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Exploring Italianness from the Margins: Linguistic, Generic and Cultural  
Hybridisation in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Hybridisation and Italian Fictions of Immigration in the New Millennium.....	1
1.2 Introducing a Generic Approach to the Study of Italian Migration Literature...	12
1.3 Aims and Structure of Study.....	23
<b>2. Fictions of Immigration in the Italian context: Emergence and Configuration of the Genre 1990 – 1994</b> .....	27
2.1 Delimiting Generic Borders.....	29
2.2 Formulaic Patterns in Early Male Fictions of Immigration.....	33
2.3 Establishing New Patterns: Female Protagonists in the Spotlight.....	38
2.4 Immigrant Voices in Non-fictional Accounts of Migratory Experiences.....	47
2.5 Tradition, Innovation and Hybridisation.....	52
<b>3. Hybridisation as a Conceptual Tool: Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Insights</b> .....	53
3.1 A Brief History of Hybridisation in Literary and Cultural Studies.....	54
3.2 Strategies and Functions of Linguistic Hybridisation in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration.....	56
3.2.1 The Use of Language(s): Re-visiting Linguistic Heterogeneity and the Italian Language Question.....	57
3.2.2 Metacritical Reflections: Thematic Nuclei and Narrative Strategies in Discussions on the Role of Language.....	60
3.3 A Catalyst of Generic Change: Analysing Generic Hybridisation in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration.....	63
3.4 Reflecting (On), Staging and Boosting Cultural Hybridisation.....	70
3.4.1 Old Hybridity and New Hybridisation in Today's Encounters.....	70
3.4.2 Longing for Belonging: Claiming Space for Diversity.....	72
3.4.3 Re-visioning and Re-negotiating Italianness.....	76
<b>4. Who is a Real Italian? Exploring the Linguistic Dimensions of Italianness</b> .....	79

4.1 Intersections of Global and Local Perspectives in Amara Lakhous' <i>Clash of civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio</i> (2006).....	80
4.1.1 Challenging the Myth of Linguistic Supremacy.....	85
4.1.2 Forgotten Histories and Language as Dwelling-Place.....	90
4.2 Encountering and Embracing Diversity in Tahar Lamri's <i>The Sixty Names of Love</i> (2006).....	92
4.2.1 Exchanging Metacritical Reflections: Discussions of the Role of Language in the Metanarrative Framework.....	96
4.2.2 Re-visiting the Language Question: Intertextuality and Strategies of Linguistic Hybridisation in Short Stories.....	99
4.3 The Innovative Potential of Metacriticality in Investigations of Italianness....	105
<b>5. The Blurring of Generic Boundaries as a Challenge to Italianness.....</b>	<b>109</b>
5.1 Denouncing the Exclusionary Force of the Colour Line: Three Examples from 1980, 1993 and 2001.....	111
5.2 Multivocality as a Counter-Response to Marginalisation: Blending of Generic Sources in Pap Kouma's <i>We Black Italians: Stories of Ordinary Racism</i> (2010)...	116
5.3 A Journey Towards Italianness: Re-negotiating Symbolic National Belonging in Igiaba Scego's <i>My Home is Where I Am</i> (2010).....	124
5.4 Generic Hybridisation and Diversification in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration.....	131
<b>6. Heterogeneity, Multiplicity, Hybridisation: Re-configuring Italianness in Randa Ghazy's <i>Perhaps I Won't Kill Anyone Today</i> (2007).....</b>	<b>133</b>
6.1 Unmaking the Myth: The Meeting of Civilisations.....	134
6.2 Generational Conflicts: Teaching and Learning Cultural Hybridisation.....	142
6.3 Staging and Bringing Together Multiple Dimensions of Hybridisation.....	146
<b>7. Literary Itineraries for the New Millennium: Conclusive Remarks.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>8. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>155</b>
8.1 Primary Literature.....	155
8.2 Secondary Literature.....	157

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Hybridisation and Italian Fictions of Immigration in the New Millennium

