeply relational places, in which diasporic subjects are confronted with the prejudices of the Western discourse, contested in terms of belonging and identity (Somaliness in Farah’s *Links*, Italianness in Ali Farah’s *Il comandante del fiume* and Garane’s *Il latte è buono*).

In this regard, Christopher Schaberg introduces the term ‘culture of flights’ to describe the dispersed set of sensibilities, individual feelings, and collective moods circulating around the subject of airports.¹⁴⁵ Schaberg quotes as examples of his concept the rigorous security checks in Israel and the “ramshackle experience of commercial flights” in Russia, thus implying the significant role of both social and local contexts in shaping airports’ spatiality.¹⁴⁶ In Farah and Garane’s novels, the culture of flights is displayed in relation with both Somalia and Italy: in a sort of infernal gateway, Jeebleh can glimpse anticipation of how Mogadishu will display itself, of its “terrible misery” ravaged by “futile violence”.¹⁴⁷ In *Links*, the overall sense of anarchy and aggressiveness perceived by Jeebleh at the airport is the same that goes with the reader during the trips of the protagonist throughout the city, a wasteland of violence and chaos. The metonymic spatiality of the airport captures the moral and social murkiness of Mogadishu.¹⁴⁸ In *Crossbones*, the description of the airport allows the reader to grasp the presence of an eerie calm, concomitant to the unceasing

¹⁴² Nuruddin Farah (2002) “Citizen of Sorrow.” *Transition*, 81-82, pp. 10-20, p. 10.

¹⁴³ Alastair Gordon, *The Naked Airport. A Cultural History of The World’s Most Revolutionary Structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Tim Cresswell, *Place*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Schaberg, *The Textual Life of Airports. Reading the Culture of Flights*. New York: Continuum, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁷ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ Annie Gagiano (2006) “Surveying the Contours of a Country in Exile: Nuruddin Farah’s Somalia.” *African Identities*, 4:2, pp. 251-268, p. 263.

feeling of being kept under surveillance by the panoptic logic of the ICU armed militiamen. At the same time, Farah has shown how airports depend on local sensibilities and aesthetics.

Moreover, the textual spatiality of the airport, important to exploring the struggle of diasporic identities and to epitomise the ethos of a people, also plays a role at the narrative level. Indeed, the airport scenes are placed, in Farah, at the very beginning of the story, in the first chapter of *Links* and the second of *Crossbones*; in Garane, the airport-setting *symbolically* occupies the same position, at the beginning, since it signals the starting point of Gashan's process of decolonisation through his Italian, French and American experiences. However, more than their role of thresholds, which allow the protagonists to begin their vicissitudes, airports act as physical and symbolical harbingers or anterooms: both in Farah and Garane's novels, they mark the setting and the tone of the story, and they provide the reader with a concise but accurate insight of the socio-historical coordinates in which the plots are set and the events narrated.

1.3 The station: Termini between reterritorialisation and linguistic re-appropriation

The focus on a shared spatiality, with the recurrence of Mogadishu across different texts, is even more common in Somali Italian authors of the diaspora, as almost all of their novels revolve around Rome's central train station: Termini. For example, Garane Garane's *Il latte è buono* describes Stazione Termini as the gathering point for his fellow Somalis who fled the country:

A Roma i suoi si riunivano nella «più grande stazione ferroviaria d'Europa», la Stazione Termini. [...] I suoi amavano questo monumento perché storicamente è come il parlamento di Mogadiscio. Furono entrambi costruiti dall'uomo grazie al quale erano finiti in quel posto. Gli africani vedevano questo posto come costruito da un vero uomo e non da questi mezzosangue, senza fibra, senza forza, che ti chiedevano se volevi un hotel, una donna, eccetera, cento volte al giorno! Tutto succedeva alla stazione, forse sotto lo sguardo benevolo del Duce. Si vendeva lì il *garbasar*, il *dirac*, il *rumay*, i biglietti aerei, i passaporti di un paese inesistente, dato che, per la proprietà transitiva, l'ambasciata non esisteva.¹⁴⁹

In Rome his people [Somalis] gathered together in the "largest train station in Europe", Stazione Termini [...] His people loved this monument because historically is like the Parliament in Mogadishu. They both were built by the same man thanks to whom they ended up there. Africans saw this building as built by a real man and not by those mixed-race people, without fibre, without strength, who asked you if you wanted a room to sleep, a woman, etcetera, hundreds of times a day! Everything happened at the station, perhaps under the benevolent gaze of the Duce. *Garbasar*, *dirac*, *rumay*, flight tickets, passports of an unreal country were sold there since, by transitive property, the embassy didn't exist.

¹⁴⁹ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 81.

Garane makes clear the correspondence between Rome and Mogadishu by emphasising the historical relation between the two cities. The parliament is then compared to the station, thus stressing the shared history of the two countries through the aesthetics of the building and through another cross-historical connection: the presence of Mussolini (“the benevolent look of the Duce” and “by the same man thanks to whom they ended up there”). In doing so, Garane recalls “the mythical revival during Mussolini’s imperial ambitions with the establishment of the [...] Italian East Africa”.¹⁵⁰ But this connection allows us to consider the station, rather than an atemporal *non-lieu*, as the “central organizing symbol” of the Somali diasporic condition, as it signals, both physically and literally, the displaced condition of Somali people.¹⁵¹ Termini comes to define a range of texts of the Somali diaspora not only because it epitomises the departure point of several generations of Somalis but also because, symbolically, it arises as one of the centres of the Somali diaspora, which resonates with the role of London’s Waterloo Station in the Caribbean narratives of the 1950s. In sum, Termini does not represent only *a space*, but also *a time* of migration and resettlement in Somalia’s history.

Whereas the relevance of Termini stands out in Somali Italian writings, it echoes also in Nuruddin Farah’s *Gifts* (1993). In the following passage, the protagonist Duniya, a 30-year old woman who lives in Mogadishu and works as a nurse, reflects upon her past and the condition of homelessness of many Somalis of the diaspora.

Duniya remembered being shown such people in the environs of the Stazione Termini, the main railway station in Rome. Nearby there was a piazza called *Indipendenza* [sic], the Somalis’ and Eritreans’ meeting-place in the Italian capital. Duniya wondered why it was that foreigners and the homeless congregated around departure- or arrival-points in their country of economic exile.¹⁵²

Whether Garane’s description aims to trace a temporal connection between Somalia and Italia, Farah emphasises the role of the station for the diasporic Somali community of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Also, Somali scholar Ali Mumin Ahad, who arrived in Italy in 1988, considers Termini as a pivotal place for aggregation in his autobiographical account.¹⁵³ Somali Italian author Igiaba

¹⁵⁰ Helena Cantone (2016) “Italy-Africa: A Contradictory Inventory of Modernity.” *Critical Interventions*, 10:1, pp. 5-27, p. 11.

¹⁵¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1993, p. 4.

¹⁵² Nuruddin Farah [1993] *Gifts*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 174.

¹⁵³ “Col tempo, in coincidenza con la caduta del regime e la guerra civile in Somalia, la stazione divenne il punto di ritrovo e di riferimento per la crescente popolazione di profughi somali dalla guerra civile. Era inevitabile recarvisi per una ragione o per un’altra. Una delle ragioni era anche la presenza della SIP nei

Scego, in *La mia casa è dove sono (My Home Is Where I Am, 2010)*, stresses the same importance of the station and traces, like Garane, a hypothetical vicinity between Rome and Mogadishu: “Allora Termini dava loro l’impressione che Mogadiscio fosse dietro l’angolo. Bastava prendere un treno e volare via lungo i binari di un sogno” [“Then Termini gave them the impression that Mogadishu was just around the corner. It was enough to take a train and fly away along the tracks of a dream”].¹⁵⁴

The station turns into a hub to find other exiled Somalis, thus forming a physical network across nations. However, Termini is, at the same time, a centre (of the Roman Somali community) and a periphery, since it occupies a marginalised area within the topography of the city. It is a threshold that becomes, due to the circumstances, the episteme of Somali migrants: Igiaba Scego explains that the city of Rome remained unknown for many Somalis, as they settle only in the surroundings of the station, in a sort of spatio-temporal limbo. The station represents for Somalis the “bridge between their new residence and home, a material and symbolic link with their distant homeland”.¹⁵⁵ Also, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel describes this in-betweenness in her *Lontano da Mogadiscio (Far from Mogadishu, 1994)*, as follows:

Roma, caput mundi. Sono alla stazione Termini [...] ovunque mi giro vedo volti somali. Donne belle, giovani e meno giovani, in sandali o tacchi a spillo, con chiome dai tagli moderni, vestite in jeans, gonne, pantaloni, magliette o con il tradizionale *dirac*; coperte da coloratissimi *garbasaar*, o modesti *bijabs*. Sempre in gruppo, come per esorcizzare la solitudine. Occhi perennemente in cerca di un volto amico di cui non si ha notizia da lungo tempo.¹⁵⁶

Rome capital of the world. I am at Stazione Termini [...] wherever I turn, I see many Somali faces. Beautiful women, young and older, wearing sandals or stilettos, with modern haircuts, in jeans, skirts, trousers, t-shirts o with the traditional *dirac*; their heads wrapped in colourful *garbasaar* or plain chadors. Always together, as to dispel solitude. Eyes perpetually looking for a friend you haven’t had news of in a long time.

sotterranei della stazione. Tutti, senza eccezione, dovevano recarsi lì per telefonare a casa, in Somalia” [After some time, along with the end of the regime and the civil war in Somalia, the station became the gathering and reference point for the growing population of Somali refugees from the civil war. One inevitably ended up there for one reason or another. One of the reasons was also the presence of the SIP (telephone company) in the underground part of the station. Everyone, with no exception, had to go there to call home, in Somalia]. In: Ali Mumin Ahad (2012) “Da un emisfero all’altro.” *Kuma&Transculturazione*, p. 10 (my translation).

¹⁵⁴ Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*. Milan: Loesher, 2010, p. 103. Also, the whole of Chapter 5 in *La mia casa è dove sono* is committed to the description of Termini (pp. 96-112).

¹⁵⁵ Lidia Curti (2007) “Female Literature of migration in Italy.” *Feminist Review*, 87, pp. 60-75, p. 61

¹⁵⁶ Shirin Ramzanali Fazel [1994] *Lontano da Mogadiscio*. South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, p. 52 (my translation). As noted, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel’s autobiography is quoted by Nuruddin Farah in *Links*: “He set forward and, turning slightly, saw a slim book in Italian written by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, a Somali of Persian origin.” Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 226.

The symbolic bond with the motherland becomes physical in the way in which displaced Somali turn the station into a familiar place, as Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Cristina Ali Farah and Igiaba Scego show. In the following extract, Scego describes the station as a centre for migrant communities and, in particular, shares with both Fazel, Garane and Ali Farah a common vocabulary, with recurrent words used to portray Termini's reterritorialisation:

La Stazione in questi ultimi anni è migliorata tantissimo. Da una parte ci sono stati i restauri del comune, dall'altra le varie comunità migranti si sono date da fare. Ci sono negozietti per tutti i gusti. Vuoi fare le extension? Vuoi un po' di cardamomo per i tè speziati delle tue parti? Vuoi un drappo con la storia della regina di Saba sulla parete di casa? A Termini trovi delle cose fantastiche: dai sari alla corteccia *rummay* per lavarti i denti, trovi anche la *goiabada* che i brasiliani mangiano con il formaggio [...] poi *eenjera* e *zighini* a non finire.¹⁵⁷

The station has improved a lot in recent years. On the one hand there have been the refurbishments done by the municipality, and on the other the various migrant communities have done quite a job. There are little shops for every taste. Do you need to do extensions? Do you need some cardamom for the spicy teas from your country? Do you need a drape on the wall of your house with the story of the Queen of Saba? At Termini, you can find fantastic things: from the saris to the *rummay* bark for brushing your teeth; you can also find the *goiabada* that Brazilians eat with cheese [...] then *eenjera* and *zighini* galore.

Likewise, Cristina Ali Farah, in *Madre piccola* (*Little Mother*, 2007), represents the station as one of the principal assembly points for the expatriate Somalis, the place where a sense of community may be preserved. The term reterritorialisation, coined by French scholars Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is useful in our case to broadly describe the re-establishment of Somali cultural aspects in host place, in the attempt to make it their own.¹⁵⁸ The personal geography of each author and character is then inscribed in a large-scale framework composed by the several movements of the diaspora, in which Rome emerges as one of the centres.

The conventional and transient spatiality of the train station, another supposed 'non-place', is then questioned. The concept of *non-lieux*, indeed, seems to find its antonym in the narratives of displacement and migration, where different kinds of mobility highlight how transient spaces might be used in other than merely functional ways. Termini, a *non-lieu* like the airports in Mogadishu,

¹⁵⁷ Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, p. 106 (my translation).

¹⁵⁸ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari [1972] *Anti-Œdipus*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari [1980] *A Thousand Plateaus*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004.

clearly present a place “relational, historical and productive of identity”.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the station is transformed by displaced Somalis who, by importing social practices and small economic activities, aim to re-build a familiar relationship between culture and place, as the following passage from *Little Mother* suggests:

I don't think one can write about the Somali community in Rome without starting from the Roma Termini train station, the crossroads, the scene of our longings. I even tried to convince myself for a while that it was a seedy place, only fit for tourists and refugees, a place where you had to hold on tight to your purse and gold chain. Preconceived ideas born out of my resentment. Who could not long for that buzz that hit you, in the central concourse, next to the train tracks, as soon as you got close to the café just like any other, the Somali café [...] there were always a whole lot of Somalis in that café [...] All you had to do was go to the Termini train station to meet the world. In those days we went to the *draddorio* to eat rice with goat meat, we got a *defreddi* at the stand, we bought *bajjiye* [chickpeas] with fresh hot pepper and *rummay* from the young girls.¹⁶⁰

As the passage shows, Ali Farah stages another practice of re-appropriation, that of language, as she makes calques of words and interweaves Italian and Somali. Termini's reterritorialisation is then combined with the Somalisation of the Italian language, as Somali communities of the diaspora engage with acts of both reconstruction of a place and re-appropriation of a language. Whereas Somali authors reconfigure the Italian language in the sense of self-representation, in *Madre piccola* this aim is achieved with the linguistic act of subversion of the Italian proper geographical names, such as *draddorio* as the loanword for *trattoria* [eating house]. Ali Farah tries to manipulate the language of the colonisers and to make it her own, as in *defreddi* [from *tè freddo*, cold tea], *fazoleeti* [from *fazzoletti*, handkerchief] or *kabushinni* [cappuccino]. In doing so, more than showing a conflict, she suggests a strategy of cohabitation in which words undergo a process of

¹⁵⁹ Jens Kirk, “Non-Place and Anthropological Place: Representing the M25 with Special Reference to Margaret Thatcher, Gimpò, and Iain Sinclair.” In: Gebauer, M., Nielsen, H. T., Schlosser, J. T., & Sørensen, B. (eds.) *Non-Place. Representing Placelessness in Literature, Media and Culture*. Aalborg, DK: Aalborg University Press, 2015, pp. 195-220, p. 206.

¹⁶⁰ Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*. Translated by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011, pp. 25-26. “Credo che non si possa scrivere della comunità somala a Roma senza partire dalla stazione Termini, crocicchio, luogo delle nostre nostalgie. Mi sono voluta convincere, per un periodo, che fosse un posto squallido buono solo per turisti e sfollati, dove stare attenta alla borsa e alla catenina. Preconcetti dei miei risentimenti. Chi poteva non desiderare quel fermento? Quello che ti scuoteva avvicinandoti appena, nel corridoio centrale, al lato dei binari, al bar come un altro, il bar dei somali [...] lì di somali ce n'erano davvero tanti. [...] Bastava andare alla Stazione Termini per incontrare il mondo. [...] Allora andavamo alla *draddorio* a mangiare il riso con il capretto, prendevamo *defreddi* al chiosco, compravamo *bajjiye* con il peperoncino fresco e *rummay* dalle ragazze.” In: Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*. Milan: Frassinelli, 2007, pp. 28-29.

familiarisation.¹⁶¹ Italian words are written according to Somali pronunciation, to signify an attempt of a linguistic inclusion. At the same time, they reterritorialise the station by re-naming local toponymy: Ali Farah, for example, refers to Xassan's phone centre and the Qamar's shop as "i nostri luoghi" [our places], emphasising a sense of belonging and familiarity, as to provide a well-defined alternative aesthetics and toponymy of the station itself.¹⁶² Ali Farah's passage parallels, at the formal level, Fazel's, Scego's and Garane's extracts, as they share recurrent Somali words such as the *rummay* [a twig used as a toothbrush] and the *garbasar* [a woman's shawl worn to cover head or shoulder]. The references to the sensorial field connected to food and scent appear as a shared trait in the description of the spatiality of Termini as re-invented and represented by Somali people.

However, both reterritorialisation and re-appropriation, which can be considered as two sides of the same coin, are both in the making and, thus, imperfect and incomplete. Cristina Ali Farah describes how Termini changed over time and how its spatiality influences her protagonist at the emotional level. After the Bossi-Fini Law, a stricter law about immigration introduced in 2002, Termini has turned into a different place, "so full of pain", and "a place that exhales pestilence, a crossroads to be avoided".¹⁶³ As well, the author emphasises how the spatiality of the station, once made up by small shops and friendly encounters, has turned into a capitalistic environment ruled by global brands: "flashy shops, Benetton, Nike, Intimissimi, Levi's, Sisley; fast-food places, phone canters, pay-for-use public baths, automatic ticket machines, escalators, maxi screen with advertisements, updated train boards".¹⁶⁴ Also in the following passage from Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono*, the spatiality of the station is conveyed negatively, becoming a place to avoid:

Mi inquietava la stazione da piccola. Non ci andavo volentieri. Quando i miei volevano salutare un amico, mi ci trascinavano per forza. Spesso frignavo. Crescendo, il mio rapporto con la stazione non è migliorato. Non frignavo più, ma provavo fastidio. Per me Termini era un ghetto, una roba da sfigati. Non volevo metterci piedi. Non volevo essere travolta da quel puzzo di piscio, da quel puzzo di sconfitta.¹⁶⁵

The station worried me as a child. I didn't go there willingly. When my parents wanted to greet a friend, they dragged me there by force. I often whined. Growing up, my relationship with the station has not improved. I no longer whined, but I was annoyed. For me, Termini was a ghetto, something for losers. I didn't want to set foot in there. I didn't want to be overwhelmed by the stench of piss, by that stench of defeat.

¹⁶¹ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 49.

¹⁶² Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 26.

¹⁶³ Ivi, p. 26, 145.

¹⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 26.

¹⁶⁵ Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*. Milan: Loesher, 2010, pp. 96-112, p. 104 (my translation).

The fictionalisation of Termini as a ghetto and, later on, the embodiment of practices of commodification, underlines how the presence of Somali people was subject to indifference by the Italian institutions. In Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's previous account, the verb *esorcizzare* [to exorcise] is key to understanding the importance of the place and its power to assemble Somalis together ("sempre in gruppo") so as to banish solitude. Scego also reflects on the limits of resettling in a specific area, thus fostering the segregation of Somali people, unwelcomed in the former motherland.¹⁶⁶ In this sense, Termini becomes a metonymy of the whole nation, since Italy is a place that allows only a limited social inclusion. Carmen Concilio has noted that "Italy is only a sort of waiting room, a sort of third space, not so much a third space of hybridity, but a purgatory between the hell of the civil war and the heaven of a future elsewhere, mainly in North America and Canada".¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, Ali Farah explains that, after the so-called Bossi-Fini Law, many Somalis tried to move to northern Europe, "toward one of those mythical countries that offer you a place to sleep and a plate of food: *Ingiriiska, Norway, Holand, Swidish*".¹⁶⁸ Because of the legal restrictions in permitting full citizenship to the former colonised subjects, Italy emerges as a country where it is unlikely to settle and plan one's futures; Termini, correspondingly, becomes a place of grief, sorrow and dashed hopes.

In this regard, Nick Tembo notes that Termini provides "an interesting way of looking at how unsafe or haunting spaces [become] a source of yet another form of migration for displaced bodies".¹⁶⁹ Indeed, transient places such as the station (and also airports) are continually revised in parallel geo-political and socio-historical changes. As well, diasporic subjects, who frequently travel across these places, are in incessant negotiation between opposite polarities: movement and stability, visibility and invisibility, tradition and transformation. At the textual level, a transient place like Termini turns out to be the defining topos of the Somali diaspora in Italy; it represents the

¹⁶⁶ "Per molte persone della diaspora somala conoscere Roma non era la priorità. Era [Termini] il centro dei somali. Lì cominciava la vita vera [...] Roma a molti non importava nemmeno" ["For many people of the Somali diaspora, knowing Rome was not the priority. It was [Termini] the center of the Somalis. There began the real life [...] Rome didn't even matter to many"]. Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, pp. 103-4 (my translation).

¹⁶⁷ Carmen Concilio, "Italy in Postcolonial Discourse. Jhumpa Lahiri, Michael Ondaatje, Nuruddin Farah." *English Literature*, 3, pp. 113-125, p. 122.

¹⁶⁸ Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 26. On July 11, 2002, the Italian government passed the so-called 'Bossi-Fini' (Law No. 177), which introduced criminal sanctions for persons caught entering Italy illegally or returning after being expelled. Immigrants were also subject to be arrested and held under detention for six to twelve months, if caught attempting to re-enter Italy before the expiry of a re-entry ban. A second offence is punishable by up to four years imprisonment. The permit for residence of immigrants was strictly linked to a work contract which, however, could not be provided to the subjects awaiting asylum review. Above all, all foreigners applying for a residence permit had to be fingerprinted.

¹⁶⁹ Nick Tembo (2017) "Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother*." *Scrutiny*2, 22:2, pp. 65-81, p. 67.

impossibility for Somalis to feel welcomed and incorporated into Italian society, but also the place that triggers the processes of reterritorialisation and re-appropriation. The spatiality of the station becomes then the manifold manifestation of the feelings of both exclusion (from the Italian society) and inclusion (in the diasporic community) experienced by Somali people. Whereas, on the one hand, it challenges fixed ideas of home and belonging, on the other it questions the atemporality of non-places and their non-relational feature.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter, according to Glissant's archaeological notion of *locus*, has tried to underscore the multi-layered representations of Mogadishu's and Rome's spatiality in different novels. In the first part, it has focused attention on Mogadishu's fictionalised representation, which has triggered a broader examination of its relevance in terms of nation-making and identity. As shown, the airport, with its temporal and spatial specificity, metonymically showcases the society to which it belongs and the country in which it is located. Instead of being a non-place, where human subjects are reduced to consumers or passengers and personal identities are nullified, it emerges instead as a *locus* of conflict and trauma, denoted both historically and contextually. These aspects have been examined in relation to three novels in particular, *Links*, *Crossbone* and *Il latte il buono*, across multiple languages. While, in *Links*, Farah narrates the occurrence of a shocking event that eventually traumatises the protagonist, in *Il latte il buono* Garane describes the problematic experience of Gashan as a Somali-born character at the passport check in Rome. Through the ways these characters negotiated the *non-lieux*, I showed how the latter are domesticated and rendered vernacular. *Crossbone*, as well as *Liido Beach* and *Il comandante del fiume*, further supported this idea of spatial 'domestication', also showing that airports may be looked as metonymical places. Instead of being unrelational, ahistorical and unconnected to their surroundings, they emerged as sites of intersection between local-bound practices and time-related dynamics.

The close reading of these fictionalised episodes has led to the analysis of another emblematic spatiality in Somali novels: Termini train station in Rome. It emerged as a space where Somali people tried to rebuild a sense of community. Diaspora, even though made up of different experiences and destinations, has become a symbolical and physical space embodied in Termini, where Somalis have found themselves bonded by shared experiences, such as the civil war and the following resettlement. Through the process of spatial reterritorialisation, I have shown how Somali Italian authors have described the process of familiarisation and transformation of Termini according to their cultural, social and linguistic practices. In doing so, Somali Italian

authors also tried to fight marginalisation and ghettoisation during a period, the 1990s, in which Italy became an unwelcoming country, ill-equipped to host African migrants and, paradoxically, even more hostile for those coming from the former colonies.

Finally, this chapter has investigated the representation of Mogadishu by focusing on distinctive historical moments, as to emphasise the importance of the city in the formation of Somali identity and nationhood over time. In *Il latte è buono*, Garane shows the significance of the colonial built-form for the making of Gashan's identity, split into two contrasting tendencies: his Somali and Italian belonging. Through the affection for his *luoghi prediletti*, he embodies the Fanonian concept of the 'mimic man' or, in other words, he is at the first stage of the tripartite decolonising process theorised in *The Wretched of the Earth*. This connection between place and identity, also alluded to in other Somali novels, has fostered a comparison with colonial textual and figurative sources, which showed how colonialism contributed to the shaping of Somali identity. The chapter, through the analysis of mapping and discursive strategies employed in a Fascist tourist guidebook, has shown the spatial and symbolical tactics, employed by Italians, to control and subjugate Somali people. *Il latte è buono* underscores the relevance of these colonial practices and how they influenced identity formation even during the post-independence period (1960s).

The next chapter will push the analysis a little bit further so as to connect spatiality with language. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I aim to show how Farah's *Links* confronts the core idea of 'colonial' as an overarching term for domination or superiority by showing a more nuanced use of the former colonial language, as Italian gradually lost its conflictual connotations. Moreover, I will explain how Italian shaped the identity of the protagonist Jeebleh and how, through Dantean intertextual references, the Italian language emerges as a means to reterritorialise Somalia from peripheral context to global relevance. In other words, I argue that the *Divine Comedy* allows Farah to draw a comparison between Medieval Florence, which has become well-known globally due to Dante's works, and Mogadishu, two cities associated by the experience of the civil war. The *Comedy* provides the lens through which the war-torn setting of Mogadishu and Somalia is portrayed in *Links*, and it also rises as a powerful diegetic device to support the protagonist's point of view, the latter being a Dante scholar.

Chapter 2.

The question of language: The Italian presence in Farah's *Links*

Along with language, it is geography –especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging and travel itself– that is at the core of my memories.

–EDWARD SAID, *Out Of Place: A Memoir* (1999)

In academic studies about Somalia, a sense of linguistic, cultural, social and religious unity is often recurrent in the descriptions of the country, which has been often labelled as one of the most homogeneous in regard to language (Somali), religion (Sunni Islam), ethnicity (Cushitic peoples).¹ However, this supposed homogeneity, which has been taken for granted in Western academia, has underestimated the presence of different ethnic groups, dialects, and contested borders. In fact, more recently, Somalia has emerged as a country with an intrinsic plurality of historical influences, social and linguistic practices.² The idea of homogeneity showed its weakness when Somalia imploded, despite having the right credentials to become a long-lasting nation-state due to its sound uniformity in terms of origin, language, and tradition of its people.

¹ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*. Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1963. I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988. Hassan Osman Ahmed, *Morire a Mogadiscio*. Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1993, p. 17: “Somalia is one of the few nation-states; there is only one language, the Somali, and the official religion is Islam.” Abdirashid A. Ismail, *Somali State Failure: Players, Incentives and Institutions*. Helsinki: Hanken School of Economics, 2010, p. 9: “What is more puzzling is how this [the failure] could happen in a country like Somalia, the most homogeneous country in Africa both ethnically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically.” M. H. Abdulaziz (2003) “The history of language policy in Africa with reference to language choice in education.” In: Adama Ouane (ed.) *Towards a Multilingual Culture of Education*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute of Education, pp. 181-200, p. 189: “Somalia is one of the most homogenous areas of Africa in terms of ethnicity, language, culture and religion.”

² Scholar Safia Aidid, in examining the works by I. M. Lewis (a prominent yet controversial scholar of Somali studies), noticed that they have “reduced the complexity and heterogeneity of Somali society as a whole to a monolithic, nomadic pastoralism even though it was based on his fieldwork observations in only one region of Somaliland.” Safia Aidid, “The New Somali Studies.” *The New Inquiry*, 14 April 2015, thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-new-somali-studies. Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia. Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995.

Quickly the Somali case has proven to be a telling example of how Western meta-narratives may fail to explain historical, political and social developments of non-European contexts.³ For Somalia, the terms theorised in the Romantic culture of the late eighteenth-century (same language, religion, ethnicity and territory) turned out to be unsuccessful in understanding the trajectories of Somali history, both pre-colonial and colonial, its sociopolitical formations and the causes of the civil war.

As already stated, the founding principle of this thesis is the concept of literature as an interliterary community, thus considering Somali contemporary fiction and poetry as a multilingual and cross-cultural space in which its authors, often polyglot, employ references and linguistic practices coming from different literary and cultural traditions. Literature as an interliterary community, therefore, challenges and reworks any nation-bounded idea of culture.⁴ The following analysis, accordingly, confronts the dominant paradigm about the use of former colonial languages in postcolonial writings. By comparing Somali authors of the diaspora through a transnational and multilingual approach, it opposes well-defined concepts based on linguistic hierarchies and grounded in the superior status of former colonial languages.

This chapter (as well as the following one), elaborates upon the use of language as a tool employed by Somali authors to investigate the concepts of nation, Somaliness and belonging. Moving on from the spatial perspective of the first chapter, the following explores the linguistic aspect, so as provide an analysis of both real and conceptual geographies in the Somali case.⁵ For this purpose, I elected the use of the Italian language in Farah's *Links* as the main focus, a slightly neglected aspect of Farah's production. Before close reading the novel, I also aim to investigate Farah's life,

³ Hassan Mahaddala (2004) "Pithless Nationalism: The Somali Case." In Abdi M. Kusow (ed.) *Putting the Cart Before the Horse: Contested Nationalism and the Crisis of the Nation-State in Somalia*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, pp. 59-74. Moreover, the linguistic policies of Siyaad Barre have privileged the nomadic language *Maxaa* (from the north), to the detriment of the agro-pastoral *Maay* (south), by creating an unbalance in terms of allocation of power and representation of Somali clans. According to Mohamed Haji Mukhtar, the two dialects coexisted until 1972, when the former was adopted as the official national language. Mohamed Haji Mukhtar (1995) "Islam in Somali History: Facts and Fiction." In: Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia, op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ For example, Farah has studied Amharic and Arabic at school, being Somali an oral language at the time of his education but can speak and understand Italian and little German as well. Ali Farah is fluent in Italian, Somali and English, having used these languages as her creative tools for novels and short stories (she now lives in Brussels). Garane, who studied in Italy and France, is currently teaching Spanish in the United States, but wrote his first novel in Italian. Finally, Mogadishan New York-based author Afdhere Jama wrote his novel in English with Italian and Arabic references. Likewise, Scego, whose novels are often inscribed in a multilingual framework that encompasses her first language, Italian, and then Somali, Spanish and English.

⁵ Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini (2018) "Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature." *Journal of World Literature*, 3:3, pp. 290-310.

thus considering the “*author’s biography or the author as a historical figure.*”⁶ This approach provides the reader with the socio-historical and intellectual context in which Farah was born and raised, because it played a significant role in shaping his oeuvre and his relationship with the English, Somali and Italian language. Moreover, I argue that his novels, and *Links* in particular, are fundamental for raising the epistemological question of considering the choice of using a former colonial language, for artistic purposes, as a mere evidence of subjection and hegemony. In fact, by studying the use of Italian in *Links*, I aim to show how the former colonial language undertakes a more nuanced role than the one ideologically laden due to colonialism.

2.1 Nuruddin Farah and his linguistic background

This section engages with the linguistic formation of Farah, in order to understand how his background informs his writing in relation to multilingualism and literary cultures. Farah was born in Baydhabo in 1945, a city located in former Italian Somaliland, two hundred kilometres from Mogadishu. He attended classes in Qalaafe, a town under Ethiopian dominion in the Ogaden territory, growing up “virtually as an Ethiopian citizen” and learning English, Amharic and Arabic.⁷ Since he could not pursue his academic education there, he moved abroad, choosing India as his destination. After a degree in philosophy, literature and sociology at Panjab University in Chandigarh, India, he returned to Mogadishu to work as a teacher.⁸ At that time, he wrote a novel in Somali, having a number of chapters serialised in *Xidigta Oktober* (the official government newspaper), but the censorship of Siyaad Barre’s regime discouraged its publication.⁹ Then he moved to the UK, where he attended a one-year master’s degree in theatre at Essex University (1975—1976) and wrote his first novel in English, *A Naked Needle* (1976). Because the latter allegedly made fun of the dictator and portrayed the corruption of the government, Farah was declared *persona non grata* and an enemy of the revolution by the Somalia ambassador in 1977. He decided to stay in Italy to avoid thirty years in prison back in his country for the accusation of being a traitor.¹⁰ After a short period between Milan and Rome, Farah moved to Nigeria, West Germany,

⁶ Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini (2018) “Significant Geographies: In Lieu of World Literature.” *Journal of World Literature*, 3:3, pp. 290-310, p. 304.

⁷ Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock (eds.) *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Jackson-London: University Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 47.

⁸ Ivi, pp. 43-62.

⁹ Censorship also discontinued a play he wrote, a satire of the cosmopolitan Somali élite of that period, similar to Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). In: Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock (eds.) 1992, p. 49.

¹⁰ “I was in Italy from 1976 until October or November, 1979, working on the trilogy. [...] Sardines underwent a great deal of change. At one point, one of the versions was wholly set in Milan.” Patricia Alden

then to Sudan, Uganda, and returned to his country only in 1996, after twenty years of exile, for a visit.¹¹ He finally relocated to Minneapolis and then Cape Town, where he currently resides.

As his biography shows, the route Farah followed to become an Anglophone writer –English being one of his five languages– has been influenced both by personal choices and by circumstances, such as censorship, resettlement abroad, exile, university studies, and the Somali language itself, which became transliterated into Latin alphabet only in 1972.¹² In this multilingual and cosmopolitan framework, we can locate the notion of ‘democratic drift’: Farah himself, with that term, explains that, in his narrative, language functions as a tool to express the protagonists’ points of view.¹³ Accordingly, Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine have studied at length how the English language in Farah’s novel does not aim at any “psychological verisimilitude” or realism, but rather wishes to express the character’s thoughts, political views and articulate their perspective, thus avoiding the singular authorial way of telling a story.¹⁴ Each character expresses his or her ideas by articulating them analytically, regardless of education, psychology, age, or gender. For example, Ubax, the eight-year-old daughter of Medina in *Sardines*, gives voice to her thoughts using the fluency and the linguistic competence of a well-educated adult. In *Links*, an armed member of the militia in Mogadishu who responds to the title of Major and drives the protagonist Jeebleh to his hotel, exchanges with the latter a dialogue about politics, history and identity, mocking the supposed superiority of American modernity over Somali primitiveness.¹⁵ Therefore, English may be understood as a creative medium for representing Somalia, as it gives the characters the opportunity to express themselves through a shared medium, which defines them more than the psychological insight or the verisimilitude of their social and cultural background. In other words, it seems that English allows Farah to display the issue of negotiating identities not only on a linguistic level, but on an ideological one. Indeed, his protagonists compete at the level of ideas, debating them regardless of their historical, social or political background. English, consequently, represents an aesthetic medium that emerges as a literary language which does not aim to give a

and Louis Tremaine, “How Can We Talk of Democracy. An Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” In: Derek Wright (ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*. Asmara: Africa World Press, 2002, pp. 25-45, p. 41, 43.

¹¹ Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock (eds.) *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Jackson-London: Univeristy Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 44, p. 62.

¹² “AS: I would assume that besides Somali and English, you still think in other languages such as Arabic...? NF: Arabic, and Italian, and I read French, and I read a little German, not much, and then I also have an attachment to the literatures of India because I went to university there.” In: Ahmed I. Samatar (2001) “Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” *Bildhaan*, 1, pp. 87-106, p. 89.

¹³ Armando Pajalich (1993) “Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” *Kunapipi*, 15, p. 64.

¹⁴ Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine, *World Authors Series: Nuruddin Farah*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999, pp. 157-161.

¹⁵ Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines*, pp. 13-14; *Links*, p. 18.

mimetic representation of Somalis' way of speaking or Somalia's linguistic context, but it suits Farah's highly erudite and analytical style to create a fictional country that for a long time has existed only in his imagination, during his exile.¹⁶

In several interviews, when asked about the choice of English, Farah reiterates the idea of the language as a tool to express concepts, rather than as a carrier of culture.¹⁷ For Farah, the “ideas that carry the book” are crucial in the writing process, so that the main aim of his narrative appears to be the portrayal of the multiple views of the protagonists. Farah's well-defined and self-aware opinion on the creative and literary use of language, as repeatedly expressed by Farah, marks his distance from the debate on African languages that have seen, as foremost spokesperson, authors Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Simon Gikandi has pointed out how Farah's literary works “have never been imprisoned [...] by the foundational moments of African literature”, established by the triumvirate of Chinua Achebe (1930—2013), Wole Soyinka (1934—) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938—).¹⁸ For example, when the latter were interested in exploring the postcolony through the eyes of male subjects in the aftermath of independence, Farah's published *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), a novel about the coming-of-age story of a nomad girl.¹⁹ Moreover, he employed postmodern narrative modes of writing while realism was used, with some exceptions, as the dominant approach to narrate the post-independence African nations.²⁰

In regard to language, Farah himself provides us with an answer about his positioning in the language dispute, thereby making clear his supposed non-involvement in the debate:

NIEMI: You have very often been asked why you write in English and not in Somali. But as we know there are strong reasons behind your decision to write mainly in English. First of all, you wrote your first novella [...] before the Somali language had a script. After the Somali orthography was established in 1972, you wrote a novel in Somali, but you ran into trouble with this novel and switched back to English. This question of English vs. indigenous African languages evokes the language disputes first discussed on a larger scale [...] in Makerere in 1962. Since then, for instance, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have openly disagreed on the language question, i.e. whether African authors should or should not feel free to use former colonial

¹⁶ Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine, *World Authors Series: Nuruddin Farah*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999, p. 162.

¹⁷ Ahmed I. Samatar (2001) “Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” *Bildbaan*, 1, pp. 87-106, p. 93; Rebekah Presson, *New Letters on the Air*. Kansas City: University of Missouri, 1993, radio interview.

¹⁸ Simon Gikandi (Autumn, 1998) “Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality.” *World Literature Today*, 72:4, pp. 753-758, p. 753.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*. Concerning the exceptions, a notable mention is Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974), a novel focused on the story of the protagonist, Elizabeth, an exile from South Africa, who has come to Botswana with her son, and the narrative of her mental breakdown.

languages, particularly English, in their writing. I am wondering what is at stake today in the decision to write in English rather than in Somali or another indigenous African language.

FARAH: My position is obviously not taking sides. What matters in fact is not often the language, but the content of what one writes. Obviously, language matters in determining the nature of the content, but I think in a current situation in Africa sometimes it would be very, very difficult to write in indigenous languages and remain neutral in political questions. And the reason is because, in a multi-ethnic, multi-language country like Kenya, somebody speaking a different language from Ngũgĩ might think, “Well, are he and I of the same mental mould?” And the other thing is that there is a great deal of jingoism and national jingoism in local languages. Which obviously does not necessarily happen when you are writing in European languages.²¹

In fact, even though Farah claims his refusal to take sides in the language debate, he seems to agree with Achebe, since he indirectly admits that a language does not carry its own ethos and that, consequently, it could be used as a tool to represent any foreign culture (as in the case of English to portray Igbo in Achebe’s novels). In doing so, Farah seems to challenge the idea of uniqueness and authenticity, supporting instead the concept of ‘function’ as introduced by Achebe in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975).²² This should be intended as the ability that a language possesses to adapt to the context, which depends on how the writer approaches the use of that specific language. The latter, therefore, is not considered as the bearer of a whole culture, but as a tool which the writer may use to convey cultural specificity.

Farah’s approach to language can be read according to his biography, which explains that his personal choice to use English has been the result of personal and historical circumstances, not explicitly connected with colonialism, as in the case of Achebe and Thiong’o. As his life shows, he attended schools in a region that, geographically, was located at the crossroad of cultures and languages (Arabic, Somali and Amharic) and then, when he moved abroad, he became exposed to English, Italian and Indian cultures until he returned to Mogadishu where, in the meantime, Somali had become a written language. This latter fact implied, for Farah, the fundamental impossibility to write in a language that was predominantly oral and had no official alphabet until 1972.²³ In this

²¹ Minna Niemi (2012) “Witnessing Contemporary Somalia from Abroad: An Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” *Callaloo*, 35:2, pp. 330-340, p. 330.

²² Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975, p. 61-62. Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice. The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literature*. London-New York: Routledge, p. 109.

