

## CONVEYING (POSTCOLONIAL) AFRICAN PRESENCE IN ITALIAN LITERATURE: PEDAGOGICAL DOSSIERS IN *LA PROMESSA DI HAMADI* AND *LA MIA CASA È DOVE SONO*

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### Sommario

*In questo saggio si esamina l'evoluzione del romanzo-manuale Afro-italiano attraverso l'analisi di due lavori pubblicati a distanza di vent'anni l'uno dall'altro, La promessa di Hamadi (1991), di Saidou Moussa Ba e P.A. Micheletti, e La mia casa è dove sono (2012), di Igjaba Scego. Il testo di Ba e Micheletti è un tentativo unico nel suo genere di mediare la presenza di nuovi migranti dall'Africa e vede la collaborazione di un migrante africano e un linguista con esperienze di redazione di manuali scolastici su problemi sociologici. Il volume contiene un significativo dossier pedagogico sulla migrazione e sulla presenza africana in Italia. Pubblicato originariamente nel 2010, La mia casa è dove sono di Scego contiene invece solo una serie limitata di tali materiali paratestuali. Una riedizione del 2012 del testo di Scego, tuttavia, venne pubblicata con una corpus significativamente ampliato di materiali supplementari. Io qui analizzo la struttura e natura di tali materiali, confrontandoli con quelli usati da Ba e Micheletti e concentrandomi sui riferimenti a colonialismo, razzismo e Africa nell'Italia contemporanea. Sostengo che il testo di Ba e Micheletti, pur concentrandosi sul razzismo italiano, considera però il passato coloniale di altre nazioni (quali la Francia o il Sudafrica). Scego, al contrario, insiste sulla storia dell'Italia come nazione colonizzatrice, focus che viene poi intensificato nel paratesto pedagogico dell'edizione 2012. Scego e collaboratori insistono anche sulle abilità letterarie della scrittrice italo-africana e ne esaltano la versatilità nell'impiego dell'italiano; facendo inoltre un uso della tecnologia che sarebbe stato invece del tutto insperabile per un lavoro realizzato vent'anni prima.*

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As the works of historian Angelo Del Boca (1976, 1979, 1982) and writers such as Ennio Flaiano (1947) show, Africa has long been present in the Italian popular imagination. However, the contribution of writers of African origin to Italian literature is relatively recent. The entry of African 'writers' into Italian literature came largely through the '*letteratura della migrazione*' trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which was brought to attention in Italy by Armando Gnisci and introduced to scholars in the Anglophone world originally through studies published by Graziella Parati (1999). '*Letteratura della migrazione*' sought to engrave into the Italian imaginary a variety of representations of migrants as a widely diverse group, beyond any particular national or even continental belonging. However, some of the most noted works of this trend are written by Africans with Italian collaborators, about the experiences of Africans within Italy. Pap Kouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti* (1990) and Salah Methnani's *Immigrato* (1989) are two examples of this. Thus, literary texts which were produced in order to foster understanding of migrant experiences that contributed to a discourse on Africans within Italy were partially created by Africans. This article examines one such work: the collaboration between the Senegalese Saidou Moussa Ba and Italian journalist Alessandro Micheletti, which took place in the early 1990s. However, in order to illustrate the direction and representations of Africans in Italian literature, I also examine a more contemporary work by Igiaba Scego, an Italian-born writer of Somali origin who is probably one of the most renowned Afro-Italian writers today. Scego's case demonstrates how contemporary Italo-African culture and criticism emphasises more directly on Italy's colonial past in Africa, and the identities to which this cultural contact has given rise. It also celebrates the Italo-African writer as an individual cultural producer with the linguistic competence to wield the Italian language as s/he sees fit.