The publication of a significant number of linguistically, generically and culturally hybrid Italian novels in the first decade of the twenty-first century has signalled the pressing need for contemporary writers to explore and challenge the dominant notion of Italianness. The novels, that I have decided to designate with the term of 'fictions of immigration', make part of a larger phenomenon of Italian migration literature, a field that has made significant contributions to the re-definition of the country's literary and cultural scene in the past twenty years. The defining feature of these more recent hybrid fictions of immigration lies in their attempt to take up the challenge of actively engaging with critical issues that concern contemporary Italian society. These issues comprise first and foremost the questions of (non)belonging for new minority groups in Italy, whose access to symbolic citizenship is denied on the grounds of their incompatibility with the rigid, mainstream construction of Italianness, commonly along the line of colour or a different religious faith.<sup>1</sup>

In a historical moment that sees a major social transformation of Italian society, this thesis will investigate texts that seek to represent and reflect on the radical social hybridisation that has been triggered by Italy's new role as a receiving country for global migratory flows. I will demonstrate how, with the help of innovative narrative strategies, linguistic, generic and cultural hybridisation of the formal structure is achieved in the novels in my corpus. These narrative strategies are employed in order to render textually the complexity of the ongoing social transformation that calls for a

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1 I use the term 'symbolic citizenship' here following Avishai Margalit (1996: 151-159) who adds the symbolic dimension as the fourth component to T.H. Marshall's tripartite model of citizenship divided into legal, political and social aspects. The symbolic dimension, i.e. the right to "shar[e] in the society's symbolic wealth," such as, for example, the legal recognition of a minority language, is presented as necessary in order to for an individual not to feel excluded, to truly belong, in a society. I will return to that concept later in this section, as well as in more detail in Chapter Five.

thorough revision of the dominant notion of Italianness. In other words, it is precisely through textual hybridisation that these novels explore, challenge and re-negotiate Italianness.

The specific genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context emerged in the early 1990s with the publication of the first autobiographical narratives co-authored by migrant authors and Italian writers and journalists. The configuration of this genre was to a large extent determined and shaped by its temporal connection with the immediate social reality of immigration in Italy. As such, fictions of immigration are best conceptualized as a generic super-term or a micro-system (cf. Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 115) that encompasses a number of well-established novelistic genres such as autobiography, *Bildungsroman*, novel of migration, to name just a few. In fact, even in the first narratives that appeared in the period between 1990 and 1994 different preferences and narrative solutions can be identified in male versus female narratives of migration. Over the span of twenty years the genre has developed and diversified significantly and, especially in the past ten years, contemporary fictions of immigration have started to exhibit a high degree of experimentation in terms of narrative techniques, both on linguistic and generic levels. Hence the aim of this dissertation will be to shed light on the connection between the introduction of new narrative strategies of textual hybridisation and the need to search for alternative strategies that enable a literary engagement with ever more complex contemporary issues of belonging and national identity.

Immigration has been slowly changing Italian society and this process today is becoming more and more visible, for example, in the presence of an increasing number of children of immigrant parents schooled in Italy who consider themselves Italian. However, I am not suggesting that, by addressing urgent contemporary issues of exclusion and marginalisation, literature merely keeps up the pace with historical and social developments that are taking place in Italian society. The relationship between the texts in my corpus and social processes that they engage with is certainly not one-directional. As Gabrielle Helms has pointed out in her discussion on the participation of contemporary Canadian novels in the processes of nation-building and belonging:

novels are not simply reflections of social attitudes, caught in a one-directional relationship; rather, novels themselves contribute significantly to cultural attitudes and references and thus help to consolidate social visions or encourage resistance. (Helms 2003: 6)<sup>2</sup>

In Helms' analysis, novels, by offering a range of perspectives, especially from marginalised, subordinated or outright forgotten subjects, have the potential to challenge dominant discourses (2003: 17). I believe that a similar potential can be attributed to contemporary Italian fictions of immigration, which employ techniques of textual hybridisation in order to defy simplistic assumptions on what Italianness should mean today in an increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multicultural society. Contemporary fictions of immigration can thus be identified as examples of “texts that oppose the *status quo*, and relentlessly challenge it” (Locatelli 2008: 19). As such, these texts are valuable and deserve to be read, studied and taught not only because they explicitly pursue ethical and political aims, but because they seek to engage the reader in the practice of “‘dialogic reading’, i.e. the critical and plurivocal hermeneutic activity which literature interminably provokes within individuals and among ‘interpretive communities’” (ibid.: 20).