²³ Farah, in an interview with Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina, ironically explained that the practical reason which prevented him from writing in Somali was the absence of a typewriter with Somali fonts. Rift Valley Institute. “Nuruddin Farah and Binyavanga Wainaina in conversation.” *YouTube*, 15 May 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbNk_uztZ8s. Accessed 10 May 2020.

scenario, the English language, as Michael Andindilile points out, has become the foremost “vehicle for bringing together diverse linguistic, literary, cultural and religious expressions into a genre that facilitates transnational discourse”.²⁴ It was Farah’s self-aware choice to represent a country that, for centuries, has been a multilingual and multicultural reality. In this regard, Gikandi rightly explains that “Farah’s political referent is local (his novels rarely go beyond the politics of his native Somalia); but [...] it is through intertextuality that he extends his literary and philosophical referent to make postcolonial Somali culture part of a cosmopolitan discourse”.²⁵ Accordingly, in the following section, I aim to explain how the Italian language, by its employment in the novel *Links* and in the intertextual use of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, supports Farah’s ‘cosmopolitan discourse’.

2.2 The Italian language in *Links*

Being an English-language author, Farah has been overlooked by Italian literary studies, even though his contribution to the enrichment of Italian postcolonial literature has been –and still is– essential due to his way of retrieving the Italian colonial past and its present-day interferences and legacy in Somalia. A few studies have addressed the role played by the Italian language in Farah’s novels.²⁶ Their contribution, though fundamental, is limited to the trilogy ‘Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship’ (1979—1983), with the exception of Christopher Fotheringham’s article, which is more focused, however, on the movements of Farah’s *oeuvre* in space and time through translations and reception.

The influence of the abovementioned scholars has been fundamental in the field of Italian studies, since they have raised the issue of colonial discourse and linguistic policies in the literary works of an author who does not belong, because of his use of the English language, to the canon of Italian literature. One shared key topic of their articles is the complex role that Italian played in the making of Somali identity and its ambivalence of being a language both of colonial domination and cultural empowerment for the cosmopolitan Somalis of the 1970s. Their works reflect on Farah’s

²⁴ Michael Andindilile (2014) “English, Cosmopolitanism and The Myth of National Linguistic Homogeneity in Nuruddin Farah’s Fiction.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 50:3, pp. 256-74, p. 256.

²⁵ Simon Gikandi (Autumn, 1998) “Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality.” *World Literature Today*, 72:4, pp. 753-758.

²⁶ Carlo Gorlier (1998) “Nuruddin Farah’s Italian Domain.” *World Literature Today*, 72:4, pp. 781-85. Itala Vivian (1998) “Nuruddin Farah’s Beautiful Mat and Its Italian Plot.” *World Literature Today. Focus on Nuruddin Farah: The 1998 Neustadt Prize*, 72:4, pp. 786-790. G. S. Weinberg (2013) “The Italian Legacy in Post-colonial Somali Writing: Nuruddin Farah’s *Sardines*.” *Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 26:1, pp. 26-47. Christopher Fotheringham (2019) “History’s Flagstones: Nuruddin Farah and Other Literary Responses to Italian Imperialism in East Africa.” *Interventions*, 21:1, pp. 111-130.

employment of Italian, which informs Somalia's "unusual relation to the culture of colonialism" and "the multiplicity of its cultural and historical influences".²⁷ In particular, Carlo Gorlier surveys the Italian words present in Farah's early production, so as to point out the linguistic evolution over time. Itala Vivan suggests intriguing intertextuality between Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979) and Italian author Leonardo Sciascia's novels, used as narrative models for the organisation of the plot, the characters and the central theme, namely the "useless quest[s] for truth in enigmatic labyrinths".²⁸ Lastly, Grazia S. Weinberg focuses her attention on Homi Bhabha's hybridity and liminality to explain the relationship that informs the protagonist of *Sardines* (1981), Medina, considered as a subject who "identifies neither with the colonized nor with the colonizer".²⁹

Nevertheless, even though these scholars have contributed to expanding Italian literary studies beyond national borders, the analysis of the Italian language in Farah's novels has been neither revised nor updated, thus overlooking if and how his use of Italian has changed over time. Therefore, in order to reassess the previous critical debate around this subject, this section proposes a new perspective on the role of the Italian language in Farah's late production and, in particular, in *Links*. In doing so, I aim to question the dichotomy between colonial and local language, since Farah engages with Italian in a peculiar and atypical approach: from a critical perspective, Farah's use of Italian questions general theories and concepts fashioned by postcolonial scholars regarding the use of a colonial language and its "indigenization".³⁰ As I will show, Farah systematically employs words and expressions in Italian in the same way African writers employed their native language *against* the colonial language, such as with the use of untranslated words, for example in novels *Things Fall Apart* (1954) by Chinua Achebe's or *The Voice* (1968) by Gabriel Okara's. The main point is that, in the case of *Links*, and according to the multilingual context of Somalia and Farah's biography, the opposition between colonial and native language is not binary, as more than two 'colonial' languages come into play. Since Farah writes in English, he employs unglossed or untranslated words in both Italian *and* Somali, thus overturning fixed categories and blurring the

²⁷ Simon Gikandi (1998) "Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality." *World Literature Today*, 72:4, 753-758, p. 753.

²⁸ Itala Vivan (1998) "Nuruddin Farah's Beautiful Mat and Its Italian Plot." *World Literature Today. Focus on Nuruddin Farah: The 1998 Neustadt Prize*, 72:4, pp. 786-790, p. 789.

²⁹ G. S. Weinberg (2013) "The Italian Legacy in Post-colonial Somali Writing: Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*." *Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 26:1, p. 41.

³⁰ Scholar Chantal Zabus uses the term to describe the way in which "writers from formerly colonized countries have sought to convey concepts, thought patterns, and even linguistic features of their mother tongues or first languages in the European languages." Chantal Zabus, "Writing with an Accent. From Early Decolonization to Contemporary Gender Issues on the African Novel in French, English, and Arabic." In: Simona Bertacco (ed.) *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures*. London-New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 32-47, p. 32.

divide between colonial and postcolonial linguistic strategies. In doing so, in his late production, Farah does not underscore the idea of Italian as a former colonial language, but he suggests a more nuanced approach that triggers questions of belonging and identity along a different axis than that between colonisers and colonised subjects.³¹

In Farah's *Links*, I argue that the use of Italian –which has been used even after the colonial period by the urban elite and administration– has shifted from being the cause of inclusion–exclusion and belongings in *Sardines* (1979) to a *lingua franca* for the protagonists of *Links* (2005).³² In this regard, if we consider the 'Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship' trilogy (*Sardines*, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, 1981, and *Close Sesame*, 1983), the Italian language embodies the legacy of colonialism and plays a significant role during the pre-independence period in the communication among well-educated and urban-based Somalis. According to both Vivan and Gorlier, Italian at that time was perceived ambiguously, as a love-hate relationship, being considered as both the most visible remnant of the colonial past and the means to cultural and social enrichment.³³

On the contrary, the use of Italian in the historical and political context of *Links* turns out to be peripheral –but not incidental– in 1990s Somalia. After the 1970s, Somalia witnessed the decrease of its “linguistic links with Italian” due to endogenous factors, such as the status of official national language acquired by *Af Soomaali* [Somali language] after Siyaad Barre's linguistic policies.³⁴ With regard to the Italian territories in the South, colonial education supported the main aims of exploitation and suppression of the colonised. If we consider the first period of the Italian occupation, at the beginning of the 1900s, it should be noted that the Dante Alighieri Society

³¹ In this regard, it may be useful to borrow the words used to describe another nomadic and atypical writer, the French-Mauritian Nobel Prize winner J. M. G. Le Clézio, whose “work blurs boundaries and progressively draws away from cultural specificities while transforming the text and the influence of fictional space into productive energy.” Martine Antle, Roger Celestin and Eliane DalMolin (2015) “J. M. G. Le Clézio or the Challenges of the Intercultural.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 19:2, pp. 123-127; Marilia Marchetti (2015) “J. M. G. Le Clézio: Une Littérature de l'Exil et de l'Errance.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 19:2, pp. 162-174.

³² The presence of the Italian language in Somalia has been studied by Susan J. Hoben (1988) “Language Issues and Education in Somalia.” In: Annarita Puglielli (ed.) *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies, Rome 1986*. Rome: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1988, pp. 403-409; Ali A. Abdi (1998) “Education in Somalia: History, Destruction, and Calls for Reconstruction.” *Comparative Education*, 34:3, pp. 327-340; Ahmed Yusuf Duale (2004) “Education in Somaliland.” In: Richard Ford *et al.* (eds.) *War Destroys, Peace Nurtures. Somali Reconciliation and Development*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, pp. 281-283. Ali Mumin Ahad (2017) “Towards a Critical Introduction to an Italian Postcolonial Literature: A Somali Perspective.” *Journal of Somali Studies*, 4:1, pp. 135-159; Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir (2008) “Somalia: Education in Transition.” *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 7:1, pp. 91-125.

³³ Itala Vivan (1998) “Nuruddin Farah's Beautiful Mat and Its Italian Plot.” *World Literature Today. Focus on Nuruddin Farah: The 1998 Neustadt Prize*, 72:4, pp. 786-790, p. 786.

³⁴ Carlo Gorlier (1998) “Nuruddin Farah's Italian Domain.” *World Literature Today*, 72:4, pp. 781-85, p. 783.

opened the first school to teach Somali children the Italian language (1907). But the highest scholastic level set for Somalis was grade 7, thus preventing them from attaining the same instruction of the Italians. Naturally, this type of education was functional to the intentions of colonial discourse, which aimed to train low-level cultured locals to perform simple tasks, but with a slightly different approach if compared with British colonial education and administration policies. During Fascism and after the promulgation of *Leggi Razziali* (Racial Laws, 1938—43) Somalis were definitely excluded from the educational system and physically relegated away from ‘white’ spaces.³⁵

Indeed, while Italian governors were interested in training Somalis to become farmers or unskilled workers, according to the policies of land exploitations of the Fascist regime, the British in the North needed Somalis who could help in the colonial administration, to maintaining law and order. Due to the Italian policies, the percentage of Somalis who had the opportunity to receive a proper education was minimal, even more in the South.³⁶ Besides, each Somali region adopted a different language for its own school system, according to geo-political influences. At the time of independence in July 1960, therefore, there were three languages as medium of education in Somalia: Italian, English and Arabic, the latter being used in Qur’anic schools. Further complicating the educational effort was the fact that Somali became a written language (*Af Soomaali*) only after 1972. Before that period, during the AFIS, in the Southern regions, Italian governments cooperated in the building of a university system and Italian was chosen as the primary language of instruction. In 1954 the Somali National University, also named ‘L’Università Nazionale Somala’, was established in Mogadishu. However, Somali and English were introduced too as additional languages of instruction, to emphasise from the beginning the inner multilingual and cosmopolitan feature of the Somali National University. From 1973 onward, during the first years of Barre’s regime, Somali language courses began to spring up throughout the country while English and Italian started to be uprooted. The language of instruction in primary and secondary schools also became Somali, in the attempt to balance out the system all over the country in the name of Somalisation.³⁷

³⁵ Shamis Hussein, “The Transition of the Education in The Somali Democratic Republic in the Post-Colonial Years System.” In: Annarita Puglielli (ed.) *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies*. Rome: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1988, pp. 412-13.

³⁶ Susan J. Hoben, “Language Issues and Education in Somalia.” In: Annarita Puglielli (ed.) *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies*. Rome: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1988, pp. 403-10, p. 404.

³⁷ Shamis Hussein, “The Transition of the Education in The Somali Democratic Republic in the Post-Colonial Years System.” In: Annarita Puglielli (ed.) *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies*. Rome: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1988, pp. 412-13.

However, in the wake of the civil war in the early 1990s, due to the rising difficulties of holding classes and acquiring books and other necessities, as well as the physical destruction of the buildings, classes at the university were suspended. The same fate happened to the entire educational system, which collapsed during the civil war. Moreover, the lack of a well-established Italian educational system contributed to dim the influence of Italian in Somalia, to the advantage of English, already spoken in British Somaliland. Accordingly, in *Links*, set during the 1990s civil war, the presence of the Italian language, as I will show, marks this decrease and emphasises the distance (both cultural and historical) of the present times from the burden of the colonial period. Italian, instead of playing the role of the colonial language, thus splitting the identity of the colonised into two conflicting selves, serves to contextualise the cultural boundaries inhabited by the main characters, two well-educated Somalis who had the chance to study in Italy. I aim to show that other factors, more than the Italian language or belonging, have a predominant influence in the protagonists' struggle to reassess their idea of Somaliness.

In order to investigate Farah's approach, I analyse two ways in which Italian informs *Links*: firstly, Farah places the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri as the main paratext. Dante's poem represents the central reference of Jeebleh's cultural horizon, and, at the same time, arises as the literary antecedent on which *Links* draws, as the numerous quotations from "Inferno" in the epigraphs illustrate. According to scholar Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo, because of the several intertextual references to themes and structure, Farah's novel can be considered as "an allegorical rewriting of [...] and a commentary on Dante's *Inferno*".³⁸ The *Divine Comedy* could, therefore, be understood as the literary bond between "Inferno" and Mogadishu, but also as the connection of the protagonist with two different cultural influences. Moreover, the *Comedy* also builds a link between the condition of exile, experienced by Dante in Medieval Florence, and the condition of civil war witnessed by the protagonist Jeebleh in his visit in Mogadishu.

Secondly, Farah uses in *Links* un glossed Italian words and expressions, which can be grouped into three main categories. For practical reasons, it could be useful to list them, in what could be considered as an attempt to draw up an Italian catalogue of *Links* as shown in the appendix at the end of thesis. The first category is made up of single words and short expressions usually emphasised in italics and never translated; the second includes most of all proper names; the third

³⁸ Francis Ngaboh-Smart, *Beyond Empire and Nation: Postnational Argument in the Fiction of Nuruddin Farah and B. Koyo Laing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, p. 71.

involves sentences that refer generally to Italy or Italian culture. I decided not to focus only on the Italian words in the narrow sense, but rather to widen the inclusion and embrace any references to the Italian background, to better understand the multidirectional relationship between language, characters, and the latter's cultural milieu. The unglossed words, as well as the several references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the novel, are therefore employed to denote the characters' culture rather than the writer's.³⁹

If we compare this list to the previous catalogue made by Gorlier for the novel of the 'Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship' trilogy, one first observation is that the words in Italian recur less often.⁴⁰ I argue that the presence of fewer Italian references in the context of Somalia during the civil war marks a historical turning point in Somalia, as they underline a gap between the present-day generation (which is made up of Somalis born in the post-independence period) and the old one (that of the main Somali characters, Jeebleh and Bile, who witnessed the AFIS and the period before the coup). Both Jeebleh and Bile studied in Italy, when the latter was –even though ambiguously– the country elected to conduct Somalia to independence.⁴¹ During the 1960s and the 1970s, the relations between Somalia and Italy were grounded in cultural and economic exchanges, thereby allowing Somalis to keep a partial control of the local administration and to study in the Italian universities, such as those of Padua or Rome, the two academic institutions most heavily involved in developing a higher education system in Somalia during that period.⁴²

In the different context of civil-war Somalia, the presence of Italian references mostly serves to underline a gap between the present-day generation of Somalis, unaware of or not directly

³⁹ Ashcroft *et al.* underline a similar practice in the case of Hindi words used in V. S. Naipaul's story "One out of many" (1971) and Ibo words in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1963). In: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. London-New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰ Carlo Gorlier (1998) "Nuruddin Farah's Italian Domain." *World Literature Today*, 72:4, pp. 781-85.

⁴¹ Ambiguity denoted the AFIS period, since Italy revealed both its interest to guide Somalia toward its independence following the UN agenda and a nostalgic attachment to colonial practices. Italy kept managing and controlling Somalia's economy and ruling the government, thus preventing Somalis to take sovereignty in the administration of their new-born nation. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. Nostalgia delle colonie*, vol. 4. Rome, Bari: Laterza, 1984; Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: Rome and Mogadishu from Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999; Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, "L'Italia e il Corno d'Africa. L'insostenibile leggerezza di un colonialismo debole." In: S. Matteo and S. Bellucci (eds.) *Africa Italia. Due continenti si avvicinano*. Santarcangelo di Romagna, IT: Fara Editore, 1999, pp. 100-16.

⁴² "After 1960 the Ministry of Education sought to turn all elementary schools into four-year programs, followed by four years each of intermediate and secondary schooling. It was decided that English should eventually replace Italian as the medium of instruction in the third year of primary school." Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir, (2008) "Somalia: Education in Transition." *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 7:1, pp. 91-125, p. 97.

influenced by colonial rule, and the previous one, that of Jeebleh and his lifelong friend Bile, grown “following a custom which has seen many Somalis [...] furthering their studies in Italian institutions”.⁴³ Farah himself informs the reader that all of them attended university in Padua and Rome, as well as Hagarr, Bile’s mother.⁴⁴ As the list shows, the remnants of colonial institutions surface in bureaucracy, education and food. However, Italian words provide the contextual specificity for Jeebleh, Seamus and Bile, who are distinguishable from the other characters because of “the formulas and conventions of the particular cultural language” they know.⁴⁵ The fact that they could speak or have learnt Italian locates them in a position that is different, for example, from that of Caloosha, the warlord antagonist of the novel, or Af-Laawe, the malevolent and sly Jeebleh’s guide in Mogadishu. In other words, whether or not Farah uses English to describe the intellectual debate in his novels, he also aims to give his characters “psychological verisimilitude” through the Italian language, a practice that he overlooked in his previous production.⁴⁶ These two tendencies coexist in *Links* and while Farah continues, on one hand, to organise his novels following a narrative inclusiveness (given by English language), on the other, he pays attention to denote a more careful characterisation of his protagonists (using, for example, Italian).⁴⁷

In relation to the connection between language and identity, Italian words also underline a shift in the making of characters’ identities. Whereas in the previous trilogies Italy showed its influence as the former colonial power through the presence of language and education, in the “Past Imperfect” novels, the United States arises as the latest emblem of the neocolonial global dynamics. To be more precise, I argue that Farah’s use of the Italian language has followed the shift both in his thematic concerns and in Somalia’s geopolitical situation. From “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship” (1979—1983) to “Blood in the Sun” (1986—1998), Farah moved the thematic centres of his novels from “the problematics of decolonisation and nationalism to [...] those of self-rule”.⁴⁸ Finally, in the ‘Past Imperfect’ trilogy, he finally achieved a more “cosmopolitan, global and transnational” perspective. This shift does not mean that a clear line divides the two periods, but rather that they are still interconnected, unsolved, simultaneous and blended, as the adjective ‘imperfect’ of the title’s trilogy suggests.

⁴³ G. S. Weinberg, “The Italian Legacy in Post-colonial Somali Writing: Nuruddin Farah’s *Sardines*.” *Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 26:1, p. 31

⁴⁴ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 170.

⁴⁵ Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 160.

⁴⁷ Derek Wright (1990) “Zero Zones: Nuruddin Farah’s Fiction.” *Ariel*, 21:2, pp. 21-42, p.17.

⁴⁸ Derek Wright (1990) p. 122.

After the AFIS period, Italy became one of the superpowers in an economically dominant position over Somalia, along with the US, the UK, and USSR, but lost its position as cultural role model, as it had been for the older Somali generations. The primary references for young Somalis are definitively global and are represented by American movies, Bollywood and YouTube videos.⁴⁹ In *Links*, Jeebleh struggles to locate his identity in the new (dis)order of things, to borrow Masterson's words.⁵⁰ The protagonist recalls the lost Italian period of youth, possibilities and promising future for him and Somali people with a feeling of bittersweet nostalgia. Against the unfortunate turn of events in his own country, Jeebleh's depicts his life in Italy as bohemian, and nostalgically recalls it using lively anecdotes and references to his university years.⁵¹ When connected with Italy, an overall tone of wistfulness denotes the reminiscences of Jeebleh, Seamus and Bile.⁵² Farah places the references to the Italian culture when the memories surface, to better describe Jeebleh's melancholic feelings towards his youth. A true enthusiast of *spaghetti all'amatriciana*, the protagonist's linkage with the Italian language emerges as marked neither by the engagement with nor by the burden of colonialism. In *Links*, the latter remains implicit, and it is not experienced by the protagonist with the same contradiction as in *Sardines*.⁵³ The Italian language represents the *lingua franca*, the common ground where his friendship with Bile and Seamus is sustained, having been the crucible in which their relationship was forged. Tellingly, Jeebleh describes their friendship as "a country – spacious, giving, and generous" and it could be argued that the prominent language spoken in this imagined country was Italian, as Jeebleh himself remembers that "the last time they met they used Italian".⁵⁴ The latter is also one of the links between Somali people across the globe, as suggested in a particular episode in the novel, when Jeebleh talks about the book by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel who, while in exile in Italy, wrote her autobiography *Lontano da Mogadiscio*.⁵⁵

The shift between the earlier and the later works becomes clear if we compare the experiences of Jeebleh to that of Medina, protagonist of *Sardines*. Both have pursued their academic career in Italy and returned to Somalia after their studies abroad. However, while Medina inhabits the so-called

⁴⁹ Farah, *Links*, p. 274, p. 294; *Crossbones*, p. 8, 9, 21, 127.

⁵⁰ John Masterson, *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work of Nuruddin Farah*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013.

⁵¹ Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 82.

⁵² Farah, *Links*, pp. 80-87, 191. In *Crossbones* too: "Jeebleh is back now to the remote past, where he pays a nostalgic visit to his and Bile's childhood and revisits his student day in Italy." Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 82.

⁵³ "Medina's relation to Italian culture and language is characterized not by assimilation, but by her intermediate status, "forever exiled, ambivalent, subaltern subject of cultural difference." G. S. Weinberg, (2013) "The Italian Legacy in Post-colonial Somali Writing: Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*." *Italian Studies in Southern Africa*, 26:1, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Farah, *Links*, p. 57, 185.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 226.

'third space' theorised by Homi Bhabha, namely the displacement induced by the feeling of being both a native and an outsider due to the knowledge of the former colonial language and culture, Jeebleh, in spite of his Italian influences, does not feel the same uncertainty related to identity.⁵⁶ Medina's condition of in-betweenness the Italian and Somali culture differs, I would argue, from Jeebleh's position, which is the result of neocolonial dynamics in which the United States plays the leading role. In this sense, the novel *Links* questions and fictionalises the power of a dominant culture, the American one, in shaping the representation of a nation such as Somalia, in terms of producing, controlling and sharing information and images. Farah directly engages with the Operation Gothic Serpent (3–4 October 1993) and challenges the dominant narrative of the military intervention created by the American media. From that moment onwards, Somali people have been depicted as savages and Mogadishu as "the world-capital of things gone to hell".⁵⁷ Through the status of Jeebleh –a native Somali and an American citizen– Farah aims "to represent and examine the US military intervention from Somali eyes", in direct conversation with the Academy Award-winning film *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and Mark Bowden's non-fiction book of the same name.⁵⁸

This problematic process of identification and belonging to two different national groups is played out in the field of language. In the case of *Links*, accordingly, Italian does not represent the point of contention. The novel, more precisely, instead of revolving around the colonial influence and its abrogation, explores new forms of production of knowledge from the West and, in particular, from the US. Rather than Jeebleh's fluency in Italian, it is his Somali language, passport and his American citizenship to cause him identity-related troubles and the exclusion from the Somali clan-based community.⁵⁹ Whereas Medina finds herself split between her Somali heritage and her acquired Italian belonging, Jeebleh does not struggle with his cultural connection to Italy, but with his American nationality. At this point, the terms 'transnational' and 'diasporic' with regard to identity may be helpful to better understand Jeebleh's position as portrayed in *Links*. According to the definitions suggested by scholars Cristina Bradatan, Adrian Popan and Rachel Melton, 'transnational' and 'diasporic' should not be used as synonyms. While "transnational [subjects] are firmly rooted in the host country and are involved in the social life of the community", diasporic

⁵⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

⁵⁷ Helen Fogarassy, *Mission Improbable: The World Community on a UN Compound in Somalia*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999. Garth Myers, *African Cities. Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*. London-New York: Zed Books, 2011, p. 138.

⁵⁸ Myers, pp. 138-139. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999. *Black Hawk Down*. (2001). [video] USA, UK: Ridley Scott.

⁵⁹ Farah, *Links*, p. 9, pp. 32-36.

people “have little or no mixing with their country of adoption”.⁶⁰ In the case of Jeebleh, he continually asks himself how to express his feelings about the US, concluding that he cannot say he loves his host country, being only “engaged with America”.⁶¹ Even though he considers New York as his home, he doubts he “would use the word ‘happy’ to describe [his] state of mind there”.⁶² Accordingly, in the novel, there are no references to his life in the US and almost nothing is revealed about his family, job, house or his everyday life. In this sense, Jeebleh may be considered diasporic towards America, since his emotional life appears to be more connected with his home country than with his host land.⁶³ At the same time, his relationship towards Italy seems closer to the idea of transnationality, even though at the time of the story it is linked to his memories.

As the presence of the words in Italian suggests, Farah gives the reader more information about the period spent by Jeebleh in Padua and Rome, decades earlier, than about his current life in New York, which randomly surfaces in relation to his wife and daughter (mostly absent from the novel if not for allusions). Also, instead of negotiating his belonging between his Italian and Somali identities, Jeebleh struggles with his affiliation to clan hierarchies and the traditional culture they endorse, dubbed as backwards [*dbaqaan biddo*]. Jeebleh experiences, as the whole third chapter of *Links* shows, the excruciating situation of being constantly questioned about his belonging between different polarities that those defined by the colonial discourse: it is his Somali and American belonging to be interrogated, both by Somalis in Mogadishu, and by Americans in New York, who always assume that he has arrived recently as a refugee. As Jeebleh himself states, his relationship with the adopted country is far from serene and more troubling than his relation with the former metropole: “I was fed up being asked by Americans whether I belonged to this or that clan” and, similarly, he remarks that it is “irritating to be asked by people at the supermarket which clan I belong to”.⁶⁴ Also, Jeebleh has troubles with his identity at the airport, at the very beginning of the novel, when his Somali passport is not recognised by the police officer at the documents check, as studied in Chapter 1.⁶⁵ According to the analysis by scholar Dodgson-Katiyo, “characters who return to Somalia from the West do not necessarily move from ‘the comfort zone’ into ‘a chaotic

⁶⁰ Cristina Bradatan, Adrian Popan and Rachel Melton (2010) “Transnationality as a Fluid Social Identity.” *Social Identities* 16:2, pp. 169-178, pp. 176-177.

⁶¹ Farah, *Links*, p. 42.

⁶² Ivi, p. 266.

⁶³ Cristina Bradatan *et al.*, pp. 169-178.

⁶⁴ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Ivi, pp. 9-10.

situation’, since they have problems in the comfort zone” too.⁶⁶ Language, in these movements across countries and cultures, poses its own problems, as it incites Jeebleh’s feelings of displacement and misunderstanding. Bile as well, who never left, affirms that in “Somalia the civil war then was language”, addressing his exclusion from the new order imposed by the civil war (“[...] only I didn’t speak the new language”).⁶⁷ Similarly, Jeebleh often finds himself in the condition of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. For example, he has difficulties in translating Somali expressions into English, as in the case of *dagaalka sokeeye* [civil war];⁶⁸ he struggles with the use of Somali pronouns, trapped in the uncertainty between ‘we’ and ‘they’ to mean Somalis in general or the clans, respectively;⁶⁹ he immediately recognises that the civil war has created its own vocabulary and shaped the language accordingly.⁷⁰

All the linguistic barriers that Jeebleh experiences are not caused by the Italian language: English and Somali, instead, function as a means of exclusion and inclusion, and work in parallel with the definition of his identity, split between being an American and a Somali. The two languages mark Jeebleh’s hybridity across cultures, as a subject who cannot exclusively identify himself either with his American or Somali nationality. *Links* seems to portray this challenging development of one’s own identity, in which both “language and gesture need to adapt to a different context”.⁷¹ To be identified as transnational, Jeebleh has to practice his Somaliness and understand that the civil-war context requires a new proper set of actions and behaviours according to the social actors involved. *Links*, in this sense, encompasses all the nuanced identity-related possibilities of someone who, like Jeebleh, identifies with different nationalities or national groups, rather than feeling alienated or displaced.⁷²

The feeling of displacement, epitomised by Medina in *Sardines*, presents a crucial difference from the position of Jeebleh: on the one hand, Medina’s in-between situation is brought on by the dichotomy of having acquired the culture of the colonisers and being a colonised subject, while

⁶⁶ Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo (2016) “The ‘Rubble’ & the ‘Secret Sorrow’: Returning to Somalia in Nuruddin Farah’s *Links & Crossbones*.” In: Ernest N. Emenyonu (ed.) *Diaspora & Returns in Fiction*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, pp. 77-81, p. 72. This is also evident in Farah’s *Crossbones*, which shows the treatment of Somali characters who underwent a process of stigmatisation and brutalisation after the 9/11 period.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Ivi, pp. 137-138.

⁶⁹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 12, 41, 219.

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 4. This aspect is analysed with regard to the airport spatiality and the traumatic event that Jeebleh experienced once landed in Casillay.

⁷¹ Bradatan *et al.*, 2010, p. 176.

⁷² Minna Niemi (2012) “Witnessing Contemporary Somalia from Abroad: An Interview with Nuruddin Farah.” *Callaloo*, 35:2, pp. 330-340, p. 336.

simultaneously being neither of those things. The Italian language, in Medina's case, represents the emblem of her cultural hybridity and, in terms of identity, shapes her liminal position across two nations that have been in hierarchical positions (metropole : colony). On the other hand, Jeebleh's uprootedness does not result from his experience in the former colonial country, because in his case, Italian "functions [...] as an identity-grounding home under a condition of displacement".⁷³ Jeebleh's relationship with language has unbalanced the old hierarchies, adding a third part in the picture, namely the US as neocolonial power. As shown, the Italian language embodies a *lingua franca* through which his friendship with Bile and Seamus developed, the language of his studies and of Dante's *Comedy*, which he uses as a guide to make sense of the national collapse.

However, Farah does not hesitate to underscore Italy's illegal activities in Somalia, and the role it plays as a neocolonial power, above all in *Crossbones*.⁷⁴ The latter, set almost ten years after *Links*, regarding the linguistic practice, marks the disappearance of any Italian words, so that the only linguistic references to Italian are the spelling of Mogadishu ("Mogadiscio"), proper names such as Padre Colombo, Brigate Rosse, or Istituto Universitario L'Orientale di Napoli, and the occurrence of the interjection "*Basta!*" ("Enough!").⁷⁵ Even though Italy plays a role in present-day Somalia, along with other countries, the cultural influence that Farah underscored during the 1960s and the 1970s has vanished in the 2000s, as the few references previously listed show. According to the changing dynamics of history and the decreased power of Italy in cultural terms, Farah makes clear that civil war has erased Mogadishu's past and, along with the buildings, also its history and its cosmopolitan features.⁷⁶ As shown, also toponymy, once dominated by Italian references, has undergone the same destruction, becoming completely absent in the new scenario of the 2000s.

In this context, the Italian language has dissolved, likewise the buildings and architectures of the colonial period. Civil war, diaspora, the collapse of the state and the neocolonial order in which Somalia is embroiled, have changed the relations of power, resulting in a far more composite

⁷³ Angelika Bammer (ed.) *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 15.

⁷⁴ Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, pp. 183-84.

⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 59, 319, 314 and 273, respectively.

⁷⁶ "In Mogadiscio the cathedral was razed to the ground in the general mayhem at the start of the civil war, but here in Djibouti the synagogue stands as testimony to peace. One of the first Somali strife was an Italian, Padre Salvatore Colombo, who lived in Mogadiscio for close to thirty years as the head of the Catholic Church-funded orphanage, one of the oldest institutions in the city. More recently, a Shabaab operative desecrated the Italian cemeteries, digging up the bones and scattering them around. To Ahl, the presence of a synagogue in a country with a Muslim majority is a healthy thing: cities, to qualify as cosmopolitan, must show tolerance towards communities different from their own. Intolerance has killed Mogadiscio." Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 59.

scenario than that of the colonial period. According to the mimetic stylistic use of the language, already undertaken in *Links*, Italian surfaces only in the old generation, such as in the case of Dhoorre (the secondary character who dreams about Vittorio De Sica's *Shoeshine*) and of Kala-Saar, a professor who has a doctorate from Orientale University in Naples and "has the habit of peppering his Somali with foreign terms in Italian, Arabic or English".⁷⁷

The colonial presence slackened its grip in comparison to what is described in 'Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship' trilogy (1980–83). Civil war made a *tabula rasa* both of Somalia and Mogadishu, so that the memory of the past (the colonial and the postcolonial) has been collectively lost and it survives at the individual level, in the memory of the old generation who witnessed those times. Therefore, if in *Sweet and Sour Milk* Farah compared Siyaad Barre with Benito Mussolini, stressing the continuity between the colonial dynamics and their equivalent in Somalia's dictatorship, in *Crossbones*, al-Shabaab is equated by professor Kala-Saar to the Italian left-wing terrorist group Brigate Rosse [Red Brigades], since they are "good at disrupting, not at constructing anything."⁷⁸ However, Farah reties the links with Italy by employing Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* as *Link's* primary literary and intertextual antecedent in the attempt of giving sense to the national collapse and to fictionalise the civil-war scenario. According to the idea that language represents the character's culture, I aim to show in the following section how this practice is put into practice through the intertextual references to the *Divine Comedy*.

2.3 Dante in Mogadishu: The role of 'Inferno' in Farah's *Links*

In *Links*, the epigraph section is exceptionally rich, and it is made up of twelve quotations by four different authors. The quotations establish a complex relationship between the plot, its protagonist, and the intertext, namely, the source of the epigraphs. In *Links*, the latter role is played by Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, which establishes several intertextual resonances with the novel and the protagonist. This section then proposes an investigation on how Farah's intertextual practices work between *Links* and the *Comedy*, so as to shed light on the specificity of Farah's employment and understanding of "Inferno" but, also, to examine how the intertextual use of Dante is helpful

⁷⁷ Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 48, 314. With regard to Kala-Saar, who represents the old generation of Somalis who studied abroad during the AFIS or in the early post-independence days, it is noteworthy that Farah introduces that character using an ironic tone, so as to encourage a parody of a know-it-all professor. Ivi, pp. 314-15, p. 318, 321.

⁷⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones*, p. 318.

in drawing a cross-cultural and cross-historical parallel between 1990s Mogadishu and Medieval Florence.

In his poem, the Florentine poet recounts in first-person narration his allegorical journey through the three realms, to which he commits three canticles: “Inferno” (Hell), “Purgatorio” (Purgatory), and “Paradiso” (Paradise). By employing the interlocking three-line rhyme scheme called *terza rima*, the Comedy provides a comprehensive overview of the knowledge of the Middle Ages, but also offers an understanding of Dante’s worldview and vast erudition about literature, politics and religion. Born in Florence in 1265 and expelled from his city due to political reasons, Dante spent his life in exile until his death in 1321, after years of wandering and unceasing writing; in exile, he conceived most of his literary production, including his preeminent work, *The Divine Comedy* (1308—1320).⁷⁹

Fiona Moolla has rightly noticed that *Links* overturns the grounding premise of the *Comedy*: “Dante the Pilgrim descends into Hell and discovers that it looks remarkably like his native Florence. Jeebleh, by contrast, returns to his native Mogadiscio and discovers that it looks remarkably much like Hell”.⁸⁰ Moolla’s comment on the two texts clearly points out that Farah does not aim to rewrite the Comedy. Accordingly, there are no systematic correspondences, for example, between the poem and the novel in terms of structure: while the *Comedy* is divided into three canticles consisting of 33 Cantos (34 in “Inferno”), *Links* is made up of four parts and an epilogue, for a total of 31 chapters. The plot itself does not reflect Dante’s symbolic journey through the three realms of the dead, nor does it embrace its allegorical scope. Ultimately, Farah jettisons several of the pivotal assumptions grounded in Dante’s medieval ethos, drawing upon Christian theology and Thomistic philosophy, such as the ubiquitous role of God, the divine and rational order of the afterworld and the logic of *contrappasso*, namely the principle by which punishments are assigned.

Despite these differences, the *Comedy* clearly emerges as the primary literary source that triggers a process of intertextuality. According to Gérard Genette, the latter notion, multiple and split, does

⁷⁹ The presence of exile emerges as an apparent association between Dante and the protagonist of *Links*, the diasporic Somali Jeebleh, who fled Mogadishu at the outbreak of the civil war to settle in the United States. Moreover, it recalls Farah’s life, as he began an exile that would last for 22 years after being warned by the Somali government that he would be arrested over the content of his novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976). In *Links*, however, Farah does not uphold this association explicitly, thus leaving the shared biographical aspect of exile in the background. *Links*, in fact, is a novel about homecoming and describes the experience of Jeebleh’s return home, rather than his life in New York as an expatriate.

⁸⁰ Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*. Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2014, p. 158.

not represent only “a relationship of co-presence of one text within another”, but it engages with a series of different practices within the variable system of textual analysis and interpretation.⁸¹ In the case of *Links*, as Lorenzo Mari appropriately suggests, Farah employs intertextuality as a means to build a metaphorical-metonymic conversation between the poem and the novel through some extra-textual elements, such the epigraphs, which are significant for its in-depth interpretation.⁸² The focus of this section is to show that the complex intertextual network should certainly be investigated, as Mari indicates, as a dialogue between the novel and the poem, but from the protagonist’s point of view. More specifically, the *Comedy* provides the lenses through which Farah and Jeebleh address the war-torn setting of Mogadishu and Somalia, and it also represents a powerful diegetic device to support the protagonist’s point of view, the latter being a Dante scholar. Indeed, Jeebleh looks at “Inferno” as his principal source to unravel the complex skein of Somalia’s reality, to grasp the events he witnessed, and to describe the characters he met during his journey.

However, this process occurs at two different levels, namely that of the author and that of the protagonist. On the one hand, Farah supports his protagonist’s analytical understanding of Mogadishu’s civil war by fostering a parallel between the latter and medieval Florence, thus reading the civil-war scenario in Somalia with the Dante’s distinctive visual and narrative skills. On the other, he implies a degree of incommensurability between his novel and the poem by suggesting the limits of Jeebleh’s perspective based on Dante’s references. This practice can be retrieved in the *Comedy* as well: in the poem, even though the author is the protagonist, Dante the poet distances himself from the character; in *Links*, this distance is paralleled (or recalled) by Farah’s attitude towards his protagonist, both to underscore the latter’s limited perspective and to endow him “with sufficient voice to express an understanding, particular to [him], of what it means to be human and to play roles in human communities”.⁸³ In other words, the tercets from “Inferno” aim to give, from the protagonist’s point of view, “shape and significance to the immense panorama [...] of anarchy” into which Mogadishu and Jeebleh are plunged.⁸⁴ Drawing upon the imaginative richness of Dante’s poem, the protagonist deciphers and interprets his experience in the city. Farah fosters this view by weaving a multifaceted thread of intratextual and intertextual connections, either allusive or explicit. At the same time, I argue, Farah also disturbs the rationale behind Jeebleh’s interpretation: he prompts the readers to place his novel against the backdrop of Dante’s poem, by

⁸¹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*. University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 1.

⁸² Lorenzo Mari, *Forme dell’interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e World Literature*. Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2018, p. 103.

⁸³ Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine, *Nuruddin Farah*. Woodbridge, US: Twayne Publishers, 1999, p. 161.

⁸⁴ T. S. Eliot (1923) “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” *The Dial*, 75, pp. 480-83, p. 483.

using the latter as the primary literary resource to structure *Links* and Jeebleh's mental universe, but he also distances himself from the *Comedy*, thus attesting its insufficiency to represent present-day Somalia's condition.

The following analysis will show how this double strategy occurs, and how Farah both articulates similarities and parallels with "Inferno", but also unsettles his protagonist's understanding by implying his one-sidedness. Specifically, Farah reveals that Dante's view is partially incomplete and inadequate to understand the realities of Somalia unless one employs different practices of intertextuality, such as subversion, simplification, and recontextualisation, which can be considered as key practices to elucidate the relationship between the *Comedy* and *Links*. The choice of the *Comedy* as the primary intertext, at this point, could appear unclear due to the apparent differences and the necessity to modify and adapt it. However, I argue that Farah's choice to draw on Dante's poem relies on its ability to cross time, space and language through its eschatological scope and universal claim. As I will show, Farah seems interested in the political aspect of Dante's poetics and his evocative representation of Hell as the after-life equivalent of Florence.

Farah turns the *Comedy* to his own advantage and employs it to represent the new and specific context of Somalia. He finds in "Inferno" a rich set of imaginative resources and visionary images that supports his representation, dramatisation and understanding of Somalia present-day condition, which resembles an infernal experience. In the case of *Links*, Farah looks at Dante's poem in relation to its ability to intertwine universal aspects with the local framework of medieval Florence. By invoking a universal and human condition of suffering, Farah resolves the separation between the two texts and fosters their intertextual link. Hence, the following intertextual analysis aims to stress "interpretation rather than [...] the establishment of particular facts" between the poem and the novel, in order to retrieve and examine "the cultural codes which are realized (and contested) in texts".⁸⁵ Farah does not provide a close reading of the poem, denoting a lack of philological interest in retrieving the exact historical context of Dante's times.⁸⁶ Likewise, instead of reclaiming the theological, teleological, and allegorical scope of the *Comedy*, Farah shows interest in Dante's fictionalisations of the relationship between humans in an ill-fated time of grief and sorrow and dire political contexts.