Since the end of collaborations between Italian and African authors by the latter half of the 1990s, Italian writers of African descent have expressed themselves in a variety of manners. Scego's position as a native speaker of Italian, born and raised in Italy, makes her part of a new generation of Afro-Italians that have been referred to as a "generazione Balotelli" (Ridet, in Scego, 2012:244). However,

Scego's position as an Italian Somali has also led her to write works that provocatively remind Italian readers of the country's colonial past in Africa. The literary quality of Scego's work has gained her prestige worldwide; she has published four novels, the last of which won the prestigious Italian *Premio Mondello*. Though Scego originally published her autobiographical novel *La mia casa è dove sono* in 2010, in 2012 the publishing company Loescher released a new version of the work with supplementary materials. This article focuses on the nature and structure of these materials, comparing them to the paratextual elements in the text published by Ba and Micheletti two decades earlier. In doing so, I examine two cases of how educational texts have imagined an African presence in Italy over the last twenty years. I unveil, in particular, the different foci on Eastern and Western Africa in each text, and show how the later work by Scego emphasises an Italian colonial past in Africa. If, as Scego claims in an interview, "dell'Africa non si sa niente a scuola" (2012:96), then both these texts aim to create greater awareness of the continent through their novel-manuals.

*La promessa di Hamadi* is a collaborative novel created by Alessandro Micheletti (often thought to be the "P.A. Micheletti" attributed co-authorship of the tale), an educational textbook writer from Milan, and Saidou Moussa Ba, a Senegalese cultural activist who has lived in Italy since 1987. It is difficult to ascertain the precise extent to which Italian authors translated works by African writers, from other languages (such as French) into Italian, or the extent to which they were involved in editing the Italian language of African storytellers (most of the North and West Africans whose names appeared on the covers of books around this time had not studied formal Italian). What is clear in the case of the Ba/Micheletti text is that it was deliberately written as an educational manual, as the presence of its significant pedagogical appendix of eighty-six pages indicates. This literary collaboration produced a text meant to serve as a tool for intercultural mediation, representing immigrants in Italy in general, but most specifically African immigrants. Their target audience is Italian high-school children. Micheletti already had vast experience in writing manuals for use in secondary schools. Ba recounts that he was already working in Italian high schools as a

cultural mediator when he met his future collaborator. Ba feared that students would take his stories, of the immigrant experience as first-hand testimonies of his own life, too personal to be objective, so he wanted to find a pedagogical tool that would create greater distance between himself, the stories he used, and the students to whom he told them (Taddeo, 2005). In order to create this objective pedagogical tool, Ba and Micheletti composed a novel together. This novel-manual represented a break from previous literary collaborations between Africans and Italians, who had published testimonials infamously categorised by one Italian collaborator as “sociological works of little literary value” (Fortunato in Polveroni, 1995). This work differs furthermore in the nature of its paratext. Salah Methnani's *Immigrato* (written with Mario Fortunato) and Pap Kouma's text (with Oreste Pivetta) contain only very short forewords by the Italian collaborators in addition to the tale's text. Ba and Micheletti's text, by contrast, contains a much larger paratext: with photos of Senegal, plot summary questions for students, newspaper articles on racism and immigration with more questions, and extracts from translated Senegalese texts upon which students are invited to reflect. The novel is thus akin to a learning manual on the background of African literature and discourses on Africa in the west, as well as the positions of Africans and of the history of racism within Italy.

The novel depicts the trials of brothers Semba and Hamadi Tall, who both emigrate to Europe. Hamadi is an economic migrant who leaves Senegal due to his inability to make a living either in the countryside where the crops fail, or in the city of Dakar where work is rare and precarious. Semba, on the other hand, is less easy to categorise. He intends his trip to Europe to be short, since he only travels in the hope of finding his brother, about whom he has not received any news for some time. Semba is forced to live among the migrant community and is treated as another ‘clandestine’ migrant by Italians, but this categorisation is represented as lazy and unfair. The migration stories of both characters recount many of the difficulties that African migrants in Italy undergo: especially in their statuses as undocumented illegal immigrants in the 1980s, their difficult living conditions in overcrowded and overpriced accommodation, their

exploitation as illegal manual workers, and their use as drug traffickers by mafia forces. After a long and arduous search for Hamadi, Semba finally meets his brother by chance while both are saying a Muslim prayer atop the fêted Christian site that is the *duomo* in Milan, an example of the cultural *métissage* that this novel recommends. However, the novel avoids simplistic didacticism by showing that the cultural chameleonism prescribed by the African protagonists is not easily borne out in contemporary Italy. Soon after the brothers' meeting, Hamadi is tracked down and killed in the novel by a malevolent chameleon more knowledgeable of the Italian terrain: Don Giuseppe, or Pino. Pino is a racist mafia boss masquerading as a friendly Italian to Semba and financing his search for his brother. However, once Semba finds Hamadi, Pino kills him in revenge for his militant behaviour among the illegal workers he has been employing. Before he is shot dead, Hamadi targets the issue of racism, one that the novel tackles explicitly, telling Don Giuseppe that this disease will eventually kill him. The novel therefore ends with a pedagogical message on contemporary attitudes.