In discussing Mikhail Bakhtin's contribution to genre theory and criticism, Jan Rupp (2013) emphasises the role and the influence of socio-cultural factors in the dialectical relationship between generic history and the given socio-historical context, the notion that represent one of the major building blocks of the Russian scholar's generic theoretical framework.<sup>3</sup> In testing the heuristic potential of the generic approach in the study of Italian fictions of immigration, my primary interest lies in the exploration of the ways in which, on the one hand, Italian cultural dynamics have contributed or even

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2 In the investigation of selected contemporary Canadian novels, Helms (2003) explores the critical engagement of these texts with the hegemonic ideology of Canadian nation-state. Her close readings are informed by the analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, complemented by the theoretical framework of cultural narratology, which supplies an elaborate methodological toolkit.

3 Rupp writes that “genres are always inflected in social and cultural as well as in literary terms” hence genres “are likely to change according to overall changes in social life and the real world, in which they are placed” (2013: 73). He supports his thesis by quoting the following passages from Bakhtin on the role and function of genres that “work as ‘drive belts from the history of society to the history of language’ (Bakhtin 2000c [1952-53]: 88)”, and on the necessity to study generic history “in such a way that it ‘reflects more directly, clearly, and flexibly all the changes taking place in social life’ (ibid.)” (ibid.)

determined the emergence and the following development of the specific genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context, while, on the other, fictions of immigration themselves have attempted to exert influence on the “social life and the real world” (Rupp 2013: 73) by engaging in the debate on the most critical contemporary social issues, such as discussions surrounding the exclusivist notion of Italianness.<sup>4</sup>

Arguments that contemporary fictions of immigration attempt to engage in and open up a discussion on Italianness might encounter the objection that Italianness itself can hardly be defined or even that it does not really exist. Indeed, Italianness, or Britishness or any other -ness are difficult concepts to pinpoint. The goal of this study will not be to explore the meaning of Italianness as such, or to re-trace historical developments of the concept.<sup>5</sup> The focus instead will be on the plurality of voices of the protagonists of contemporary fictions of immigration who set out to explore and to challenge the mainstream, dominant meaning of Italianness from their marginal position as subjects who are constantly confronted with parts of Italian society unwilling to accept new “cultural hybridity associated with immigration to Italy” (Andall/Duncan 2010b: 2).<sup>6</sup> In the preface to the collective volume *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, the editors stress the need to analyse more closely the dynamics of opposition, the resistance to processes of social and cultural hybridisation by some parts of contemporary Italian society:

In the postcolonial period, the issue of Italian identity resurfaces as relevant to the notion of hybrid space as the presence of migrants is increasingly seen as threatening core dimensions of Italian national identity. (Ibid.: 6)

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4 Cf. Basseler/Nünning/Schwanecke who identify the focus of their recent collective volume as being precisely on the “interrelation between changes in the cultural and historical contexts and the development of literary genre” (2013b: 2).

5 This line of research has been undertaken recently by Patriarca (2010).

6 Cf. Nira Yuval-Davis (2011: 1): “In these post 9/11 (and 7/7) times, 'strangers' are seen not only as a threat to the cohesion of the political and cultural community, but also as potential terrorists, especially the younger men among them. The question of who is 'a stranger' and who 'does not belong', however, is also continuously being modified and contested, with growing ethnic, cultural and religious tensions within as well as between societies and states. Politics of belonging have come to occupy the heart of the political agenda almost everywhere in the world”, a statement that demonstrates the global dimension of the problems that Italian society is facing today.

This resistance, in their analysis, often result in attempts “to evoke some kind of authentic Italianità” (ibid.)<sup>7</sup>. The *Italianità*, or Italianness, that Andall and Duncan are referring to here, is presumably a rigidly constructed artificial notion of Italians as white and Christian people, a notion that effectively precludes symbolic recognition for an ever-increasing number of Italians who belong to new minority groups. In fact, major social issues related to growing ethnic, linguistic and religious diversification of Italian society are at the forefront of political and cultural debates today.<sup>8</sup> Sociologists confirm the tangible outcomes of the practices of everyday, as well as institutionalized forms of resistance to social and cultural hybridisation in the existence of practices of exclusion, marginalisation and segregation, topics that are discussed in contemporary fictions of immigration.