⁸⁵ John Frow, "Intertextuality and Ontology." In: Michael Worton and Judith Still (eds.) *Intertextuality. Theories and Practices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 46-55, p. 46.

⁸⁶ Lorenzo Mari, *Forme dell'interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e World Literature*. Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2018, p. 102.

Before examining Farah's interpretative process of the *Comedy*, I wish to highlight three aspects of the novel concerning the theme of exile, the narrator and the edition of the poem used by Farah. Concerning the first aspect, Jeebleh shares with Dante (and with Farah) the same condition of exile, as noticed by Moolla.⁸⁷ However, as the analysis will clarify, the quotations from Dante's poem never refer to this biographical connection, thus leaving the shared feature of exile in the background. Farah suggests, on the one hand, by presenting the Somali civil war as a modern-day Hell along with the paired comparison between Dante's Florence and "Inferno", a profound interconnection between past and present, but also between Italy and Somalia, along with cross-cultural and cross-historical analogies. On the other hand, Farah emphasises the need for a recontextualisation, suggesting that Dante's intertext is also partly inadequate to the task of wholly describing Somalia's contemporary reality.

This latter aspect surfaces due to the high degree of recontextualisation, but also in a network of intertextual links that encompass several other references to Somali folktales, American television news, newspapers, films, Irish fables and the Koran. In other words, "Although Dante's "Inferno" constitutes a prominent literary intertext of *Links*, the latter also integrates references to media representations of the war, in a way deploying them as another subtext"⁸⁸. While the protagonist recognises in Mogadishu an earthly Hell drawn upon Dante's description of the netherworld, Farah implies that this perspective is confined to Jeebleh's point of view. Indeed, other characters may have engaged different representations and understandings of Mogadishu and the civil war, derived from their own beliefs and cultural background. For example, in a dialogue of the novel, Farah explores three different ideas of Hell according to Jeebleh, Bile and their friend Seamus.⁸⁹ The first, as shown, shares Dante's imaginative creation unfolded in "Inferno", building a bridge between the representational level of the fictional character and the paratextual element supplied by the author. The second, Bile, draws his interpretation from the Koran, which enables a relationship between 'Hell' and 'fire' while, lastly, Seamus argues that Hell should be considered as "a state of mind" by telling an Irish fable.⁹⁰

This example, along with the limited third-person narrator, who provides the reader with the thoughts and actions of the protagonist alone, further supports the understanding of the novel as

⁸⁷ Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*, p. 158.

⁸⁸ Ines Mzali, "Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Nuruddin Farah's *Links*." *College Literature*, 37:3, 2010, pp. 84-105, p. 95

⁸⁹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 57.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

primarily focused on Jeebleh's point of view. He is the focal character and always appears on the scene, so that the events of the plot are described through his perception; the reader, then, comes to know about the offstage actions when and if other characters tell them to Jeebleh once they have happened. The *Comedy* surfaces as a bridge between the "mental universe" of Jeebleh and that of the reader, via intertextual and intratextual practices.⁹¹ The reader, in turn, plays an active role in unravelling this multi-layered intertextuality made up of recontextualisation, allusions and subversions.

An example of how the *Comedy* occupies the mental universe of Jeebleh may be found in the passage of the novel, also pointed out by John Masterson, when the protagonist himself states: "I recited a verse from Dante's *Inferno*, in which enslaved Somalia was a home of grief, a ship with no master that was floundering in a windstorm".⁹² Farah analogises Somalia to Italy via the metaphorical use of the "home of grief" and the ship left adrift, so to debunk the idea that the concept of "failed nation" can be applied only to postcolonial countries. This trans-historical analogy supports the argument that Farah employs the *Comedy* as a source that allows him to develop a universalising process: by drawing a parallel between thirteenth-century Italy and contemporary Somalia, Farah points out the joint historical trajectories occurred by both the metropole and the so-called colonial periphery.

Finally, the third aspect concerns the issue of language. Farah used Allen Mandelbaum's English translation of the *Comedy*, instead of the original Italian version, as he acknowledged in the final "Author's note".⁹³ This choice of relying on the translation, despite the familiarity with the Italian language by both Farah and the protagonist, seems to overshadow the role of Dante as a former colonial author. The latter term, in this case, should be understood as a reference to the Italian canonical authors who were employed in the 'colonial' education in Somalia, as well as during the AFIS (1950—60).⁹⁴ However, in *Links*, Farah minimises this scholastic role of Dante by avoiding

⁹¹ Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*, p. 158.

⁹² John Masterson, *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work by Nuruddin Farah*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013, p. 153. Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 193. To be precise, these metaphors have a different source: while "a home of grief" is the translation of "doloroso ospizio" in "Inferno" (*Canto V*, 16), the image of the ship is taken from "Purgatory" (*Canto VI*, 77) and translates the line: "Nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta" [ship without a helmsman in harsh seas].

⁹³ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, 335.

⁹⁴ Indeed, as Ali A. Abdi has noticed, "one of the first formal colonial schools operating in Somalia was opened by the Italian Dante Alighieri Society in 1907 to teach Somali children the Italian." In: Ali A. Abdi (1998) "Education in Somalia: History, Destruction, and Calls for Reconstruction." *Comparative Education*, 34:3, pp. 327-340, p. 331.

any specific reference to the Tuscan poet's presence in the colonial educational system, as instead explicitly highlighted by other Somali authors, such as Garane Garane in his novel *Il latte è buono*.⁹⁵

Therefore, more than a colonial author imposed by the former Italian cultural supremacy in Somalia, Dante appears as a transnational model to represent human suffering, along with an extensive tradition of authors who have re-actualized and re-interpreted the *Comedy*, such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Primo Levi, Osip Mandelstam and Derek Walcott. This universalizing feature of the poem is then the shared starting point to trigger the following intertextual analysis, focused on the particular and personal approach employed by Farah to adapt the *Comedy* for his purpose. As the following analysis will show, Farah focuses his attention on how the poem exemplifies Jeebleh's affiliation to the Italian culture, and how it represents a diegetic device to provide the symbolic background through which the protagonist experiences Mogadishu.

Concerning the epigraph, Gérard Genette defines the epigraph as “a quotation placed *en exergue*, generally at the head of a work or a section of a work”.⁹⁶ In *Links*, the corpus of quotations of the epigraph section may be divided into two groups, according to the source, location, and function. Farah places three quotations from different authors before the title and after the dedication.

If you don't want to be a monster, you've got to be like your fellow creatures, in conformity with the species, the image of your relations. Or else have progeny that make you the first link in the chain of a new species. For monsters do not reproduce.

MICHAEL TOURNIER

The individual leads in actual fact a double life, one in which he is an end to himself and another in which he is a link in a chain which he serves against his will or at least independently of his will.

SIGMUND FREUD

A dog starved at his master's gate
Predicts the ruin of the state!

WILLIAM BLAKE

I argue that Tournier, Freud and Blake's function “is one of commenting –sometimes authoritatively– and thus of elucidating and thereby justifying not the text but the title”.⁹⁷ Also, they disclose the identity struggle of the protagonist, but they do not reappear as intratextual references, and they do not seem to belong to the imaginative universe of the characters. Even

⁹⁵ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 47.

⁹⁶ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 144.

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 156.

though interesting, they are beyond the scope of this analysis and, thus, they will not be discussed here in-depth. The quotations with a higher “illocutionary force” are, in fact, those from Dante, which represent the primary subject of this analysis.⁹⁸ They are all taken from “Inferno”, and they share the same position, being located before each of the four parts and the epilogue.

In order to examine the intertwined practices of subversion, simplification, allusions and recontextualisation, I suggest looking at the first four epigraphic quotations from Dante’s “Inferno” placed before Part 1. The first is made up of the lines 1-3 of *Canto III*:

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY,
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL PAIN,
THROUGH ME THE WAY THAT RUNS AMONG THE LOST.

These words are engraved on the gate of Hell, as they appear to Dante the pilgrim and the Latin poet Virgil, his reliable and wise guide through the netherworld and the embodiment of reason.⁹⁹ Chapter 1 has analysed Jeebleh’s Dantean allusion to describe the city as “a place of sorrow” and as “the city of death”, directly rephrasing Dante’s tercet.¹⁰⁰ In this case, the intratextual reference between the paratext and the text via Jeebleh, allows Farah to establish the literary framework in which both his protagonist and the novel are inscribed.

Farah then stretches another allusion, less explicit, when introducing the character of Af-Laawe, who appears as a shadow, like Virgil when he materialises in the first meeting with the pilgrim.¹⁰¹ Jeebleh himself supports this allusion further by noticing that Af-Laawe’s name means “the one with no mouth” and that, “to a Dante scholar” it “might allude to the *Inferno*”.¹⁰² However, the latter correspondence remains ambiguous. As in the case of the metaphors of the ship and the house, Dante is used by Jeebleh without precise references. This imprecision supports the fact that Farah is not interested in a philological rewriting of the *Comedy*, and that Jeebleh himself uses Dante’s lines to describe the Somali context loosely.

⁹⁸ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Edited by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991, p. XXII.

¹⁰⁰ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 5, 70.

¹⁰¹ Ivi, p. 4. Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*, p. 158.

¹⁰² Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 123.

Mari suggests that, in fact, Af-Laawe represents the “negative parody” of Virgil and that his name refers to Siyaad Barre, whose sobriquet was Af-weyne [big mouth].¹⁰³ However, starting from this interpretation, a reader who is familiar with the poem may spot another similarity, that between Af-Laawe and Charon, the mythological boatman who ferries the souls across the river Acheron. As in the *Comedy*, Af-Laawe does not drive Jeebleh to the city and he only manages to organize a lift for him, similarly to Charon’s role as psychopomp, who withholds from Dante, being a living body, a trip in his boat. In the poem, the crossing of the river Acheron is left undescribed, since Dante faints, waking up on the other side, at the beginning of the following *Canto*. The comparison between the mythological ferryman and Af-Laawe is also reinforced, as the latter is described while being busy with carrying away a boy’s corpse (ten-year-old boy senselessly murdered at the airport, as described in Chapter 1) with his funeral vehicle.¹⁰⁴ The same uncanny resemblance and degree of uncertainty also affects the analogy with Virgil. In fact, the latter has no direct equivalent in *Links*. Since no one can be trusted, because lies are the norm in a city where friendship, family, loyalty, betrayal, violence and hatred are nuanced terms, Jeebleh cannot be wisely guided through Mogadishu. Besides, “distrust was the order of the day, and everyone was suspicious of everybody else”.¹⁰⁵ This presence of ubiquitous conspiracies and machinations suggests one of the causes at the heart of the civil war: “the betrayal of one Somali by another”.¹⁰⁶

The last quotation of the epigraph further buttresses the cloak and dagger background of the novel: “They said he was a liar and father of lies”. Dante, in *Canto XXIII* (line 144), employs this single-line periphrasis to describe Lucifer, but Farah discards the context of the *Canto* and uses the fallen angel as a benchmark to refer to the former dictator Siyaad Barre. As well as Lucifer, who is not mentioned in that line, Barre is a *presentia in absentia*, since his role and legacy are only implied.¹⁰⁷ However, whether Jeebleh explicitly places betrayal in the foreground to describe his fellow Somalis’ behaviour, Farah makes him a liar and a traitor in the first place. Jeebleh tells half-truths to his wife in New York regarding his business in Mogadishu;¹⁰⁸ Caloosha, the antagonist, repeatedly calls him a liar and implies that Jeebleh’s mother may have died thinking him a traitor;¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Lorenzo Mari, *Forme dell’interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e World Literature*. Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2018, p. 104. Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. Westport-London: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Ivi, p. 51.

¹⁰⁶ Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁷ Lorenzo Mari, *Forme dell’interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e World Literature*. Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2018, p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, 178.

¹⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 102, 237.

finally, he “wouldn’t hesitate to lie if he believed that by doing so he might serve a higher purpose”.¹¹⁰ This latter idea leads him, in the end, to even justify violence for the sake of justice.¹¹¹ Farah then dramatises how Jeebleh becomes progressively involved in the social and moral codes of the civil war, so that, “paradoxically, the quest for justice draws him closer and closer to the Devil”.¹¹² On the contrary, Dante’s gradual proximity to the pit of Hell, where Lucifer dwells, does not correspond with his resulting moral corruption, since the poem allegorically represents the soul’s journey towards God.

This attention placed on the human aspect, rather than on the dogmatic features that underpin the poem, is retrieved in the epigraphic quotation from *Canto III*:

For we have reached the place...
where you will see the miserable people,
those who have lost the good of the intellect.

These lines 16-18 recontextualise the lost souls of Hell as the inhabitants of Mogadishu, thus acquiring the function of “commenting on the text, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasises”.¹¹³ Jeebleh himself, rephrasing Dante’s words and stressing the intratextual references, describes his fellow Somalis as “dwelling in terrible misery” and as people who have lost their ability to “remain in touch with their inner selves”.¹¹⁴ The latter description paraphrases the word ‘intellect’, but again, Farah recontextualises the term, distancing it from Dante’s meaning: while, in the tercet, ‘intellect’ means God or the Supreme Good, in the novel it denotes the capacity to choose between right or wrong, good or evil.¹¹⁵ The harsh judgement made by Jeebleh about Mogadishans further shrinks the spectrum of human feelings and reduces the inhabitants, due to the cruelty of the civil war, into non-human beings who, “living in such vile conditions, were bound to lose touch with their own humanity”.¹¹⁶

The third and last quotation of Part 1, from “Inferno” X, further underscores the symbolic association between the sinners’ souls and the people of Mogadishu, arising an identity issue:

¹¹⁰ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 48.

¹¹¹ Ivi, p. 332.

¹¹² Fiona F. Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah. The Individual, the Novel, the Idea of Home*, p. 123.

¹¹³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 157.

¹¹⁴ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 15, 70.

¹¹⁵ Natalino Sapegno, *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1981, p. 31.

¹¹⁶ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 201.

Your accent makes it clear that you belong
among the natives of the noble city...”
My guide—his hands encouraging and quick-
thrust me between the sepulchers toward him,
saying... “Who were your ancestors?”

Farah assembled the tercets himself by accurately choosing the lines of *Canto X* (25-26; 37-39; 42) more suitable to highlight Jeebleh’s struggle with his identity. To better elucidate this strong intertextual link, the more general discursive structure of *Canto X* should be considered. Dante and Virgil stand in the sixth circle, where open tombs engulfed by flames surround them. Here lay the heretics, meaning by heresy the “self-separation from that with which we should be connected (city, God, family, friends)”.¹¹⁷ This explanation echoes Jeebleh’s expression referring to the inhabitants of Mogadishu, who lost the ability to live according to the rules of the society, and “showed little or no kindness to one another”.¹¹⁸ In this regard, Farah relies on the translation “noble city” for “nobil patria” [noble homeland], overturning Dante’s generic allusion into an explicit reference to the urban context. Mogadishans have restored ill-fated clan logics, and everyone has become suspicious of friendship, due to the primary importance assumed by blood affiliation. They “care[d] little about one another” and are affected by an “incurable apathy”, thus stressing that, according to Jeebleh’s point of view, Mogadishans are unable to either recognise or understand their fellows’ sorrow.¹¹⁹ Correspondingly, when in *Canto X* Dante stages a meeting with Farinata and Cavalcante de Cavalcanti, the two souls are described as self-centred and ignorant of each other’s suffering.¹²⁰

Concerning the epigraph and the dialogue with Farinata (the “him” in the quotation, a member of a noble family and a military leader of the Ghibellines), Farah transfers the meeting into the new context and draws a parallel between Florence and Mogadishu. In the *Comedy*, the meeting with Farinata allows Dante the poet to stage his affection for his place of origin, doomed by the struggle between the factions of White and Black Guelphs, the former supporting the Pope and the latter opposed to his influence. After the Guelphs defeated the Ghibellines, they began infighting. Dante was among the supporters of the White faction, thus causing his exile after the Black Guelphs took

¹¹⁷ Teodolinda Barolini. Introduction. “*Inferno* 10: Love in Hell.” *Digital Dante*, July 2017, digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-10/. Accessed 10 May 2020.

¹¹⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 201.

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 237.

¹²⁰ Mark Musa, *Dante’s Inferno. The Indiana Critical Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 85.

control of Florence. Similarly, Farah dramatises Jeebleh's affliction towards the destruction of the city due to fratricidal conflicts.¹²¹

Farinata recognises Dante the pilgrim thanks to his "accent", thus introducing another primary theme of *Links*, namely language. Language, both in "Inferno" X and in the novel, may be considered as a "weapon of choice" that can prevent any form of dialogue and hinder any real possibility of conversation.¹²² This negative feature stands out in the novel since Jeebleh often finds himself in the condition of being misunderstood, misinterpreted or not listened to, as analysed in the previous section. Accordingly, the most suitable example to illustrate the relationship between 'accent' and 'belonging' can be retrieved in the words of Bile, Jeebleh's oldest friend:

In Somalia the civil war then was language [...] At one point, a couple of armed men flagged me down, and one of them asked, 'Yaad tabay?' I hadn't realized that the old way of answering the question 'Who are you?' was no longer valid. Now the answer universally given to 'Who are you?' referred to the identity of your clan family, your bloody identity!¹²³

Bile's statement, after experiencing seven years of imprisonment because of his opposition to Barre's dictatorship, builds a cross-cultural and multilingual link between the question in the last line of the quotation from "Inferno" X: "Chi fuor li maggior tui?" ["Who were your ancestors?"] and the Somali sentence "Yaad tabay?" [Who are you?] as understood by Bile during the civil war.

The puzzling question, as bewildering as the resulting strenuous quest for a proper answer, represents one of the key themes of Somali literary production, since it distillates the subject of clannism as tackled by Somali authors.¹²⁴ In his only consultation with the elders, Jeebleh explicitly clarifies his opinion "of distrust of clan", continuously reiterated throughout the whole novel. In this regard, a passage of the novel *In the Name of Our Fathers* (1996) by Abdirazak Y. Osman fictionalises almost equally the same trouble between 'accent' and 'belonging'. In the following passage, the protagonist Ali, who belongs to the Hawiye clan and whose father is among the founders of the USC, is described while roaming the streets of Mogadishu, a city on the brink of

¹²¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 14, 35.

¹²² Teodolinda Barolini, "Inferno 10: Love in Hell." *Digital Dante*, July 2017, par. 17, digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-10/. Accessed 10 May 2020.

¹²³ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 119.

¹²⁴ Indeed, Jeebleh, who feels "no clan-based loyalty himself –in fact, the whole idea revolted and angered him" (*Links*, p. 11.), cannot avoid being questioned about his origin by other characters, such as Major, Af-Laawe, his antagonist Caloosha, and by clan elders. Lorenzo Mari, *Forme dell'interregno. Past Imperfect di Nuruddin Farah tra letteratura post-coloniale e World Literature*. Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2018, p. 105.

destruction. In his attempt to run away from the violence, he meets a soldier of the militia ready to shoot him:

“Speak up!” The voice repeated. “Who the hell are you?”

The question Who are you? meant To which tribe do you belong? That was the way the question was put since the government was supposed to be against the use of tribes and tribalism.

“We are all brothers!” I yelled, just like my companion, using his dialect and courage.

“Don’t you see that!”¹²⁵

The young Ali, thanks to his ability to mimic another clan’s accent (Isaaq) is then able to escape and avoid being recognised as a Hawiye, antagonist of the Darood during the war. Even though Abdirazak Osman does not conceal the names of the clans involved in the infighting as Farah, he shares with the latter the same distrust, as the call for brotherhood shows. In the novel, Ali is described as unconcerned in the matter of clan affiliation, but he inevitably finds himself involved in the civil war. In the novel, Abdirazak Osman fosters the negative effect of tribalism, as he puts it, to the elder generation, his father’s one, as “young people could make fun of each other’s tribe without any hard feelings at all”.¹²⁶

Jeebleh’s repulsion for clannism isolates him from the community and causes him to have trouble to relate with his fellow Somalis. Also, in his case, the distance between his generation and the older one increases due to the different approach towards clannism. In his only consultation with the elders of his clan, Jeebleh explicitly clarifies his opinion of distrust of clan.¹²⁷ To emphasise this distance further, Farah recurrently describes Mogadishans as assembled in mobs, and Jeebleh is depicted as the only one who stands out from the crowd, as Dante the pilgrim is the only living body among the souls, who often gather together in groups or flocks.¹²⁸ This same dissimilarity is ironically alluded to in *Links*: “What distinguished [Jeebleh] from the men in the crowd, apart from the fact that he had neither a club nor a firearm, was that they were all wearing sarongs. He had on trousers”.¹²⁹ Likewise, the protagonist’s name implies his distinctiveness, meaning “the one with pockets”.¹³⁰ This feature, which marks Jeebleh’s position of relative extraneousness, also allusively

¹²⁵ Abdirazak Y. Osman, *In the Name of Our Father*. London: Haan Publishing, 1996, p. 83.

¹²⁶ Ivi, p. 69.

¹²⁷ Dodgson-Katiyo (2016) “The ‘Rubble’ & the ‘Secret Sorrow’: Returning to Somalia in Nuruddin Farah’s *Links & Crossbones*.” In Ernest N. Emenyonu (ed.). *Diaspora & Returns in Fiction*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, pp. 77-81, p. 70. In *Links*, pp. 127-128.

¹²⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 16, 96, 117, 130, 135, pp. 195-200.

¹²⁹ Ivi, p. 196.

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 95.

foreshadows the incommunicability with his fellow Somalis, reiterated throughout the whole novel. The recurrent presence of crowds leads to the first quotation of Part 2, assembled by Farah himself, taking lines 16, 19-20, 22-23 and 26 from *Canto XIV*:¹³¹

O vengeance of the Lord...
I saw so many flocks of naked souls,
all weeping miserably...
Some lay upon the ground, flat on their backs;
some huddled in a crouch, and there they sat
... supine in punishment.

Again, this quotation shows that Farah does not retrieve the moral judgment placed upon the souls, inasmuch as the original reference to the sins is entirely removed. The focus is instead placed on the wretched human condition, rather than on the divine *contrappasso*.¹³²

Similarly, the quotation before Part 2, taken from *Canto XXIV* (lines 88-93), underlines the same condition achieving a universalising significance:¹³³

With all of Ethiopia
or all the land that borders the Red Sea—
so many, such malignant, pestilences.
Among this cruel and depressing swarm,
ran people who were naked, terrified,
with no hope of a refuge or a curse.

Canto XXIV deals with the seventh bolgia, a deep, narrow, concentric ditch or trench where thieves dwell, and Dante's allusion to Ethiopia is a reference to the significant number of serpents which inhabit the seventh bolgia—so many as to surpass the number of snakes that live in the Ethiopian desert. Farah omits this hyperbole and manipulates the tercet to open up the novel's geopolitical context.¹³⁴ Accordingly, he modifies the original last line ("with no hope of a hole or heliotrope")

¹³¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 147.

¹³² In the *Comedy*, Dante and Virgil are in the third ring of the seventh circle, and the groups of souls gathered in flocks are those guilty of the three kinds of violence against God: the blasphemers lie on their backs; the usurers are crouching and the sodomites, omitted in the quotations, ceaselessly wander. Mark Musa. *Dante's Inferno, The Indiana Critical Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 119.

¹³³ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 147.

¹³⁴ While this example illustrates Farah's recontextualisation of "Inferno", the closing lines of Chapter 23, the last before Part 3, shows the employment of an intertextual allusion unrelated to the epigraphs. The chapter ends with a sentence that subtly paraphrases lines 141-2 of "Inferno" V: "Io venni men così com'io morisse | E caddi come corpo morto cade" ("I fainted, as if I had met my death | And then I fell as a dead body falls"). Farah rewrites the lines describing Jeebleh while collapsing: "Finally he fell, forehead first, as

so to remove completely any reference to the snakes and the heliotrope, a supposed magical stone that could cure one from a snake's venom and give invisibility.¹³⁵ Thus, the "land that borders the Red Sea" should be recontextualised and understood, instead of Arabia, as Somalia, which engaged with Ethiopia an abiding territorial and political dispute over the Ogaden region, a territory comprising the eastern portion of Ethiopia predominantly populated by Somalis. The "people who were naked, terrified" represent, rather than Dantean thieves, the countless displaced people of that region, who have been experiencing war for decades and nowadays have "no hope of a refuge". Moreover, Farah aims for a more pragmatic reterritorialisation of the Ogaden region by subverting the orientalisising denotation that informs Dante's description.¹³⁶

The quotation before Part 3, in which the lines from *Canto XI* (37-38; 40-41; 52-54) refer again to the inhabitants of Mogadishu in terms of a negative connotation, leads the reader to investigate the issue of Somaliness that underpins Jeebleh's experience:¹³⁷

...Murderers and those who strike in malice,
as well as plunderers and robbers...
A man can set violent hands against
himself or his belongings...
Now fraud, that eats away at every conscience,
is practiced by a man against another
who trusts in him, or one who has no trust.

The fact that Farah himself –once again– assembled the tercets, allowing the choice of the more relevant images to suit the novel's thematic spectrum, further supports the idea that the context in which Virgil exposes the structure of Hell is not pertinent to draw a parallel between the poem and the novel. Instead, the quotation fosters an all-embracing and evocative description of Mogadishans, without relating them to sins and punishments. Again, the symbolical parallel is drawn upon persons and objects rather than deities, since the sinners who have been violent against

though he were dead" (*Links*, 241). It should also be noted that Jeebleh often faints, much like Dante the pilgrim during his journey through Hell. In the case of "Inferno", Dante relates the loss of consciousness in response to terrifying, distressing or overwhelming situations. This shared physiological response between Jeebleh and Dante the pilgrim suggests the attempts by Farah to deflate the sensationalism of the representations of war as conveyed by the mass media. The motif of fainting, therefore, allows Farah to emphasize his character's humanity and to reflect on the traumatic effect of violence unfolding an anti-sensationalist narrative. Ines Mzali (2010) "Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Nuruddin Farah's *Links*." *College Literature*, 37:3, pp. 84-105, p. 98.

¹³⁵ Natalino Sapegno, *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. La Nuova Italia, Florence, 1981, p. 270.

¹³⁶ Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (ed.) *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991, p. 718.

¹³⁷ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 243.

God are omitted. The word “belongings”, in this case, acquires particular importance concerning the role of private property in *Links*. As Farah highlights, private houses, in particular, represent a critical problem in Mogadishu, where brutal expropriations and unlawful dispossession are means to establish control over an urban area or district. In terms of this perspective, the place that Bile and Seamus call ‘The Refuge’ in *Links* (a self-made medical clinic as the abode for Somali people who seek shelter) gains symbolical meaning, becoming an object, or a *bene* [a material good], which needs protection from depredation and human violence.¹³⁸

Whether the quotation mentioned above from *Canto XI* refers metaphorically to the inhabitants of Mogadishu as suggested through the whole novel, the following quote from “Inferno” XXVIII (lines 1-6) may be read, specifically, in relation to Chapter 26. The latter, as well as the *Canto*, is committed to unfold the issue of how to describe and portray horror. In other words, *Links*’ chapter engages with the way in which Western neocolonial production of knowledge informs the representation of Somali people.¹³⁹

Who, even with untrammelled words and many
attempts at telling, ever could recount
in full the blood and wounds that I now saw?
Each tongue that tried would certainly fall short
because the shallowness of both our speech
and intellect cannot contain so much.

This acknowledgement of being unable to describe exhaustively “the blood and wounds” bonds both Jeebleh and Dante, “overwhelmed by the sight of mutilated, bloody shades”.¹⁴⁰ Correspondingly, Chapter 26 tells of one of the crudest episodes of the novel, namely the account of the brutal American military intervention that occurred in 1993, culminating in the Battle of Mogadishu, which saw the downing of two helicopters and several casualties. The chapter is a retelling of the incident from Somalis’ point of view, as both a counter-discourse to the dominant

¹³⁸ Afterwards, Dante mentions fraud, which he relates to reason because of its premeditation and purpose to betray both friends and strangers. As already highlighted, during his stay in Mogadishu, Jeebleh seems to be surrounded by fraudulent sinners, as described in last two lines of the quotation. Due to an overall situation of fraud, betrayal and half-truths, everyone should be looked at with suspicion, thus fostering the presence through the whole novel of a leitmotiv of mistrust.

¹³⁹ Natalino Sapegno, *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*, La Nuova Italia, Florence, 1981, p. 308.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Musa. *Dante’s Inferno, The Indiana Critical Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. XXIX.

American narrative, and a counter-representation to that mono-logic and sensationalistic of the media.¹⁴¹

The lines in the epigraph, which appear at the beginning of the *Canto XXVIII*, resonate in the very last part of Chapter 26 of the novel. Jeebleh plays the role of the listener, allowing two witnesses of the event to tell –like the souls of Hell revealing Dante their story– how the “horrific terror” occurred when the two Black Hawk helicopters were downed.¹⁴² A five-and-a-half-year-old girl, daughter of the witness, suffered from damaged hearing because of the cacophonous noise of the helicopter, thus preventing her from being able to speak again. The rotating blades and their razor-sharp noise resemble the “blade of the devil’s sword” as described in *Canto XXVIII*. Farah portrays Jeebleh in the act of visualising the episode as if he becomes himself a witness of the event (“Jeebleh imagined the boy”; “Jeebleh was able to imagine” and he “could hear the sound in his own mind”). However, Farah also deflates the sensationalism of the baleful account by preventing Jeebleh from imagining it (“Jeebleh stared, dumbfounded, unable to imagine the terror”).¹⁴³

In this case, therefore, the epigraph underscores the diegetic bond that connects Jeebleh to Dante, both unable to describe and imagine the horror. The Epilogue further highlights this analogy, when the protagonist draws his conclusion upon the political view that underpins the *Comedy* and states that “his own story lay in a tarry of other’s people tales, each with its own Dantean complexity”.¹⁴⁴ This analogy encourages the comparison with the civil war that has been consuming Florence. In Mogadishu as well, the civil war is fought between groups who share the same religion, Islam, (as Catholicism linked the White and Black Guelphs in Florence), and who share the same language and place of abode. For Dante, the pope and the members of the Church were corrupt and immoral, seeking temporal power; political leaders, as well, were interested in their goods while ignoring their people’s needs. Dante’s conception of the correct politics implies that the church’s sole mission should be to take care of religious matters rather than secular ones. In his times, both the emperor and the pope were neglecting their duties, resulting in the moral and political disorder

¹⁴¹ Kerry Bystrom (2014) “Humanitarianism, Responsibility, *Links, Knots.*” *Interventions*, 16:3, pp. 405-423, p. 413. Garth Myers, *African Cities, Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*. Zed Books, 2011, pp. 138-139. Ines Mzali (2010) “Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Nuruddin Farah’s *Links.*” *College Literature*, 37:3, pp. 84-105, pp. 96-98.

¹⁴² Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 275.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 331.

he witnessed.¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, Jeebleh seems to embrace this overall interpretation of Dante, since both religion and politics are accountable for the current hard reality of Somalia.

Farah, by considering religious leaders among the actors who ignited the civil war, proposes a universalizing comparison between two usually antithetical cultural systems. In *Links*, indeed, the faults that Dante ascribes to the religious leaders of Christianity are re-centred onto the religious leaders of Islam, who share with the former the same longing for the temporal power to the detriment of transcendental, or spiritual, concerns. Religious and clan elders are to be blamed for the collapse of the state and the betrayal of their fellow Muslim Somalis, since they “were in cahoots with a cabal of warlords to share the gain they could make out of ordinary’s people miseries”.¹⁴⁶ Jeebleh’s understanding of the Somali context with regard to religion is then built upon Dante’s idea, and supported in the Epilogue, when he explicitly refers to Dante to read Mogadishu’s dire reality.

However, when *Links* concludes, the plot seems to lack a proper denouement, thus suggesting a relevant difference between the poem and the novel. The central events of the story –the kidnapping, the following release of Bile’s niece, and the death of his arch-enemy Caloosha– happen without Jeebleh being present. The protagonist, furthermore, looks less resolute than after his arrival, in a sort of inverse trajectory to that of Dante the pilgrim. Accordingly, the line that rapidly closes the last quotation of the novel, from *Canto XX* (124-126; 130), matches the quickness of Jeebleh’s departure from Mogadishu: “Jeebleh quit Mogadiscio the following morning”.¹⁴⁷

But let us go; Cain with his thorns already
is at the border of both hemispheres

¹⁴⁵ In Florence, as well as in Mogadishu, the split between the two parties occurred along family lines at first; later, ideological differences arose based on contrasting views in terms of politics and religion, with the Blacks supporting the Pope and the Whites craving more freedom from Rome. Specifically, Farah recalls Dante’s political view, at least superficially, as expressed in *De Monarchia* (a Latin treatise on secular and religious power written between 1312 and 1313). With this text, the poet intervened in one of the most controversial subjects of his period: the relationship between secular authority (represented by the Holy Roman Emperor) and religious authority (represented by the Pope). In the third book, Dante condemns the theocratic conception of the power elaborated by the Roman Church, which assigned all power to the Pope, making his authority superior to that of the Emperor: this meant that the Pope could legitimately intervene in matters usually regarded as secular. Mark Musa, *Dante’s Inferno. The Indiana Critical Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 162.

¹⁴⁶ “Jeebleh thought of how the country had been buried under the rubble of political ruin, and how Somalis woke to being betrayed by the religious men and the clan elders who were in cahoots with a cabal of warlords to share the gain they could make out of ordinary people’s miseries. The clan elders got their reward in corrupt gifts of cash; the religious elders, turning themselves into cabaret artists, conned the rest of the populace, as they carved an earthly kingdom for themselves.” In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 331.

¹⁴⁷ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 334.

and there, below Seville, touches the sea.
...Meanwhile we journeyed.

The extensive astronomical periphrasis used by Dante to express the moment of sunrise, when the moon reaches the horizon and is about to descend, parallels the final lines of *Links*: “He left as soon as he sensed the sun intruding on the horizon of his mind”.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the periphrasis from *Canto XX* is used to express 6 a.m., and the closing lines of *Links* show that the departure of Jeebleh occurred at the same time. After the days spent in Mogadishu, Jeebleh leaves as he senses the sun shining and “before the mist in his mind cleared”.¹⁴⁹ The enigmatic closing lines denote the distinctive indeterminacy of the novel and deflate the “classic denouncement [...] where the narrative ascribes deeds to doers”.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, at the very end of the story, Jeebleh appears confused and insecure, as Dante’s pilgrim at the beginning of his journey. In this sense, Farah subverts the beginning of the *Comedy* by representing his protagonist as “lost, unable or unwilling to decide which road to follow” (as the pilgrim as “had lost the path that does not stray”).¹⁵¹ It seems that, in the end, Jeebleh is in need for a guide, a role that this time is performed by Dajaal, who offers to accompany him, hold him by the elbow, and show him the way. Like Dante with Virgil, Jeebleh cannot but “silently follow Dajaal”.¹⁵²

The recurring use of lines from “Inferno” to depict Mogadishu suggests that Dante’s *Comedy* emerges as a powerful meta-textual reference that links and encompass experiences, languages and traditions coming from different cultural and historical backgrounds. The importance of the Italian poet, as shown in the case of Farah, emerges also in other Somali authors of the diaspora, who employ his major work as a source of meaning or as an evocative parallel. Igiaba Scego, for example, in her novel *La mia casa è dove sono*, quotes Dante to describe the sense of the protagonist for a neighbourhood of Mogadishu: “I liked via Roma with its little shops, I liked the livestock market in Wardhingleey and I liked that sort of circle of Dante’s *Inferno* that was Buur-Karoolle in Xamar Ja-jab, a place where it was easy to bump into ethyl alcohol addicts.”¹⁵³ Likewise, in *Adua* (2015), Scego refers to the Italian language as “Dantean Italian” [“la lingua di Dante”] and the Florentine poet himself is quoted explicitly by one of the protagonists, Zoppe, who repeats by heart the lines

¹⁴⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 334.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁰ Ines Mzali (2010) “Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Nuruddin Farah’s *Links*.” *College Literature*, 37:3, pp. 84-105, p. 100.

¹⁵¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 333.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

¹⁵³ Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*. Milan: Loescher, 2010, p. 29.

that appear on the threshold of Hell in “Inferno”.¹⁵⁴ In Garane’s *Il latte è buono*, the first line of the *Divine Comedy* recurs as a leitmotiv in the plot, pronounced by Gashan during the Siyaad Barre’s coup and the protagonist’s exile. In this regard, the following chapter aims to explore how Garane employs, in his novel, intertextuality, by focusing attention on his use of the Italian language and of Somali orature.

2.4 Conclusion

Through an analysis of the relationship between language and characters, narrative strategies and historical background, this chapter has addressed the nuanced discursive practices of *Links*. Farah’s novel has disclosed a connection between Somali and Italian culture beyond the burden of colonialism, and as means for relating, with intertextual and cross-historical strategies, contemporary Somalia to Medieval Italy. Through the figure of Jeebleh, and the comparison with that of Medina of *Sardines*, I showed how Italian does not play a part in the struggle for belonging and in the making of Somali identity as it did during the 1960s and 1970s. In the mid-1990s, Jeebleh is questioned for his American citizenship and Farah, accordingly, narrates his problematic confrontation between his idea of Somaliness and clan ideology.

Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, in this case, played the role of literary intermediary to connect two historically different but symbolically analogous realities. Farah, in particular, has recontextualised and, in a sense, reterritorialised Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. This approach also showed how Italian is related to the development of Somalia’s history and how, in Farah’s novel, it shifted from being the former colonial language involved in the identity-making of Somali people (in *Sardines*), to a more artistic and unbiased tool, able to bond characters from different nations (Jeebleh, Bile and the Irish Seamus). Also, by providing a close cross-reading of both the *Comedy* and *Links* and an investigation of the practices of recontextualization, subversion and allusions, the analysis has underscored both the opposing and converging tendencies between the two texts.

In doing so, this study wishes to open up to potential future analysis along the comparative axis between Farah and other (modern, postmodern or postcolonial) authors who have engaged with Dante’s oeuvre. As well, it may suggest moving Italian studies outside national borders, so as to retrieve the several literary influences that Italian literature has across the globe and, especially, in

¹⁵⁴ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Translated by Jamie Richards. London: Jacaranda Books, 2019, p. 16, 41: “Through me is the way to the city of woe. Through me is the way to sorrow eternal. Through me is the way to lost below.”

postcolonial contexts. Unfortunately, the almost total absence of studies about Farah in the field of Italian studies is remarkable, highlighting the latter's unwillingness to engage with postcolonial theory or grasp the Italian presence in contemporary writings in a more world-wide context.

The chapter has shown how recontextualization can produce a dialogue between a canonical work of literature such as the *Comedy* and a new present-day context. In this particular case, the civil-war and the hell-like scenario of the 1990s Mogadishu trigger a fruitful comparison with both the representation of the suffering sinners in the netherworld, as imagined by Dante, and with the city of Florence, consumed by infighting, in the fourteenth century. This link between the poem and the novel, as shown, opens up to several interpretations and further comparative readings, due to the breath of allusions, references and images drawn into the novel from the *Comedy*. Among them, the special relationship between the narrator and the author, as well as between the paratext and the text, has been pivotal to show how intertextual practices operate in *Links*.

Farah decontextualizes the poem, omitting any references to its allegorical, historical, cultural and theological specificity, and then recontextualizes it as a diegetic device to support the protagonist's understanding of the Somali conflict. The magnitude and universal scope of the *Comedy* is then both retrieved and recreated to position local Somali infighting on a wider cultural scale. This process, substantially achieved through the intertextual interplay between the two texts, allows Farah to move the context of Somalia from the periphery – where it is usually relegated – to the centre of both literary and historical dynamics. However, the transcultural and transnational dialogue between the two texts, as shown, is also disturbed, as Farah implies the need for an adaptation and a recontextualization. Accordingly, he assembles several tercets from 'Inferno' by himself, as to underscore the significant influence of Dante's poem but, at the same time, to point out its incommensurability.

In the following chapter, the Italian language will be studied from a different perspective. By analysing Garane's *Il latte è buono*, I aim to discuss how the novel challenges the idea of orature as a mere aesthetic proof of authenticity or Africanness, supposedly employed by authors of African origin to state their cultural specificity in opposition to written Western literary forms. Quite the reverse, the analysis will show how orature should be specifically related to the Somali and Italian context, as the novel represents one of the first examples of a text that employs the former colonial language to give voice to colonised subjects in the Italian literature. Owing to these reasons, I aim to provide a new methodology for studying Somali orature and its influence on the written form,

but also to examine the aesthetic practices used by Garane in relation to those employed by the first post-independence generation of African writers.

Chapter 3.

The spoken word meets the script: *Il latte è buono* and the role of Somali orature

La lingua è il collante dell'identità.