Ba stated that he wanted a pedagogical tool to help create distance between himself and students and it is clear on investigation that his involvement in creating the educational paratext in this work is partial at best (Taddeo, 2005). The 'working materials' that appear in the volume, after the text of the novel, aim to make schoolchildren consider the issues and socio-cultural context of this story in contemporary Italy. These are described as "a cura di Patrizia Restiotto e Alessandro Micheletti". Curiously, Ba is mentioned neither as a contributor nor an author. This appears strange, given that there is a glossary of the specifically African elements referred to in the text (which sometimes refers specifically to ethnicities of Senegal and excerpts of works by Senegalese writers, from whence Ba hails). It is possible that Ba's name was omitted by mistake. Interestingly, Daniele Comberiati (2010) notes that, when they wrote a second novel together, Micheletti was by then far more interested than Ba in creating an educational paratext. Comberiati mentions that the second version of *La memoria di A.*, published in 1996 by De Agostini, contained educational elements "personalmente curate" by Micheletti and "fortemente volute dal giornalista italiano" (55). This double

edition was due to a divergence in views between the two authors; Ba thought Micheletti too quick to label white people as racists, whereas, as Comberiatì explains, Micheletti saw his collaboration as an opportunity to produce texts with didactic elements regarding Italians as racists (55). Thus, the idea of 'Africa' was above all a vehicle for an Italian editor to protest racism against migrants. Furthermore, Micheletti later revealed that his wife, Patrizia, was involved in creating the educational materials that append the novels he constructed with Ba. In a 2005 interview with Raffaele Taddeo, Micheletti reveals that the "P" in the name P.A. Micheletti, which appears next to that of Ba on the novels' covers, is the name of Patrizia Restiotto. Thus, an extra mediator is at work in these texts in the form of Restiotto, a textbook specialist with an interest in French language writing. Restiotto can therefore be presumed to have helped frame some of the materials emanating from Francophone Africa in this text, although one would associate them more immediately with the Senegalese Ba.

The materials in the dossier of *La promessa di Hamadi* take the form of the aforementioned glossary, a three-part dossier discussed below and a four-part set of worksheets that test students' understanding, provoke analysis and provide essay questions to consider when reading each of the novel's seventeen chapters. The representation of African culture is mediated especially through a set of materials on African literature. The first section, "Conosciamoli attraverso la loro letteratura", contains four extracts from Senegalese literary texts. These texts provide a counterpoint to prejudiced ideas of illiterate Africa, showing how stories, both oral and literary, have long been part of traditions on this continent. The first extract, "la leggenda di Faleke", is a transcription of an oral tale. A short introduction underlines that it is referred to several times in Ba and Micheletti's novel. Unfortunately, however, there is no mention of the language in which the tale originated, which presumably was not Italian. As mentioned later, Igiaba Scego goes much further in asserting the existence and importance of African languages in her work, challenging Eurocentric linguistic bias in a far more explicit way than earlier texts of the "letteratura della migrazione."