Negative consequences, even failures of successful social hybridisation at this point in time mean that profound structural fragmentation is taking place, for example, within the Italian labour market,<sup>9</sup> while instance of urban segregation become visible even to a casual observer. What once used to be “the local problems of Mumbai, Paris, London, Hong Kong”, to borrow Homi Bhabha's words,<sup>10</sup> in the course of the past two decade

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7 Among such “core dimension of Italian national identity” the scholars name the renewed emphasis on the Catholic component, especially in the wake of the publication of Oriana Fallaci's 2001 *The Rage and The Pride* in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks. Graziella Parati, for example, has discussed another of Fallaci's recent books (Fallaci 2004) in more detail. The book in question, according to Parati, targeted once again a larger audience of Western Europeans who were warned “that Muslims have invaded Europe, have transformed it into Eurabia, and are threatening 'western reason'” (2005: 191). Fallaci's writings, as Parati stresses, have to be interpreted in a larger cultural context that sees, for example, Cardinal Biffi's call to limit arrivals in Italy only to Catholic immigrants (ibid.: 23). As the close reading of Randa Ghazy's 2007 novel in Chapter 6 will show, the young Muslim Italian protagonist takes up the opportunity to offer her own response to Oriana Fallaci.

8 The body of scholarship on the subject of the impact of recent migratory flows to Italy has significantly increased at the turn of the millennium. The list of the most updated sources includes Mezzadra/Ricciardi 2013, Corti/Sanfilippo 2012, Maciotti/Pugliese 2010, Bonifazi 2009, Colombo/Sciortino 2008, Pugliese 2006. More specifically on the analysis of political debates and more general public discourses concerning immigration see Colombo 2012.

9 The centrality of the problem of work for the protagonists of Italian fictions of immigration will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter Two. On the conditions of Italian labour market and the role of immigrants see Ambrosini 2009, Catanzaro/Colombo 2009.

10 In a passage of the Preface to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha quotes from a lecture on Human Rights delivered by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1945. In this lecture Du Bois speaks of the “*quasi-colonial*

has become a local problem of many Italian cities and towns. A short walk on a Saturday night from the church of Saint Faustino and Saint Giovita in the Carmine neighbourhood to piazza Duomo in Brescia can turn out to be an overwhelming experience for someone not familiar with the city. While the latter area is frequented by young white middle class professionals enjoying their *aperitivo* in one of the stylish bars with the view of the two cathedrals, the tiny ethnic food shops and numerous telephone centres managed and serving a multitude of different nationalities only a ten-minute walk away bear testimony to new kinds of urban segmentation that has been reshaping the face of Italian urban landscapes.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, my use of the term “hybridisation” calls for a preliminary explanation, which will be significantly expanded in Chapter Three of the dissertation. Fully acknowledging the negative cultural baggage that the term embodies,<sup>12</sup> I will argue throughout this study that hybridisation can be fruitfully used in the analysis of contemporary fictions of immigration as a concept that effectively captures the dynamic aspect of the ongoing transformation of the genre. This latter transformation has to be contextualized within the larger historical and social framework of today's Italian society. As such, I will use hybridisation in order to refer to two distinct, yet

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*status*” of certain groups in American society who are both geographically isolated in urban spaces and denied their political and legal rights (1994: xviii).

11 Cf. Riccio who states the following: “the city is the space par excellence in which diversities meet and cultural exchange takes place. It is also the space of conflict, of inequalities that co-exist and of practices of forced conviviality” (2006: 35). Riccio's chapter is part of the collective volume, edited by Asher Colombo, Antonio Genovese and Andrea Canevaro, that gathers results of several sociological and anthropological studies in which the impact of immigration on Italian urban spaces has been analysed empirically. Vincenzo Romania, a sociologist who authored the pioneering study on social mimetism of Albanian immigrants in Italy, *Farsi passare per italiani: strategie di mimetismo sociale* (2004), recently dedicated a post in his online blog to what he called as the 'ghost neighbourhood' of the city of Padova, the historical area of Arcella: “The Arcella neighbourhood is hence one of the places in Italy where you can best observe the effects of territorial segregation that immigrants have been subjected to.” (Romania 2013, online) Similarly, when Oreste Pivetta, one of the most active Italian participants in the emergence of the phenomenon of Italian migrant literature in his role of the co-author of the bestselling *Io, venditore di elefanti* (Khouma/Pivetta 1990), had to give a talk at a conference dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of this literary phenomenon, he also stressed the necessity of analysing urban textures that emphasis stratification of contemporary Italian society when it comes to the impact of immigration (2011). Urban settings are a permanent feature and in some cases can be treated as co-protagonists in many fictions of immigration as, for example, Burns (2013: 131-177), Papotti (2011) and Mengozzi (2011) demonstrate in their contributions.