–NURUDDIN FARAH, *Bastardi dell'Impero* (1995)

The continent is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say 'Africa'. In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist.

–RYSZARD KAPUŚCINSKI, *The Shadow of the Sun* (1998)

This chapter aims to provide an innovative approach to Italian literary studies, which have rarely addressed postcolonial writings within their remit and have been reluctant to open up to African studies.¹ In particular, the study of the authors from or related to Somalia has been ignored, as if their cultural and literal context could be included in overarching concepts such as 'postcolonial' or 'migrant literature' rather than Italian literature. Thus, their cultural specificity has been blended into a generalised logic; a few concepts theorised by well-known postcolonial scholars were used as the principal sources to the understanding of Somalia, the whole of the former colonies and the present-day second generations of writers.² In terms of literature, Libyan, Eritrean and Ethiopian authors are often studied together because of the use of Italian as their primary creative language. Articles or anthologies often compare and gather together the writings by authors from the former colonies under the label of gender, postcolonialism, Italian and migration. In this regard, one could

¹ Christopher Fotheringham (2018) "Publishing, politics and literary prizes: Nuruddin Farah's reception in Italy." *African Studies*, 77:4, pp. 568-583. See also Christopher Fotheringham (2018) "History's Flagstones: Nuruddin Farah and other literary responses to Italian imperialism in East Africa." *Interventions*, pp. 1-20.

² For example, migration and 'otherness' (Armando Gnisci in *La letteratura italiana della migrazione*), margins vs. centre (Graziella Parati in *Margins at the Centre: African Italian Voices and Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*) or race and diaspora (Alessandro Portelli, "Mediterranean Passage: The Beginnings of an African Italian Literature and the African American Example").

also notice the significant –if not puzzling– deficiency of Somali academic works within the references or bibliographies of studies related to Somali literature, almost as if “to sustain non-Somali dominance on all things Somali”, and to emphasise “how colonial logic is replicated in contemporary scholarship on Somalis, and in the research practices of non-Somali academics in their gaze upon the Somali”.³ This lack of specific and systematic researches and studies about African literature is a glaring omission, which results in generalisation and approximation.⁴ The interpretative tools for the texts produced by Somali authors have always been taken from Western-centric models. The case of orature, as this discussion will show, is key to highlighting how these “missed debates and gaps” in academia have accidentally created an endorsement of Orientalism and, besides, unwittingly fostered a Western point of view on Somali literary tradition.⁵

In this regard, orature stands out as the most unequivocal evidence of the oversimplified approach towards non-Western writings. In the Italian case, for example, the only two studies that deal specifically with postcolonial literature addressing only Somali authors are the works by Simone Brioni and Laura Lori.⁶ Even though they both examine with a deep and well-framed insight the texts by Somali authors considering them as localised and specific expressions of Italian postcolonialism, their analysis ultimately neglect the Somali cultural and literary background.⁷

³ Sofia Aidid, “The New Somali Studies.” *The New Inquiry*, 14 April 2015, par. 2, thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-new-somali-studies/. Accessed 10 May 2020.

⁴ In this regard, the lack of departments of African literary studies or regular courses of Postcolonial studies, in Italian departments could be read as the cypher of the lack of interest for the postcolonial literary production in the Italian language. The structural resistance of the Italian Studies to embrace the most up-to-date academic trends prevented the Italian academia to develop an organised and well-framed postcolonial theory and to adapt, instead, the Anglophone and Francophone one. In Miguel Mellino (2006) “Italy and Postcolonial Studies.” *Interventions*, 8:3, pp. 461-471.

⁵ Roberto Derobertis, “Da dove facciamo il postcoloniale? Appunti per una genealogia della ricezione degli studi postcoloniali nell’italianistica italiana.” *Postcolonialitalia*, 17 February 2014, bit.ly/2GqPOff. Accessed 10 May 2020.

⁶ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015. Laura Lori, *Inchiostro d’Africa. La letteratura postcoloniale somala fra diaspora e identità*. Verona: Ombre corte, 2013.

⁷ In this regard, Lori’s *Inchiostro d’Africa* (2013) shows the telling presence of just two Somali scholars in the bibliography, while Brioni’s has six (they both share Ali Mumin Ahad). In Lori’s work, the central theoretical approach is grounded in work by Ashcroft *et al.* and correctly emphasises the role of unglossed Somali words in Garane’s novel. However, concerning the influence of Somali orature, Lori glosses over, writing that: “The first part of the novel is set in a mythical past and the style, adapting to the content, becomes a-logical and fairy-tale-like, following the traditional African style of storytelling.” This passage shows the absence of any reference to the specific Somali literary or cultural background, which is not taken into consideration. Laura Lori, *op. cit.*, p. 71. Simone Brioni provides a more thorough analysis of the influence of orature in *Il latte è buono*, both at the narratological and thematic level. However, the former plays a major role, thus leaving uncovered the latter aspect, which again is referenced with Western sources, such as David Laitin and Ioan Lewis. Simone Brioni, p. 114: “*Il latte è buono* shows the oratorical and rhetorical ability of the Somalis, which is a significant trait of this cultural tradition as underlined in historical works (Laitin 1977: 37; Ioan Lewis 2002: 5).”

These two examples show the problematic use of the term orature when addressed to the analysis of Somali writings.⁸ Therefore, the following section aims to examine *Il latte è buono* by Garane with a specific discussion of the role of Somali orature and its intertextual references in the novel. In doing so, it should be necessary to contextualise *Il latte è buono* according to its multicultural influences. As Armando Gnisci claims in the back cover of the novel, Garane's short novel can be considered the first Italian postcolonial text, since it departs from the distinctive features of the so-called 'letteratura della migrazione' (literature of migration or migrant literature): the autobiographical plot, the presence of an Italian co-author, the first-person narrator and the main themes of migration and resettlement. Indeed, *Il latte è buono* is a work of fiction, and even though the events of the novel resemble some aspects of Garane's life, the author is consistently concealed under the protagonist's actions and thoughts, which are never presented with the first-person narrator. Additionally, it is not co-authored as most of the writings included in the category of 'letteratura della migrazione', such as the cases of Oreste Pivetta with Pap Khouma, Maurizio Jannelli and Fernanda Farias De Albuquerque and Tahar Ben Jelloun with the journalist Egisto Volterrani. Finally, the protagonist's migration involves Italy, but also France and the United States. Above all, in the case of Garane, Italy represents the former metropole and not only a host country.⁹ This latter detail marks a fundamental difference from 'letteratura della migrazione', because it informs the way in which the author employs the Italian language, which represents, more than a creative device, the former colonial language.

In this regard, Garane is 'writing back', but not in the sense of appropriations of canonical texts, rather using the former colonial language to give voice to colonised subjects. Garane, in other words, has created a work of literature which has never been written before in the Italian literary context. I argue that the feature of being the first postcolonial Italian novel does not constitute a

⁸ The same logic can be inscribed in Manuela Coppola's article about Cristina Ali Farah. Even though Coppola's essay is accurate in examining the role of Italophone women writers both on the sociological and literal level, the analysis becomes unclear when addressing the role of language. Coppola writes that orality provides the "traditional structure of Somali narration" and that "the language [...] gives the rhythm of the story", but do not gives other explanations. Manuela Coppola (2011) "Rented Spaces: Italian Postcolonial Literature." *Social Identities*, 17:1, pp. 121-35, p. 132.

⁹ One could argue that the first literary work to be written by an immigrant writer without the help of an Italian co-author is *Far From Mogadishu* by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel (1994). However, even though it is now a milestone of Italian postcolonial literature, it is not a work of fiction, but an autobiographical account. It should be also mentioned the vast, and unfortunately forgotten, Alessandro Spina's work (1927–2013). Recently, Arcade Publishing translated his novels from Italian into English. Giovanni Vimercati, "Alessandro Spina's Anti-Colonial Hospitality, Then and Now." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 4 March 2018, lareviewofbooks.org/article/alessandro-spinas-anti-colonial-hospitality-then-and-now/. Accessed 10 May 2020.

mere chronological detail but implies a genealogical affiliation in terms of style (the relations between languages and the role of orature) to the early production of postcolonial writings of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the presence of *Il latte è buono* in the Italian literary tradition, which lacked examples of novels written by former colonised subjects before its publication, encourages us to consider the novel as part of a broader multicultural and global production of writings connected to postcolonialism and African literature.

3.1 The Italian language in *Il latte è buono*

The originality of *Il latte è buono* appears clear from the first chapter, “Nascita di una regina” [Birth of a queen], which has both in style and structure the tone of a genesis. The plot develops *in medias res* in an unspecified past and indefinite setting, namely the land of Azania, a borderless fictional region between Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and perhaps northern Tanzania.¹⁰ At the time of the story, the Ajuran clan dominates this territory and emerge as a solid state in which the political and religious power is strongly centralised in the figure of the Imam, the head of the sultanate. Historically, the Ajuran controlled the central-south regions of contemporary Somalia from the mid-thirteenth to the late seventeenth century and collapsed due to internal divisions. Western colonialism did not reach the Somali coast until the Portuguese invasions and the consequent Ajuran–Portuguese conflict around the 1540s.¹¹

The historical uncertainty and the overall mythological and dreamlike tone are informed by stylistic devices that underpin the fantastic aura of the plot, as the following passage suggests:

Shakhlan Iman era nata dopo ventiquattro mesi vissuti nel grembo di sua madre. Era lei che aveva fatto la scelta, perché voleva formarsi all'interno di una donna, di sua madre, in una terra dove gli uomini facevano il bello e il brutto tempo. All'interno di sua madre aveva ascoltato le discussioni all'esterno del grembo. Sapeva tutto su tutti e su tutto, ma loro non sapevano che c'era una femmina nel corpo di una donna che non parlava quasi mai. Il grembo le diceva tutto. Sapeva tutto sul reame che un giorno lei avrebbe diretto.¹²

¹⁰ According to Garane, the story is set in the eighteenth-century. In Giulia Gadaleta (2006) “Letteratura della migrazione. Intervista a Garane Garane.” *El Ghibli rivisita online di letteratura della migrazione*, 3:12, June 2006, archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=03_12§ion=6&index_pos=2.html. Accessed 13 April 2020. The fictional country of Azania appears also in *Black Mischief* (1932) by Evelyn Waugh, thus indicating an African island located in the Indian Ocean. Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief*. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.

¹¹ Mohamed Haji Mukhtar, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003, p. 35.

¹² Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 5. All translations of the novel are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Shakhlan Iman was born after twenty-four months spent inside her mother's womb. She made this choice herself, because she wanted to develop inside a woman, her mother, in a land where men ruled the roost. Inside her mother, she listened to the discussions outside of the womb. She knew everything about everything and everyone, but they did not know that there was a girl inside the body of a woman who hardly ever spoke. The womb told her everything. She knew everything about the kingdom she would rule someday.

As is clear from the first lines, the prose intermingles realism and supernatural elements ("Shakhlan Iman was born after twenty-four months"), as well as idiomatic phrases ("men ruled the roost"), hyperbole ("She knew everything about everything and everyone") and references to the mythical land of Azania ("the realm she would rule over someday").¹³ Garane describes the non-secularised life of Gashan's ancestors, who gather together to decide and discuss the future of their people. The third-person narrator plays the role of an unreliable voice and informs the overall polyphony of the chapter. Brioni rightly notes that "*Il latte è buono* shows the oratorical and rhetorical ability of Somalis, which is a significant trait of this cultural tradition".¹⁴ Accordingly, the chapter – unhampered either by actions and events– is shaped as a dialogic tale dominated by different perspectives around a central dilemma: the choice between an elective or a dynastic filiation and how a female heir (Shakhlan Iman) could be justified and accepted within the patriarchal tradition. The narrator presents his opinion by introducing contradictory comments while the characters are expressing their thoughts and views about the role of the future queen. Thus, as this chapter revolves almost entirely around the dialogic interactions between characters, language plays a major role that should be investigated.

It should be noted that Garane employs Italian as his privileged communicative tool to describe a pre-colonial context in which the sociocultural framework was mainly non-Western and influenced by Islamic culture and religion. In doing so, he establishes a correlation between different systems of belief using Italian, the former colonial language. This stylistic and cross-cultural process is achieved with several devices, which will be analysed thereafter. However, it should also be noted that Garane incidentally places himself along with the position held by Chinua Achebe in the debate

¹³ The absence of a specific chronotope is highlighted by the term Azania itself which, according to the Somali scholar Mohamed Mukhtar, has a mythical echo, since its origins have been lost in centuries of traditions and translation. The first attestation of the word Azania dates back to the anonymous work entitled *Periplus of The Erythraean Sea* (AD 40-70), a travelogue that describes navigation and trading opportunities from Roman Egypt to the towns on the coast of the Red Sea along the Horn of Africa and the Arabic peninsula to the Indian Ocean. Mohamed Haji Mukhtar, "Islam in Somali History: Fact and Fiction." In: Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995, p. 11.

¹⁴ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 114.

about language and identity in the post-independence African context. Indeed, Achebe considers language as a creative tool rather than “a carrier of culture” (as suggested by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o), in accordance with the idea of Garane, who shows the ability that a language possesses to adapt to different contexts.¹⁵ More specifically, among the several devices used by postcolonial writers to “transform [the colonial language] according to the needs of their source culture”, Garane employs the insertion of un glossed words, translated and untranslated sentences (proverbs in this case) and references to the Somali culture with the process of code-switching.¹⁶ I argue that his poetics enables *Il latte è buono* to engage with the practice of contextualisation, cushioning, relexification and ‘transfer of context’, key-concepts that will be introduced in the following analysis.

In the first chapter, sentences and dialogues in Italian are intermingled with words and clauses in Somali. In the latter case, Garane’s style employs two strategies: the Somali words are not provided with a translation, as in the case of *cilaan* in the sentence: “Respirò profondamente e cominciò a toccarsi la barba piena di *cilaan*” [“He breathed deeply and began to touch his beard full of *cilaan*”].¹⁷ Or, in other cases, a translation is implied in an informative way, as in: “Era come ascoltare il *mocallim*, l’insegnante del *dugsi*, la scuola coranica” [“It was like listening to the *mocallim*, the teacher of the *dugsi*, the koranic school”].¹⁸ In the latter case, Garane employs the act of cushioning, since he adds an explanatory translated word after the Somali one to convey the original meaning.

In the case of entire untranslated sentences, as in: “*Naag la’an yaa noolaan karaa?*” or “*Waxaan weydisanayaa in dabadooda nadiif ay abaato sidii dabada daanyeerada?*”, the non-Somali speaking reader can only attempt to understand their meaning according to the context.¹⁹ This specific method, called contextualisation, emerges as a more enigmatic rhetorical device. Usually, Garane places the untranslated sentences in proximity of their supposed loose translation, giving the impression of a process of multilingual paraphrasing. Ashcroft argues that “the absence of an explanation [as a] sign of distinctiveness and it also ensures that meaning is not a matter of definition but an active

¹⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Curry, 1986, p. 13.

¹⁶ Bill Ashcroft (2014) “Bridging the Silence: Inner Translation and the Metonymic Gap.” In: Simona Bertacco (ed.) *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literature*. London-New York: Routledge; pp. 17-31, p. 24: “[...] This is the cultural gap when writers transform English according to the needs of their source culture: by inserting un glossed words, phrases, or passages from the first language; by using concepts, allusion or references that may be unknown to the reader; by syntactic fusion, by code-switching; by transforming literary language with vernacular syntax or rhythms; or even by generating a particular cultural music in their prosody.”

¹⁷ Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 17.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 5, 10.

engagement”.²⁰ As, for example, in the sentence: “La tradizione era come il letto dove Shakhlan era seduta. Il suo *jimbaar* era fatto della pelle di cammello. Era duro, diritto, né il sudore, né la pioggia, niente poteva cambiare il colore del suo *jimbaar*” [“Tradition was like the bed where Shakhlan was sitting. Her *jimbaar* was made of camel skin. It was hard, straight, no sweat or rain, nothing could have changed the colour of his *jimbaar*”].²¹ However, the reader who is not familiar with the Somali language finds himself bewildered, if not excluded, from reaching the complete understanding of the passage.²²

In other occasions, Garane translates Somali proverbs into Italian, introducing them with recurrent locutions: “Non dice forse” or “Non dice d'altronde” [“Isn't it said that...”] followed by the quotation of the translated proverb.²³ As scholar Chantal Zabus has theorised it, this “process of embedding proverbs into the very texture of the novel” is called relexification.²⁴ The aim of this practice is to “simulate the indigenous tongue” by not giving a verbatim translation, but by adapting it, in this case, to the Italian pattern. Whereas relexification works at the syntactic level, I argue also that it operates semantically: the ‘semantic relexification’ is then achieved by providing the original meaning according to the discursive norms of the Italian language, so as to familiarise the Italian reader with the culture of the Ajuran. Even though it is not possible to retrieve the original Somali proverb and compare the translation with the original syntax, it can be argued that Garane is carrying out the process of ‘semantic relexification’ by transferring the meaning of the proverbs from one language to the other.

According to Zabus, these three different practises (contextualisation, cushioning and relexification) are common in several English-language novels by Igbo authors of the post-independence period, such as Nzekwu’s *Blade Among the Boys* (1962), Nwankwo’s *Danda* (1964) and

²⁰ Bill Ashcroft (2014) “Bridging the silence: Inner Translation and the Metonymic Gap.” In: Simona Bertacco (ed.) *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, pp. 17-31, p. 26.

²¹ Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 16.

²² Both Brioni and Zabus suggest that the copious insertions of vernacular words may lead the reader to frustration and inhibition. In particular, Simone Brioni reads the use of the untranslated word as the signal that *Il latte è buono* may envision the presence of Somali and Italian readers, rather than Italian readers only. In: Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 35. Chantal Zabus (1990) “Othering the Foreign Language in the Western Europhone Novel.” *Canadian Revue of Comparative Literature*, 17:3-4, pp. 348-66, p. 356.

²³ It is the case of “Non si dice d'altronde nella terra dei nomadi che non ti si chiami donna, se prima non hai visto la polenta in tempo di carestia e si sia vista la tua pudicizia e la tua pazienza?” [“Isn't it said in the land of the nomads that «you do not call yourself a woman, if you have not seen the polenta in times of famine and have seen your modesty and your patience?»”]. In Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 32.

²⁴ Chantal Zabus, “Writing with an Accent. From Early Decolonization to Contemporary Gender Issues in The African Novel in French, English and Arabic.” In: Simona Bertacco (ed.) *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 34.

Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) and *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Therefore, Garane can be located within a well-established group of early postcolonial African authors (but also by Indian English authors such as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Vikram Seth), since he uses similar stylistic and rhetorical devices to achieve the same effect of both estrangement and understanding. The former is realised by the lack of any translation of Somali words, neither in text nor in a glossary, which is completely absent from the paratextual structure. In the way Garane uses the same linguistic strategies of the writers of the so-called post-independence African literature, we can draw a parallel between his novel and those of the previous generation of African authors (born in the decades 1920s–1930s).

This affinity is also highlighted by the shared feature of being one of the first authors to use Italian (the former colonial language of education and administration) to write a postcolonial novel about Somalia (a former colony). This process of appropriation of a European language to fictionalise African contexts began in Nigeria and Kenya as decolonisation unfolded in the 1950s and the 1960s, when the first English-language novels by Achebe or Nwankwo were published. In the case of Somalia, for the abrogation and appropriation of the Italian language, the starting point was postponed until the 2000s or, according to Gnisci, until 2005, when *Il latte è buono* was published. For this reason, I argue, even though the ignition of the linguistic decolonisation for a Somali-born author marks a gap of almost five decades if compared to Nigerian or Kenyan experiences, the aesthetic devices at the basis of the process of abrogation and appropriation remain the same. Finally, the affinity between Garane's novel and the 1960s and 1970s literary production is underlined also by the same need to provide the reader with an unfamiliar context. The Italian public—due to the already mentioned delay in processing postcolonial novels—can be compared to the early English readers of Achebe's or Nzekwu's novels. As Zabus notes, “time has not come yet when the African novelists can insert an African word or refer to an African cultural event in the same manner as European novelists can throw into their text German, English, or Latin locutions and refers to Jupiter, Mozart, and Nietzsche without any explanation”.²⁵ Accordingly, *Il latte è buono*

²⁵ Chantal Zabus, “Writing with an Accent. From Early Decolonization to Contemporary Gender Issues in The African Novel in French, English and Arabic”, p. 35. This generational gap with Garane can be stressed with the case of Uba Cristina Ali Farah (1973–), who stages another re-appropriation practice, since she makes calques of words to provide a link between Italian and Somali, as analysed in Chapter 1. She reconfigures the Italian language in the sense of self-representation. In *Madre piccola* (2007), this aim is achieved with the linguistic act of subversion of the Italian proper words (*draddorio* as the loanword for *trattoria*, ‘eating house’). In this case, Ali Farah tries to manipulate the language of the colonisers and to make it her own (as in *defreddi*, which is the voiced phonetic calque on *tè freddo*, ‘cold tea’) suggesting a strategy of cohabitation, more than conflict. In essence, Italian words are turned into Somali, to signify the attempt of a linguistic inclusion, as analysed in Chapter 1 and further discussed in Chapter 4. Cristina Ali

shows this overflowing vernacular resonance only towards Somali, while the novel is also set in France and the United States. However, the presence of French and English words is almost absent, as if to mark the specific role of Italian as the former colonial language; as well, it remarks the necessity for African novelists to provide Western readers with proper context.²⁶

This aesthetic device of leaving words or phrases untranslated in postcolonial texts emerges as “a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word [the higher status]”.²⁷ Somali and Italian operate together to negotiate new meanings without subordinating one language to the other. Concerning this latter hermeneutic level, I introduce the concept of ‘transfer of context’, which focuses more on the semantic perspective of relexification. A term coined by Braj Kachru to define the use of Indian English in fiction, it is understood as “the transfer of those cultural patterns which are absent or different in those cultures where English is used as a first language”.²⁸ In the case of *Garane*, proverbs transfer the references of the oral tradition into Italian, but not only via a rhetorical or aesthetic process, but also according to the ethical aspirations of Somali poetry. Traditionally, poems aim to emphasise relevant themes, promoting mnemonic capacity and focusing on specific values. Naturally, the rhythmic pattern and the use of alliteration, pivotal structural devices of Somali poems to reiterate the central subject, are lost. Therefore, I argue that the presence of proverbs in *Garane* denotes the legacy of the oral tradition not at the stylistic level, but because they incorporate the community’s ethos.

This argument has been overlooked in the studies about orature in Somali postcolonial novels, thus nourishing the idea that dialogism and supernatural elements of the folktales were the only markers of the oral influence on the script. In fact, as the analysis has shown, *Il latte è buono* retrieves the oral practices in the same way as other Western or African novels do, such as the use of repetitions, proverbs, the dialogic form, the narrator-performer, the reader-listener and a non-linear structure

Farah herself states: “Bending Italian (my mother’s tongue, but also the very language of the colonizer) to the rhythms of Somali, I was trying to interlock the two countries’ histories, to put together two worlds that apparently were separated.” In: Claire Jacobson, “Between two worlds: An exclusive interview with Ubah Cristina Ali Farah.” *Asymptote*, 15 March 2017, par. 3, asymptotejournal.com/blog/2017/05/15/between-two-worlds-an-interview-with-ubah-cristina-ali-farah/. Accessed 10 May 2020.

²⁶ In *Il latte è buono*, the words *minority* (107) and *reservations* (102) are the only English recurrences; French words are *climatiseur* (‘air conditioner’, 45) *s’il vous plaît* (‘please’, 89), *somaliens* (90) and *boum* (‘party’, 93). In each case, no translation is provided, as to imply the familiarity of the Italian reader with these foreign words.

²⁷ Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 65.

²⁸ Braj Kachru, *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 131. Neelam Srivastava, *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel*. New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 146.

with ellipses.²⁹ These features, typical of the oral narratives, do not prove *Il latte è buono* to be influenced by Somali orature because, I argue, the specificity of the latter emerges in the novel at a different level: through the repirse of the sociopolitical role of the poems (namely spread and teach values) and through the use of a specific set of methaphors which belong to the oral tradition. For example, if we focus our attention on the use of proverbs, they are usually considered as the most evident trace of an ‘African oral tradition’; however, they are rarely addressed with the same specific approach about their context as when they are employed by Western authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien, Herman Melville or Charles Dickens, to name a few.³⁰ In these latter cases, proverbs are never addressed as overarching markers of European or American cultural traditions. Besides, in *Il latte è buono*, their presence is limited if compared to their recurrence in other Somali authors, such Faarax M. J. Cawl or Xuseen Sheekh Biixi.³¹

Another oral feature often related to the ‘African’ oral influence is the use of repetitions, as they stylistically reproduce the spoken language. However, if we look closely to *Il latte è buono*, repetitions are in fact sentences in Italian and not in Somali, such as Dante’s line: “*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*” [When I had journeyed half of our life’s way], which links Garane’s novel to one of the most renowned works of the Italian literature, the *Divine Comedy*, insated to Somali oral practices. Thus, the argument that the novel is related to orature via the repetitive pattern of sentences, words or proverbs is somewhat misplaced or superficial.

²⁹ This theoretical approach appears to be superficial and misleading, as well as Western-centric since it unveils the way in which orality is seen from a Euro-American perspective. In order to point out this ingenuousness with an example, I suggest considering the novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad. This well-known story is told by the protagonist-narrator Charles Marlow, who recounts to his fellow sailors the events that led him to the expedition in Congo. Another narrator, who appears only at the beginning and in the end, listens while Marlow is telling his story and reports his words to the reader. This narrative structure of the frame story allows us to consider the protagonist as the storyteller and the readers, as well as the unnamed second narrator, as listeners. The novella references sea tales, like the venture of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, un glossed words in foreign language (French, Latin) and sentences which sound proverbial (“In the tropics one must before everything keep calm”). However, scholars have rightly overlooked *Heart of Darkness* as an example of traditional [European] style of *storytelling*, to paraphrase Lori. Western novels may retrieve oral forms or proverbs and show a strong commitment to dialogism or storytelling as well (as in the case of *Il latte è buono*) but are hardly considered as influenced by a supposed Western orality.

³⁰ Olga Trokhimenko (2003) “If You Sit on the Doorstep Long Enough, You Will Think of Something”: The Function of Proverbs in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.” *Proverbium*, 20, pp. 367-378. Kevin Hayes, *Melville’s Folk Roots*. Kent: Kent State UP, 1999. George Bryan and Wolfgang Mieder, *The Proverbial Charles Dickens*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.

³¹ Martin Orwin (2007) “Reflections of the Somali situation in the novel *Waddadii Walbabaarka* [The Road of Grief] by Xuseen Sheekh Biixi.” In: Ali Jimale Ahmed and Tadesse Adera (eds.) *The Road Less Travelled: Reflections on the Literatures of the Horn of Africa*. Trenton-Asmara: The Red Sea Press, pp. 329-340.

Therefore, the necessity to analyse orature from a different angle, which enables the reader to point out the oral features that are *definitively* Somali.³² As I will show, the term Somali itself, as related to a homogeneous literary tradition, is far from being unproblematic, thus reinforcing the case that any reference to an even more general African context is unsustainable. I claim that the starting point to develop the new approach should be, specifically, the identification of the genres, themes, style and forms belonging to the Somali oral tradition. Instead of applying the concept of orature upon that of literature, we should ask: Which genre of the oral tradition is employed in the novel? Which oral stylistic forms are employed or dismissed in the script? Are there shared themes between the oral and the written forms? Accordingly, in order to underline which characteristics are preserved and which are inevitably lost between the oral form and the script, this last section aims to analyse how *Il latte è buono* negotiates the features and the aims of the Somali oral tradition.

3.2 The role of orature in *Il latte è buono*

According to Garane himself, his novel (not only the first chapter) can be considered as a *gabay*.³³ The latter is an epic and long (more than a hundred lines) oral form composed according to strict rules of alliteration.³⁴ It can be used to express solemn themes –praise, philosophical reflections, riddles, and satires – which are exposed to the community during particular events. As in the case of Garane, political issues represent primary topics to be addressed and shared in the *gabay*, since they are considered of vital importance for the community.³⁵ As scholar Amina H. Adan notices, “poetry is not only a classic expression but it is also the daily journal which makes the masses aware of the issues which concern their world”.³⁶ This specificity of the *gabay* –directly referenced by the

³² I borrowed this expression from Elleke Boehmer’s *Postcolonial Poetics*, which explores how poetics shapes the reading practices of postcolonial writings. Boehmer’s attention is thus directed to underscore the aesthetic principles that make a poetics which might be called *definitively* postcolonial. Elleke Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st-Century Critical Readings*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 11.

³³ In Giulia Gadaleta (2006) “Letteratura della migrazione. Intervista a Garane Garane,” *op. cit.* For the description of the *gabay*: Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi Gadhweyne (ed.) *War and Peace: An anthology of Somali literature (Sungaanta Nabadda iyo Colaadda)*. London: Progressio, 2009, p. 93. Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 75-77. Also, Simone Brioni, p. 114. According to scholar B. W. Andrzejewski, “poetry was, it is claimed, the best means of influencing public opinion in such matters as interclan policies and was an accepted way of airing private disputes and grievances” In B. W. Andrzejewski (1985) “Somali Literature.” In B. W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz and W. Tyloch. *Literatures in African Languages. Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna State Publishing House, pp. 337-407, p. 340.

³⁴ Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 75-77.

³⁵ Enrico Cerulli, *Somalia: Scritti vari editi e inediti*. Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1964, p. 12.

³⁶ Amina H. Adan (1981) “Women and Words.” *Ufabamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 10:3, pp. 115-142, p. 115.

author— as a male poetic expression that addressed political issues allows us to consider the position of Garane as problematic concerning the concept of the universality of the Somali people.

Indeed, the *gabay* is just one of the many forms of *maanso* [poetry] and it has been mainly employed by nomadic clans and by men. However, scholar Ali Jimale Ahmed has addressed the problematic and critical shift of the *gabay* from being a specific genre of the traditional pastoralist societies to representing the universal expression of Somali oral tradition.³⁷ Furthermore, Didier Morin states that: “Le conflit interclanique passant par un échange poétique, le *gabay* [...] il est devenu synonyme de “poésie classique somalie(nne)”, *gabay booyaaaleedka Soomaaliyeed*” [The interclan conflict through a poetic exchange, the *gabay* [...] has become synonymous of “classical Somali poetry”, *gabay booyaaaleedka soomaaliyeed*].³⁸ In the case of *Il latte è buono*, the focus on the novel’s filiation with the *gabay* and the role of the latter as a specific genre in the literary and political history of Somalia should not prevent us from considering the novel according to its multiple influences and cross-cultural references.

I argue that Garane discharges the *gabay* from its specific socio-geographical context and, instead, aims for its universal scope. Accordingly, he challenges any definition of the genre as rigid by playing both with Western and African literary forms. Garane himself explicitly suggests analogies between the two, writing that: “Il giornale dell’italiano è come la cultura orale, parla, racconta tutto, ma è fedele alla persona che lo compera, giacché ha le sue stesse idee politiche, religiose” [The newspaper of the Italians is like the oral tradition: it tells everything, but is loyal to the one who buys it, because it shares his same political and religious ideas].³⁹ Moreover, on the one hand, the development of the protagonist from being a colonised subject to an anti-colonial intellectual allows a reading of the novel as a Fanonian *Bildungsroman*, as already underlined in Chapter 1. On the other, the political weight of the *gabay* and its influence leads us to connect *Il latte è buono* with

³⁷ Ali Jimale Ahmed (1996) “Daybreak is Near, Won’t You Become Sour?” *Ufabamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 22:1-2, pp. 11-24, pp. 13-14. Also Said Samatar suggests a possible metonymic use of the word *gabay* to identify Somali poetry as a whole. Said S. Samatar (Winter, 1980) “Gabay-Hayir: A Somali Mock-Heroic Song.” *Research in African Literatures*, 11:4, pp. 449-478, p. 451.

³⁸ Didier Morin studied the role of the *gabay* and its evolution as a national genre in the nation-building period. “Le genre *gabay* [...] n’a pas de thématique assignée. Son recueil qui cite une trentaine de poètes, comparé à ceux de Lewis et Andrzejewski (1964, 1993), Samatar (1982), Antinucci et “Idaa’jaa” (1986) ne coïncide que pour les partisans des Derviches. Ce “noyau”, central dans l’histoire de la littérature politique, qui ne traduit en aucun cas la diversité d’inspiration du *gabay* et de la création poétique en général, se signale d’abord par son caractère conjoncturé.” Didier Morin (1997) *Littérature et politique en Somalie*. Bordeaux: Centre d’Étude d’Afrique Noire, p. 5.

³⁹ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 77.

the more specific context of Somali orature, without considering the latter as –simply– a rhetorical device.

With regard to the *gabay*, on the one hand, Garane contaminates its original form and themes, but it also regards it as a synonym for Somali poetry. As Ali Jimale Ahmed has claimed, by universalising the *gabay*, “Somali poetry has been robbed of its most salient contour: engaging dialogue with tradition and sub-cultures”.⁴⁰ Even though I agree with this argument and with Ahmed’s suggestion that the *gabay* is indeed a sectarian and ‘dirvishized’ form of poetry, I also aim to explore Garane’s attempt to foster a negotiation between different traditions within Somali culture and orature. I also argue that this goal is only partially achieved, as it will be clear after the analysis, and that a many-voiced and more inclusive representation of Somali history and society remain unaccomplished.

First of all, Garane’s effort is supported by the persistence of some metaphorical references that are well-established in the Somali oral tradition.⁴¹ In particular, three main symbols appear to be at the core of the symbolism of the novel, all of them referring to animals and vastly present in Somali orature: *latte*, *cammello* and *asino* [milk, camel and donkey]. These three symbolical references inform Garane’s attempt to negotiate a sense of community beyond the factional logics of the Ajuran clan. Despite taking a different path from Farah, who disregarded the clan-lineage and its development over time, Garane tries to achieve the same goal: to make sense of the collapse of the state and explore the cognate concepts of identity (Who are the Somalis?) and nation (What is Somalia?) in relation to the clan formations of the pre-colonial period.

The importance of milk [*caano*] emerges from the title and the opening line, with a possible connection or tribute to the novel by Nuruddin Farah entitled *Sweet Sour Milk* (1979).⁴² The recurrence of milk is persistent if we consider the number of times it refers to Somalia by peering into sociological, political, and literary studies or academic publications. As has been already observed, it is strictly connected to the etymology of the name *Soomaali*, as if milk could be read as

⁴⁰ Ali Jimale Ahmed, “Daybreak is Near, Won’t You Become Sour?”, pp. 13-14.

⁴¹ In this regard, Brioni notes that “Shakhlan Imam’s [sic] portrayal recalls mythological oral narratives, as she is described not merely as only partly human, but also partly female.” However, Brioni overlooks to explore further how Garane links the representation of Shakhlan to the literary antecedents in Somali oral tradition and to explain which are the latter. Instead of focusing only on Shakhlan, it may be more useful to analyse the references to the oral form more specifically. In: Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 114.

⁴² Ivi, p. 113.

the identity cypher of Somali people.⁴³ Oral tradition has narrated the virtues of milk and its beneficial and nurturing properties, thus giving to milk (along with meat) a positive connotation. *Caano* is regarded as the archetype of life: nomadic populations used camel milk as a vital source of livelihood.⁴⁴ However, in the novel, milk embodies different cultures and reflects Gashan's feeling towards particular contexts. For example, in the United States, the milk is "good and scalding", in reference to his experience in the country where "the God Dollar has replaced morality and culture". Before leaving Mogadishu for Rome, the milk becomes cappuccino, as if to suggest Gashan's expectations towards Italy; on the contrary, while in Rome, the same cappuccino turns to be sour, as if to reflect the overall atmosphere of racism that Gashan experiences in Italy.⁴⁵

The prominence of the camel, a powerful animal capable of crossing the arid and desert areas of the north, arises in literature due to its importance in nomadic every-day life. Tamed camels were useful in providing all kinds of necessities: milk and meat for nourishment, strength, resistance to heat and thirst for transport and travel. Moreover, the camel (and also the she-camel, called *Maandeeq*) has emerged as the symbol of the nation in the oral poems of the mid-twentieth century, when the first anti-colonial movements sprung all over the country.⁴⁶ This metaphorical recurrence from the 1940s-1960s is retrieved by Garane, but he does not understand the camel as a unifying symbol of the nation, but as one of the two emblems of Somalia. Thus, the other animal employed by Garane is the donkey [*dameer*], which is connected to the southern part of the country, crossed by the Wabiga Jubbada and the Webi Shabeelle, among the few rivers to have a constant supply of water throughout the year.⁴⁷ Favourable soil conditions make the region a fertile plain to the development of the farming population, thus placing this territory in stark contrast with the semidesert plain which faces the Gulf of Aden coast in the north, where rainfall allows the growth of shrubs, sufficient for the pastures of nomadic populations. The camel in these northern

⁴³ With this regard, as a Somali proverb asserts: "[We] live on meat and milk" (*Cad iyo caanaa lagu noolyahay*). In: Ali Jimale Ahmed (2007) "The Somali Oral Tradition and the Role of Storytelling in Somalia." Minnesota Humanities Centre, pp. 1-19, minnesotahumanities.org/Resources/somalioraltradition.pdf. Accessed 10 May 2020.

⁴⁴ Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel in the Somali Oral Traditions*. Uppsala: Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1987, pp. 78-87.

⁴⁵ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 108, 72.

⁴⁶ Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel in the Somali Oral Traditions*, pp. 79-88. Ali Mumin Ahad (2007) "Could Poetry Define Nationhood? The Case of Somali Oral Poetry and the Nation." *Journal of Historical and European Studies*, 1, pp. 51-58.

⁴⁷ Rick Davies, *The Village, the Market and the Street: A Study of Disadvantaged Areas and Groups in Mogadishu, Somalia*. Mogadishu: British Organisation for Community Development, 1987, p. 208.

territories was considered superior to any other grazing animal, and it also established its owner's social role.⁴⁸

Garane himself explains the symbolic value of these two animals in relation to Somali identity in an interview for the magazine *El Ghibli*:

Volevo rappresentare i due poli della cultura somala: ho usato l'asino per certe tribù sedentarie del sud [...] Mentre ho usato il cammello per le tribù del nord e dell'occidente somalo. I somali sono discendenti dei nomadi e il nomade glorifica il cammello: se una donna è bella dicono che assomiglia a un cammello. La Somalia è stata vittima dello scontro del cammello e dell'asino: c'è stata una guerra civile e il cammello rappresenta i nomadi che si sono insediati nelle città che gli asini non volevano, perché erano portatori di una cultura clanica.⁴⁹

I wanted to represent the two poles of Somali culture: I used the donkey for certain sedentary tribes of the South [...] while I used the camel for the tribes of the North and the West. Somalis descend from nomads and nomads worship the camel: if a woman is beautiful, they say she looks like a camel. Somalia has been the victim of the clash between camels and donkeys: there has been a civil war, and the camel represents the nomads who set themselves up in the city against the donkeys' will, because they were bearers of a clannish culture.

The recovery of this symbolism from the oral tradition allows Garane to represent two polarities in the history of Somalia according to both geographical position and the traditional structure of the kinship lineage. Even though Garane broadens the spectrum of the representation of historical Somali communities by mentioning the agro-pastoralist ('donkey') culture, he maintains the nomadic-pastoralist ('camel') as dominant. In this sense, Garane reinforces the idea of a binary system in the framework of Somali society as shaped by colonialism: the Italians fashioned the invention of Somali people as a community hierarchically divided into nomads (free men) and sedentary farmers (slaves), so as to maintain control by breaking the self-balanced and local concentration of power into pieces [*divide et impera*].⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The wealth of a shepherd, associated with power, was derived from the amount of hereditary possessions and the number of camels. In: Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel in the Somali Oral Traditions*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Giulia Gadaleta, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Ali Mumin Ahad, "The 'Historic Sins' of Colonialism in Somalia." *Journal of Somali Studies*, 6:1, 2019, pp. 9-40. Interestingly, also Farah points out the responsibilities of the Italian colonial rule in shaping Mogadishu's demography; Italians, indeed, recruited many Somalis by bringing into the army a large number of people from regions others than those adjacent to the city. Over time, this migratory movement threw the city's demography off balance. After the Second World War, Mogadishu became the only city in the country "to find jobs, to be where the action was, where the industries were, where the only university was, and where you could consult an eye-doctor or a heart specialist." The centralisation of power in a city ill-prepared to host a large number of inhabitants, therefore, resulted in vast peripheral areas dominated by neglect. Nuruddin Farah [2002] "Of Tamarind & Cosmopolitanism." *African Cities Reader*, March 2010, p. 11.