Following the story of Faleke, extracts from Senegalese poet Birago Diop's work "Souffles" ("Breaths", 1948) appears both in its original French and Italian translation. The authors here treat linguistic diversity in Africa more explicitly, as they describe how Diop, who transcribed oral tales into French, aimed to shape a European language to African purposes (Ba & Micheletti, 1991:162). However, once again the languages from which Diop gleans these stories are not mentioned. Furthermore, choosing to include the French version of Diop's poem and encouraging readers to seize the African rhythms of the sounds may obscure the fact that Diop's work originates in a language entirely unlike French: the Wolof language predominant in contemporary Senegal. However, the next Senegalese author mentioned in this dossier has a very clear link to the novel's plot. Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* (1961) is a text from whose plot *La promessa di Hamadi* appears to borrow. The name of one of the main protagonists of the Italian collaboration, Semba Tall, is a linguistic and ethnic cognate of that of the main protagonist of Kane's work, Samba Diallo, and issues of migration, homesickness, Islam, and racism are all central to the plot of both texts. In a nod to the similarities between the two texts, the mystical ending of Kane's novel is produced in translation in Micheletti and Restiutto's dossier and students are asked to read the endings of both novels consecutively. Thus, this section underlines intercultural influences, where a Senegalese classic that draws heavily on Islam is shown to have influenced a text based and produced in Italy. This idea of intercultural mixing is followed up most strongly in the dossier's final section. The final extract in the dossier comes from the work of renowned Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was the first President of the Republic of Senegal in the post-independence era. Senghor, as this extract tells the reader, is best known for his philosophy of *Négritude*, which promotes the notion of black pride but also traces a long history of intercultural contact between Africa and Europe. This philosopher was thus a great advocate for the cultural hybridity that his novel strongly seeks to promote. An introduction to such a reconciliatory philosophy from an African artist and politician several decades earlier is a valuable means of introducing students to attitudes towards integration that

contemporary Africans in Italy might have. This literary section of the dossier serves as a means of understanding the cultural groundings of Africans in Europe before introducing them through the use of raw data and media coverage.

The largest section of this dossier, “Conosciamoli attraverso dati, documenti e problemi” is twenty-five pages in length, more than double the amount dedicated to literature. Twelve subsections are introduced by a citation from the novel. This section treats such matters as enforced economic migration over the decades preceding the 1990s, especially from Africa, pointing to Italian participation in encouraging this and having migrants work “nella struttura stessa dell'economia italiana” (172). The authors insist there is no shame for contemporary migrants who “bussano alla nostra porta, reclamando il diritto a un'esistenza più umana” (173). The section identifies several means of entry into Europe for migrants, especially since the Schengen agreements on free movement for residents in most European Union countries in the 1980s, offering therefore an explanation as to why Italy has received more migrants in recent years. The section entitled “Chi sono” is perhaps the most direct attempt to explain the origins of the many migrants present in Italy and focuses on Africans. It explains that they are not just “Marocchini” (Moroccans, which often stood as a collective label for Africans in Italy in the 1980s) and makes specific mention of Senegalese, Egyptians and Ghanaian migrants, then referring to specific Asian and Eastern European populations and a plethora of emerging communities, from Laotians to Zambians who “provengono dai paesi più differenti e hanno alle spalle le storie più diverse” (174). Thus, the dossier ultimately mentions specific backgrounds of migrants but avoids entering too deeply into specificities, which is reminiscent of the logic of those who described a general ‘*letteratura della migrazione*’ and the non-specific but non-Italian ‘*Italophone literature*’ that Parati labelled and popularised. In any case, readers are invited to sympathise with the difficult condition of travel for the many ‘clandestine’ who wash up on Italian shores and the editors use newspaper or magazine reports of such experiences (from the popular *Corriere della Sera* and *Panorama*) in order to provide examples of these phenomena as well as underlining Italian media representations

of them. The precarious position in which these migrants exist once they have entered Italy is also described in provocative language. Readers are reminded that many migrants are employed illegally in Italy, in poor working conditions and without labour rights. The editors claim that Europe uses these migrants in “condizioni subalterne” in a “ruolo di nuovi schiavi”. The section “Razzismo all'italiana” contains more provocative language regarding the role of Italy in spreading prejudice and inequalities of the type with which Ba allegedly later became disillusioned (Comberlati) as it tells stories about racial attacks on migrants. A section on the Martinelli laws provides an account on how immigrant presence was regularised to some extent in Italy and the final part of this section is once again highly critical of Italy and the capitalist machine; “le soluzioni” criticises large foreign investments that exploit the “terzo mondo” and suggests a “seria politica di cooperazione allo sviluppo” (191) between the Global North and South. The section ends with a plea for the acceptance of multiplicity in Italy and the creation of a mosaic that has “tessere... [che] non devono essere ferme, ma in movimento” (193).