12 Robert J.C. Young (1995) has thoroughly documented the problematic legacy of the concept in his seminal work.

intrinsically related phenomena of social and textual hybridisation, both of which are traceable, albeit on different levels, in the novels that make part of my corpus. The use of the term social hybridisation in this study will not attempt to convey a positivist, celebratory attitude towards the current structural transformation of Italian society. As exemplified firstly in sociological studies hinted at in the previous section, and even more importantly, as represented in the novels that will be discussed in the analytical 7chapters, the ongoing social hybridisation in Italy so far has arguably aggravated the existing historical fragmentation, especially on the levels of class and regional divisions. Social hybridisation in this sense will designate the statistically relevant demographic re-structuring of Italian society as a result of recent migratory flows. When it comes to the phenomenon of textual hybridisation in contemporary fictions of immigration, I will discuss in more details three separate, yet again closely interrelated dimensions of this kind of hybridisation, namely linguistic, generic and what can be very broadly designated as cultural hybridisation, all of which will be examined in the analysis of specific narrative techniques and hybrid formal features.

Such an investigation of different manifestations of hybridisation in contemporary literary works and its interrelationship with current socio-cultural developments in Italian society is a timely endeavour. Structural changes of the society triggered by the impact of new migratory patterns and the emergence of migration literature that sets itself the task of exploring and offering a different perspective on these social issues are phenomena that can be observed and needs to be investigated in all European, and probably most non-European, contexts today. Immigration is a heated topic in the political debates globally, and Italy is certainly not an exception. Even if Italy can be said to have undergone the transition from a country of emigration to a country of immigration relatively late, if compared to other European contexts such as the UK, France or Germany,<sup>13</sup> the larger European and global framework of migratory patterns

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13 As Colombo and Sciortino have demonstrated, the Italian case shows strong continuities with the general patterns of immigration to Europe (2004). Likewise, it has also been pointed out how a larger framework that takes into account transnational migratory dynamics over an extended, two-century period (both the twentieth- and the twenty-first) has to provide the background for the analysis of the impact of immigration on individual countries (cf. Gropas/Triandafyllidou 2007). In addition, to state that Italy had quickly and irreversibly transformed itself into a country of immigration already by the late 1980s would be to oversimplify the complexity of the Italian case. Enrico Pugliese, for example, emphasises the high percentage of Italian emigrants who returned home in the same period in which

has to be taken into consideration when discussing the specificities of Italian migration history. The relatively young age of a unified Italian state, the importance of the history of emigration and internal migrations, persistent regional differences, - the analysis of all of these factors are needed to provide a broader contextualization for the emergence of Italian migration literature in the early 1990s and current developments within it.

Migration literatures today represent constitutive parts of various national literatures, where their status varies according to the given national context. If we look at the literary culture of Spain, another Southern European country that has experienced very similar recent migratory patterns to those of Italy,<sup>14</sup> the newness and the marginality of migration literature there highlights the many points of convergence with the development and the reception of the phenomenon in the Italian case (Chiodaroli 2012). However, in the panorama of migration literatures from different national contexts, Italian migration literature deserves special attention on account of its high degree of engagement in the debates that have no less than the country's near future at stake. In the twenty years of its existence, this now highly diversified and heterogeneous field has demonstrated a particular sensibility and attention to such crucial issues as racism, exclusion and marginalisation of immigrants in Italy. These issues have not been resolved, and the thematic continuity between the first and the more recent novels of immigration bears testimony to the importance that these topics still play.