This latter problematic aspect is emphasised also by the allusions made by Gashan to his superior status of being a ‘noble’, an heir of the Gareen, descendent from the Ajuran clan.⁵¹ In this sense, Garane seems to rely on the double partitions made by European explorers and, later, by colonial anthropologists with regard to Somali society. According to this division, the noble Somalis were those nomads of the North devoted to pastoralism, while the agriculturalists of the South were non-noble.⁵² Also, minorities are not part of the historical framework the novel. Yibir and people from Bantu and Arabic descent, which are often very different from the nomadic culture, are thus excluded from the process of nation-building. Without any in-depth representation of the agro-pastoralist, sedentary and coastal cultures, *Il latte è buono* risks reproducing the colonial practice of imposing the nomadic traditional structures upon these cultures.

At the same time, *Il latte è buono* may be read as the battleground where different perspectives and opinions take place. If oral poems are understood as a means to “excite controversy [which] were answered by other poems”, then in the novel, dialogues –more than actions– decide the future of the people of Azania and have the power to influence the choices that the Ajuran would face in the future as a clan.⁵³ I argue that the presence of orature results in the use of dialogism not only as a stylistic trait or form of political commitment, but also as a didactical device.⁵⁴ In *Il latte è buono*, due to the use of an intrusive omniscient narrator, Garane plays the role of the *abwaan* [the gifted poet] of the Somali literary tradition, since he “speaks in the collective tongue of the group”.⁵⁵ Garane’s novel, in this sense, fictionalises Somalia before colonialism using a former colonial language, Italian (as it was English for the Igbo tradition in Achebe). While anthropological and historical accounts written in Italian played a pivotal role in locating Somalis as objects of investigation, Garane’s novel employs the very same language to speak in the voice of the former colonised subjects.

Garane places Somali history at the crossing point between the pre-colonial and colonial period and he inscribes the Ajuran clan’s development in relation to the broader scenario of Somali national history. Indeed, I argue that Garane suggests an understanding of the Ajuran clan as a

⁵¹ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 36, 55, 64.

⁵² Ali Mumin Ahad (2008) “Il dualismo *Sab/Somali* e la definizione della identità nazionale somala.” *Africa*, LXIII, 1, pp. 429-468, p. 438, 465.

⁵³ B. W. Andrzejewski (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 340.

⁵⁴ Ali Jimale Ahmed (2007) “The Somali Oral Tradition and the Role of Storytelling in Somalia.” Minnesota Humanities Centre, pp. 1-19. Retrieved at minnesotahumanities.org/Resources/somalioraltradition.pdf.

⁵⁵ Maxamed Dahir Afrax (2009) “The *Abwaan* as Guidance Provider. The Centrality of the Message in the Somali Play *Shabeelnaagood*.” *WardbeerNews.com*, pp. 1-36, p. 3. Retrieved at yumpu.com/en/document/read/16505530/the-abwaan-as-guidance-provider-wardbeernews.

metonymy for the entire Somali nation, which at the turn of the nineteenth-century had to face two dialectic themes of conflict, as Ali A. Mazrui called them: colonialism (exogenous) and cultural heritage (endogenous).⁵⁶ The concept of *kairos* (namely, a proper, critical or suitable time for action) may be suitable to describe this moment in Somali history, since its qualitative nature, in opposition to the sequential time (*chronos*), informs the style of the chapter. History seems to be condensed and distorted and unravelled around Shakhlan's birth and the Ajuran's discussion about it. According to Brioni, this "abrupt division between a historic real present and a dreamlike golden age recalls a Eurocentric chronology which identifies the beginning of history in Africa with colonialism".⁵⁷ Quite the reverse, I claim that the structure of the novel –and the first chapter, in particular– can be read in opposition to the strict organisation and partition of time in Western society. Indeed, the lack of actions, the structure based upon dialogues and the indefinite setting of the first chapter show that the plot is not organised along a linear axis and that, above all, 'history' started far before European colonisation. Whereas in "Nascita di una regina" the time hastens, slows and broadens and the main corpus of events is condensed into the dialogic form, also in the rest of the novel precise references regarding the time-setting lack. The reader grasps that the plot stretches from Siyaad Barre's coup in 1969 and his death in 1991, but these two dates are never made clear. Moreover, the narrator is always vague concerning Gashan's life, so the reader could never understand precisely how long he stayed in each country or when he moved from Rome to Florence, then from France to the United States. Gashan's life flows from one paragraph to another with persistent ellipses and the repetitions of "*Il latte è buono...*" ("Milk is good..."). This stylistic device, as has been analysed previously, suggests the idea that the story is told by the narrator as he recalls it.

Above all, it is the presence of Shakhlan that highlights the non-linearity of the plot and the lack of "strict organisation and partition of time in Western society" throughout the novel. Her recurring presence (she appears in the beginning of the novel (eighteenth-century) and after her death, during the post-independence period (1960s) and, as well, during the civil war in the early 1990s) emphasises that the formation of the post-independence Somali nation is always dependent on the process of negotiation between traditional socio-political formations and new democratic trends.⁵⁸ Garane stages this syncretism and, in his attempt to portray a past before colonialism, he

⁵⁶ Ali A. Mazrui, *General History of Africa VIII*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1993, pp. 447-448.

⁵⁷ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 114.

⁵⁸ In this sense, Ajuran's fictionalised history represents one of the several trajectories towards colonisation followed by Somali clans at the end of the eighteenth-century. It exemplifies the decision-making of many

aims, to paraphrase Chinua Achebe, to “look back and try and find out where [Somalis] went wrong, where the rain began to beat [them]”.⁵⁹ The effort to image a putative lineage or a shared history among Somalis places Garane in the ongoing debate on genealogy that underpins the works of Somali historians and intellectuals, who consider the past of Somali people as an open question. As Mohamed Trunji notes, “The existing literature on this important historical period is scanty, shallow and incomplete by nature; it is a work by foreign writers, and consequently does not provide a comprehensive or clear picture of major events”.⁶⁰ In the novel, the lack of a coherent narrative of the history of the Somali nation and the often-incoherent relations of the protagonist towards the clan-based system leave the issue of the past unsolved.⁶¹

However, the account of the “dreamlike golden age” of the first chapter is an effort to relocate the beginning of history before colonialism. The Ajuran people are facing a dilemma, which resulted from the birth of a female heir, Shakhlan Iman, namely whether to choose between an elective or a dynastic descent or, in other words, between tradition and change. Throughout the chapter, the third-person narrator reports the opinions of several characters about Allah, the Quran, infibulation, and legitimacy under the leaves of *Quarac* [*Acacia tortilis*], the sacred tree.⁶² In doing so, Garane deploys several points of views, such as those of Kana, the wise old man on which the decision-making confidence lies, and of secondary characters, whose role is to express doubts about the future. In this dialogic the decision-making process, Garane shows who were the active subjects in the Ajuran society and he both reinforces and challenges normative roles. For example, even though the main protagonist is Shakhlan, the only characters who are allowed to speak are men, thus supporting the patriarchal structure of the Ajuran clan.⁶³ In this regard, the novel may be connected firmly to the *gabay* because the story is told by men and is *mostly* about men. Shakhlan, indeed, does not appear as a protagonist, since Garane tells the story before her birth and overlooks her reign as the queen of the Ajuran: she remains a listener for the whole chapter, until the last pages, when she suggests to move to the coast where “new people called ‘Somalis’ are

clans before the colonial period and, at the same time, it questions the enigmatic issue of the origin of Somali clans and their multiple mythological descents. About this latter theme, Garane represents how religion and traditions play both a cohesive and a divisive role. Scholar Mukhtar notes that “some claim that their ancestors migrated from Arabia, but do not know the date or place of arrival. Others will tell stories about their past, about antiquity and about phir’onic civilizations itself having been originated by Somalis in Puntland.” Moxamed Haji Mukhtar, “Islam in Somali History: Fact and Fiction.” In Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Mohamed Trunji, *Somalia. The Untold History 1941-1969*. Leicester: Loohpess, 2015, p. XXIII.

⁶¹ Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁶² Desmond Mahoney, *Trees of Somalia. A Field Guide for Development Workers*. Oxford: Oxfam, 1990, p. 32.

⁶³ Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

assembling”.⁶⁴ Shakhlan’s mother, as well, is described as silent and obedient.⁶⁵ Their role as women is more symbolical than physical, and their bodies are questioned: Shakhlan, for example, is obligated to undergo infibulation, so as to “emasculate [her] woman’s body”.⁶⁶ Thus, male characters, such as Kana and Gashan, remain the holders of the historical narrative.

However, in staging dense dialogues, Garane also displays one of the primary roles of orature, an aspect covered rarely in the analyses of *Il latte è buono*: to allow children to know their culture. As Ali Jimale Ahmed puts it, “Oral literatures, therefore, apart from their aesthetic quality and the experiential wisdom inherent in them, ensured the survival of tradition in the minds of the young”.⁶⁷ The creative gimmick used by Garane so as to retain this feature is to make Shakhlan part of the discussion about her future even though she is still inside her mother’s womb. In this way, she is introduced into the rites, values and the whole dense symbolic skein of the clan in which she will grow. Shakhlan embodies, before birth, a character situated in a historical moment of transition: she is destined to occupy a male role, the position of the leader of the Ajuran, before the arrival of the first Europeans. Shakhlan interrupts the patriarchal system and breaks the net roles as encoded within the clan. Garane, nevertheless, includes in the plot the representation of subjects who confront the homogeneity and the hierarchical roles of the clan; even though he does not completely subvert the dominant roles, he allows a certain degree of fluidity within the Ajuran clan. In this regard, the character of Hassan Dirir can be introduced as the embodiment of the marginalised subject who can talk back. His position lies in-between acceptance and rejection, as there is no common understanding on how to consider him within the clan. For example, when he tries to share his opinion on the dynastic issue by standing up, one of the young warriors asks him to sit down.⁶⁸ He is granted the right to speak thanks to Kana, who, nevertheless, looks at Dirir as a stranger, not as “uno di noi” [one of us]. Garane presents him as the emblem of the difference, in a land where nomads and warriors represent the norm:

Nella terra dei nomadi e dei guerrieri, Dirir non aveva uno statuto ben definito: assomigliava ad un uomo, aveva la voce femminile, non era sposato, non parlava tanto

⁶⁴ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 40.

⁶⁵ Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi notes that “*gabay* was mostly composed by men, while *buraanbur*, which is of a lighter measure, was mostly composed by women.” It would have been interesting to know if, in the case *Il latte è buono* were told by Shakhlan herself, Garane would have used the term *buraanbur* to describe his novel. In: Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 75-77.

⁶⁶ Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Ali Jimale Ahmed (2007) “The Somali Oral Tradition and the Role of Storytelling in Somalia”, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 23.

con le donne, non si indirizzava agli uomini...Ma era un guerriero e Kana lo sapeva. Sapeva che nessuno poteva dire a un guerriero di sedersi.⁶⁹

In the land of the nomads and the warriors, Dirir did not have a well-established status: he looked like a man, he had a feminine voice, he was not married, he did not speak much with women, he did not address men...But he was a warrior, and Kana knew it. He knew that nobody could tell a warrior to sit down.

In this passage, Garane depicts the ambiguity of Dirir, as he shifts between manly and womanly features. Garane writes: “Ma Dirir sapeva che tutti si chiedevano se lui fosse Adamo, Eva, o...” [But Dirir knew that everyone was wondering if he was Adam, Eve, or...].⁷⁰ It should be noted, in this case, that the Christian references further suggest that the absence of any word to denote Dirir is due to a lack within Western culture too.⁷¹ The hierarchical scale of values, which places the figure of the warrior at the apex of the social pyramid, guarantees him a role within the clan: being a warrior assures him the status needed not to be an outcast. Dirir is aware of his particular position and is aware of representing the exception within the homogeneity of the group he is part of. At the same level is Shakhlan, since she has to perform a male role.

In doing so, Garane questions the supposed stillness and homogeneity that colonial discourse related to indigenous culture, thus creating a heterogeneous microcosm grounded in syncretism. In addition, Shakhlan's ambivalence is the same as his father, as to stress that change and evolution do occur within the clan:

[...] era un grande capo, grazie al suo coraggio, alla conoscenza del carattere dei suoi sudditi, e alla sua eloquenza che gli permetteva di improvvisare delle poesie per eccitare i nomadi di cui era il capo. Era, insomma, un vero Gareen. Aveva l'istinto pastorale e l'istinto del sedentario.⁷²

[...] he was a great chief, thanks to his courage, his knowledge of the nature of his subjects and his eloquence that allowed him to improvise poems to inspire the nomads he led. He was, indeed, a true Gareen. He had the pastoral and the sedentary instinct.

In this short description emerges the importance attributed to knowledge and the value given to orature, as the ability to compose poetry appears as a form of personal superiority at the social level. Garane also suggests the need of a compromise in order to reconcile the dichotomy he

⁶⁹ Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 27.

⁷¹ In this regard, a similar ambiguity to the presence of homosexuals was found in the Amhara, an Ethiopian group, where they were defined as ‘male-female’ (*wändarwärad*) and generally accepted. In: Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.) *Boy-Wives and Female Husband. Studies in African Homosexualities*. New York: Palgrave, 1998.

⁷² Garane Garane, *Il latte è buono*, p. 38.

envisions in the very structure of the Somali nation, namely the antagonism between nomadic and sedentary people. In doing so, he moves along multiple axes, in which clans, nomads, sedentary people and the nation appear as categories of a pyramidal structure in which the hierarchies are questioned over time and never fixed. As we have seen, in the pre-colonial period, clan and sub-clan formations were described as the dominant sociopolitical organisation, with the power centralised in the religious-warrior figure of the Imam, the head of the state. During the post-independence period, political parties replaced previous clan leaders, as well the figure of the president took the lead of the new democratic nation. Lastly, the regime of Siyaad Barre, perpetuating an ambiguous behaviour with regards to clannism, re-established previous hierarchies of power, thus allowing clan leaders to become leaders at the head of political parties.⁷³

In describing this complex evolution, Garane takes a contradictory position. On the one hand, he describes the Ajuran (and the House of Gareen, the ruling hereditary dynasty of the sultanate) as a functioning state, dominant in Somalia during the eighteenth-century; on the other, he shows how this sultanate, organised around the Ajuran clan should not be considered as a static entity (such as nation) with a precise territory (the idea of Azania suggests this inconsistency), but as a community able to negotiate its traditions according to the challenges of history. In doing so, the author of *Il latte è buono* aims to retrieve the historical development of Somalia's political formation, from a pre-colonial clan-based state (the Ajuran sultanate and the Somali coastal people) to the post-independence secularised nation-state.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused attention on the strategies employed by Garane to describe a pre-colonial reality with a colonial language, thus drawing a parallel with the post-independence generation of other African authors and remarking upon similarities in readership. Moreover, the last section aimed to provide a new methodological approach to study Somali orature and its influence on the novel. By contextualising the oral tradition and focusing on three metaphors in particular, I have showed how Garane manages to reproduce some traits of the oral form and

⁷³ “The victory of Ethiopia, aided by Russia and Cuba, coupled with his own arrogance of power, rapidly led Siad Barre back to the dependency upon the clan which he had claimed to repudiate when he came to power. In succession he turned on the Majerteen, the Isaaq, the Ogaden and the Hawiye, using other clan militias, in particular those of his own Marehan clan. Before he finally fled Mogadishu in January 1991, all the main clans had created their own militias as well as political organisations.” Patrick Gilkes (2002) “Wars in the Horn of Africa and the dismantling of the Somali State.” *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 2, pp. 89-102, p. 93.

retrieve the political relevance of oral poems. Against the generally accepted reading of orature as a marker of authenticity and Africanness or as merely an aesthetic trait, I have explained why, to investigate its impact on the prose, orature should be understood contextually, avoiding generalisation and narrowly shaped categories.

Also, this chapter has showed how, in Italian postcolonial studies, the presence of the Somali oral tradition has never been either discussed or studied with proper attention. *Il latte è buono*, instead, functions as a key example to demonstrate that Somali orature is far from being a simple aesthetic device that affects dialogues and syntax. On the contrary, its employment in Garane's novels has been analysed according to the specific tradition of Somali oral poems, which cannot be labelled as broadly African.⁷⁴

Finally, the chapter has stressed the relation between Garane's novel and the aesthetic practices employed by the first generation of Anglophone African writers of the post-independence period. The following chapter aims to retrieve another neglected relation, connecting the novels by Somali Italian authors (Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah) with the Italian literature through those aesthetic practices shaped after World War II. More specifically, their novels will be analysed along with some novels about *la Resistenza* (the partisan struggle during the war and against the Fascist state and the Nazi occupation) to retrieve shared aesthetic and ethical principles between postcolonial and post-war and anti-fascist writings. According to the grounding principle of this thesis, namely the cross-cultural and multilingual feature of Somali writings, Scego's and Ali Farah's novels will be analysed from their 'Italian' side, with particular attention to the Italian literary tradition, often neglected in favour of a more Anglo-centred postcolonial approach.

⁷⁴ Along the same axis, Derek Wright has already questioned the connection between supposed good traditional values and orality in his article: "Oligarchy and Orature in the Novels of Nuruddin Farah." *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, 15:1, 1991, pp. 87-99.

Chapter 4.

A poetics of resistance: Somali postcolonial literature and 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza'

Liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentred, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages.

–EDWARD SAID, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)

All poetics is a network.

–ÉDOUARD GLISSANT, *L'intention poétique* (1997)

This chapter aims to analyse works by two prominent Somali Italian writers –Igiaba Scego and Ubax Cristina Ali Farah– in order to examine their relationship with the literary production of the so-called 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' [Resistance Literature], which flourished after –and from– the experience of World War II.¹ I suggest reading Italian postcolonial literature and Resistance Literature comparatively. In particular, by using Italo Calvino's preface to his *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path of the Spiders' Nests*, 1947), in which he tried to define the aesthetic founding principles of the 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza', this chapter aims to retrieve the network of similarities with the formal features of the postcolonial production of the 2000s –especially in Scego and Ali Farah– and thus invite a comparison between the two.²

¹ The *Resistenza italiana* or *la Resistenza* [Italian resistance movement] is an all-encompassing term for Italian resistance groups during World War II. It opposed both the Nazi forces and the local regime, the Italian Social Republic, especially after the German military occupation of Italy between 1943 and 1945. The movement arose among Italians of various social classes, and it is also known as the Italian *lotta partigiana* [partisan fight]. The modern Italian Republic was declared to be founded on the struggle of the Resistance.

² Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*. Translated by Archibald Colquhoun. London: Penguin, 2013. Calvino's first novel is a coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of World War II. The protagonist Pin, an orphaned cobbler's apprentice, lives alone with his sister, who is known as the town's prostitute. While his sister sleeps with a German sailor, Pin dares to steal his gun, hiding it among the spiders' nests in an act of rebellion that entangles him in the adults' *lotta partigiana*. The novel develops the story of Pin joining a partisan group to fight against the Nazis and to endear himself to the grown-ups of his town in Liguria.

These two literary outcomes have never been examined together and, moreover, Italian postcolonial novels have been analysed according to their European and international influences and references. This approach has fostered the idea that postcolonial authors, although using the Italian language, are ‘unrelated’ to the Italian literary tradition, but stem from Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial influences. This analysis then charts the critically neglected relation between postcolonial works and the Italian literary tradition, thereby challenging the idea that this production is unrelated to the development of the latter. As underlined in Simone Brioni’s *The Somali Within*, Somali Italian authors have been located between trans-cultural and transnational relations (with Anglophone, Francophone and Latin American literatures), but not in relation to their ‘Italian’ and ‘Somali’ sides.³ The question thus emerges of how to position Scego and Ali Farah in the Italian literary tradition and, moreover, why this ‘Italian side’ have been neglected so far. Questions surrounding the positioning of Somali Italian authors have broader implications for contemporary debates relating to understandings the relationship between language and national identity in the Italian literary –but also socio-political– context.⁴

In this chapter, I wish to fill a gap in Italian studies by suggesting that the novels by Somali Italian authors should *also* be analysed according to the influences coming from Italian literature. The following analysis, therefore, investigates the concept of literary tradition, still anchored to the idea of being national in the way it includes texts written by Italian-born authors, narrowly understood as white, and speaking Italian as their native language. In other words, this chapter aims to critically engage with the Italian literary canon arguing that Somali Italian authors, on the one hand, position themselves in relation to multiple backgrounds and cultures and, on the other, they challenge, dramatise and problematise the concepts of *identità italiana* [Italian identity] by showing their relationship with the Italian literature. As they investigate the meaning of Somaliness from a diasporic perspective, they also address the concept of Italianness, claiming their presence in the Italian literary scenario.

³ Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, pp. 141-142.

⁴ Kaha Mohamed Aden states that her writings are set in two geographical contexts, which correspond to two time-settings, “My writings combine two gazes: one towards Somalia and the other towards Italy” [“Quello che scrivo ha prevalentemente due sguardi: uno verso la Somalia ed uno verso l’Italia”]. Clotilde Barbarulli, “Kaha Mohamed Aden e Ribka Sibhatu in dialogo con Clotilde Barbarulli.” In: Cristina Bracchi (ed.) *Poetiche politiche. Narrazioni dell’(im)politico: figure e figurazioni della prossimità nell’Intercultura di genere*. Padova: Poligrafo, 2011, pp. 157-175, 166.

This approach does not wish to underplay their transnational and multilingual framework or to anchor them to a singular and well-defined national or domestic influence. On the contrary, this analysis aims to re-elaborate the term ‘postcolonial’, which should not be either applied uncritically to the Italian literary production or ‘imported’ from Anglophone academia, but adopted in relation to its geographic, literary and historical specificity. As I aim to show, Italian postcolonial novels emphasise the necessity to provide a corrective to the Anglocentrism that has underpinned postcolonial studies.⁵ In this regard, Sandra Ponzanesi has suggested that “the geopolitical and cultural specificity of Italian postcolonialism helps to readdress and requalify the precepts and principles of postcolonial theorizing by including the history of a different European south”.⁶ Accordingly, I consider Somali Italian literary production as a pivotal case to highlight how the postcolonial paradigm should be unpacked in relation to its multi-national, multicultural, and multilocal context.

Paraphrasing Salman Rushdie’s words used to describe the case of Indian authors in English, Somali Italian writers “have access to a second tradition”, which is made up of displacement, cross-cultural connections and multilingualism but, at the same time, they are related to the history, the culture and the society of the host country.⁷ This ‘second tradition’ allows us to consider them not just as ‘Somali’ or ‘Italian’ but both, at the same time. Somali Italian contemporary novels emphasise the global aspect of the diaspora but also the local feature of their contexts, since both characters and authors show how they move in an interliterary space made of movements, multiple influences and a shifting set of relations between languages and cultures. Their diasporic “roots *and* routes” cannot be either understood or limited to the dynamics of global capitalism and international mass migrations.⁸ On the contrary, they should be connected to local and cultural practices and linked to the legacy of colonialism as well.

My argument, evidently, does not imply a teleological or linear development from ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’ to Italian postcolonial literature. Instead, it proposes possible connections between these two branches of the Italian literary tradition in terms of aesthetic and ethical practices, so as to emphasise a shared set of stylistic formulae and leitmotifs. In other words, this analysis shows how several aesthetic devices used by postcolonial authors –usually looked at in relation to the

⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Cultures*. Albany: Suny Press, 2004, p. 51.

⁶ Sandra Ponzanesi, “The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies: European Perspectives.” In: Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.) *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 51-70, 57.

⁷ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981—1991*. New York: Viking, 1991, p. 124.

⁸ James Clifford (1994) “Diasporas.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 9:3, pp. 302-338, 308.

Anglophone postcolonial production— match those theorised by Italo Calvino in the Preface of his pivotal Resistance novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path of the Spiders' Nests*, 1947). The latter authoritative starting point is crucial to clarify the multiple literary paths taken during the complex period of the *Resistenza*, made up by countless novels, poems, short stories and *memoirs*. It should be noted here that the analysis of the texts belonging to the 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' will be focused on the novel form (this choice will be explained in the following section). Moreover, the primary interest will not be the examination of the ideological perspectives of every single author of the *Resistenza*, but the ethical and aesthetic scope of their novels. In this regard, two different writers such as Beppe Fenoglio and Luigi Meneghello may find common ground in the way they have employed the English language, or they have addressed the concept of Italianness after Mussolini's dictatorship. Likewise, shared views about 'orality', 'dialects' or 'resistance' further enable the comparison between the novels of the *Resistenza* and those by contemporary postcolonial writers.

This comparative approach aims to show the fluidity of the influences between texts and paradigms so as to expand the concepts of both 'postcolonial literature' and 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' beyond their traditional area of influence. This approach highlights that both post-war and postcolonial authors explore how self-identity, language and nationhood are related and built together, and how both literatures challenge the idea of canon and 'national' literary tradition. Also, Somali Italian postcolonial and *Resistenza* novels share a similar feature as they both deal with civil-war contexts.⁹ This aspect has been critically neglected, but it emerges as a strong tie between Italy and Somalia: both nations underwent dictatorship (Benito Mussolini and Siyaad Barre) and civil war. Despite the differences at the historical level, this study shows that, in fact, the two literary productions which followed these events share similar aesthetic and thematic features. Moreover, it proposes a fruitful perspective for reassessing the theoretical approach of both Italian studies and postcolonial theory.

This engagement with the Italian literary canon is essential, in my opinion, because it might emphasise the specificity of the Italian case and its dissimilarity with the Anglophone one. This approach does not aim to deny the idea that languages and cultures transcend their places of origin and national borders and that there cannot be influences and similarities between different

⁹ The representation of the civil war has been analysed in Chapter 2 in reference to the employment of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Nuruddin Farah's *Links*. Whereas Farah opens up to the intertextuality between his novel and the Italian poem, Italian-writing Somali authors look at the civil war in a way that implicitly resembles the literary production of the post-war 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza'.

contexts. Rather, my intention is to explore the concept of ‘postcolonialism’ without merely reproducing or applying the Anglo-American theoretical toolkit, thus using the category of ‘postcolonial’ as an umbrella term for very different cultural, social and historical situations. The following sections will show to what extent the Italian postcolonial paradigm presents differences from the Anglophone one. In particular, I argue that the historical and literary background of the post-war period in Italy, which has no correspondent in British literature, shows parallels with the postcolonial productions of Somali Italian writers. This approach will reveal how Italian postcolonial literature followed a remarkably different path from the Anglophone one, in relation to the development of the novel-form and its association to colonialism and nation-building.

4.1 Postcolonial authors: a conundrum for Italian literature

Whereas postcolonial novels have been studied concerning to their transnational influence with non-Western or non-European writings, little work has been done about the references between Somali Italian literature and its position within the Italian literary tradition. This aspect has been critically neglected by postcolonial studies, which failed to look at postcolonial texts with a comparative approach and, moreover, it has been overlooked by Italian studies, which still consider postcolonial writings in Italian as unrelated to the Italian tradition.

For example, in a section of his exhaustive *Scrittori e popolo* (2015), Alberto Asor Rosa, an eminent figure in the field of the Italian studies, has attempted to locate postcolonial authors within Italian literature rather cautiously. He admits that the postcolonial production “escapes, and continues to escape, despite its growing importance, any attempt to positioning it, both for the multiple knowledge it entails (there are now two, three, four stories and contemporary cultures at play), both for the difficulty of connecting these attempts, of different origins, to the «national» framework that, according to tradition, we still strive to build”.¹⁰ Even though Asor Rosa points out the theoretical struggle in linking postcolonial production to the “national framework”, due to the “multiple knowledge” it involves (being cross-cultural and multilingual), he renounces such an effort entirely.

¹⁰ “D’altra parte, esso sfugge, e continua a sfuggire, nonostante la sua crescente importanza, a qualsiasi tentativo di sistemazione, sia per la conoscenza multipla che comporta (ormai ci sono due, tre, quattro storie e culture contemporanee in gioco), sia per la difficoltà di connettere questi tentativi, di origine diversa, al quadro «nazionale» che, secondo la tradizione, ci sforziamo ancora di costruire.” In: Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo. 1965. Scrittori e massa. 2015*. Turin: Einaudi, 2015, p. 406.

Moreover, it should be noted that Asor Rosa's engagement with the postcolonial paradigm is problematic, if not suspicious. Questionably, he suggests that one of the effects of postcolonial writings may be that the latter "strengthens the loss of those links with the Italian literary tradition so deeply connected [...] with what we cannot otherwise call nothing else but «Italian identity»."¹¹ With this assumption, Asor Rosa underscores the idea, well-established and old-fashioned, that national literature is the product of a fixed national identity or a stable national character.¹² In doing so, he also reiterates the belief that, to be called Italian, an author should write within the national borders, as the Italian identity, at the national level, is bounded to the territory and its unity.¹³ This chapter, instead, shows how "those links with the Italian literary tradition" are far from lost or in danger: quite the reverse, they are strengthened by Somali postcolonial authors, as they are involved in the making of new self- and national identities through their literary production, also by looking back to the Italian literary tradition. This starting point offers a new perspective on the 'Letteratura della Resistenza' itself: by comparing Italian and Somali Italian literatures, we can read the former as having something akin to anti-colonial and postcolonial aesthetics. In other words: not only does Italian postcolonial writings need to be acknowledged as part of the Italian literary tradition, but we also need to re-examine the latter by tracing analogies and resonances with the Italian postcolonial production.

It is important to emphasise that the exclusion of postcolonial writings from the literary tradition has been triggered, also, by modes of selection, validation and endorsement deeply rooted in factors of assessment based on aesthetic principles. In this regard, Graziella Parati notices that:

Traditional Italianists would downgrade the texts written by migrants to being non-literary expressions [...] that have no place in a canonical classification of the narratives that define Italian literature. This protectionist approach to literary studies has a place

¹¹ Alberto Asor Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 407: "Rafforzi la perdita di quei legami con quel ceppo letterario italiano così profondamente connesso [...] con quella che non si può ancora altrimenti chiamare se non «identità italiana»."

¹² Scholars Alberto Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg have explored how the idea of Italianness was strongly defined during the Risorgimento, a period in which artists and writers were involved in the national myth-building. In doing so, literature relied on the elitarian ideals of the well-educated bourgeoisie, thus excluding other voices (according to gender, class, ethnicity and location) in the making of the national identity. Alberto Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*. New York and Oxford: Berg, 2001, pp. 7-10.

¹³ Marie Orton notices that "the [...] systematic exclusions in the name of national literary unity find parallels through the twentieth century in the suppression of many voices from Italy's border zones that do not fit with tidy cartographies of space (e.g. Edith Bruck, Fleur Jaeggy, Claudio Magris, Paolo Maurensig, Giuliana Morandini, and Giorgio Pressburger, none of whom are anthologized in general histories of Italian literature)." Marie Orton (2012) "Writing the Nation: Migration Literature and National Identity." *Italian Culture*, 30:1, pp. 21-37, p. 24.

in very normative approaches to aesthetics and runs the risk of limiting the role of literature in interpreting the culture in which it interacts.¹⁴

Owing to these ‘normative approaches’, Italian studies have excluded postcolonial authors’ productions from their agenda, thus retrieving the ostracism toward ‘marginal’ and ‘minor’ voices according to the very same principles that were at work during the *Risorgimento*. This chapter, as said, aims to show how Somali Italian authors employ aesthetic forms and strategies that were developed by a literature that much contributed to the making of the «Italian identity»: the ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’.

I argue that these ‘normative approaches’ promoted an excessively generalised idea of ‘postcolonialism’ and neglected the complexity of cultural, historical or geographical influences, but also ignored the relationship between authors.¹⁵ Scholars Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo have noted that Italian postcolonial studies has engaged with several perspectives, such as gender and cultural studies, but failed in conceiving a coherent and specific theoretical system.¹⁶ Also, according to Fabrizio De Donno and Neelam Srivastava, Italian postcolonial studies have relied on concepts and theories shaped in the Anglophone academia. Accordingly, they have noticed that “postcolonialism as a scholarly field [...] needs to extend its scope of enquiry beyond the Anglo-French models of the colonial (and postcolonial) relationship, which to some extent determine the theoretical directions taken by critics”.¹⁷ In this regard, two telling examples may be introduced to point out the limitations of applying this logic to the Italian context: first, in the Italian literary tradition, the novel did not play the same role of “cultural artefact of bourgeois society” imbued by imperialism, which performed in the English literary tradition.¹⁸ Second, Italian postcolonial authors (from Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya or Eritrea) have never written or published *from* their native country, as happened, for example, in the Franchophone and Anglophone context (with Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o).

¹⁴ Graziella Parati (2005) *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 175.

¹⁵ An exception to this main trend is the work by Sandra Ponzanesi, who analyses writers from the Indian and Afro-Italian diaspora. Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Cultures. Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora*. Albany: Suny Press, 2005. Some scholars, however, have placed geography (namely the place of origins of the authors) at the basis of their studies, such as Daniele Comberiat, Sara Marzagora, Caterina Romeo, Annalisa Urbano and Gabriele Proglia.

¹⁶ Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.) *L'Italia postcoloniale*. Milan: Mondadori, 2014, p. 16-17, 54.

¹⁷ Fabrizio De Donno and Neelam Srivastava (2006) “Colonial and Postcolonial Italy.” *Interventions*, 8:3, pp. 371-379, p. 372.

¹⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, p. 88.

These two examples, which will be analysed further in this chapter and considered as cornerstones for the development of a postcolonial literature specifically Italian that, should be enough to show how Italian postcolonial literature has followed a different route from the Anglophone one. Whereas the latter resulted from the modification and subversion of the traditional colonial discourse –buttressed, ratified and validated by canonical novels– this same development, in the Italian case, has been hindered by the absence, in fact, of an authoritative and canonised literary production which endorsed Italy’s imperial ambitions over time.¹⁹ The following section, before analysing the novels of Somali authors in relation to ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’, aims to explore the development of the Italian literature during Fascism and after the war, so as to provide the reader with a comprehensive historico-cultural context in which to inscribe the postcolonial production.

4.2 The suppressed memory of Italian colonialism

One of the aesthetic features that characterises Somali postcolonial literature is the fragmentation of the narrative. In this regard, Scego’s *Rhoda* (2004), *Oltre Babilonia* (2008) and *Adua* (2015) deploy the same feature of re-telling the past through individual memories using a polyphonic structure and the multiplication of the points of view. Along the same axis, Uba Christina Ali Farah structured her novel *Little Mother* (2007), which stages the double cultural belonging of Somali peoples who resettled in Italy. Garane’s *Il latte è buono* has been studied as a form of Fanonian *Bildungsroman* in which autobiographic elements play a significant role.²⁰ Therefore, the feature of dealing with the past in the form of a fictionalised memoir –from the perspective of individual recollections– informs most postcolonial Italian production. This characteristic, which displays the main events of the plot in disjointed historical time and setting, has been looked at as a globally shared aesthetic device among postcolonial writings. Brioni notes that the non-chronological structure, always split between two settings, “creates an implicit link to the present, which shows that the seclusion of colonised subjects within Italian colonies is reduplicated in the present discrimination against immigrants”.²¹ Starting from this theoretical perspective, the analysis of the link between fragmented memories and postcolonial texts can be developed further. Whether

¹⁹ Giovanna Tomasello, *L’Africa tra mito e realtà. Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana*. Palermo: Sellerio, 2004; Monica Venturini, *Controcànone. Per una cartografia della scrittura coloniale e postcoloniale italiana*. Rome: Aracne, 2010.

²⁰ Simone Brioni notices that the very first proof of the split identity is given by the double name both of the author and the protagonist of *Madre piccola*, Domenica Axad. In: Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, p. 67.

²¹ Ivi, p. 61.

historiography, archival documentation and the literary canon have had a primary role for Anglophone postcolonial authors to write back and reclaim their presence after being silenced, for Italian postcolonial authors, the history of colonialism is mostly grounded in individual memories and constant references to the legacy of colonialism, more than on colonialism itself. In other words, Italian postcolonial authors do not rely on official historiography to disrupt the conventional Eurocentric notion of history, nor on canonical texts to rewrite or subvert the representation of colonised subjects. Instead, they depend on individual recollections, which inform the polyphonic and multilingual feature of their novels. The latter, I argue, may reflect how Italy has dealt (or has not) with its colonial past after World War II.

This section aims to investigate this aspect and relate it to the development of Italian literature. In order to have a comprehensive perspective of the specificity of the Italian postcolonial context, so as to highlight the differences with the English one, an exploration of the historical and cultural post-war and Fascist period should be provided. This examination also aims to clarify why 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' plays a primary role in the attempt to locate postcolonial literature within the Italian context. Moreover, to explain one fundamental link between 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' and postcolonial writings, this section will underscore the series of concurrent causes that led postcolonial authors to rely on personal memories, instead of archives or canonical novels.

As several scholars have underlined already, Italy has failed to confront and acknowledge its colonial period.²² This defective process of reworking of the past has occurred due to concurrent politico-historical and cultural facts. Among the former, there stands out the lack of relevant armed conflicts in the colonies against the motherland for independence during the 1950s.²³ Moreover, the irregular decolonisation and protracted disengagement after the war prevented Italy, unlike Great Britain and France, from becoming the destination of the migration movements from the former colonies following independence.²⁴ This limited migratory flow, which did not affect the

²² Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, "Introduction." *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*. Berne: Peter Lang, 2005; Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002. Fabrizio De Donno and Neelam Srivastava (2006) "Colonial and Postcolonial Italy." *Interventions*, 8:3, pp. 371-379. Monica Venturini, *Controcànone. Per una cartografia della scrittura coloniale e postcoloniale italiana*. Rome: Aracne, 2010.

²³ Both the Libyan (1923 and 1932) and Ethiopian (1936-1941) resistance movements mainly occurred during the Italian Empire and the Fascist rule.

²⁴ Lorella Tosone: "The 'strange decolonization' has certainly contributed to stress and widen the limits of Italian development and cooperation policy: the delay with which Italy confronted itself with its own colonial past, and the peculiar way in which the Italian political establishment portrayed the success of its presence in Africa. Representing Italians as the only good colonialists and so reiterating the myth of the

population numerically, also reinforced the idea of Italianness as being homogenous and coherent in terms of culture, religion and ethnicity, namely Christian and white.²⁵ Furthermore, Italy, in spite of having lost the war, kept political control over a former colony (Somalia) after World War II, thanks to the United Nations' agreement (AFIS). In Somalia, especially, political, cultural and economic independence has not been the result of anticolonial struggles or protracted processes of decolonisation, such as other African countries which freed themselves through conflicts. On the contrary, political autonomy was the outcome of negotiations, as the in-between phase from the beginning of the administration (1949) and independence (1960) witnessed the co-existence of the Italian occupation with the growing awareness of the idea of Somalia as a sovereign nation.²⁶ The delicate task of preparing southern Somalia for independence over ten years hindered the possibility to realise a radical rupture with the motherland; at the same time, this predominantly smooth political transition did not encourage the motherland itself to publicly debate the misdeeds of the colonial period.²⁷ Above all, the unusual and unique UN trusteeship –improperly regarded by the Italian government as a reward for the good colonial rule– enabled Italian institutions to overlook the crimes and the cruelties committed during the colonial military campaigns.²⁸

At the socio-cultural level, according to Angelo del Boca, both institutions and the media concealed and overlooked evidences of war crimes perpetrated in the former colonies, in order to rebuild the public image of Italy, largely damaged after the experiences of Fascism and World War II.²⁹ Besides,

brava gente has certainly contributed to letting the Italian governments and public opinion feel exempt from committing seriously to Third World economic development.” Lorella Tosone (2011) “Italy’s Policy of Cooperation for Development: A “natural vocation” for Rhetoric?” *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, 25, pp. 125-144, p. 130.

²⁵ Gaia Giuliani (2014) “L’italiano negro.” *Interventions*, 16:2, pp. 572-587.

²⁶ Matteo Guglielmo, *Il Corno d’Africa*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013, pp. 20-22. Ali Mumin Ahad (2008) “Il dualismo *Sab/Somali* e la definizione della identità nazionale somala.” *Africa*, LXIII, 1, pp. 429-468. pp: 460-1: “In the process of national, territorial and cultural unification, a certain degree of cultural homogeneity emerges concerning language and religion, but Somali nationalism, elitist and with little experience, is incapable to effectively break with tribal society. Its inexperience derives from its late appearance, only in the 1940s, on the horizon of Somali society, after the defeat of the Italian colonial empire of East Africa and the arrival of England as the administrative power of the two former colonies.”

²⁷ It should be noted that, however, in the first two years of the trusteeship, the Italian administration tended to re-establish its authority by imprisoning and repressing members of the Somali Youth League, and some incidents also occurred, ending in several casualties. In: Mohamed Trunji, *Somalia. The Untold Story 1941-1969*. Leicester, UK: Loohpess, 2015, pp. 44-48, 136-29. Andrea Ungari (2002) “Umberto Zanotti Bianco and the Mogadishu events of 1948.” *Modern Italy*, 15:2, pp. 161-176.