The third section of the dossier contains four sub-sections, the first two of which deal specifically with Africa. The section “Jerry Essan Masslo” recounts the murder of a young South African in Caserta in 1989. Thus, the section opens with an image of the highest type of intolerance towards Africans. It provides extracts from an interview with Masslo, who talks of his difficult experiences in Italy and ends with a poetic homage from the man who interviewed him. Following the examination of several Senegalese writers earlier in the glossary, the section “Tahar Ben Jelloun”, marks the inclusion of another well-known Francophone African writer and intellectual, who has won many literary prizes for his work in Italian about immigration (with the aid of a collaborator). Ben Jelloun's contribution focuses again on racism (the author is renowned for his work *Le racisme expliqué à ma fille*, 1998). This section is supplemented by an analysis of racism by a renowned Italian sociologist and a speech from a member of the Italian episcopal council on common human tolerance.

This exhaustive section on the ills of racism is followed by materials directed to students as reading guides to the primary text.

The eleven “Schede operative” contain comprehension questions and ask students to perform research on the lives of African migrants in Italy. Many questions particularly ask students to engage with African geography. They are asked to situate Africa “su una carta geografica” and to find information about specific places in Dakar, about the role and significance of figures such as *griots*, and about traditional belief systems generically referred to as “animism”. Follow-up questions ask them to imagine Italy through the eyes of an African. The representation of Africa is inextricably linked to issues of migration and Italian racism. Further questions focus upon mass media representations of immigrants, especially in advertisements (which is linked to the novel’s ironic use of a United Colors of Benetton advertisement that purported to embrace multiculturalism at this time) and students are urged to interview immigrants about their experiences. Perhaps, in order to aid in the understanding of why so many Africans were seen on the street so frequently during this period, they are also asked to research immigrant housing options within Italy. In another provocative move of the kind that apparently turned Ba away, the text then asks students to describe instances of “razzismo mascherato” from friends, acquaintances and the media and encourages activism, asking them to imagine how to run a campaign against racism. These educational appendices thus aim at developing a clear understanding of a category called immigrants, but which is here embodied by Africa. Students are sent to the dossier so often that it is obviously highly connected to the novel. The literary text is thus based around these materials, as part of a wider pedagogical package. This is perhaps why Ba insisted on his second collaboration with Micheletti (1995) appearing first as a stand-alone novel, a work of African literature in its own right involving an African creator above all.

The focus on the importance of African voices within a cosmopolitan ‘postcolonial Italy’ has not ceased following the wave of *letteratura della migrazione*. Sandra Ponzanesi (2014) has written of a Western-produced “Postcolonial cultural industry”, commodifying difference at a time of, ironically, increased xenophobia and increased restrictions on immigration (1). Although she criticises the cynicism of such commodification, Ponzanesi

ultimately argues for the benefits of the appearance of multicultural voices in sites like Italy, since they both help create awareness and increase rich artistic productions. The work of Igiaba Scego is often celebrated as an example of both of these. Her novel *La mia casa è dove sono* stands out as a text that maps out to readers both the presence of Italy in Africa and the multiple nodes (some long-standing) of Africans within Italy. The text contains autobiographical descriptions of moments from her life as a woman of Somali heritage in Italy. Scego reminds readers of Italian colonial history and includes explanations of the reason for the existence of a Somali diaspora in Italy and the wider world, providing a history of Somali independence and later dictatorship under the rule of Siad Barre. This work treats a more specific area of Africa than that referred to in the Ba-Micheletti collaboration and insists on an Italian colonial past that these authors do not emphasise. Scego's work also differentiates terms such as migration and diaspora and insists on the diversity of groups within her very specific version of Africa (the pervasion of clans in Somalia) as well as the longer history of Africa in the imagination of many Italians. The text deals in significant detail with the idea of mapping. As the title of the text suggests, the author is at home in the country in which she lives, Italy, but she also maps an African presence within *lo stivale*. She maps out her diasporic family: their presence in other countries such as the UK, their presence and history within Somalia, from nomadic tribe to becoming "un insieme eterogeneo di sconosciuti" in the city of Mogadishu (70). Although it was first published as a literary text in 2010, Scego's text was re-published in a different version, with educational appendices, two years later, presumably since it was viewed as a useful tool for telling the story of Africans within Italy, and of Italy's relationship with Africa. Perhaps this is not surprising since, by 2012, African migration was at the forefront of discourse on immigration in Italy, yet respect towards people of African origin is startlingly absent in important realms such as politics<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, politician Cecile Kyenge, then a minister in the Italian government, was referred to as an orangutan by fellow deputy Roberto Calderoli in 2013 (Rquotidiano, 2013).