The kind of impact that immigration has on Italian society is taking on new forms in the twenty-first century and this is especially obvious when we come to discuss the

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immigrants from various parts of the globe started to arrive in Italy as a factor which has been underestimated in the calculation of immigration figures (2006: 61-75). Thus in the 1980s the proportion of actual foreigners settling down in Italy was probably still extremely low, which demonstrates that Italian migratory trends have to be analysed more carefully. Likewise, it must be remembered that even if the numbers of Italian emigrants in the later decades of the twentieth- and the first decades of the twenty-first centuries have diminished significantly, Italian have never stopped emigrating. The issues of brain drain, this particular phenomenon that describes the leaving of the country by young, highly-educated people in search of better opportunities abroad, has never been as pressing as today. In fact, a recent article in *Corriere della Sera* summarizes the findings of the latest Censis report on Italian society, providing data on Italians who have recently left the country. These numbers are rapidly increasing, from 50.000 in 2002 to 106.000 in 2012, with a peak in between 2011 and 2012 that registered a surge of +28,8 % ([http://www.corriere.it/economia/13\\_dicembre\\_06/censis-italiani-sciapi-infelici-cerca-connettivita-sociale-9cf650f4-5e48-11e3-acc7-1683485977a2.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/economia/13_dicembre_06/censis-italiani-sciapi-infelici-cerca-connettivita-sociale-9cf650f4-5e48-11e3-acc7-1683485977a2.shtml), last retrieved 2013-12-15).

14 See nore 13.

integration of children born or raised in Italy by immigrant parents. The presence of new minority groups with hyphenated identities, be they Italian citizens legally or not<sup>15</sup>, represent the most recent and fundamental development that calls for a thorough revision of Italianness and the correlated notions of symbolic citizenship and national belonging. Everyday lives of Italian people from such minority groups, especially of younger generations, who consider their Italianness as constitutive part of their self-definition<sup>16</sup>, but who do not fit the mainstream notion of Italianness owing either to the colour of their skin or/and religion, are subject to various forms of persecution, humiliation and questioning in their interaction with the society where they were born and/or raised.

Hence, as I have anticipated in the previous sections, the main research object of this study will be to shed light on the complex interaction between contemporary social and cultural dynamics in a society undergoing a major transformation as well as literary texts that participate in and discuss this transformation. The starting-point of my investigation lies in the conviction that even if the production and the publication of Italian fictions of immigration have been made possible by the transformation of Italian society that I will define as its radical hybridisation, contemporary fictions of immigration have always actively engaged in the debates on the effects and the future outcomes of this kind of hybridisation, rather than passively “reproducing” and “functioning as a literary mirror” to such processes.<sup>17</sup> By focussing on individual experiences of immigrants and children born to immigrant or mixed couples, these novels explore, challenge and seek to re-negotiate the very notion of Italianness. Moreover, the engagement with this crucial contemporary issue is not rendered only on the thematic level, but is performed on the textual level through the employment of different narrative strategies of linguistic, generic and cultural hybridisation that enable the literary representation of the complex current transformation of Italian society.

How Italianness has been/continues to be constructed within mainstream discourses,

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15 See Kotic/Triandafyllidou (2007) for the discussion of current Italian legislation on citizenship.

16 An expression that I borrow from Avishai Margit and his reflections on belonging in a society (1996: 153), see also note 1.

17 This point will be developed further in section 1.2.

what this notion represents, and how it could be re-negotiated in the twenty-first century in order to guarantee what Homi Bhabha calls “a right to difference-in-equality”, is at the forefront of the reflections in the novels in my corpus. Bhabha adapts this concept from the work of Etienne Balibar and develops it in a passage devoted to the notion of “a vernacular cosmopolitanism” (1994: xvii). The key component of vernacular cosmopolitanism, according to Bhabha, would be such a right to difference-in-equality that:

represents a desire to revise the customary components of citizenship – political, legal and social citizenship (T.H. Marshall) – by extending them to include the realm of 'symbolic citizenship' (Avishai Margalit). The symbolic aspect raises affective and ethical issues connected with cultural differences and social discrimination – the problem of inclusion and exclusion, dignity and humiliation, respect and repudiation. (Bhabha 1994: xvii).

Bhabha develops this reflection further by stressing the political and ethical aspects of this right which offers opportunities for “creating new modes of agency, new strategies of recognition, new forms of political and symbolic representation” (ibid.: xviii). Such “[m]inoritarian affiliations or solidarities”, in Bhabha's sense, transcend and disregard national borders, in a way similar to what Italian migration literature does when it explores and challenges exclusivist constructions of national identities by forming alliances with literatures of different national contexts through intertextuality, and the borrowing of narrative devices. As I will argue throughout this thesis, hybrid fictions of immigration published in Italy in the twenty-first century call, through the voices of their protagonists, for and at the same time already exercise a right to difference-in-equality within the national borders, at home, where “globalization begins” (1994: xviii), by participating in the discussion on the meaning of Italianness, its limits and its necessary revisions in the twenty-first century.