²⁸ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia. Rome and Mogadishu: from Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*. London: Palgrave, 1999, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ Angelo del Boca (2003) “The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism.” In: Patrizia Palumbo, *A Place in The Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*. Barkley, Los Angeles University of California Press, pp. 17-36; Angelo del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale. Nostalgia delle Colonie*, vol. 4. Rome, Bari: Laterza, 1984.

no public discussions about colonialism nor prominent voices against the colonial exploitations arose from the Italian intellectuals after the war and the collapse of Fascism.³⁰ At least until the 1980s, anti-colonial voices faced obstruction and censorship by the Italian government, which censored movies and novels.³¹ The cases of the Libyan-American historical movie *The Lion of the Desert* (1981) and the Eritrean author Erminia Dell’Oro are telling. In an interview, journalist Giuliano Santoro stated: “I was told by Erminia Dell’Oro, an Italian writer born in Eritrea, author of several novels about colonialism, that in the 1980s she proposed to different editors a book about the crimes of Graziani, but they rejected it because it was too strong [...]. Not to mention *The Lion of the Desert*, the film on Libyan resistance against Italians, blocked by censorship for about thirty years.” As a consequence, Italians strengthened the flattering idea of being *brava gente* [good people], a self-indulgent epithet that has occupied the ideological function of mitigating the misdeeds of colonialism and eventually set aside disquieting periods of national ignominy.³² The deep-rooted rationale of the Italian *missione civilizzatrice* [civilising mission] aimed to “go to clean a land” –to borrow Kipling’s words– and bring light into the darkness of the African territories endured in the collective consciousness also during and after the AFIS period.³³

Due to the ambivalent behaviour of journalists and intellectuals about colonialism, the absence of a war crimes trial and the slightly concealed complicity of politicians towards old fascist rules of administration, Italian society easily overlooked, for example, the Libyan and Ethiopian concentration camps and the chemical weapons employed in Ethiopia.³⁴ These historical and

³⁰ For example, Italian left-wing intelligentsia supported the Algerian struggle against the French, but it failed to engage consistently with the revision of the Italian history overseas in the post-war period. It should be noted that, however feeble, some voices against the colonial enterprise raised after World War II to call for an acknowledgement of Italy’s responsibilities in the African territories. Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, pp. 4-5.

³¹ Giuliano Santoro and Wu Ming, “La guerra razziale. Tra Affile e il colonialismo rimosso.” *Dinamopress*, 19 November 2012, www.dinamopress.it/news/la-guerra-razziale-tra-affile-e-il-colonialismo-rimosso. Accessed 10 May 2020. Also: Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945: The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 193.

³² Alessandro Pes, “La Democrazia Cristiana e la decolonizzazione mancata (1947—1952)”. In: Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, *Quel che resta dell’Impero*. Milan: Mimesis, 2014, pp. 417-38. Paolo Favero (2010) “Italians, the ‘Good People’: Reflections on National Self-Representation in Contemporary Italian Debates on Xenophobia and War.” *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies*, 12:2, pp. 138-53.

³³ Rudyard Kipling, “A Song of the White Men.” In: R. T. Jones (ed.) *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition, 1994, p. 292.

³⁴ A few examples may be helpful to stress the Italian view on the colonial period over time. In 1978, Sandro Pertini, at that time President of the Italian Republic and member of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), received Siyaad Barre in Rome praising the “ideals of independence and democracy” to which the Somali dictatorship, who studied in Florence in his youth, “would have devoted his noble existence with untiring efforts.” In: Angelo Del Boca, *Una sconfitta dell’intelligenza*. Bari: Laterza, 1993. Indro Montanelli, one of the most prominent Italian journalists, confessed in an interview that during his stay in Ethiopia in the 1930s

cultural reasons led scholars Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan to theorise, for the Italian case, the fragmentation of private and collective memories in relation to the colonial past. Along with the strategic re-writing of history under the logic of *Italiani brava gente*, the lack of official historiography and accessible documents of the colonial period allows for the memory of the colonial past to mostly survive in private recollections and first-hand testimonies.³⁵ Due to the lack of a detailed historiography, with factual information and documents, and the absence of available literary texts about colonialism, it was unlikely, for postcolonial writers, to characterise their novels with cultural understanding without using the memories of the witnesses. In other words, the only sources for reconstructing the past were to be found in the direct experiences of the parents' or relatives' authors.

4.3 The colonial novel and its legacy in the Italian literary tradition

The particular Italian scenario, as described in the previous section, influenced the way in which Italian postcolonial authors have looked at history, literature and national identity. In other words, the practices of writing back from a Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean or Libyan perspective have resulted in modes and forms different from those emerged from Anglophone ex-colonial territories. Anglophone postcolonial writers, for example, drew from the vast literary canon of novels that have been both obliquely and openly influenced by colonialism. In Italy, the topic of colonialism and its aftermath has been addressed irregularly by established Italian authors, as the novel failed to achieve the same prominence as in Anglophone literature. Whereas, for example, works such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) or J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) challenge the representations of the colonised subjects starting from canonical novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Robinson Crusoe*, in Italian postcolonial literature this practice of re-writing occurred infrequently. Since the fiction of colonial themes and setting written during Fascism could hardly represent a model, postcolonial Italian

he married a 12 or 14-year Abyssinian girl after buying her "along with a horse and a shotgun, for 500 lire". He recounted the story with no traces of shame, regret or embarrassment, calling the girl "un bell'animalino" [a cute beastie]. In: Giovanni Cavalieri, "Enzo Biagi: *Io ti saluto, vado in Abissinia* (intervista a Indro Montanelli)." *YouTube*, 11 December 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbAycbYMYE0. Accessed 10 May 2020.

³⁵ Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds). "Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism." *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 9-27. Furthermore, whereas colonialism has been intermittently present in literature, it has been relatively neglected by the official historiography until the relatively recent works by scholars Angelo Del Boca (published at the end of the 1980s) and by Giorgio Rochat, Nicola Labanca, Alessandro Triulzi and Gian Paolo Calchi Novati. As a consequence, the possibility of a documented history of Italian colonialism could not be retrieved until recent times. Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale*. Rome: Carocci, 2011, pp. 38-48.

authors have not relied on those texts as literary antecedents to be subverted.³⁶ The corpus of the so-called ‘romanzi coloniali’ [colonial novels], which was announced during the 1930s by the two periodical magazines *Esotica mensile di letteratura coloniale* (1926–28), *L’Oltremare* (1927–34) and *L’Azione Coloniale* (1931–1945), explicitly embodied Fascist beliefs and aimed to share them with a large audience.³⁷ The ethos expressed in low-quality ‘romanzi coloniali’ was embedded in the idea of the beneficial action of colonialism in Africa. The unquestioned supremacy of white men over black colonised subjects, along with the total subjection of the African woman, underpinned this colonial production. In other words, colonial novels were programmatically conceived to support the Fascist regime both ideologically and explicitly; the characters, accordingly, were the personification of the fascist man and exemplified his unbending morality and integrity. Africa, the *continente nero* [black continent], was portrayed either as an exotic place of lustful reprobation –where senses and irrationality rule over rationality and logic– or as a land of opportunities, where to build the colonial consciousness and show the industriousness of the fascist man.³⁸

However, if this colonial literary production (as well as the propaganda documentaries and movies) helped to shape an *immaginario coloniale* [colonial consciousness] at the social level, it failed to establish long-lasting canonical novels at the literary level. The colonial literary project announced during the 1930s produced, instead, *feuilleton*, propaganda-related writings and mediocre novels.³⁹ As scholar Giovanna Tomasello explains, the success of fascist colonial fiction, in terms of public, has remained uneven over time and ended with the dissolution of the Empire. Moreover, no important publishing companies during the 1920s and the 1930s realised series dedicated to colonial literature specifically, thus preventing the development and persistence of colonial novels over time.⁴⁰

³⁶ Libyan-Italian author Alessandro Spina (1927–2013) has described a feeling of repulsion more than an attitude of subversion towards the writings about Africa: “A person, both a politician and a writer, as well as in the most diverse professions, is also defined with respect to those who come on stage with him. Definition, or identity, is reached by two distinct ways: illustrating the debt to the masters, or shouting horrified (in my case, while reading Bacchelli’s *Mal d’Africa* and other novels): *this is not me!*”. In: Alessandro Spina, *Diario di lavoro. Alle origini de ‘I confini dell’ombra’*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010, p. 66 (my translation).

³⁷ Giovanna Tomasello, *L’Africa tra mito e realtà. Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana*. Palermo: Sellerio, 2004, pp. 141-198.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Feuilleton*, also referred to as *romanzo d’appendice*, is that part of a newspaper or magazine devoted to fiction, criticism, or light literature. In this section, then, a single more substantial work, often of narrative fiction, can be published in smaller, sequential instalments.

⁴⁰ Except for the case of Fortunato Cacopardo, who owned a Libyan publishing house. In: Giovanna Tomasello, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-7. To give an example of how this literary production was predominantly propagandist, it is worth mentioning the representative case of Mario Appelius’s novel *Il cimitero degli elefanti* (*The Elephants’ Graveyard*, 1928). The author’s prose –overflowing with orientalist traits– points out why

The postcolonial production in Italian does not result in the re-writing of the colonial (Fascist) novels, due to their low quality, their lack of printed copies on the market after the 1940s and their absence in anthologies and collections. Conversely, “most [Anglophone] postcolonial writers, nourished by the literary canon (and novelistic) British, during their formative years in the British colonies, often used the literary canon and the novel as a means of expressing their own contestation and even rebellion”.⁴¹ In the Italian case, Ghermandi’s *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Scego’s *Oltre Babilonia* are the only two explicit examples of the ‘writing back’ practice, loosely based on the novel by Ennio Flaiano’s *Tempo di uccidere* (winner of the Strega Prize in 1947).⁴² However, Ghermandi and Scego’s novels do not represent a faithful and accurate rewriting. Besides, *Tempo di uccidere*, even though it has been continually in print for sixty years, has been re-evaluated only recently, due to the interest shown by postcolonial studies towards Italian colonialism. In fact, Ghermandi and Scego’s novels are, predominantly, a conscious attempt to challenge one of the few Italian novels related to the shadows of colonialism whose author achieved –in recent years– substantial importance in the field of Italian postcolonial studies.⁴³

colonial novels of the Fascist period could have hardly been used as literary models or included in the canon: “L’animalità equatoriale voleva sfogare su quella liliale bellezza la sua sozza libidine di spazzatura della specie [...] vedeva il suo corpo di vergine europea palpato dalle mani bramosi dei barbari” [The equatorial animality wanted to unleash the filthy lust of its scum on that pristine beauty [...] she saw her European virgin body fondled by the yearning hands of the savages]. In: Mario Appelius, *Il cimitero degli elefanti*. Milan: Alpes, 1928, p. 256.

⁴¹ Florence Labaune-Demeule (2016) “The novel in post-colonial literatures: Re-mapping the genre.” *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 38:2, pp. 109-121, p. 101.

⁴² Ennio Flaiano (1910–1972) was an Italian screenwriter, playwright, novelist, journalist, and drama critic. He is best known for his work along with director Federico Fellini, with whom Flaiano co-wrote famous and international acclaimed screenplays. His novel *Tempo di uccidere* (*Time To Kill*, 1947) is set in Ethiopia during the Italian invasion (1935–36) and tells the story of an Italian officer who accidentally kills an Ethiopian woman and is ravaged by the memory of his act. A movie adaptation with the same title was released in 1989, directed by Giuliano Montaldo and starring Nicolas Cage and Giancarlo Giannini. Silvia Camilotti, *Ripensare la letteratura e l’identità: la narrativa italiana di Gabriella Ghermandi e Jarmila Očkayová*. Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012.

⁴³ In this regard, we should mention three other texts related to the ‘African’ experience that have represented colonialism in a critical way (or, at least, have not entirely supported it): Mario Tobino’s *Il deserto della Libia* (*The Libyan Desert*, 1952), a semi-autobiographical novel about the war in Libya between 1939–1941, the war-diary of Giuseppe Berto entitled *Guerra in camicia nera* (*A Blackshirt’s War*, 1955), and Enrico Emanuelli’s *Settimana nera* (1961, translated in English as *Black Dove*, 1964), winner of the Prix International Charles Veillon in 1962, a story of an erotic obsession set in Mogadishu during the years of the Italian trusteeship. However, these novels are currently out of print. Mario Tobino [1952] *Il deserto della Libia*. Milan: Mondadori, 2011. Giuseppe Berto [1955] *Guerra in camicia nera*. Milan: BUR, 2010. Enrico Emanuelli [1961] *Settimana nera*. Milan: Mondadori, 1966. The English translation: Enrico Emanuelli, *Black Dove*. Translated by Peter Green. London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964. Giulietta Stefani (2010) “Eroi e antieroi coloniali: uomini italiani in Africa da Flaiano a Lucarelli.” *Zapruder. Culture in movimento*, 23, pp. 40-56.

The difference that should be noted here is that, despite the similarities between English and Italian literature in their shared orientalist representation, in the Italian case, the colonial discourse was present in non-fiction writings. Besides, when novels were employed to shape and support colonial practices, they did not survive the test of time, thus vanishing from the Italian literary tradition, anthologies and publications after the war. This fact, on the one hand, hindered the rewriting of novels explicitly or implicitly related to colonialism, due to the lack of the latter on the market but, more generally, due to their disappearance from the cultural scenario; on the other hand, it allows the persistence of Africa as an exotic creation, never challenged and rarely reworked after Fascism.⁴⁴

Italian postcolonial authors of the 1990s, therefore, could not rely on a wide range of novels affiliated to imperial representations. The novel-form, developed in Great Britain hand in hand with imperialism, in the case of the Italian literary tradition has not supported and ingrained the colonial ideology as much as in the Anglophone tradition.⁴⁵ This crucial difference between the two literary traditions should be regarded as an unavoidable starting point to look at the Italian postcolonial production. In the analysis of Italian postcolonial texts, the underlying assumption theorised both in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* concerning the English fiction should be questioned. According to Said, English novels achieved an overseas reach from the early stage (Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and then intermittingly maintained this aspect until the nineteenth-century, when the novel gained importance and partook in the overseas expansion "as the aesthetic form and as a major intellectual voice, so to speak, in English society".⁴⁶ This bourgeois global vision of the world, sustained and consolidated in the novel, has been embraced more or less explicitly by authors such as Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, and Jane Austen, and then carried throughout the twentieth century by Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster. Moreover, English literature became integral part of the syllabus in the universities, colleges and schools of the former colonies, from India to the Caribbean. As part of the education of the native elite, English literature was taught to colonised subjects, while in the Italian case the educational policies were less structured and ill-planned.

⁴⁴ On this subject, scholar Giovanni Santangelo reveals how the orientalist representation of Africa informed Italian literature in the post-war period, underlining that its orientalist literary presence has endured as a topos of exotic adventures and nostalgic comeback until at least the 2010s. Giovanni Saverio Santangelo, "Mal d'Africa e rivisitazione del colonialismo nelle scritture italiano del secondo dopoguerra." In: Francesca Tomassini and Monica Venturini, *Scritture postcoloniali. Nuovi immaginari letterari*. Rome: Ensemble, 2018, pp. 63-94.

⁴⁵ This is also because Italian colonialism lasted much less than British colonialism. Even though Italy started its colonial enterprise at the end of the nineteenth century (1869), the so-called Italian Empire lasted roughly seven years, between 1936 and 1943.

⁴⁶ Edward Said, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.

Accordingly, the English global vision of the world and the colonial consciousness –both grounded in long-lasting imperialistic policies– has not been actively accompanied in Italy with the same novelistic development occurred in England. Italian novels, I argue, have been nation-bound, if not provincial, due to the slow unification process (achieved only in 1861) and, naturally, due to the lack of overseas territories as vast the British ones. In the Italian literature of the nineteenth- and twentieth century, the reach of global movements and settings was considerably lower if compared to those described and experienced by English authors. For example, the overseas territories recurred rarely as main settings in both prose and poetry, lacking direct contact with the colonies and thus unrelated to the every-day life of both Italians and Lybians, Ethiopians or Somalis in the colonies.⁴⁷ During the period of the first settlement in the African continent, the economy based on trading with the metropole was weak and underdeveloped, thus preventing remarkable migrations from Italy to the colonies and vice versa. The absence of a robust national identity before 1861 and the lack of a strong and economically powerful bourgeoisie, placed Italian literature ‘behind’ the English one, well-established within the colonial territories and with the novel already established as the leading literary genre. In other words, the geographical domain in which the Italian cultural and economic influence predominantly thrived has been enclosed, for centuries, inside the borders of *mare nostrum*.⁴⁸

In the Italian novels, Somalia, Libya, Eritrea and Ethiopia never achieved the status and the literary prominence of, to say, India or South Africa in the English fiction. Even though Italian authors developed and sustained exotic and orientalist images of Africa, the latter has been consistently represented as part of the colonial discourse only during Fascism. Even then, the colonies surfaced in fiction as ahistorical, undefined and mythical places.⁴⁹ This suggests that, until at least the Fascist period, Italian authors were unfamiliar with the geographical vastness and the topographical, historical and political understanding that underpinned English fiction and reverberated in the novels by Kipling, Conrad, or Forster. Moreover, the novel had not achieved the predominant role attained in the English literary landscape. During the early colonial period up

⁴⁷ Massimo Boddi, *Letteratura dell'Impero e romanzi coloniali (1922—1935)*. Minturno: Caramanica, 2011, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Even fascist leader Benito Mussolini, who dreamed of creating an Italian Empire and coveted the control of territories facing the Indian Ocean, remarked the primary role of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea, aiming to re-establish the greatness of the Roman Empire.

⁴⁹ In this regard, when Massimo Bontempelli (1878—1960), an Italian intellectual who wrote on the Fascist magazine *L'Azione coloniale*, was asked to define whether Italy possessed or lacked a colonial literature, he tellingly pointed out that in order to have “a colonial novel it is hardly enough to simply centre a plot in Tripoli that might have happened in Perugia.” Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, p. 142.

to the full expansion of the Empire, poems, articles, diaries, chronicles and travel books played a significant role in supporting the colonial discourse, the orientalist representation of colonised subjects and their subjugations, especially after the Italian defeat at the hands of Ethiopian forces at Adwua in 1896. The literary production of the late nineteenth-century, related to the so-called African argument and remarkably successful during that time, was then made up of reportage, memories and travelogues of missionaries and explorers, namely non-professional writers, but few worthy fictional works.⁵⁰ Again, it should be noted that, at this stage, the novel represent a latent form in the production of knowledge about Africa, because several popular novels appeared only later, during the 1930s and 1940s and under the direction of Fascist literary policies.⁵¹

As a result, the novels that explicitly endorsed colonialism have been eventually forgotten or disappeared from both the literary and the publishing scene, mostly because of their poor quality and the regrettable ideological stances they imply.⁵² The whole production of the Fascist period, which includes by then-famous authors such as Mario Appelius, Vittorio Tedesco Zammarano, Mitrano Sani and Orio Vergani, has never been reprinted in post-war Italy after the downfall of the regime. In other words, their novels did not make a lasting difference in the development of the novel in terms of influence and legacy; arguably, they represent the dead end of a genre which could have contributed to challenge and question colonialism, but ended up by becoming

⁵⁰ Augusto Franzoni's *Aure Africane* (1883) and *Continente nero* (1885); Antonio Cecchi's *Da Zeila alle frontiere del Kaffa* (1885–1895); between 1885 and 1887 Massaja's ten volumes of his *I miei trentacinque anni di missione nell'Alta Etiopia* was published; Gaetano Casati's *Dieci anni in Equatoria* (1891); Romolo Gessi's *Sette anni nel Sudan Egiziano* (1891). In Giovanna Tomasello, *L'Africa tra mito e realtà. Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana*. Palermo: Sellerio, 2004, p. 12. Loredana Polezzi (2014) "Description, appropriation, transformation: Fascist rhetoric and colonial nature." *Modern Italy*, 19:3, pp. 287-303.

⁵¹ Monica Venturini (2017) "Al di là del mare. Letteratura e giornalismo nell'Italia coloniale. 1920–1940." *Clio&Themis*, 12, pp. 1-13 and pp. 7-8.

⁵² In arguing this point, I would not suggest that the Italian literary tradition lacked canonical authors who wrote about colonialism and its civilising mission, or dramatised nationalistic issues and described Africa from an exoticising perspective. The main point here is that renowned authors who dealt with the vast topic of colonialism have fictionalised the latter's vision, policies and attitude unsystematically in their literary production. Furthermore, this production embraced Africa more like an idea than a real place. It should be noted here that Giovanni Pascoli (1855–1912) wrote one of the most famous endorsements of colonial enterprise in Libya. However, his *La grande proletaria si è mossa* is not a fictional work, but a public oration that Pascoli published in 1911. Pascoli's rhetoric, similar to that of Gabriele D'Annunzio, aims to foster feelings of fraternal pride, patriotism and imperialism. It was highly successful at that time, because it promoted unity and a shared destiny for all Italians towards modernisation in a still culturally divided nation. It should also be noted that Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907), regarded as the Poet Laureate of modern Italy and Nobel Prize in 1906, showed equivocal opinions about colonialism: if in 1887 he condemned the colonial ambitions of Prime Minister Agostino Depretis, in 1890 he supported the government of Francesco Crispi and his aggressive policy to make Italy a colonial power. In: Adriana Baranello (2011) "Giovanni Pascoli's 'La grande proletaria si è mossa': A Translation and Critical Introduction." *California Italian Studies*, 2:1, escholarship.org/uc/item/6jh07474. Accessed 10 May 2020.

propaganda, supporting Fascist ideology and perpetuating orientalist representations of colonised subjects.

Consequently, the so-called 'Italian colonial literature', appropriately written for consumption or for propaganda to build an imperial consciousness, never achieved the status of 'canonical' literature. In this sense, the Anglophone corpus of novels fashioned during the prolonged period of colonialism and imperialism cannot be compared to the Italian one. Accordingly, scholar Giuseppe Finaldi underlines that, in the late nineteenth-century, "Italy's most prominent contemporary writers [...] did not write 'colonial' novels [...] but many lesser known authors did turn to the African wars or at least to colonial-style events to create the backdrops for their novels and to turn Africa into an Italian literary scenario".⁵³ This lack of novels by renowned writers results in the impossibility, for Italian postcolonial writers, to reread and rewrite "great colonial masterpieces, which not only misinterpreted [colonised subjects] but assumed they were unable to read and respond directly to what had written about them".⁵⁴ The absence of canonical novels who, implicitly or explicitly, have represented or sustained colonialism by embodying its practices and visions, delayed the development of Italian postcolonial literature and influenced how postcolonial authors have looked at literature, colonialism and its legacy.⁵⁵

In this scenario, as I have shown, Italian writers produced poor-quality novels under Fascism and did not write *from* the colonies. As a consequence, Italian postcolonial authors did not look at colonial novels or at historiography as their primary sources for re-appropriation and rewriting, but developed different artistic practices and networks of literary influence than those shaped in the Anglophone colonial and postcolonial world.⁵⁶ This historical and literary picture leaves unanswered the question about the relation between Italian literature and postcolonial writers; hence, in the following section, I will address how, in this limited environment of colonial-related literary forms and themes, the 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' provides a valuable model –even

⁵³ Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, p. 137.

⁵⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, p. 35.

⁵⁵ As well, postcolonial authors could not rely on archival documentation until recently, so that the only memories or reports of the colonial past were the personal accounts of the witnesses. The absence of official historiography about the events of Italy overseas, documented, updated, openly available and thought at any education level, prevented the construction of a stable postcolonial social consciousness. Fabrizio De Donno and Neelam Srivastava (2006) "Colonial and Postcolonial Italy." *Interventions*, 8:3, pp. 371-379.

⁵⁶ In the short period of the Italian Empire (1936—1941), no influential or distinguished voices emerged *from* the African territories. Considerably later, around the 1990s and the early 2000s, the first postcolonial novels began to be published, written by the sons or the nephews of colonised subjects within the Italian borders. Again, this particular development of the Italian postcolonial literature marks a difference with the Anglophone one.

though not connected with the colonial enterprise overseas— for reading postcolonial authors in an Italian perspective.

4.4 '*Letteratura sulla Resistenza*': a historical and literary overview

The argument at the basis of this section is that the events that occurred during colonialism and the processes of decolonisation, above all in Somalia in the AFIS period, have not been fictionalised or discussed as much as the Italian resistance movement, a debated period in the post-war Italian political, historical and cultural scene. It should be noted here that these two socio-historical events, namely the discussion about the *Resistenza* and the AFIS trusteeship, are contemporary. For example, when Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* was published in 1947, Italy was discussing the political future of Somalia and its potential administration until the country's independence. During the 1950s, when the Italian literary scene saw the publication of the vast experiences of the *Resistenza*, Somalia was recognised a trust territory under the Italian government. However, while anti-colonial tendencies rarely occurred in Italian fiction, and hardly appeared as prominent topics in the public scene, the partisan fight emerged as one of the most prolific literary subjects. The *lotta partigiana* [partisan fight] produced a whole new narrative movement, which eventually was identified as '*Letteratura sulla Resistenza*'. Even today, Italian partisan fight represents a debated and controversial moment of Italian history, both at the historical and political level, but also stands out as a far more investigated and fictionalised topic, if compared to colonialism. Besides, if we consider the AFIS trusteeship period (1950—1960), the number of novels set in that phase is close to zero.⁵⁷ In other words, in post-war Italy, the literary construction of the *Resistenza* completely eclipsed the Italian colonial experience, and indeed disavowed the emancipation movements of the former colonies.

The post-war period has been looked at as a pivotal moment of political and economic renovation, but also of cultural reconstruction after the fascist era.⁵⁸ In this late 1940s, "literary and testimonial texts around the Resistance came to define an idea, a lived experience and a narrative of Italy's ruinous civil war".⁵⁹ On re-telling of the events that occurred during the partisan struggle, the novel

⁵⁷ Apart from *Settimana nera* (1961) by Emanuelli. This novel, however, which received the International Prize Veillon in 1961, reiterates stereotypes about Africa and African women. Enrico Emanuelli, *Settimana nera*. Milan: Mondadori, 1961.

⁵⁸ *Resistenza* was later recast as a war of liberation against fascism, and the post-war period saw an attempt to reconstruct an idea of the nation that distanced itself from its fascist past." In: Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930—1970*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, p. 3

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 211.

form played a dominant role in the representation, construction and understanding of the *Resistenza*, anticipating ideas which would be acknowledged and discussed only later by historians. Moreover, the post-war period engendered a generation of skilled and prolific writers who are now considered cornerstones of Italian literature, such as Italo Calvino, Cesare Pavese, Beppe Fenoglio, Luigi Meneghello, Renata Viganò and Ignazio Silone, to name a few.

Whereas the Resistance emerged as the epic and founding moment for the new post-1945 national identity, thus holding “pride of place in public ceremonial, political debate and to a point also in historical writing in Italy”, colonialism did not achieve the same prominence concerning its very role in the making of national identity.⁶⁰ The two historical moments have been polarised over time in antithetical extremes: on the one hand, the Resistance has been publicly promoted as “the popular and national struggle [...] of an entire population to liberate the country from the German invader and its few Fascist allies”, thus embracing its constructive features and all-inclusive scope. On the other, colonialism has been related to a short period, dismissed as Fascist rather than Italian, and overlooked for decades by official historiography. As scholar Paolo Pezzino has noted, “The Resistance [...] represented a classic example of the ‘public use of history’, in which a historiographical discourse is construed to further the purposes of other orders of discourse (institutional, ideological, or party political)”.⁶¹ On the contrary, the entirely ruinous experience of colonialism has been cleverly pulled by politicians and institutions towards a recognised self-absolution; it has been seen as a moment related to Fascism or, at best, as a period of civilisation for the colonies, in a sort of self-indulgent justification of the colonial enterprise. As a result, after the war Italy emerged as unambiguously anti-fascist (as stated in the Constitution of the Italian Republic, 1948) but not as much explicitly anti-colonial.⁶²

Despite these historical differences, the development of the so-called ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’ presents some similarities, in terms of aesthetic forms and ethical aims, with the novels of Italian postcolonial authors, in particular the Somali ones, such as Igiaba Scego and Uxax Cristina Ali Farah. Due to these similarities, I suggest a possible thematic and stylistic relation between two

⁶⁰ Paolo Pezzino (2005) “The Italian Resistance Between History and Memory.” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10:4, pp. 396-412, pp. 396-97.

⁶¹ Ivi, p. 397.

⁶² The left-wing and anti-fascist political party PCI (Italian Communist Party), on the one hand encouraged the anti-colonial struggle for the Algerian independence against the French, but on the other hand it supported the trusteeship plan in Somalia by reclaiming the good work done in the colony by the Italians. Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: Rome and Mogadishu: from Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*. London: Palgrave, 1999, pp. 49-50.

different experiences in Italian history, which, nonetheless, found a similar outcome in literature. Before doing that, I will chart the main features of the so-called ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’.

For example, three well-renowned and canonical authors of the *Resistenza* who represented the *lotta partigiana* [partisan fight], such as Italo Calvino, Beppe Fenoglio and Luigi Meneghello, characterised their novels with a significant autobiographical matrix, even though depersonalised via fictional protagonists.⁶³ This determination to reconstruct facts through individual and collective memories, led those authors to electing the novel as their privileged form of representation. This choice followed the employment of short stories and poems as testimonial texts to describe, in a first phase, the liberation struggle and the partisan fight. Even though the quality of these writings is mostly modest and rhetorical, short stories and poems allowed *partigiani*, most of them inexpert or non-professional writers, to fulfil the need of testifying an experience instantly understood as fundamental for the civil and political renewal of the Italian society after two decades of Fascism.⁶⁴

After this first period, some intellectuals and professional writers chose to reconstruct through the novel-form, the atmosphere and the shadows of the Resistance, more than facts and events. In their case, the urge for testimony and documentation, which pushed both witnesses and partisans to dramatise the precise and detailed reconstruction of events personally experienced, is left behind in favour of a more fictionalised and detached representation of the resistance movement. The autobiographical component is then concealed in the novel and disjointed in different characters; nevertheless, the writer’s involvement in the partisan struggle remains unambiguous, and emerges as the main subject of their narratives. These are the cases of Calvino’s *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests*, 1947), Fenoglio’s posthumous novels, Elio Vittorini’s *Uomini e no* (1945) and Meneghello’s *I piccoli maestri* (1964). All of them have been indeed *partigiani*. In other cases, such as Elio Vittorini’s *Conversazione in Sicilia* (*Conversation in Sicily*, 1941), Cesare Pavese and Carlo Levi, the anti-fascist opposition, instead of the armed partisans’ experience, is the favoured focus.

⁶³ Lucia Re (2017) “Italy’s first postcolonial novel and the end of (neo)realism.” *The Italianist*, 37:3, pp. 416-435. Italo Calvino [1947] *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests*). Milan: Mondadori, 1993. Beppe Fenoglio [1968] *Il partigiano Johnny* (*Johnny the Partisan*). Rome: La Biblioteca di Repubblica, 2003. Luigi Meneghello [1964] *I piccoli maestri*. Milan: Rizzoli, 1998.

⁶⁴ With the exception of a few texts such as *Per i martiri di piazzale Loreto* (1944) by Alfonso Gatto, *Alle fronde dei salici* (1945) by the forthcoming Nobel Prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo, the collections *Fisarmonica Rossa* (1945) by Franco Matarotta and *Galli notturni* (1952) by Elena Bono and the collected poems *Ad ora incerta* (1984) by Primo Levi. In: Alberto Casadei and Marco Santagata, *Manuale di Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea*. Bari: Laterza, 2007, pp. 247-248. Francesco de Nicola, *Neorealismo*. Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 2016.

It is indeed in the novel that the Resistance found its uppermost literary representation. Elio Vittorini initiated this fruitful literary movement with *Uomini e no* (1945), and later he noticed and supported one of the most talented writers of twentieth-century Italian literature: Italo Calvino. The latter, initially, wrote autobiographical accounts, between 1945 and 1949, published later in the short story collection entitled *Ultimo viene il corvo* (*The Crow Comes Last*, 1949). He soon realised that the short story hindered the evolution from the autobiographical testimony to fiction, so he developed the idea of the novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* while working on his short stories about the *Resistenza*, as he states in the preface of the 1964 edition.⁶⁵ After the first commemorative literary debuts, the Resistance started to lose the celebratory tones and the rhetoric of the early stages, aiming for a more complex dramatisation, as shown in the novels *La casa in collina* (1948) by Cesare Pavese, *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949) by Renata Viganò, *Fausto e Anna* (1952) by Carlo Cassola and *Una questione privata* (1963) and *Il partigiano Johnny* (1968) by Beppe Fenoglio. The latter is considered as the author who has written the most prominent and authentic pages about the *Resistenza*, so much so that, when Fenoglio's *Una questione privata* was published, Italo Calvino defined it as "the novel that we had all dreamed of".⁶⁶

The partisan struggle represented in these novels is de-mythicalised, allowing the writers to fictionalise the ups and downs of a movement whose complexity could only be acknowledged with further re-elaborations and dramatisations. For example, author Luigi Meneghello waited twenty years before writing the novel *I piccoli maestri* (*The Outlaws*, 1964). As the author himself stated, he aimed to portray the Resistance in an anti-rhetorical and anti-heroic tone, in contrast with the commemorative narrative of the early stages or the nostalgic tone of late representations.⁶⁷ Indeed, Meneghello's interpretation lines up against the Resistance orthodoxy as expressed, for example, in Roberto Rossellini's films such as *Roma, città aperta* (1945). While the latter brings up the collective memory of that period, it also portrays the post-war phase as a heroic war of national liberation, characterised by social homogeneity. The absence of class conflict and internal divisions implies that the Italian society was uniformly anti-Nazi. Inasmuch as German soldiers embody the only antagonists, the movie dismisses the role played by the Italians in supporting Nazism, who eventually turned out to be victims rather than collaborators. In sharp contrast with Rossellini's representation, Meneghello raises the issue of the Italians' support to Nazis and Fascists, against

⁶⁵ Italo Calvino. Preface. *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, by Calvino. Translated by Archibald Colquhoun. London: Penguin, 2013, pp. 9-29.

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 27.

⁶⁷ Luigi Meneghello, *I piccoli maestri*. Milan: Rizzoli, 1998, p. 232.

the prevailing propaganda according to which Italians were *brava gente* [good people], while the antagonists were merely Germans.

By investigating the multifaceted aspects of the *lotta partigiana*, its inner contrasts and ambiguities, the abovementioned authors underscored a more complicated scenario. This aspect will be analysed in relation to Somali writings, which portray –as well– the conflict within Somali people during the civil war. First all of, both works of literature share the features of relying on divergent memories, in opposition to a coherent grand narrative in which to ground their novels. In the case of the Resistenza and the anti-fascist struggle, literature fostered discussions and re-interpretations by historians, politicians, intellectuals, but also segments of the general public and scholars of Italian studies over the years. Still, the debate on the Resistance continues to be controversial, mainly because of its inmost relation with the assessment of the Fascist period and the building of an ‘official’ memory of the Italian Republic.⁶⁸ In the case of colonialism, as shown, the debate about its “indelible wounds and mental disorders”, to use Frantz Fanon’s words, has been nullified for decades.⁶⁹ However, as well as in the case of Resistance, the contrasting memories and interpretations of that period nourished in literature through the novel-form. Despite the time gap from the loss of the colonies (1945 or, in the case of Somalia, 1969) and the first considerable postcolonial productions (late-1990s), authors like Scego and Ali Farah have tried to investigate, demystify and rewrite the complexity of that period against the hegemonic narrative summarised with the expression: ‘*Italiani brava gente*’. Therefore, I aim to explain how these two literary outcomes (‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’ and postcolonial literature) can be compared in the way they challenge the representation of the past through shared aesthetic forms and the use of the novel as their primary genre for retrieving the colonial period and the lack of public awareness about its crimes, effects and legacy.

4.5 ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’ and postcolonial literature: a comparative approach

In order to investigate the similarities between the aesthetic forms –but also the ethical approach towards literature– of two branches of Italian literary tradition, the preface written by Italo Calvino

⁶⁸ Paolo Pezzino (2005) “The Italian resistance between history and memory.” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10:4, pp. 396-412; Sandro Peli, *Storia della Resistenza in Italia*. Milan: Einaudi, 2006; Andrea Mammone (2006) “A Daily Revision of the Past: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Memory in Contemporary Italy.” *Modern Italy*, 11:2, pp. 211-226. Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006.

⁶⁹ Frantz Fanon [1961] *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 181.

in 1964 for the new edition of his novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* (1947), will be the starting point.⁷⁰ In the preface, the author retrospectively discusses the genesis of his novel by describing the context in which he developed the idea of writing it. There emerges an urgency to narrate the events occurred during the Nazi occupation, the collapse of Fascism and the dramatic experiences of the partisans who fought both against German Nazis and Italian Fascists during the brutal conflict known as the Italian Liberation War (1943—1945).⁷¹ Calvino emphasises that the crucial necessity towards his and the future generations was not to inform, or provide documentary evidence or detailed facts in historical terms about the *Resistenza*. Instead, he highlights the urge to *esprimere* [express] “life’s rough taste which we had just experienced, the many things we thought we knew or were, and perhaps really did know and really were at that time.”⁷²

In doing so, Calvino addressed a problem of poetics, namely the trouble in narrating something as new and recent as the *Resistenza*. In his own words, he faced the unprecedented task “to transform that world which for us was *the* world into a work of literature”.⁷³ Essentially, Calvino pointed out the necessity to develop innovative literary practices that could ultimately lead towards a thematic and linguistic renewal of literature. With the aim of achieving a new realism in which language, content and style were imperatively tied together, Calvino placed people’s stories, dialects and landscapes as the three tenets of the new narrative. These ideas resulted in the theorisation of the so-called Neorealism, a literary movement that Calvino described as “many voices combined, mostly voices from the provinces, a many-sided revelation of the different Italys that existed, a revelation also –and in particular– of the Italys that had been least explored by literature”.⁷⁴

Calvino’s theoretical guidelines, I argue, may be considered as the starting point to draw a parallel with the Somali Italian postcolonial production; accordingly, the following comparative analysis will show how some stylistic and thematic features of the Somali Italian novels, usually associated

⁷⁰ Italo Calvino. Preface. *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, by Calvino. Translated by Archibald Colquhoun. London: Penguin, 2013, pp. 9-29.

⁷¹ This period, also called Italian Civil War (*Guerra civile italiana*), saw the opposition between, on one front, the Italian Co-Belligerent Army (*Esercito Cobelligerante Italiano*) and the Italian Resistance (with the Allies) and, on the other, the Italian Fascist Social Republic (and the Axis powers) from 9 September 1943 to 25 April or 2 May 1945, the official date of the surrender of German forces.

⁷² Italo Calvino, Preface, p. 10. “Esprimere che cosa? Noi stessi, il sapore aspro della vita che avevamo appreso allora, tante cose che si credeva di sapere o di essere, e forse in quel momento sapevamo ed eravamo”. In the Italian version: Italo Calvino. Presentazione. *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* by Calvino. Milan: Mondadori p. VII.

⁷³ Italo Calvino, Preface, p. 11. In Italo Calvino. Presentazione, p. VIII: “Come trasformare in opera letteraria quel mondo che poi era il mondo.”

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

with the influence of foreign authors, are in fact characteristics that appeared, for the first time in the Italian literary tradition, in the novels about the Resistance. After the experience of colonialism and, above all, the extended phase of reticence in debating and analysing it, Italian postcolonial authors faced the same problem of poetics that challenged the writers of 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza'. In other words, they dealt with the representation of a relatively unexplored subject (being colonialism one of the "least explored [topics] by [Italian] literature"), and the necessity to find a suitable form to fictionalise, narrate and dramatise it.⁷⁵ As Calvino suggests in the preface, writers needed people's stories, a new language and landscapes to fulfil the aim of representing *la Resistenza*. As well, since these main focuses show correspondences to a so-called postcolonial poetics, which operate at both the formal and thematic level, they should be read comparatively.

As already mentioned, after the first production of short stories with mainly an autobiographic matrix, postcolonial authors writing in Italian turned their attention to the novel, which suddenly became the main artistic form of expression.⁷⁶ Due to the relatively little fictionalised topic of colonialism in the Italian novelistic tradition (and the total lack of postcolonial novels in Italian before the 1990s), postcolonial Italian authors inevitably looked at the vast corpus of postcolonial authors writing from around the world. However, some of them, such as Igiaba Scego, have grown up in Italy or, like Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, have studied in Italian schools. They both have attended prominent universities, respectively Ca' Foscari (Venice), La Sapienza and Roma Tre (Rome). Their cultural background is *also* Italian, due to their education and biographical reasons, so it may be fair to assume that their literary influences may also be found in the Italian literary tradition.⁷⁷ In this regard, Igiaba Scego herself places Italo Calvino among her models and, furthermore, Luigi Meneghello's text *Il dispatrìo* (1993) has been suggested as the antecedent for her short story *Dismatria* (2005), which title immediately implies a relationship between the two.⁷⁸ Moreover,

⁷⁵ In the previous section, it has been shown how colonialism, in comparison to the Anglophone narrative production, was rarely addressed and not included in the literary canon after the failure of the 'colonial novel' project.