The paratext of the 2012 version of this novel clearly targets the idea of Africa in Italy, both as a result of migration and a colonial past, rather than Africans as an embodiment of a wider group of migrants within Italy. The back cover contains citations from Scego reflecting on her identity as “nera e italiana”, “somala e nera”, “afroitaliana” and “italoafricana”. While Scego did write a novel aimed at adolescents in the early 2000s, her work is generally celebrated for going beyond the didacticism that so strongly characterises the materials produced by Ba and Micheletti’s first collaboration. When developed into an educational tool, however, Scego’s work can appear unwieldy; there are 274 footnotes, for example, which inevitably detract attention from the main text. It is not clear if the footnotes contained in this text reflect the choice of Scego (who is thanked for her “assidua partecipazione alla realizzazzione del libro” on the second page of the book) or that of the Rome-based Oblique Studio group to which the supplementary materials are credited, but this approach clearly differs from Ba and Micheletti’s work. Very little is taken for granted regarding the readers’ familiarity with terms and references. The footnotes explain Somali language terms and expressions pertaining to Africa but also explain European references, details on Rome and Italian history, and even ‘complex’ Italian words as well as references to the White House and the Garden of Eden, which would seem commonplace to most readers. In fact, only 72 of the footnotes reference Africa. Most of these refer to the Somali language and history but a variety of them also treat countries which were periodically under Italian rule (Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea) as well as other countries in this continent (Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Morocco). Some footnotes also reference countries such as Kenya and Djibouti, which fall under the ‘Somali Star’, the original Somalia explained by Scego in the text. This is thus a work that privileges East Africa and the countries Italy was involved with therein, rather than the West Africa from which many Africans were seen to come in the 1980s and 1990s.

To add gravitas to this contemporary commentary on multicultural Italy, the text is introduced by a preface written by influential journalist Goffredo Fofi. Fofi announces the author of this text as a “portatrice di due culture” and her previous work is tagged as

promoting intercultural communication: “un’indicazione di percorso, per un incontro necessario e bello con l’altro, nella realtà della globalizzazione” (3). This is a text that will therefore, inform students about globalisation, although the author insists that she is representing one specific Italian and one specific African culture. This is therefore a move forward from the days of collaboration between an African and an Italian, since Scego is both. Ninety pages of the paratext surround the literary work itself: roughly the same amount as in Ba and Micheletti’s text, although here the structure is quite different. The text surrounding Scego’s novel contains twice as many questions towards students relating to the text and the dossier’s title as a whole, “Intrecci di lettura; materiali e suggerimenti” hints at a more active role on the part of students, who are given suggestions rather than instructions. Like Ba and Micheletti’s text, the appendix contains a historical dossier but one which is significantly shorter (two historical pieces from Mario Merosi’s 1995 historical study *Somalia*) and far more specific in its focus on a former Italian colony in East Africa. Also, like Ba and Micheletti’s, the paratext contains a literary element. Rather than providing examples of renowned classics of African literature, however, readers are simply further introduced to Igiaba Scego. Readers are not invited to come to know *them* (as in the previous text) but *her* and it is clearly suggested that she is one of *ours*, since her belonging to Italy, stated throughout the novel, is reinforced in multiple ways: in her short story “Zarina” regarding her cousin, in an interview with her, in her letter to the Italian president Napolitano regarding such issues as the position of Italian youth in an unemployment-ravaged economy and her own lack of ability to find success as a writer and academic in Italy, and by a speech from Napolitano on ‘new Italians’ in which he cites Scego (2012:204-206). Having firmly established Scego as an African writer in Italy and also from Italy, the dossier then asks students questions about the text in the “Esplora il testo” section, where they are asked to compare Scego’s work to that of other classic Italian writers such as Dante Alighieri. This writer is to be taken seriously as a literary writer, then, a message that is reinforced by the inclusion of a “Rassegna critica” to close the text. This consists of five reviews of Scego’s novel by Italian, German and French authors, including Maria Viarengo,

another Italo-African literary writer. Each review focuses on a different aspect of Scego's text and insists on its status as a well-received novel before it was used as an educational text. Thus, Italian writers of African heritage are integrated into a wider discourse on Italian literature in this text.