“Hybridisation is Possible” read the title of a conference that took place at the Dergano Library in Milan in June 2013 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of El-Ghibli, one of the most important and well-known online magazines devoted to Italian migration literature. Pap Khouma, the editor-in-chief of the magazine and one of the

authors who will be discussed in this study, opened the conference with a presentation<sup>18</sup> in which he outlined the most significant political and cultural events in Italian history of the past two decades. In spite of the fact that most of Khouma's presentation could be interpreted as an act of denunciation of unjust attitudes and racist practices towards immigrants in Italian society, the conclusion of the printed version of the speech instead emphasises the positive perspective on the future of Italian society:

Dear readers,  
even if we are aware of the fact that there is still a long way to go, the current presence of a number of Members of Parliament, Senators and Ministers of foreign origins or born and raised abroad, black or white, represents a humiliating defeat for anyone who affirms that the time is not ripe and at the same time signals an institutionalized opening in the multi-ethnic Italy towards its new citizens and towards the future. (Khouma 2013, online).

Pap Khouma, whose work will be discussed in Chapters Two and Five of the dissertation, is one of the first migrant writers in the tradition of Italian migration literature. The fact that he decided to conclude his speech with a polemic, yet still optimistic note in which he puts forward a strong claim for the future of the country, can be interpreted as an exercise in a particular kind of vernacular cosmopolitanism capable of building new connections and affiliations on the local level. However marginal the field of Italian migration literature may be at this particular historical time, as my analysis will show, this phenomenon is continuing to grow and produce texts that engage their readers in critical contemporary discussions by offering diversified, minority perspectives on their particular national context.

In this section I have presented some of the key research questions that I will endeavour to answer in this study. In the following two sections I will provide a more detailed introduction to the field of Italian migration literature and the place of fictions of immigration within the field, while the last section will give a general presentation of the aims and structure of the dissertation.

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18 Some of the papers presented at the conference were subsequently published in the September 2013 El-Ghibli issue, online at [http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/id\\_1-issue\\_10\\_41-section\\_0-index\\_pos\\_1.html](http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/id_1-issue_10_41-section_0-index_pos_1.html).

## 1.2 Introducing a Generic Approach to the Study of Italian Migration Literature

In the first section of the introduction I have used the terms Italian migration literature and fictions of immigration, both of which will have to be clarified in the following pages. As conventional as the term has become since 1997 when Armando Gnisci first introduced the concept of *letteratura italiana della migrazione*, the question of finding an appropriate label to designate the literary phenomenon of Italian migrant first- and second-generation authors, still remains unresolved, as Jennifer Burns has recently noted (2013: 6).<sup>19</sup> The details of the debate on the most suitable and encompassing categorization of the increasingly large and diversified corpus of texts,<sup>20</sup> in terms of genres, nationalities of the authors, the linguistic abilities of the authors, has been thoroughly discussed in a number of volumes that appeared in conjunction with and after the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the birth of Italian migration literature.<sup>21</sup>

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19 The debate on the best possible denomination for the phenomenon was initiated as early as the 1990s, the first decade of the existence of Italian migration literature, by the pioneering scholars of the phenomenon, in particular Armando Gnisci (1992, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) and Graziella Parati (1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999). Major critical contributions to the field of Italian migration literature appeared in 2005 when Parati published a book-length study *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* in which the scholar provided a broader contextualization for the phenomena of literature and cinema of migration in Italy and 2006 when Gnisci edited a collective volume *Nuovo planetario italiano* containing critical contributions on Italian and other European literatures of migration, complete with anthologized excerpts of the works of migrant writers in Italian.

20 A valuable resource for approaching the topic is the book co-authored by Mauceri and Negro (2009) that provides an overview of texts written by migrant and Italian authors alike that are divided according to topics discussed. A very popular computerized tool is BASILI (Database of Immigrant Writers in Italian), set up by Armando Gnisci in 1997 and currently managed by Franca Sinopoli. BASILI contains information on authors and texts, as well as references to secondary sources on Italian migration literature, all of which can be searched for individually at <http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/basili2001/>. It is worth mentioning that Mengozzi, for example, points to some gaps and omissions in BASILI, that regard, for example, authors such as Igiaba Scego and Randa Ghazy, to name a few. These authors, presumably on the ground of being considered more properly Italian writers tout court are not included in the database even if most of their writing deals with the topic of recent immigration to Italy (2013: 29). Another kind of resource for consultation in printed form is a bibliography of Italian migration literature compiled by Cosenza (2011).