⁷⁶ In this regard, the autobiography by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel may be a telling example of the first outcomes of postcolonial literature, as well as the early short stories written by Igiaba Scego, such as *Salsicce* (2003) and *Dismatria* (2005). The same path has been followed by Kaha Mohamed Aden, whose literary debut was the publications of a collection of short stories entitled *Fra-Intendimenti* (2010). Furthermore, before publishing her first novel, Christina Ali Farah's earliest literary attempts coincided with the semi-autobiographical short story "Interamente", appeared on *El Ghibli* in 2003.

⁷⁷ As underlined in Chapter 3, Garane, who spent his youth in Mogadishu and studied in Italy only later, can be compared, accordingly, with the African writers of the post-independence period, with whom he shares similar discursive practices.

⁷⁸ Igiaba Scego, "Dismatria." In: *Pecore nere*. Bari-Rome: Laterza, 2005. Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within. Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015, pp. 43-44. Luigi Meneghello [1993] *Il dispatrìo*. Milan: Bur, 2000.

Cristina Ali Farah's novel *Il comandante del fiume* has been studied according to the fairy-tale texture of its prose, influenced by Italo Calvino and Cesare Pavese.⁷⁹ Since they are authors and intellectuals who engage with the language and politico-historical topics and *also* write within and from the Italian context, they should be read multidirectionally, in relation to their multicultural background. Their Italian side, in fact, emerges as a fruitful, yet neglected, source of reflection. Therefore, instead of considering the Italian postcolonial production as the embodiment, in Asor Rosa's terms, of the "loss of those links with the Italian literary tradition", I aim to show how postcolonial authors re-establish and reinvigorate, instead of cutting off, "those links".⁸⁰

For example, the insertion of foreign words in the Italian framework of the plot, as well as the references to Somali, American or Brazilian culture and literature, has been looked at as markers of their non-relatedness to the Italian literary tradition. However, if this stylistic feature can be certainly understood as a sign of the transnational and cross-cultural character of both the texts and the authors, it should not be read as exogenous or new (namely non-Italian) in the Italian literature. Calvino himself affirms that one of the new characteristics of the post-war Italian literature is its transnational feature. By including American writers such as Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), and Soviet authors like Isaac Babel (1894–1940) and Alexander Fadeyev (1901–1956) as its main models, the new-born narrative endorsed the employment of foreign forms, terms and references as a distinctive trait. Language was meant to be a wide-ranging medium in which dialects, everyday expressions, and formal and literary lexis were to be included for the sake of the representation. For instance, in Beppe Fenoglio's *Il partigiano Johnny* (1968), the juxtaposition of Italian and English, through unglossed words (with no italics) is a frequent practice, as the following explicative lines show: "Ora egli passava nottate fumando, accavallando le gambe e leggendo [...]. So, mornings were diseased and nightmare [...] qualcosa, dentro pungente e icefying, l'avvertiva che era male" ["Now he spent the night smoking, crossing his legs and reading. So, mornings were diseased and nightmare [...] something inside, pungent and icefying, warned him that it was bad"].⁸¹

⁷⁹ Annamaria Clemente, "Ubah Cristina Ali Farah tra Calvino e Pavese." *Dialoghi Mediterranei*, 13, 1 May 2015, www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/ubah-cristina-ali-farah-tra-calvino-e-pavese/. Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-142.

⁸⁰ Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo. 1965. Scrittori e massa. 2015*. Turin: Einaudi, 2015, p. 407.

⁸¹ Beppe Fenoglio, *Il partigiano Johnny*. Rome: La Biblioteca di Repubblica, 2003, p. 8. Also: "Johnny saltò posti per affiancarsi a Regis, salutare e amico nella sua silenziosa civiltà e sobria endurance" ["Johnny jumped to join Regis, wholesome and friendly in his silent civility and sober endurance"], p. 126 (my translations).

Furthermore, the narrative techniques derived from American literature and cinema of the 1920s and 1930s, such as the use of concise and blunt dialogues to resemble ordinary speech, are key features in the novels by Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese.⁸² Both English literature and language played a fundamental role in inspiring Luigi Meneghello too, but also in shaping his unique style.⁸³

About this relationship, he himself stated that:

È stato in Inghilterra, e attraverso la pratica dell'inglese, che ho imparato alcune cose essenziali intorno alla prosa. In primo luogo che lo scopo della prosa non è principalmente l'ornamento, ma è quello di comunicare dei significati. Questa per me era una novità. Faceva a pugni con l'intera temperie dell'educazione retorica a cui ero stato esposto.⁸⁴

It was in England, through the practice of the English language, that I learned some essential things about prose. First, the main purpose of prose is not to ornament, but to communicate meanings. This was a novelty for me. It clashed with the whole period of rhetorical education I have been exposed to so far.

Therefore, 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' brought about two innovative and quite revolutionary additions to the Italian literature: the open acknowledgement of foreign influences (American, British and Soviet writers), and linguistic bricolage. This transnational pull represented a way to position Italian literature on a global scale, but also to shatter the fascist linguistic protectionism and cultural segregation. Juxtaposition, as well as relexification and cushioning –key features of postcolonial writings– also operate in the works of 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' as both poetic principles and political stances. This movement of going-between languages and cultures, in the light of post-war Italy, “carries particular imaginative as well as an ethical force: going between worlds; going between a writer in one context and a reader in another”.⁸⁵ The concept of 'ethical force', for example, connects postcolonial with anti-fascist writings: in Fenoglio's *Il partigiano Johnny*, the Italian language embodies the fascist tool of political propaganda, a language stuck in rhetoric and protectionism that needs re-appropriation. In *Il partigiano Johnny*, then, English emerges as an ethical and aesthetic tool to obstruct the linguistic policies of the regime and to oppose censorship.⁸⁶ The novel, accordingly, contaminates the Italian prose with foreign terms, sentences

⁸² Alberto Casadei and Marco Santagata, *Manuale di Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea*. Bari: Laterza, 2009, p. 248.

⁸³ Luigi Meneghello, “La materia di Reading e altri reperti.” *Opere scelte*. Milan: Mondadori, 2006, p. 1307.

⁸⁴ Giulia Brian (2011) “Nel «brolo» di Luigi Meneghello, là dove fioriscono le parole.” *Studi Novecenteschi*, 38:81, pp. 149-169

⁸⁵ Elleke Boehmer, *Postcolonial Poetics*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, p. 53.

⁸⁶ Fabio Montermini (2007) “La creatività lessicale nel Partigiano Johnny.” *Les enjeux du plurilinguisme dans la littérature italienne*, pp.127-140. Dante Isella (1992) “La lingua del “Partigiano Johnny.” In: Beppe Fenoglio, *Romanzi e racconti. Edizione completa*. Turin: Einaudi, pp. XIII-XLIV.

and syntax, in a process that can be broadly conceived as an act of abrogation. Anti-fascist intellectuals and writers (such as Fenoglio, Meneghello, but also Pavese and Calvino), after being silenced and marginalised, developed new literary strategies to dismantle the fascist conceptual paradigms aiming for transformation and liberation.

In both 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' and Somali Italian writings, authors "abrogate any centralizing notion of the 'correct', or standard, way of doing things and re-define the practice in a different setting".⁸⁷ Italian (a language both fascist and colonial) is reinvented and enriched through intertextuality, juxtaposition, loan and unglossed words, against any normative standard; whereas Fenoglio aims to resist and confront the regime's linguistic policies, postcolonial authors attempt to abrogate and appropriate Italian as well, arguing for the parity and irreducibility of Somali towards the former colonial one. These linguistic tools (explored in Chapter 1 in the case Uba Cristina Ali Farah), can be read here along with the theorisation of the 'real', as imagined by Calvino. He suggests that the so-called 'real' should be achieved through the renewal and rediscovery of regional and local expressions, with a strenuous opposition to the Fascist rhetoric, and the restoration of orality.⁸⁸ In this sense, the spoken word is understood as the collections of the stories and the direct memories of the events that occurred during *la Resistenza*. In order to represent the everyday language, this *repertorio documentaristico* [a kind of documentary archive] should then be made up of tales, people's common sayings and songs.⁸⁹

The latter approach emerged as the prominent literary practice, in opposition to any detailed or precise investigation provided by historic or archival documentation. The biographical matrix plays a fundamental part in rewriting the past, and even though postcolonial authors have no direct knowledge of the events (as the partisan writers do), the role of personal memories is highly valued as well. The lack of direct testimony of past events is indeed balanced by the autobiographical component of the novels, which aims to emphasise the link with colonialism by underlining its legacy in the present. Whether Scego and Ali Farah have no first-hand experience of colonialism, they can retrieve it with the fictionalisation of their struggle against the racist and colonial attitudes of contemporary Italy. Also, their novels work across generation, as they employ the memories of their relatives to dramatise the forgotten colonial experience and bring it to light. This is the case, for example, of Scego's *Adua* and Ali Farah's "A Dhow Crosses the Sea".

⁸⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Italo Calvino, Preface, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 14.

In 'Letteratura della Resistenza', memory, orality and language, as understood in Calvino's terms, are combined with the intent of ethical and civil testimony, and with the so-called *impegno* [engagement or commitment]. After World War II, the demand for a concrete commitment to the political and social reality of Italy was a key subject for writers, directors and intellectuals. The latter, after their involvement in anti-fascist movements or their enrolment in *lotta partigiana*, started to consider literature as a form of commitment. In Calvino's theorisation, the *engagement* should not correspond with a political stance, as this idea could eventually turn literature into propaganda, nor it should be evaluated as a preconceived mode that informs and shape the author's poetics. Rather, writers should use literature to engage with contemporary topics and do not allow their political engagement to produce literature.⁹⁰ In opposition to idealised and didactic perspectives, Calvino suggests a novel form unbound from programmatic ideologies, in which narrative motifs are provided from "what [the writer] had seen and experienced".⁹¹

If we consider Somali Italian authors, the recovery of direct memories of colonialism, through the dramatisation of real experiences, arises as one of the foremost literary features of their novels. Rather than relying on official archival materials, their approach resembles the concept of *repertorio documentaristico* [a kind of documentary archive] theorised by Calvino. Orality, as already shown in the previous chapters, and the attention to the oral *repertoire* of stories and recollections, is a crucial tool in the formal structure of the postcolonial novels. Polyphony, understood as both the multiplicity of point of views and the use of different languages or dialects, is employed by Scego, Ali Farah through unglossed Somali words or loan words, and the multi-narrator perspective. However, while in the case of Garane, for example, multilingualism emerges through Somali words, in the case of Scego it surfaces with expressions in Roman dialects, and also in French and Spanish. All her novels show the presence of different narrators, a feature that can also be found in Uba Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (2005). Whereas these features find a direct model in Anglophone postcolonial literature, they also may be traced back to the literary practices developed in the 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza', as explained by Calvino. Through a comparison, I aim to trace a

⁹⁰ As in the case of Vasco Pratolini's novel entitled *Metello* (1955). In this example, the novel can be read according to the requirement of the Socialist Realism, such as the representation of a positive hero and the victorious proletariat's struggle toward socialist progress. Pratolini's *engagement* should be regarded as an intellectual fight against those who were critic and detractors of the Resistance but, at the same time, also against a simplified and celebratory representation of that period, as showed in the exemplary case of *Metello*. Alberto Casadei and Marco Santagata, *Manuale di Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea*. Bari: Laterza, 2007, p. 248.

⁹¹ Italo Calvino, Preface, p. 19.

literary and aesthetic model from resistance to postcolonial Italian writings, so as to show that these aesthetic features are inherent to the Italian literary tradition and can be looked at as forms of resistance, both in anti-fascist and anti-colonial terms.

Thus, before developing this analysis through the close reading of the novels, it should be underlined that the comparison with the authors of *Resistenza* is not confined to the aesthetic level, but it also concerns the ethical purpose of the writings. The fundamental idea of ‘resistance’ should be regarded as primarily important both in the poetics of Italian postcolonial writers and in the post-war novels, whose authors struggled in the partisan fight. Whereas Calvino, Fenoglio and Meneghello looked at the Resistance from an anti-fascist standpoint, Italian postcolonial writers resemantise the term *Resistenza* in a new anti-colonial perspective. The anti-colonial narrative they carried on, then, deals with the persistent challenge of the dominant discourse about colonial history and the supposed homogeneity of the Italian society, in which the voices of these authors are inevitably suppressed. In this sense, *Regina di fiori e di perle* by Italo Ethiopian author Gabriella Ghermandi openly endorsed the affiliation between anti-colonialism and Resistance, supporting the double meaning of the latter term. She commits several episodes of the plot to narrate the role played by Kebedech Seyoum (1910—1906), fighter of the Ethiopian liberation front, against the fascist *taliani soldati* [Italian soldiers] during the 1930s.⁹² Accordingly, Ghermandi’s portrayal of the women who organised the anti-colonial resistance and fight against the Italian colonisers has been analysed comparatively with the representation made in *La battaglia di Algeri* (1966) by the Italian anti-colonial director Gillo Pontecorvo.⁹³

Moreover, at the basis of the comparison between postcolonial novels and ‘Letteratura della Resistenza’ is an often-overlooked trait, namely that they both deal with an armed conflict between peoples of the same nation. Scego’s *Adua* and, above all, Ali Farah’s *Madre piccola*, dramatise the fragmentation of Somali people after the long-lasting period of conflicts in the 1990s, where different clans fought for the control of power after the fall of Siyaad Barre’s dictatorship. Similarly, ‘Letteratura della Resistenza’ portrays the struggle between *partigiani* and *repubblichini* after the fall

⁹² Gabriella Ghermandi, *Queen of Flowers and Pearls*. Translated by G. Bellesia-Contuzzi and V. Offredi Poletto. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. 184-205.

⁹³ Barbara De Vivo (2013) “Alla ricerca della memoria perduta. Contro-memorie della colonizzazione italiana in Etiopia nel romanzo *Regina di fiori e di perle* di Gabriella Ghermandi.” In: Franca Sinopoli (ed.) *Postcoloniale italiano. Tra letteratura e storia*. Aprilia, IT: Nova Logos, pp. 120-146.

of Benito Mussolini's regime.⁹⁴ In this regard, the two narratives, even though grounded in diverse historical and political contexts, may also be associated for their attempt to represent the conflict between citizens of the same country. In doing so, they both re-examine the concepts of nationhood, identity and belonging. On the one hand, Somali Italian authors fictionalise their problematic belonging in the new war-torn scenario of infightings and re-emerged clan logics; on the other hand, through literature, they also claim their Italian identity and their relation to the Italian culture. In other words, they dramatise their struggle in identifying themselves with the fluid concept of Somaliness and Italianness.

Whether the most employed critical approach to look at Somali Italian postcolonial texts has been focused on their process of recovering the untold history of colonialism, this chapter aims to define another approach, which aims at retrieving the similarities between the representation of Italian and Somali identity during and after a civil war. This comparative aspect also implies another similarity between the literature of *Resistenza* and postcolonial writings: both narratives, through the reassessment of the meaning of social cohesion and sense of belonging, place at their core the re-evaluation of the concepts of community and nationhood, thus engaging with the idea of Somaliness and Italianness from different but comparable perspective.

4.6 Igiaba Scego's *Adua* and the representation of history

Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (2015) may be read in the light of the aforementioned comparative and cross-historical approach, so as to emphasise the novel's connection with some of the aspects that shaped Italian post-war literature. *Adua* re-counts the colonial past in juxtaposition to the narration of the present. At the basis of the plot, there are two stories (the father's and the daughter's) set during the fascist colonialism in Somalia and Mussolini's regime in Rome (1930s), and in present times. Along these two main temporal axes, the plot often digresses, so that the reader is led, through flashbacks, to other time-settings, such as the 1970s in Italy and the 1960s in Magalo, a town in Somalia. In terms of the structure, the two main time-levels coexist and are not displayed diachronically: events do not follow a chronological order but are dispersed according to the recollections of the characters. Time, then, is continuously stretched and tightened. The three sections in which the novel is organised also represent different time-settings, connected one to the other by the presence of Zoppe and his daughter Adua, portrayed at different ages. The plot

⁹⁴ The term *repubblicini* means those fascists who supported the Republic of Salò, a pro-German puppet state led by Benito Mussolini and lasted from September 1943 to May 1945, which exercised sovereignty in Northern and Central Italy.

therefore recurrently goes back and forth in time, so that the events narrated in the section “Zoppe” are resumed after the section “Adua”. The former dramatises the events in the life of Zoppe, who worked as a translator in Rome during Fascism, while the latter narrates the story of his daughter who, in the 1970s at the age of seventeen, escaped from Somalia and moved to Italy, chasing the promise of a career in cinema. A short section, entitled “Paternale” [“Talking-To”], interposes “Zoppe” and “Adua” and portrays the Adua’s father in the act of lecturing and scolding her.

Scego, in the afterword to the book, acknowledges the sources of her work and admits a certain degree of embellishment and fictionalisation of her story. However, she also states to have developed the two plots by gleaning material from family memories and the direct experience coming from her work with refugees.⁹⁵ This choice of using biographical sources, I would argue, should not be intended merely as a personal or artistic choice made by Scego, but could be read in relation to the cultural context in which she lives and the literary traditions she is familiar with. Indeed, Scego’s novel disrupted unity, in terms of narrative voices and temporal linearity, aims to emphasise the legacy of colonial practices in contemporary Italian society. Far from being a concluded period confined in archival documents and historical records, colonialism is alive and present both in family memories of postcolonial authors’ parents and in every-day practices. The primary goal of both the narrative fragmentation and the juxtaposition of different time-settings is, therefore, to point out the connections between different periods through the representation of the colonial discourse past and present practices. More than detailed descriptions of historical events and settings, in *Adua*, the time-shifting narration mirrors the unsolved question of colonialism and the enduring effect of colonial discourse. The subjectivity of the protagonists is, indeed, influenced and traumatically shaped by the historical colonial encounter (during Fascism), and its present vestiges.

Madre piccola by Cristina Ali Farah is another example of the particular fragmented and polyphonic structure of Somali postcolonial narratives. In Ali Farah’s case, the three main characters, Domenica, Barni and Taageere, narrate in first person the experience of the civil war and the resettlement in Italy and the United States. As in the case of Scego’s *La mia casa è dove sono* and *Adua*, *Madre piccola* illustrates the involvement of the author’s relatives in colonial history, by mixing testimony, autobiography and fiction.⁹⁶ In their novels, as well, the present-day racism of Italian

⁹⁵ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Florence: Giunti, 2015. Igiaba Scego, Historical Note. In: *Adua*. Translated by Jamie Richards. London: Jacaranda Books, 2019. In the chapter, from now on, quotations are from the English edition.

⁹⁶ Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

society and politics is explicitly connected to the Fascist colonial period, and this link is suggested by the personal account of the protagonists, who endured the discursive and physical violence of contemporary Italian society, functioning in the forms of objectification, sexualisation, racism, violence and, at the political level, in restrictive policies concerning asylum and immigration. As for the writers of the *Resistenza*, the individual experiences of the author-narrator enable the process of reworking historical events and disrupt the dominant discourse. In the case of *Adua*, the dominant discourse that the novel aims to debunk is the myth of *Italiani brava gente*. In this regard, the previous section has shown how this self-fashioned term has been one of the main topics of the novels about *Resistenza*. Postcolonial literature and ‘Letteratura sulla Resistenza’ converge here in their attempt to debunk and downplay the representation of *brava gente* which constructed modern Italian identity. These novels are, therefore, elaborating on the meaning of Italianness and the process of making Italian identity, from anti-colonial and anti-fascist standpoints.⁹⁷ To point out how this process of demystification operates, I suggest starting with the analysis of the structure of *Adua*.

As shown, the novel is made up of three narrative points of view and, at the formal-stylistic level, the novel displays the provisionality of each narrative perspective with three different narrative voices, accordingly. The sections entitled “Adua” are written using the first-person narrator, while those entitled “Zoppe” are in the third-person and, lastly, the “Talking to” sections are in the second-person narrator since the father –who is speaking to Adua without receiving any answers– addresses his daughter directly with “You”. Individual recollections and memories prevail, and the personal stories in the foreground relate obliquely with offstage historical events. Calvino describes this same practise in his *Prefazione*, when he indicates that the *Resistenza* was made by the participants’ many voices and personal experience, rather than grand events. The importance of the multifaceted points of view to build a universal history is underlined by Calvino himself, who states that: “[...] those who began writing in that period found themselves dealing with the same subject matter as these anonymous storytellers: not only did we have the adventures that each one of us had endured personally or witnessed, but there were also tales which came to us already formed as narratives, with a voice, a cadence”.⁹⁸ Calvino’s words, which consider orality as the collection of different voices and the role of the writer as the gatherer of these stories, resemble those by Ali Farah: “The protagonists of diaspora feel like a necklace that has been cut, whose

⁹⁷ Likewise, as Chapter 1 and 2 showed, Somali authors are also involved in dismantling the Western dominant narrative that represents the Somali people as pirates, warlords and victims, and that explains the actual instability as a clan-related conflict.

⁹⁸ “Chi cominciò a scrivere allora si trovò così a trattare la medesima materia dell’anonimo narratore orale: alle storie che avevamo vissuto in prima persona o di cui eravamo stati spettatori s’aggiungevano quelle che ci erano arrivate già come racconti, con una voce, una cadenza.” In: Italo Calvino, *Preface*, p. 10.

beads have bounced away in several directions. I am trying to put the beads together again into a necklace”.⁹⁹

The combination of different styles and languages, and the recovery of the colonial past through recollections, find parallelisms in some of the authors of the post-war period such as Calvino, Pavese and Meneghello, who re-examined history through the eye of the present after their direct involvement in the events they narrate. This association between author and narrator is mainly achieved through the use of autobiographical sources. For example, Meneghello, in his novel *I piccoli maestri*, narrates in the first person the events occurred during the partisan fight between 1943—1945, allowing the reader to suppose a certain degree of affiliation between the author and the narrator. In doing so, rather than employing history as the prominent source, he uses his personal experience to filter the events occurred in the plot. In Somali Italian novels, the tales which come to the authors are those of relatives or parents, who personally witnessed colonialism and the aftermaths of the Italian occupation. Somali authors collect the many voices of their fellow compatriots, exiled or refugees, who endured the regime and escaped from the civil war. Specifically, in the case of *Adua*, the structure of the novel reflects this focus on multiple single stories weaved together against the backdrop of major historical events: the plot is built by two narrators who converge in the “Talking-to” section and in the several recollections made by Adua about his youth and his father. The latter continually refers to Zoppe, thus encompassing two generations, one that saw the period of Fascist colonisation (1934, Zoppe’s section), while the other witnessed the 1970s (Adua’s arrival in Italy) and the 2000s (Adua’s marriage with an asylum seeker). Consequently, *Adua* does not present a chronologically linear plot with a single focalisation and one narrator, but a polyphonic story split into different time-settings and characters, which allows recurrent themes, such as violence and racism, to connect different periods.

Regarding the story of Zoppe, in the first section he is a Somali who lives in Rome and works as an interpreter for the Fascist administration.¹⁰⁰ Scego introduces him the first time while three soldiers are punitively beating him because of the colour of his skin. According to the collective knowledge of that time, which eventually resulted in the supposed scientific studies about race condensed in the *Manifesto della razza* (*Manifesto of Race*, 14 July 1938), a black skin denoted

⁹⁹ “WikiAfrica intervista Cristina Ali Farah.” *WikiAfrica*, 19 September 2007, it.wikinews.org/wiki/WikiAfrica_intervista_Cristina_Ali_Farah.

¹⁰⁰ A little emphasis should be placed here on the effects of trauma, which implicitly surfaces in the description of the characters. Zoppe is introduced as a twenty-year old guy who is already an old man. Also Pin, the protagonist of Calvino’s novel, has “the hoarse voice of a much older boy.” In: Italo Calvino, *The Path of the Spiders’ Nest*. London: Penguin, 2013, p. 31.

inferiority, primitiveness and bestiality. Scego describes Zoppe's harsh life as a black man in Rome during Fascism, in a city increasingly hateful towards colonised subjects and Jews. In this regard, Scego's often-brutal and body-related vocabulary employed to portray Zoppe's condition is intertwined with dream-like and surreal passages, in which the author suggests the forthcoming antisemitic persecution but also the dreadful ferocity of the colonial subjugation and the outbreak of Second World War.¹⁰¹

Zoppe, who is a translator but also possesses the extraordinary and clairvoyant power of foreseeing the future, repeatedly finds refuge in visions of the future and hallucination, which further remark the fluidity of time. However, this oneiric feature reflects also the strategies of defence and escapism from trauma, caused in Zoppe by the colonial invasion. It should be noted that in Calvino's *The Path of the Spiders' Nests*, as suggested by Lucia Re, the 'spiders' nests' represent the protagonist's "secret place of retreat into a natural setting far from the pressure and turmoil of social existence".¹⁰² Pin and Zoppe, even though the destination of their escapes is physical for the former and imaginary for the latter, share the attempt to retreat away from society as a reaction to traumatic events. Their efforts, however, remain unfulfilled. In the case of Pin, he ultimately recognises, drawing a zoomorphic parallel, an eerie similarity between men and spiders, between their cruelty and intelligence, thus nullifying the safety of his sacred place. Zoppe's hallucinations, as well, often lead him to witness the future of war in Somalia and the illegal chemical weapons used by Italian soldiers against Somali people. Through Zoppe's subconscious, Scego shows the violence of colonisation and displays insights into the effects of such violence upon identity and subjectivity. As in the case of Pin, Zoppe's prophecies and nightmares are denoted by bestiality, which stands out as the main feature of his visions. The latter are described with a stylistic attention to corporeal details and adjectives belonging to the semantic field of death. The resulting accumulation gives sense to the ferocity of the invasion, against the narrative of the civilising mission. Scego's insistence on brutal images, conveyed by the expressionist use of language, may be understood as an effort to emphasise the traumatic effect of colonialism. Also, I argue, it may be considered as a rhetorical practice to counterbalance the too often minimised and underrated – if not entirely overlooked – representation of colonialism at both the mediatic and political level. As noted, Italian public policy has omitted for decades the role played by the Italians in the Eastern-African territories, thus fuelling a state-driven forgetfulness and a collective self-absolution. The

¹⁰¹ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, pp. 19-32, 57-59, 143-147 and 161-172.

¹⁰² Lucia Re, *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 263.

expressionist style thus challenges any attempts to lessen the violence of colonialism and its traumatic effect.¹⁰³

In Calvino's novel, similes and expressions related to bestiality are often employed in both dialogues and descriptions. He himself, in a later interview, affirmed to "have written things that seemed too brutal or exaggerated".¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, the following passage from the Preface highlights this shared linguistic feature with Scego:

There was the manner of depicting characters: they all had exaggerated, grotesque features, twisted grimaces, dark, deep-rooted psychological scars. If Italian literature and art had missed out on expressionism after the First World War, it made up for it at the end of the Second. Perhaps the correct label for that artistic epoch in Italy ought to be 'Neo-expressionism' rather than Neo-realism.¹⁰⁵

This (neo)expressionism, as scholar Caterina Mongiat Farina suggests, aims to point out both the cruelty and the violence of the partisans' life, and to humanise nature.¹⁰⁶ The same symbolic and analogic function of language can be retrieved in *Adua*, since Scego employs a remarkable variety of references to the animal world to describe the characters and the violence of colonialism, through a strongly expressionistic matrix. In this regard, the physical component of Scego's style, made up of numerous references to corporeality, prevails over a nuanced emotional depth. The syntax of colloquial Italian allows us to draw a parallel with the 'Neo-expressionist' style theorised by Calvino, made up of brief periods, short sentences, limited spatial descriptions and inflated psychological traits. In this context of economy of language, the presence of metaphors and similes acquire particular significance. They provide the novel, characterised by a material and bare prose, with a symbolical weight. In emphasising the latter metaphorical matrix of the language, animals and nature play a significant role.

¹⁰³ In this regard, for example, the words by Gianfranco Fini may be helpful to show how Italy has been dealing with colonialism publicly. In 2006, Fini was Minister of the Foreign Affairs and, in 2010, President of the Chamber of Deputies: in both occasions, during public speeches, he stated that colonialism was not, after all, entirely damaging. In 2015, the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, to remember the 80th anniversary of the Ethiopian war, glossed over the use of chemical weapons during the invasion. Further details can be retrieved in the online archives of *La Repubblica* and the *Corriere della Sera* at www.goo.gl/AuBw6Q and www.goo.gl/6onRTo. Accessed 10 May 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Italo Calvino, Note to the 1998 Translation. *The Path of the Spiders' Nest*. London: Penguin, 2013, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ "E poi [...] il modo di figurare la persona umana: tratti esasperati e grotteschi, smorfie contorte, oscuri drammi visceral-collettivi. L'appuntamento con l'espressionismo che la cultura letteraria e figurativa italiana aveva mancato nel Primo Dopoguerra, ebbe il suo grande momento nel Secondo. Forse il vero nome per quella stagione italiana, più che «neorealismo» dovrebbe essere «neo-espressionismo." In: Italo Calvino, Preface, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Caterina Mongiat Farina (Fall 2014) "«Mostruosi e incomprensibili come gli uomini». La Resistenza della persona in Calvino e Fenoglio." *Italica*, 91:3, pp. 419-436, p. 421.

For example, when Zoppe is in Regina Coeli – a prison in Rome – after being beaten and insulted (“darkie bastard”, “dumb nigger”, “maggot”), one of the Fascists “touched him like a mother her young” [in Italian, Scego uses more specifically the word *cucciolo*, meaning ‘cub’ or ‘puppy’].¹⁰⁷ In his cell, the calm is “rat-scented” and “worms dropped from his mouth whole”.¹⁰⁸ In other cases, animals are employed to point out the shared nature between men and beasts with a negative zoomorphic connotation: for example, official count Anselmi’s hands are compared to “the ‘paws of a warthog which is in heat’”; he moves “like a hyena that has spotted his prey”.¹⁰⁹ The elder Ethiopians’ leader has fingers “like the claws of a bird of prey”;¹¹⁰ Somali people are described “naked and thrashing around like snakes” [in Italian, *bisce*: ‘grass snakes’].¹¹¹ The French hotel owner in Addis Ababa has arms as long as the tentacles of the little octopuses that Zoppe used to find on the seashore in Magalo.¹¹² The inhabitants of Mogadishu are compared to African wild dogs that wail, waiting for their death.¹¹³ In some passages of the novel, nature itself is the harbinger of war and death: cedar fruits, thrown by Zoppe’s friend Dagmawi for fun, become grenades in the thoughts of the two friends, who imagine themselves fighting the Italians in a near future. The presence of death during the meeting between Zoppe and Dagmawi is signified by the looming presence of marabou storks, birds of bad omen.¹¹⁴

Animals also draw attention to the violence of colonialism and the disregard of the Italians towards Somali people and landscape.¹¹⁵ In the first meeting between Zoppe and count Anselmi, in the latter’s eighteenth-century house in Tivoli, horns of rhinos and a buffalo’s head hang on the wall as emblems of colonial exploitation.¹¹⁶ Violence, however, connects like a *file rouge* the Fascist period to contemporary Italy. The recollections of Adua after her arrival in Italy, as she recalls that a producer raped her with the promise of a part in a movie, parallel the violence perpetrated on Zoppe’s body at the beginning of the novel (and, more generally, the indiscriminate violence on

¹⁰⁷ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, pp. 39-41. In the original edition: Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Rome: Giunti, 2015, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, p. 41, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 183, 185.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 185.

¹¹¹ Ivi, p. 97. In the original edition: Igiaba Scego, *Adua*. Rome: Giunti, 2015, p. 87.

¹¹² Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, p. 105.

¹¹³ Ivi, p. 167.

¹¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 126-27.

¹¹⁵ From a more positive perspective, however, Zoppe dreams of himself as a man with big ears like an elephant’s and his father, Hagi Safar, takes the form of a spiteful but wise baboon; Zoppe’s sister Ayan has “braids close-knit like ants”. Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, pp. 143-147, 77.

¹¹⁶ Ivi, pp. 96-97.

African women's bodies during colonialism).¹¹⁷ In *Adua*, violence finds its central representation in the descriptions of the ferocity and cruelty committed on the two protagonists' bodies. The Fascist idea of a black man as non-human, the making of the colonised subject as inferior, mirrors the sexual objectification of black women and the legacy of erotic cliché that appeals to Western fantasies in present-day society. Scego's clear example of epistemic violence surfaces when she describes that Adua's role in the movies is limited to parts in which she is always subjugated by her male counterpart or obliged to pose naked, without speaking.

Through violence, the 1930s are related to the 1970s, and the latter are in turn connected to the ruthless Italian migration policies of the 2000s, which reflect the practices of domination shaped during colonialism. The epistemic violence, so often conveyed in the novel and mostly stressed at the physical level, suggests a parallel between the bodies of the two characters and the whole of Somalia, a colony exploited by the Italians.¹¹⁸ In particular, Scego refers to one of the most brutal moments of the colonial period: the so-called Walwal incident ["Incidente di Ual-Ual"] in the Ogaden region, a border zone between Italian Somaliland and the Empire of Ethiopia.¹¹⁹ The events dramatised in the section "Zoppe" take place during this period, and Scego herself acknowledges this historical setting in the afterword.¹²⁰ However, the protagonist does not witness these events, so they linger in the background and surface only randomly due to occasional references. The structure of the novel, then, likewise the particular temporal organisation of the plot, suggests that the act of retrieving Italian colonial history may be represented only in a deferred way. Indeed, the historical events are never directly addressed, but always told from a deferred perspective, with a focus on individual recollections. The main historical events remain circumstantial, while the single stories of the characters, rather than their involvement in the greater scene, emerge as key narrative subjects. In this case, a passage from Calvino's *The Path of Spiders' Nests* suggests another parallel with *Adua*: both novels share the same approach towards history, understood as a collection of single experiences which intermingle into one universal grand event. For Calvino, the latter is the *Resistenza*, for Scego, colonialism:

¹¹⁷ Chiara Volpato (2009) "La violenza contro le donne nelle colonie italiane. Prospettive psicosociali di analisi." *Dep. Deportate, Esuli, Profughe*, 10, pp. 110-131.

¹¹⁸ This metaphor is also present in Scego's *Rhoda*. Simone Brioni, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ In 1934, for reasons which have never been precisely determined, a skirmish between the garrison of Somalis, who were in Italian service, and an armed force of Ethiopians, ended up with the death of approximately hundreds of Ethiopians and about fifty Italians and Somalis. The following year, Italian armed forces from Eritrea invaded Ethiopia without a declaration of war, prompting the latter to declare war on Italy, thus beginning the Second Italo-Abyssinian War.

¹²⁰ Igiaba Scego, Historical Note. *Adua*, pp. 200-3.

I, on the other hand, am walking through a larch wood and every step I take is history. I think 'I love you, Adriana' and that is history, will have great consequences. I'll behave tomorrow in battle like a man who has thought tonight 'I love you, Adriana,' Perhaps I may not accomplish great deeds but history is made up of little anonymous gestures; I may die tomorrow even before that German, but everything I do before dying and my death too will be little parts of history, and all the thoughts I'm having now will influence my history tomorrow, tomorrow's history of the human race.¹²¹

This focus on the individual experiences of the characters as a crucial starting point to organise the plot and the structure of the novel should be considered a distinctive element of postcolonial Italian literature. Indeed, the experiences of colonialism survived for a long time in the single stories of the witnesses or in individual memories.¹²² The oral narrative, in the case of postcolonial writings, is a fundamental means to tell and re-tell history, instead of the documented reconstruction necessary, to say, for historical novels. Orality and recollections resemble Calvino's "urge to express", as described in the previous section.

For Calvino's *The Path of the Spiders' Nests*, scholar Karen De Léon-Jones suggests that "Transmission is oral, written language nearly absent, and this causes political discourse to distort in the telling, as the language of ideology is not accessible to the uninitiated in party politics and reduces itself to slogans and easily repeated catch phrases".¹²³ In the case of *Adua*, Zoppe's act of translation during a meeting between the Ethiopian elders and Italian officials marks the betrayal of Ethiopians, who vow to support Italian soldiers and to assassinate the Ethiopian emperor Hailé Selassié. The language of the official documents is accessible to Zoppe but not completely intelligible: he perceives the threat hidden in the Italian words, but he could only obey and accomplish his role of translator.¹²⁴ However, Scego challenges this submissive position of the translator by affirming, on the one hand, the impossibility for colonised subjects to fight back and, on the other, Zoppe's ambition and enrichment, which he placed before his country. In more than one passage of the novel, Zoppe explains his aspirations of making money and be "the envy of everyone", so that people will kneel at his feet, in contrast to his father's will.¹²⁵ He is fascinated by Rome, the Eternal City, and by the possibilities to achieve power by working with the Italians. This

¹²¹ Italo Calvino, *The Path of the Spider's Nests*, p. 139.

¹²² Jacqueline Andall & Derek Duncan, "Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism." In: *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 9-27, 15.

¹²³ Karen De Léon-Jones (1997) "Language and Identity in Calvino's *Il Sentiero dei nidi di ragno*." *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 33:4, pp. 360-68, p. 365.

¹²⁴ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, pp. 25-26.

¹²⁵ Ivi, p. 23.

ambition is understood as an example of mimicry, as theorised by Homi Bhabha.¹²⁶ However, Scego does not highlight Zoppe's fascination for the language, dresses or cultural attitude of the coloniser to the detriment of his own. He loves Dante, but the Italian language is listed among others (Arabic, Somali, Kiswahili, Amharic, Tigrinya and several dialects of the Horn of Africa) without stressing its ascendancy on Zoppe. Even though he proudly wears his khaki suit and praises his job as a translator, the primary goal of his mimicking the coloniser remains making money: "All he wanted from the Italians was the money to buy a big house [...] for his Asha. Everything else was of no consequence to him".¹²⁷ Zoppe's opportunistic behaviour prevails over the suppression of his Somali belonging, embodied in the figure of his father Hagi Safar, which is not rejected to embrace Italian colonial practices, but to achieve wealth and power and, ultimately, marry Asha.¹²⁸

This parallel implies that Zoppe's unscrupulousness may be related, as well, to the conduct of several Italians who were ambivalent towards Fascism, non-ideologically aligned to the regime but not explicitly against it. According to historian Paul Corner, "between 1943 and 1945, the great majority of Italians had not participated in the Resistance and, more significantly, had 'remained at the window', in what was in effect a great display of civil cowardice and amoral familism, in the sense of opportunistically waiting to see how things turned out before deciding to support one side or the other".¹²⁹ This approach, which reuses Primo Levi's idea of a *zona grigia* [a grey zone], can also be applied, as in the case of Zoppe, to discuss the related concepts of identity and nationhood during colonialism.¹³⁰ In a passage of the novel, Scego underscores this problematic aspect through the figure of Idris Shangani who, after the war, restored a cinema built by the Fascist during the 1930s:

¹²⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 121-131. The concept of mimicry has been discussed in Chapter 2, in relation to the protagonist of *Sardine*, Medinan, by Nuruddin Farah, and, in Fanonian terms, concerning *Il latte è buono*, by Garane.

¹²⁷ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, pp. 23-24, 93.

¹²⁸ "Zoppe's greatest desire was to impress his superiors. He wanted honors. He wanted cash. So he had to look active. Especially when he thought of the nice gifts that he would be able to give his Asha the Rash one day." Ivi, p. 33. It also should be noted that Scego suggests a relation between Zoppe's opportunistic behaviour and that of Somali people during the civil war, in the 1990s. Again, the plot relies on the temporal flow between past and present and this crisscrossing of time-setting works both for the Italian case (colonialism and the present policies against migration movements) and the Somali (collaborationism during the World War II and individual interests after the civil war). *Adua* herself states that "Now it's all about business for Somalis" (*Adua*, 15), thus endorsing the same perspective on the civil war as expressed by Nuruddin Farah in *Links* and Uba Cristina Ali Farah in *Little Mother*.

¹²⁹ Paul Corner (2012) "Luigi Meneghello and the Resistance: Motives and Memories." *The Italianist*, 32:1, pp. 209-15, p. 210.

¹³⁰ "It is a gray zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge. This gray zone possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge." Primo Levi [1986] *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017, p. 31.