The nature of the questions asked to students in the "Esplora il testo" section is not radically different from that of those posed in the section of *La promessa di Hamadi* developed by P.A. Micheletti. The questions contain true or false quizzes as well as multiple choice questions and text-based sequence-making exercises. Furthermore, as in the earlier text, a number of exercises ask students to write from the 'African' perspective of several characters. The early focus on the diversity of languages in Africa, one which is fleetingly glimpsed in the Ba-Micheletti text, is present here, as well as the many research exercises regarding the continent's geography and history, although the fact that the students can now access the world wide web, to which they are sent frequently, makes research exercises much simpler. The advanced multi-media possibilities currently available compared to the times in which Ba and Micheletti were writing are also evident: for example, students are asked to write reviews upon a film regarding Somali in Italy after having seen them "in videoteca" and to develop powerpoint presentations on the notion of diaspora (228). In its encouragement of students to find out about living conditions for Somalis in Rome, examine and imitate media rhetoric on immigrants and to interview migrants in the street, this text recalls the tactics of the earlier educational text. However, this work's section of educational questions departs from its predecessors in important ways. Scego's insistence on the underlining of colonial history is reflected through these questions, which probe students' understanding of the roles of figures like Rodolfo Graziani in empire building, as well as their understanding of the controversies regarding the presence of African monuments such as the "Stele di Axum" in Italy. Scego writes of Graziani's actions of using chemical weapons banned by the Geneva convention "nella Guerra per l'impero mussoliniano" and depicts Graziani as a war criminal "che se ne fregava delle convenzioni e dei diritti umani" (85). The Stele di Axum is depicted as robbed from Ethiopia, "stuprata...Era una prigioniera

politica” that has only very recently been returned “ai legittimi proprietari” (75-76). Students are prompted to research the political history of postcolonial Somalia but are also encouraged to consider colonial philosophies such as Rudyard Kipling’s idea of the “white man’s burden” and to place this idea in the wider framework of the philosophies they have studied (219). They are also pushed to understand Islam in more detail than in the previous text analysed, as they are urged to reflect upon the role of the religion as a form of resistance against Italian fascism and as a factor provoking some Africans to partake in wars. The paratext thus challenges the stereotypical role of religion in supposedly war-torn Africa. From the outset, questions push students to understand that there is a foreignness felt towards Africa both for the author and many so-called Africans, as Somalia is described as a “terra che non c’è”: one that is so difficult to grasp that it might as well not exist (11). This focus on the idea of diaspora as opposed to simple migrant groups also asks students to imagine people with a wider variety of attachments to Africa in Italy today. Furthermore, they are also urged to consider the line “non venivamo dal nulla” in order to reflect upon why the concept of cultural heritage is important, especially for Africans whose history has often been denied. This reclaiming of African history can be linked to the references to *Négritude* in *La promessa di Hamadi*. Questions in Scego’s work that insist on the intersection between Africa and Europe recall Senghor’s philosophy of cultural hybridity. For example, in the opening to the “Descrizione” set of questions, a first question regards characteristics of certain Somali fables but then a question is posed regarding Finland, a tactic of switching focus from continent to continent repeated throughout the section, which is seemingly aimed at placing Somalia and Italy within a wider transcontinental context. The irreducible nature of culture is further highlighted as questions focus on differences from within Igiaba’s very family. The fact that there are disagreements within the Somali family pushes students to reflect upon differences within societies, groups and families, especially with regards to traditions; in Scego’s family, for example, there is disagreement over the contentious issue of female genital cutting. Scego writes of her own attitude towards this practice: “la pratica non era frutto di una legge

religiosa: nessuna prescrizione del Libro obbliga i fedeli a questa pratica. Era solo una stortura della storia” (68). As is clear in her letter to the Italian president, Scego is not averse to dealing with explicit issues of a physical nature and the inclusion of questions regarding one of the most controversial and awkward topics debated in contemporary African society represents a daring step, as Scego and her collaborators focus on human rights issues in Africa rather than simply attacking Italian racism. Students read Scego’s rhetorical question “Quanti clitoridi sorridenti sono stato recisi?” (68-69). They are asked in the paratext to empathise with her mother’s decision not to flee those who subjected her to miscegenation by considering the idea of shame in different cultures and to give examples of this (218). Aided by her collaborators, Scego is clearly not one to hold her tongue and the final section of the dossier illustrates her outspokenness.