Idris Shangani was one of those Somalis who had made money during colonialism by sending bodies to the front during Italy's war against Ethiopia. The after the end of World War II, when the United Nations decreed that Italy and the newly-formed Trust Territory of Somaliland would ferry us to independence, Mr Shangani got even richer. [...] And you would always find people like Idris Shangani who would happily tell you how life wasn't so bad under the Italians.¹³¹

The concept of 'collaborationism' is explicitly addressed by Scego in these two passages and explored thought Zoppe's work as a translator for the Italians. He despises Idris Shangani and considers him a collaborator, while admitting the same fault and comparing himself to the Christian Judas, "who sold [himself] for a pile of money".¹³² In the case of Zoppe and Idris Shangani, their personal ambitions prevail over ideological motivations. Also, in 'Letteratura della Resistenza', partisans are liable for betrayal and collaborationism due to individual motives. Accordingly, in the case of Calvino's novel, Pin's sister is accused of being a Nazi supporter; however, Pelle –one of the youngest partisans of the group– betray his group after arguing with a fellow partisan, *il Dritto*. The next section will further analyse this aspect comparing Ali Farah's *Madre piccola* and Meneghello's *Piccoli maestri*, both underpinned by questions that address the negotiation between individual and collective memories.¹³³

The idea of collaborationism is then strictly related to that of national identity and *patria* [homeland]. In this sense, the reassessment of these concepts represents a shared theme both for Somali Italian authors and for *scrittori della Resistenza* [writers of the Resistance]. The former, in this sense, claim both a reworking of Somalis' responsibilities during colonialism and dictatorship and, at the same time, a re-examination of Somaliness and Italianness in a transcultural and transnational context. This latter aspect brings back the question of national identity at the centre of the Italian literature, rarely addressed again after the post-war period, and considered lost by Asor Rosa.¹³⁴ After Fascism, intellectuals and writers considered the re-thinking of the notion of Italianness as a fundamental subject for their writings; in the 1990s, postcolonial writers have challenged the same notion dramatizing their experience of being both Somali and Italian.

¹³¹ Igiaba Scego, *Adua*, p. 80, 83.

¹³² Ivi, pp. 171-2.

¹³³ The issue of collaborationism is also present in oral composition, such as Hawa Jibril's poem "The Old Pro-Italian Men" (1947), which deals with the issue of possible infiltration of pro-Italian Somalis in political parties. In: Safia Aidid (2011) "*Haveenku Wa Garab* (Women are a Force): Women and the Somali Nationalist Movement, 1943—1960." *Bildbaan*, 10, pp. 103-124, p. 113.

¹³⁴ Romano Luperini and Daniela Brogi (eds.) *Letteratura e identità nazionale nel Novecento*. Lecce: Manni, 2004, pp. 9-10.

This issue about identity operates on multiple fronts and allows a further comparative reading between the fictionalised representation of Somali and Italian people, as they both experienced dictatorship and civil war; in both cases, citizens of the same nation fought against themselves after the fall of a totalitarian regime.¹³⁵ In the case of Somalia, clan-belonging and internal division represented the principal trigger for the conflict that led to the collapse of the nation while, in Italy, anti-fascist *partigiani*, beyond fighting the Nazis, opposed also Fascist and collaborationists after the fall of the regime.¹³⁶

In these two parallel historical occurrences, I have shown how writers employ similar aesthetic features and ethical standpoints to represent subjects who have experienced both dictatorship and civil war. Moreover, I suggested a comparison between a shared use of language, meant to emphasise how the linguistic policies of colonialism and Fascism have led authors to appropriate and abrogate the Italian language as a political stance. The novels of both Somali Italian postcolonial authors and *scrittori della Resistenza* show a pluralist idea of the nation and can be understood as places of tension between several positions, which do not necessarily succeed one upon the other. This tension in the context of a civil war is also underscored in Uxax Cristina Ali Farah's *Madre piccola* –as I will point out in the following section with the support of another novel about the Resistance period: Meneghello's *I piccoli maestri*.

4.7 Ali Farah's *Little Mother* through the lenses of language and autobiographical testimony

In her novel *Madre piccola*, Cristina Ali Farah displays a particular attention towards language and its power in shaping diasporic identities which experienced traumatic events. In her case, language acts as a prolific tool both to retrieve the former colonial presence, through the memories of the characters, and to explore the impact of the civil-war and resettlement upon subjectivity. This section extends the previous analysis in relation to Roma Termini and linguistic appropriation to

¹³⁵ Nuruddin Farah underlines this similarity by comparing Mussolini (*il Duce*) with Siyaad Barre (*Generalissimo*) in his novel *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979). Furthermore, as previously analysed, in *Links*, Farah employs an Italian intertextual reference, Dante's "Inferno", to draw a parallel between the war-torn Mogadishu and Medieval Florence, ravaged by the fight among the two antagonist factions of Guelfs and Ghibellines. *Links*, p. 331.

¹³⁶ In an interview to Nuruddin Farah by journalist Katrina Manson, he states: "What destroyed Somalia is this clan business." In: Katrina Manson, "Nuruddin Farah: «I write about Somalia to keep it alive»." *Financial Times*, 6 October 2015, www.ft.com/content/f50dc890-1115-11e5-9bf8-00144feabdc0. Accessed 10 May 2020.

explore the ways in which the novel negotiates transnational identities in the context of diaspora and civil war. Whereas Scego's novel foregrounds the responsibilities of Somali people in endorsing colonialism and investigates the grey zone where the roles of master and servant become blurred, Ali Farah problematises the idea of belonging during the civil war, which fuelled Somalis' sectarianism. The parallel with 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza', in this case, is given by the representation of a historical and traumatic event such as a civil war, as a collection of individual memories that struggle to merge into the grand narrative of the diaspora. Both in postcolonial and resistance novels, traumatic events relate to collective experiences by focusing on personal ones.

The three main characters, accordingly, use different linguistic registers to make sense of their trauma, to elaborate it and its disruptive consequences at the emotional level. Domenica Axad's erudite vocabulary emphasises the attempt to show her proficiency and fluency in Italian, as to claim for approval and understanding. Barni –Domenica's cousin– mixes Somali with Italian in a continual flow between the two idioms, thus expanding the linguistic range of the novel and showcasing her recurrent movements from Rome to Mogadishu and back. Also Barni moves between different time-settings, as she retrieves the past relations between Italy and Somalia and the current situation. She admits having a "selective memory" while telling to a journalist her "own version of what happened" in Mogadishu during the war.¹³⁷ Lastly, Taageere's informal and paroxysmal language reveals the difficulty of some men to find a role in the diaspora after the dissolution of Somali society. Taageere embodies the struggle for Somali men to keep alive, in a foreign country, the cultural values shaped in a nation that eventually collapsed.¹³⁸ Taageere's sentiments, in remembering his life back in Somalia during phone calls from the US, blur the line between distrust and patriotism, as he shows a sense of disillusionment towards a country that cannot give him a future.¹³⁹

At the structural level, each chapter describes the story of the three protagonists in first-person; for example, in the first chapter of the book, a young Domenica Axad tells her daily life to an unknown addressee, while Barni's chapter is a dialogue with a journalist in which, however, the voice of the latter is never heard. This one-sided dialogue, with several persistent questions made

¹³⁷ Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 14.

¹³⁸ "It's so difficult for our men to invent a role for themselves. To redefine themselves. To adapt. To accept themselves. To humiliate themselves. Because you see, for us women, in the end, those fixed points, our home, our daily life, motherhood, the intimacy of our relationships, they are like little signposts that save us from getting lost." In: Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, pp. 29-30.

¹³⁹ Nick Mdika Tembo (2017) "Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother*." *Scrutiny*2, 22:2, pp. 65-81, p. 66.

by the narrators, allows the reader to be openly involved in the story and to be confronted directly. In doing so, Ali Farah aims to retrieve the colonial past, as in the case of Barni's ironic question: "You're impressed by my Italian? I've spoken this language since I was a child. [...] But you probably already know that we Somalis can almost always speak Italian".¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, the linguistic fluency and competence of Domenica Axad –born of mixed parentage from a Somali father and Italian mother– and, as well, the experience of Barni, who claims her Italian belonging having managed to eke out a living in Rome as a obstetrician, deflate the supposed sameness and purity of Italian culture and language.¹⁴¹ In doing so, Ali Farah points out the internal conflict that characterises Somali people with a transnational identity. The novel, in particular, underscores Domenica's identity struggle, due to her double belonging: in Rome, after she is "welcomed with lively curiosity" by her classmates, she soon ends up being "relegated to the anonymous group of 'all the other children'".¹⁴² In Somalia, instead, Domenica is "excluded from those activities that would have made her belong".¹⁴³

Through Barni's story, the novel explicitly shows the tendency among Somali refugees to categorise each other as either friend or foe on the basis of clan belongings, as Nuruddin Farah highlighted in *Links*.¹⁴⁴ Barni married a young man from across the divide of the communal violence of 1991, thus ignoring the concerns of her family, who considered her husband as a member of the enemy clan. However, when Barni and her husband separated after several years of marriage, his rationale is the same as that of the earlier detractors of their marriage, except that now he accuses Barni of belonging to the wrong clan. She writes him that they could no longer share a bed together, because of "all the murders we –my genealogy– had committed".¹⁴⁵ But Barni rejects the simplistic dichotomies that underlie such collective blaming: "us and you, murderers and victims, victims and murderers, who is who, if all you have to do is switch perspectives".¹⁴⁶ This context of war, large-

¹⁴⁰ Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*. Rome: Frassinelli, 2007, p. 13. This process of retrieving the past is also ignited by the creative appropriation of the Italian language and the insertion of Italian terms re-written according to Somali pronunciation, as shown in Chapter 1. The uncanny presence of Somali words into a colloquial Italian context locates the strangeness in the ordinary and fill the usual gap between what is self and what is Other. In the story told by Barni to the interviewer, *ciabatte* [slippers] is phonetically transformed into *jabaati*; the noun *peperoni* [peppers] becomes *barbaroni*, *tè freddo* [cold tea] turns into *deffredi* and *fazzoletti* into *fasoletti* [tissue], while *trattoria* is *draddorio* and *kabushiini* is *cappuccino*.

¹⁴¹ "Io? Vivo a Roma da anni ormai. Mi trovo bene. Ho la mia casa, i miei amici, la mia professione. Del passato è rimasto ben poco" ("Me? I've lived in Rome for years now. I like it. My home is here, my friends, my profession. There is little left of my past"). Ivi, p. 16.

¹⁴² Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 209.

¹⁴³ Nick Mдика Tembo (2017) "Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother*." *Scrutiny*2, 22:2, pp. 65-81, p. 72.

¹⁴⁴ Chapter 2. Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁵ Uxax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

scale violence and the ambiguity between victims and perpetrators (Primo Levi's *zona grigia*), foster a theoretical approach based on the concept of a 'civil war literature', which sheds some light on shared poetics between postcolonial and *Resistenza* literature, in spite of different historical contexts.¹⁴⁷ In the case of Somalia, Somali writers "show that the positions of perpetrator and victim have never been static and are occupied by different individuals and groups at different times".¹⁴⁸

A parallel can then be drawn by relating the ambiguity expressed in *Little Mother* with a passage from Meneghello's *The Outlaws*:

Vaca was clever [...] and some time afterwards [...] he had decided to resolve once and for all the problem of how not to be captured by the partisans, simply going and joining them [...] When I was told this, I was scandalised. I felt cheated, because I had made a personal enemy of this Vaca; but when I thought it over, it seems that our position was not so different to his after all. We too had been Fascists and afterwards we became partisans; and it had been precisely the same with him.¹⁴⁹

This passage shows how one's ideological location becomes ambivalent and ambiguous in a context of civil war. Meneghello's character called *il Vaca*, a dialect term that when used with the female article literally means cow but it also metaphorically denotes 'a woman of easy virtues', decides to join them and support their anti-fascist fight to avoid being caught in a round-up by the partisans. The narrator's initial reaction of astonishment is then quietened down by the thought that Vaca was in the same position of every other partisan, who had been fascist in the first place. This act of overstepping the feeling of resentment and betrayal occurred to Barni in *Madre Piccola*, after the same process of recognising the self in the other. For example, Barni achieves to move beyond clan-related resentment in her relationship with Ardo, a Somali girl she meets while traveling on the Roma-Giardinetti railway. Initially, Barni distrusts Ardo, who appears to be wearing the golden earrings that a young gunman had forcefully taken from Barni herself just before she fled Mogadishu. Hence, Barni connects Ardo with the clan that was responsible for both the expulsion and death of her relatives. Only when Barni is called upon to deliver Ardo's baby, she can release

¹⁴⁷ Also, it should be noted a significant difference in terms of media representation between the two civil wars, a difference that the novels (and this analysis) aim to rectify. Indeed, while the Italian partisan fight emerges as the liberation struggle against the regime, endorsing ideas of freedom and anti-fascism, Somali civil war has been looked at as tribal infights caused by clan-logics, and rarely as a reaction to the regime becoming increasingly totalitarian.

¹⁴⁸ Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia. The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p. 239.

¹⁴⁹ Luigi Meneghello, *The Outlaws*, p. 93. In the Italian edition: Luigi Meneghello, *I piccoli maestri*, p. 89.

her rancour. Accordingly, she writes: “We had settled our debt with the *nabsi*” [nemesis].¹⁵⁰ In the civil-war context, both novels point out how the concepts of ‘Nemico’ (capital letter in Meneghello, meaning ‘enemy’) and *nabsi* (in Ali Farah) denote multifaceted positions, which may eventually turn into their opposite, such as comrade or associate, when the circumstances change.¹⁵¹

In terms of plot structure, the novel *Madre piccola* overturns the linearity of the plot and subverts any idea of time-based consistency, thereby mirroring the fragmentation of the characters’ subjectivity after traumatic events. Even though the story develops along a chronological axis, the sections of both Barni and Domenica rely on several flashbacks and ellipses. The plot, roughly set in the 2000s, is continuously dragged back during the 1990s, when the civil war erupted in Mogadishu and the two protagonists were forced to leave. The structure of the novel itself, which is split into nine parts, stresses this temporal (and spatial) fluidity. Like in Scego’s *Adua*, each chapter is titled with the name of the character who tells the story using a first-person narrator (Domenica, Barni and Taageere). These sections are spaced out by a “Prelude”, an “Interlude” and an “Epilogue”, told by Domenica, Taageere and Barni respectively. The “Interlude” is entirely committed to the representation of Mogadishu during the 1990s, at the beginning of the civil war. The city, called with the original name of Xamar, is portrayed by Taageere according to his traumatic memories and addressed as a character itself: “*Xamar waa lagu xumeeyay*, Xamar they have ruined you. Who will pay for the sins committed?”¹⁵² The line “*Xamar waa lagu xumeeyay*” [Oh Mogadishu, you have been terribly wronged] is from a song of the same name by Somali songwriter Axmed Naaji. Taageere’s account is a loosely rewriting of the song, aiming for a recontextualisation, as Xamar in this case is Mogadishu instead of a woman who was raped, as it is in the song.¹⁵³ Axmed Naaji, along with Somali authors, ask himself how to restore the lost honour, “especially when its violators are the very men who have protected it”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 158.

¹⁵¹ As I have shown in the case of Scego, who represents the ambiguity of her character’s behaviours during civil war, also Nuruddin Farah’s *Links* points out the ambivalence and the radical transformation of people who undergo periods of conflicts: “[...] all of us who’ve lived in this civil war have become someone another than ourselves for brief periods of time, in which we’ve entertained moments of doubt, or dropped into a deep well of despair. Have you too become someone other, in spite of yourself?” In: Nuruddin Farah, *Links*, p. 247.

¹⁵² Ubax Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, p. 127.

¹⁵³ Ubax Cristina Ali Farah (2018) “To Leave in the Afternoon Inheriting the Language of a Civil War?” In Francesca Tomassini and Monica Venturini (eds.) *Scritture postcoloniali: Nuovi immaginari letterari*. Rome: Ensemble, pp. 197-209, p. 202.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem.

As well, memories are used as a supportive device by Domenica Axad to retrieve the past and tell her story from childhood, to give sense to her life and her ceaseless wandering around Europe. In this regard, two relevant aspects should be noted. First, in retrieving the past, Domenica relies on the script to narrate her story of displacement, in opposition to the oral form, preferred by Barni. The process of writing, for Domenica, is understood as a means to build her identity and give order to her past, hoping to facilitate her emotional healing with the script. This practice of self-discovery through writing echoes the words of Meneghello when, in the short afterword to *I piccoli maestri*, he states that “scrivere è una funzione del capire” [“writing is functional to understand”].¹⁵⁵ Whereas Domenica decides to write a letter to retrace her difficult existential route and to give linearity to her story, Barni instead chooses the improvisation and the spontaneity of the oral form, namely an interview, to recover her past and to describe the condition of Somali expatriates in Rome. Her attempt to survive and surmounts the trauma of civil-war and resettlement is enabled by telling and re-telling it, in a free-associative manner that resembles a confession.

Second, there is another challenge to the linearity of the plot in terms of the structure. The beginning of Domenica’s story, which starts with the words: “According to my birth certificate, I am Domenica Taariikh, born in Mogadishu in 1970”, is placed at the end of the story, before the epilogue.¹⁵⁶ It results that the conventional incipit, at the beginning of each story, can be only postponed in the end, namely in that moment when Domenica is finally able to clear her mind. In this regard, the words by Calvino suitably describe this situation: “Every time the beginning is that moment of detachment from the multiplicity of the possible: for the narrator it is to remove from the self the multiplicity of the possible stories, so as to close off and make the single story that he has decided to tell worth to be told”.¹⁵⁷ Only after a process of reworking and recollections, she is finally detached enough to make sense of her life events through the writing process and through a chronological structure.

In *I piccoli maestri*, Meneghello tries, as well, to balance the multiplicity (the stories of the partisan fight) with the single story (his account of the *Resistenza*). In the afterword to the Italian edition of the novel, Meneghello’s words reverberate those told by Domenica in the final chapter of *Madre*

¹⁵⁵ Luigi Meneghello, Nota. *I piccoli maestri* by Meneghello, p. 230.

¹⁵⁶ “Secondo l’anagrafe, io sono Domenica Taariikh, nata a Mogadiscio nel 1970.” In: Uba Cristina Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*, p. 194.

¹⁵⁷ “Ogni volta l’inizio è quel momento di distacco dalla molteplicità dei possibili: per il narratore è l’allontanare da sé la molteplicità delle storie possibili, in modo da isolare e rendere raccontabile la singola storia che ha deciso di raccontare.” In: Italo Calvino. Appendice. *Lezioni americane*, by Calvino. Milan: Mondadori, 2002, pp. 138 (my translation).

piccola. “I realised that finally I could see clearly, the detachment occurred, the whole matter of our juvenile sorrows lightened, I could write it”.¹⁵⁸ After a visit to the same place where in 1944 he was involved in a round-up, Meneghello started to write *I piccoli maestri*, a combination of autobiographic testimony and fiction. In fact, it is a novel about a historical event that occurred in the past –the direct first-hand experience of the partisan fight– but it is fictionalised through the filter of memory. Meneghello re-elaborates the resistance movement after twenty years by employing a detached perspective in which the narrator partially conceals the author. To paraphrase a famous line by Meneghello’s beloved poet William Wordsworth, *I piccoli maestri* may “take its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity”.¹⁵⁹ Only decades after the partisan fight, the author-narrator Meneghello remembers his youth as a *partigiano*, thus undertaking a process of reworking through the recollections of the past events. By narrativizing his experience, he tries to exorcise the “moral shock –so many years ago–of coming to understand what Fascism was and after one had been brought up as a Fascist”.¹⁶⁰

Accordingly, Meneghello started *I piccoli maestri* when he “eventually felt that [he] had pardoned himself and his friends, in January 1963”.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, the novel begins with an analepsis (the narrator in 1964 remembers his experience in 1943) and then continues with the account of the past events in eleven chapters; the latter are made up of sections split by ellipses and unbalanced in terms of length and content. Language represents a flexible device to portray the narrator’s direct experience and aims to demystify the rhetoric, conventionality and pretentiousness of the official culture.¹⁶² The polyphony of his novel, which mirrors the disorder and richness of the partisan fight and represents the variety of social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, results in the combination of dialect expressions, literary quotations, poems, songs and bureaucratic terms related to the semantic military field and in the frequent use of irony.

¹⁵⁸ “Mi accorsi che finalmente ci vedevo abbastanza chiaro, era nato il distacco, l’intera faccenda di quei nostri dolori di gioventù si schiariva, potevo scriverla.” In: Luigi Meneghello, Nota. *I piccoli maestri* by Meneghello, p. 231.

¹⁵⁹ William Wordsworth [1800/1802] Preface. *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* by W. Wordsworth and S. Taylor Coleridge. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003, pp. 5-25, p. 21.

¹⁶⁰ Luigi Meneghello, Author’s Note. *The Outlaws* by Meneghello, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Ivi, p. 5.

¹⁶² “Around the Resistenza there has arisen a rhetorical tradition that requires, and supplies, images of conventional heroes. This I find offensive. I was there, and there were no conventional heroes.” In: Luigi Meneghello, *The Outlaws*. Translated by Raleigh Trevelyan. London: Michael Joseph, 1967, p. 5.

The following short quotation provides an example of the variety of linguistic registers used by Meneghello; also, it shows how the experience of the *Resistenza*, made by people belonging to different classes, education and cultural backdrop, is encompassed in the polyphony of the novel:

“E chi sareste voi altri?” disse l’ufficiale a un certo punto. Io risposi senza pensare: “Fucking bandits”, ma subito mi venne in mente che c’era un risvolto irriguardoso nei confronti della Simonetta, e arrossi nel buio. L’ufficiale gridò: “I beg your pardon?” e io gridai: “Ho detto che siamo i Volontari della Libertà”.
“Libertà?” gridò l’ufficiale, e io glielo confermai, e poi aggiunsi: “E adesso canto una canzone che vi riguarda, se non le dispiace”
“Sing away” disse lui, e io attaccai:

*Sono passati gli anni
Sono passati i mesi
Sono passai i giorni
E ze rivà i inglesi.*

“And who are you?” said the officer after a bit.
“Fucking bandits,” I replied without thinking: But suddenly I realized I shouldn’t say such things in front of Simonetta, and I blushed; however, it was dark, and no one noticed. The officer shouted: “I beg your pardon?” and I shouted back: “I said we are Freedom Volunteers.”
“Freedom?” shouted back the officer, and I confirmed this.
Then I added: “Now I’ll sign a song. About you. Do you mind?”
“Sing away,” he said, so I started:

*Years have passed
Months have passed
The English are here
At last, at last.¹⁶³*

This particular use of the Italian language (and Venetian dialect: “*E ze rivà i inglesi?*”) does not aim merely to represent the composite linguistic and social background of the partisans; indeed, through the use of irony derived from the juxtaposition of different style and forms (free indirect speech and, as the passage shows, songs), Meneghello re-writes the story of the *Resistenza* in the key of anti-heroism and anti-rhetoric.¹⁶⁴ It should be noted here a parallel in the use of language between Somali Italian authors and the writers of the Resistance. The Italian, in the former case the colonial language while in the latter the Fascist one, is abrogated in both case through the insertion of unglossed words or variations that challenge the hegemonic standard Italian. The tools to achieve this process of appropriation and abrogation are dialect (the Venetian one, in the case of Meneghello, English in Fenoglio) and Somali (for Somali Italian authors).

¹⁶³ Luigi Meneghello, *The Outlaws*. Translated by Raleigh Trevelyan. London: Michael Joseph, 1967, pp. 236-37. The extract in Italian is taken from: Luigi Meneghello, *I piccoli maestri*. Milan: Rizzoli, 1998, pp. 226-27.

¹⁶⁴ Luigi Meneghello. Author’s note. *The Outlaws*, by Meneghello. Translated by Raleigh Trevelyan. London: Michael Joseph, 1967.

In Meneghello, then, the aim to debunk the dominant narrative of heroism and self-celebration, built around the partisan fight, goes along with the attempt to recollect, in the form of the novel, the complexities and contradictions of the post-war phase in Italian history. The means to achieve this twofold aim are a disruptive and inventive use of language and the employment of individual memories that merge into the grand narrative of the *lotta partigiana*. Accordingly, as I have shown, these key features resemble those theorised by Italo Calvino for the Resistance literature: personal memories, orality, polyphony and the active presence of autobiographical material, all combined in the novel-form, arise as discursive tools to unveils strict definitions of personal and national identities.

In this regard, the analysis of the similarities between Meneghello's and Ali Farah's novels allows us to read them as two texts that explore the issue of identity in two post-totalitarian nations, which have dealt with a period of civil war. In *I piccoli maestri*, Meneghello represents a period of collapse, both from the institutional and societal perspective, in which the idea of national identity should be re-founded with a new system of values. However, instead of turning this pivotal moment into a celebratory event, the narrator senses its complexities and its incommensurability. The fall of Fascism appears to the narrator so distant as to be unbelievable, but the harsh reality of its occurrence, nevertheless, is soon described as the loss of a centre and disorientation, to which follows a crisis in terms of personal identity.¹⁶⁵ After the *Ventennio* (the two decades of Fascism) and the totalitarian control towards culture and society, the idea of Italy as a nation was shaped according to Fascist principles, which have made Italy a place of censorship, racism, concentration camps and political purges. Fascist policies shaped a specific idea of *Italianità* [Italianness], according to which the concept of race was grounded in spiritual and cultural foundations; Italians, according to Mussolini's assumptions, had achieved racial unity and full political consciousness through the Fascist ideology. This approach fostered the idea of the homogeneity of Italian society attaching the concept of nation to Fascism. After the collapse of the regime, this equivalence unwinds, as well as the idea of being an *italiano*, an Italian, split between being a Fascist, once, and a *partigiano*, later. Meneghello addresses this lack of unity in terms of identity by showing that the partisans were not bound by a coherent ideological or political view, but by their shared aim to fight *against* Nazis and Fascists. As well, some of them fought for opportunist reasons, such as in the case of *il Vaca* who, nonetheless, embodies the same uncertainty of the other partisans.

¹⁶⁵ Luigi Meneghello, *The Outlaws*, pp. 19-21.

This intellectual, political, social and emotional ambiguity, caused by the collapse of the nation and its related complex body of principles, rules and customs, can be retrieved in the *Madre piccola* as well, and in the dissolution of Somalia as a unitary sovereign state. Somalis of the diaspora, who arrived in Italy as regular migrants or asylum seekers, look back at their country of origin through their personal perspective, but they do not share the idea of Somalia shaped after the war, when clan ideology thrived to fill the political vacuum created by the fall of Siyaad Barre. As in the case of Italy, Mussolini and Barre “arrogated the imagined national space for themselves by inscribing their personal stories in the narrative of the nation in the guise of collective history”.¹⁶⁶ Somali authors, as described here, challenge this national construction based on clan ideology and totalitarianism, attempting, from the diaspora, to reshape the concept of the nation along different perspectives, in which traumatic personal events are collected and gathered together in a sort of communal narrative of the civil war. The question that spreads throughout *Madre piccola*, as well as in *Adua* or *Oltre Babilonia*, concerns the meaning of being both Somali and Italian, and how Somalia should be understood as a nation after the experience of the civil war.¹⁶⁷

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has pointed out the inextricable links between two literary periods in the development of Italian literary tradition. Italian postcolonial writings have been compared and related to the literature about *Resistenza* in terms of language and structure, since they employ similar practices. The theorisation of the new modes of expression of post-war fiction, as given by Calvino in his *Preface*, has been associated with postcolonial authors’ forms of writing. The comparison has shown how these different outcomes are indeed related by a similar poetics, being both of them involved in the representation of new identities after dictatorship and civil war. The decolonisation practices of the postcolonial novels, along with their claim for a more inclusive concept of Italianness, resemble the anti-fascist positions of the authors of *Resistenza* and their new way of representing history. In other words, the creative use of language as a means to disrupt official rhetoric and to challenge the hegemony through loan words and multilingualism have been studied as two shared features. Besides, the transculturality of postcolonial texts –often associated with transnational influences– has been related to the Italian literary tradition. The fragmentation of points of view and the employment of the first-person narrative that conceals the author have been understood

¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Yewah (2001) “The Nation as a Contested Construct.” *Research in African Literatures*, 32:3, pp. 45-56, p. 47.

¹⁶⁷ In this regard, *Little Mother* begins with a telling, almost self-describing sentence, written in Somali: *Soomaali baan abai* [I am Somali], p. 1.

as common aesthetic devices to retrieve and re-tell history; in doing so, authors of *Resistenza* and postcolonial ones share their view on past events as fundamentally individual experiences, micro-stories which are set against main historical events (such as the armistice signed in September 1943, or the Walwal incident in 1934). History is then understood as the scenery in which singular stories worth telling take place.

The analysis has also recovered the anti-fascist trajectory of the Italian literature and traced critically neglected lines of literary influence and dialogue between writers of the *Resistenza* in post-war periods and Somali postcolonial authors who have experienced dictatorship and civil war. In particular, the chapter has explored the ways in which this anti-fascist trajectory has contributed, from the preface to *The Path of the Spiders' Nests*, to the development of aesthetic modes of postcolonial writing. These aesthetic modes, as I have shown, should be understood both as rhetorical/creative tools, and as a way to re-tell history and question the concept of national identity. I have argued that both postcolonial and post-war texts stem from analogous historical conditions and can be considered as examples of 'civil war literature'. As a result, this analysis has retrieved a neglected line between the anti-fascism of 'Letteratura sulla Resistenza' and the Somali Italian postcolonial production, thus showing that the very criteria according to which the postcolonial production has been excluded from the categories of 'national' and 'canonical' are the same that can, instead, inform their inclusion. By showing the aesthetic (and ethic) similarities between the two literatures, I suggest that Somali Italian novels are neither unrelated nor marginal to the literary historical development, as they employ comparable artistic strategies to those theorised and widely used in the post-war literary production.

Conclusions

Those who use words well
must take history's point
to ink a beautiful literature.
Honestly, I swear:
you can't harm the journalist or singer,
you must never harm the poet.

—ASHA LUL MOHAMUD YUSUF, *The Sea-Migrations*
(2017)

The political future of Somalia is still uncertain, while the past waits for a shared process of reformulation. The present five clan-states (the Galmudug State, the Jubbaland State, the Hirshabelle State, the Puntland State, and the South West State) struggle to find a solution that could guarantee to Somali people a state structure able to provide them with a long-lasting system which negotiates opposing tendencies: a unified centralised state and clan-state governments. To date, the lack of public acknowledgement about what happened during the civil war further complicates the uncertain prospective development. As well, the absence of forms of restorative justice for the crimes committed during the clan cleansing of post-regime early stages is not helping in clarifying the recent warlike events. The same silence invests the war crimes and gross human rights violations occurred during Siyaad Barre's dictatorship, which still weighs heavily on the present. To fix these issues would mean, for Somali people, find a way of “unifying a divided historical memory, to provide healing and reconciliation between perpetrators, passive bystanders, and victims, or, more modestly, to help people coexist in peace.”¹ The attempt to find ways of coexistence underpins the Somali novels considered in this thesis, as authors represent the constant struggle to negotiate between conflicting tendencies about belonging, identity, diaspora and nationhood. Farah expresses this aim in an interview, reiterating the idea already suggested by Ali Farah, whose main purpose through her writings was to put the beads, namely the stories of Somali people, together again into a necklace:

HG: So, in a sense your current project is Somalia in the present—after Siad Barre?
Put differently, your project on the diaspora is really about the need to construct a new community.

¹ Lidwien Kapteijns. *Clan Cleansing in Somalia. The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013, p. 234.

NF: Yes, an alternative to the chaos.²

In this tangled skein, Somali authors have not reverted to sectarian clan-narratives, but attempted to speak and write as *Somalis*, avoiding any authoritative position and imposition of a single truth. In doing so, they have both broadened and complicated the notion of Somaliness, but without trying to define it unequivocally; rather, they have attempted to unfurl alternative ideas of nationhood so as to include multilocal voices from the diaspora, different modes of belonging and more inclusive articulations of social relations. What emerged is a literature that, despite the adoption of ‘foreign languages’ (nonetheless familiar to Somali authors due to education, colonial legacy and their multilingual locale), placed at its centre an overriding investigation of Somaliness. Somali authors, both Italoophone and Anglophone, have thus produced a transnational and multilingual body of diasporic literature characterised by its close affiliation with Somalia, which constantly surfaces as an unceasing source of inspiration.

The transnational and multilingual approach of this thesis, grounded in the comparative close reading of Somali novels, has called attention to the idea of ‘interliterary community’. Even though writing in multiple languages and across different countries, Somali writers have responded artistically to the large-scale violence and the diaspora that followed by portraying, on the one hand, the difficulties of resettlement and, on the other, the complexities of a country that has not yet come to terms with its past. Their task of fictionalising the events after the fall of the regime emerges as an endeavour, since there is no agreement, neither at the political nor at the social level, on a consistent civil war narrative, but several divergent and opposing memories. The title of Farah’s last trilogy, ‘Past Imperfect’, emblematically conveys this very idea of uncertainty and faultiness in Somalia’s past, which emerges as a still-unclear period intermingled with multiple legacies, from the pre-colonial phase to colonialism and dictatorship.

This study, by placing at the heart of the analysis the intertwined levels of transnationality and multilocalism of contemporary Somali literature, has supplied a more holistic view on Somalia and its literary production. Instead of focusing on single authors (Nuruddin Farah, for example) or single-language approaches (English or Italian novels), this comparative method, neither definitional or exhaustive, has opened up a series of avenues for further research about contemporary Somali literature, postcolonial theory and Italian studies. Above all, by considering

² Harry Garuba (2017) “‘Dreaming on Behalf of the Community’: A Conversation with Nuruddin Farah.” *Boundary 2*, 44:2, pp. 1-14, p. 3.

the literary production in two languages by authors who share the same cultural and linguistic background, this theoretical approach inevitably expands the remit of postcolonial literature. The comparative approach, along the axis of postcolonial studies, allows us to overcome the idea of 'national' literature and to work on multilingual and transnational lines that are more inclusive. Whereas in the field of Indian literary studies, for example there are a number of scholars working in this way, in the Italian studies this approach is still largely absent.³

For example, to broaden the spectrum of analysis along this postcolonial comparativism across multiple languages, it would be interesting to consider Somali-language novels of the 2000s, such as Ibraahin Yuusuf Axmed 'Hawd's *Aanadii Negeeye* (2013), in which the every-day life of a Somali man is set against the backdrop of the post-independence Somali Republic, until the collapse of the state. Beyond English and Italian, the study of Somali literature produced in German, Dutch or Arabic would further contribute to considering the literary outcomes by Somali authors as part of the same interliterary community. Also, a great amount of online publications on literary websites (of poems, short stories, performed songs through audio devices) are playing a significant role in connecting the different experiences of the diaspora and in re-telling the event of the civil war by scrutinising and disseminating them in the public sphere. The languages of the texts studied in this thesis are only two of the many branches of Somali contemporary literature, but they are useful nonetheless to emphasise the importance of a comparative approach to delineate the trajectories of Somali diasporic literary production.

Additionally, another contribution to Italian studies, according to the idea of literature as a transnational and multilingual entity, would be to relate Nuruddin Farah, a predominantly English-writing author, to the Italian literary tradition, since several of his novels are connected to the Italian colonial past and stage the deeply-rooted cultural, political and economic relations between Italy and Somalia and between colonisers and colonised. Farah portrays how the colonial enterprise perpetrated by the Italians during Fascism survives in Somalia after independence and how it is necessary to acknowledge this past to plan the future of the nation.⁴ Furthermore, with regard to

³ For example, the recent book *Indian Literature and the World* undercores this multilingual approach. Rossella Ciocca, Neelam Srivastava (eds.) *Indian Literature and the World. Multilingualism, Translation, and the Public Sphere*. London: Palgrave, 2017. Also, the articles in the collection edited by Daniele Comberiati and Xavier Luffin. *Italy and the Literatures from the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti. Beyond the language and the territory*. Canterano, IT: Aracne editrice, 2018

⁴ Christopher Fotheringham moves in this direction, as he shows how Farah, "despite his choice to write in English, is one of the most important contributors to the tradition of postcolonial Italian literature. I understand this to be not a national literature that is necessarily written in Italian, as has traditionally been

the Italian language, Chapter 4 has also pointed out how Italophone Somali production could actively contribute to shaping Italianness. Indeed, by comparing ‘Letteratura della Resistenza’ and Somali Italian novels, this thesis retrieved neglected common points between these literatures, thus producing entirely new readings of the Italian literary tradition. By analysing shared stylistic features starting from the Preface to *The Path of the Spiders’ Nests*, I wished to debunk the idea that postcolonial novels are unrelated to the Italian literary tradition and to craft a critical space in which Somali authors can also be considered within the field of Italian studies and in relation to the Italian literary canon. The last chapter, indeed, compared post-war and postcolonial literary productions to show the shared aesthetic strategies used by the authors, despite their different background, to depict the experience of dictatorship and civil war, common both in the history of Italy and Somalia.

Furthermore, I have revealed how these diverse diasporic fictions, with variable emphases, present stylistically analogous strategies and can be analysed according to similar features. Especially, Chapter 1 illustrated how Mogadishu shaped the protagonists’ idea of belonging, but also how the past should be addressed to make sense of the present condition. For example, Somali authors share a particular interest in representing Mogadishu as the main discursive site around which their novels are constructed. Chapter 1 has shown how the capital city of Somalia became the epitome of both Somali cosmopolitanism, modernity, and unity, and the culprit of the current ruinous reality of political and social fragmentation. Rome, at the same time, from being the former capital of the Empire emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as one of the hubs of the Somali diaspora. Mogadishu’s and Rome’s spatiality has been read through key-spaces, against exclusive and clan-based formations, and against the dominant Western-centred narrative.

The novels have also shown how the term ‘postcolonial’ should be qualified according to specific contexts. By investigating Somali Italian novels, this thesis has shown how the application of concepts shaped in Anglophone academia resulted in generalisations and inaccuracies when applied to the ‘Italian’ case. In particular, Chapter 3 has shown how Somali orature underwent an overall simplification when related to its intertextual relationship with the script, becoming an emblematic marker of Africanness. Chapter 2 has shown that the use of Italian, for Farah, may suggest a new direction of investigation in the field of postcolonial studies, as he employs the colonial languages with a nuanced approach, since the protagonist’s adoption of Italian is not forced upon him as a

the case, but rather as literature that contributes towards, to use Ato Quayson’s terms, postcolonializing the Italian cultural sphere”. In: Christopher Fotheringham (2018) “History’s Flagstones: Nuruddin Farah and other literary responses to Italian imperialism in East Africa.” *Interventions*, pp. 1-20, p. 2.

result of colonial education. Rather than emphasising the protagonist's struggle in positioning himself between the former colonial culture and native background, Farah brought to the fore his problematic American belonging and, as well, his 'unhomeliness', in Bhabha's terms, towards Somalia in the civil war context.⁵

The novel, as a form that embraces multiple and simultaneous perspectives, allows Somali authors to avoid neat resolutions or programmatic endings, thus promoting a further discussion about the forms of community and sociality for the Somalia of the future. As long as Somalia fails to address publicly and historically its past and reinforce clan-based narratives in the future, literature will operate as a shared ground for tackling these issues by the interliterary community of Somali authors, writing within the diaspora space.

⁵ With this term, Bhabha understands "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world." In: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 9.

Appendix

List of Italian words and references in *Links*

Page numbers and translations are provided in parenthesis.

Group 1: single words/phrases

Spaghetti all'amatriciana (44, 138); *momenti della verità* [moments of truth] (169); *liceo classico* [high school] (202); "Che maledizione!" [What bad luck!] (210); *carbonara* (330) and *arrivederci* [goodbye] (334).

Group 2: proper names

Mogadiscio (with the Italian spelling in all Farah's novels); *Inferno* (23, 57, 193); Fiat Cinquecento (64, 150), Pisa (71); "Parmesan cheese" (116, 330); Villaggio Arabo (133); Fellini's *8 1/2* (316) and Geronimo Verroneo (318).

Group 3: sentences and general references

"A large sign, handwritten in [...] Italian" (37); "the words for fate and place of birth, sex [...] were written in Italian, and spelled incorrectly" (40); "For some years they had lived together in an apartment in Padua, in Italy" (56); "I remember Seamus and the three of us in Italy" (86); "Was it because Bile had quietly spun Jeebleh's Italian nostalgia back to Mogadiscio?" (86); "in a vulgar Italian gesture of a fig" (88); "school text in Italian" (116); "An attached note advised him, in Italian, of the numbers" (125); "receiving awards from an Italian monsignor" (155); "the opportunity to go to Italy on scholarship" (170); "an Italian-made affair" (179); "It reminded him of their days in Padua" (181); "in the apartment in Padua" (183); "Mira's father [...] was a diplomat based in Rome" (183); "When they met last, in Padua, they used Italian" (185); "In Padua, Seamus used to describe himself as 'a colonial!' [...] he was at a loss to find an equivalent word in Italian" (189); "Jeebleh would have to run a fever of nerves before reintroducing the see-sawing games of their younger days in Italy" (191); "I recited a verse from Dante's 'Inferno'" (193); "He [...] saw a slim book in Italian written by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel" (226); "A wine of bottle of excellent Italian vintage, bought in Rome" (258); "Jeebleh remembered Italian youths making on their motorcycles through the streets of Padua" (294); "We communicate only in pidgin Italian, which he could barely use to order a meal at an eatery in Turin" (318).

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