The sections entitled “Lingua” are perhaps the most significant and original part of this text when compared to its educational predecessors. As a native Italian speaker who is first and foremost a literary writer, Scego uses high level, poetic and crafted Italian that distinguishes her from her Afro-Italian predecessors whose work is described as “Pre-literary experiences of sociological value”. Sandwiched between materials celebrating this text’s literary quality, the questions about language place the Afro-Italian writer on a deliberate pedestal. Throughout this section, students are asked to define tools of rhetorical speech used by the author, such as synecdoche, hyperbole, synaesthesia or metaphor (212). Though students are asked to interpret some seemingly foreign Islamic sayings, they are also challenged to define certain high-register words and expressions from their own language and to understand certain colloquialisms that the author uses, which come from both standard Italian and Roman dialect (one example is “sbarcare il lunario”). Students are thus made aware that they are reading about an African living amongst them, one with her own local Italian dialect as well as a standard Italian so learned that it could appear as foreign to them as the African words she uses. At one point, students are asked to look through English words and translate them into Italian, perhaps in order to make them think about the experience of writing in several

languages and to help them understand how their language borrows from others. This educational version also includes “risorse online” and advertises “Materiali per l’approfondimento, prove di verifica, testi da ascoltare”. The latter of these resources, a version of the text read aloud by Scego, is an oral enactment with potential to create greater proximity among the author and students. Saidou Moussa Ba was known to visit schools in order to perform versions of the work he wrote with Micheletti but this was twenty years before Scego’s text appeared and before the wide-scale advent of the internet. The swift and easy access of students to hearing Scego’s voice creates an immediacy that can be lacking to a young person reading literature in a present in which visual culture is far more prevalent than the written word. Furthermore, students’ access to the sounds of Scego’s fluent Italian language, with a slight regional accent to boot, reduces any sense of her strangeness.

Thus, Scego’s text represents the evolution of representations of Africa in literary texts-cum-educational manuals over the last twenty years. Far from simply ‘conoscendoli’, Scego’s text focuses on students getting to know themselves as members of an Italian cosmopolis that includes Africans. As the narrator of *La mia casa è dove sono* remarks at the end of the text, “È Igiaba, ma siete anche voi” (161). Scego’s work marks the increased presence of Africans in Italy and the difference between (sometimes illegal) economic migrants who have learned the Italian language in adulthood, and Italians of African parentage born in Italy, who have spoken Italian as a native language all their lives. Scego’s insistence on the heterogeneous identities of Italians of African heritage also insists on mapping the personal histories of such subjects in ways that intertwine with the Italian colonial past. Though some of the reminders of the brutality of this past might make readers uncomfortable, Scego’s work is presented in a somewhat less accusatory manner than the racism-focused dossier produced by P.A. Micheletti as a paratext to Saidou Moussa Ba’s earlier portrayal of Africans in Italy. Scego’s underlining of the mutually informed histories of Italy and Somalia, adopted by an educational group (Oblique Studio), thus acts as a means of using old histories in order

to imagine new, more inclusive stories of a future Italy, in which the lines between 'li' and 'noi' are increasingly blurred.

This paper has analysed two literary texts that double as pedagogical tools regarding the presence of people of African heritage in Italy. The Africa referred to in each text is clearly different, with Scego's more recent text focusing on the East Africa with which Italy has a long history and insisting upon the presence of postcolonial subjects in Italy today. Scego's collaboration with Oblique Studio makes use of more advanced technological tools than those available to Ba and Micheletti twenty years previously. Furthermore, the insistence on Scego as a literary writer shows how much the reputation and identity of the Italo-African writer have evolved over twenty years. As an expert in the Italian language among others, Scego can lay claim to the label of 'Afro-italiano' currently used in popular culture (by rapper Tommy Kuti, for example). The transformation of her work into an educational text furthers the project Ba and Micheletti started in 1991 and may help readers further understand the multiple identity formations at work in an Italy increasingly viewed as a part of a wider postcolonial Europe.

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