21 The most recent developments of this debate can be found in the collective volumes edited by Quaquarelli (2010) and Pezzarossa and Rossini (2011). Chiara Mengozzi provides an elaborate overview (2013: 40-87) of the origin and ways in which an array of competing labels to that of Italian

However, as early as 2006, Franca Sinopoli (2006: 87-110) offered a very lucid overview of the most frequent questions that had been debated (and continue to be discussed) by the scholars of Italian migration literature:

To which extent can a literary quality be found in these texts?  
Does it make sense to read migrant writings exclusively through the lens of literary quality?  
What is the European status of 'literary quality' today?  
What are the possible ways in which Italian migration literature can interact with contemporary Italian literature?  
Is it at all possible to speak of Italoophone literature by foreign authors in Italy?  
Are we dealing here with a homogeneous body of texts or rather with a group of texts and authors completely different from one another and who maybe do not wish to be pigeonholed in any sub-categories of Italian literature? (Sinopoli 2006: 95).

As it becomes clear from that list, some of the questions, such as the issue of 'literariness',<sup>22</sup> do not concern only Italian migration literature, but is meant to stimulate a more general reflection on literary in the age of blurring of national boundaries.<sup>23</sup> Several years later, looking at the most recent critical scholarship in the field of Italian migration literature, some of the questions on the list presented by Sinopoli continue to

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migration literature have been generated and applied. The scholar takes into consideration denominations such as Italoophone Literature (*letteratura italoфона*), Afro-Italian Literature (*letteratura afroitaliana*), Minor Literature (*letteratura minore*), Hybrid/Creole/Mixed Literature (*letteratura ibrida, creola, meticcica*), Multicultural/Intercultural/Transcultural Literature (*letteratura multiculturale, interculturale, transculturale*), Italian Postcolonial Literature (*letteratura postcoloniale italiana*), and, finally, Migration Literature (*letteratura della migrazione*). Mengozzi further elaborates on the theoretical foundations of the concept of World Literature and its reception in the Italian academy as well as its possible connections with and repercussion for the critical reception of the phenomenon of Italian Migration Literature (2013: 87-94).

22 This is indeed one of the most discussed issues in the critical debate on Italian migration literature. Cf. Parati's earlier statements, such as the following one: "These texts lend themselves to an analysis of contemporary Italian culture that expands beyond literary parameters; as such they are sometimes found aesthetically lacking and are therefore relegated to the sphere of social studies or historical commentaries" (1999: 17). Parati modifies her argument in a more recent contribution stating that "it is necessary to affirm once again that these narratives demand a special commitment on behalf of their readers. This commitment requires first of all thinking that transcends national models, be they cultural or literary. Secondly, a connection based on intercultural alliances must be established between literature and social commitment, between texts and communities" (2010: 38).

23 Cf. Basseler/Nünning/Schwanecke (2013b: 9) who refer to the 1988 article by Herbert Grabes in which the scholar attempted to get to grips with the quality of 'literariness' by "shedd[ing] light on the interrelation of principles with which works are selected for inclusion in literary histories as well as general notions of what literature is in any given culture...It demonstrates how the worth we attribute (or do not attribute) to different works and genres depend on theoretical presuppositions and questions of canonization."

remain at the forefront of academic debates. More specifically, two key issues seem to resurface repeatedly, the first one being the artificiality and the inadequacy of the label of Italian migration that can no longer encompass yet conveniently pigeonholes the wide range of genre, topics and the varying degree of the artistic quality of literary production by immigrant authors and the children of immigrants, the so called 'second-generation' authors, simply on the ground of their (or their parents') autobiographical experience of migration. Lucia Quaquarelli gives expression to this dissatisfaction in the following way:

The problem, in my opinion, lies in the decision to accept or to refuse the fact that the author's experience of migration constitutes on its own a literary criterion that can be deemed as determining, characteristic and discriminative. The fact of the matter lies in deciding whether the nexus between literature and migration has a meaning and heuristic utility. (Quaquarelli 2011: 59).

It would seem to be the case that currently the majority of the scholars of Italian migration literature agree on this point,<sup>24</sup> with a few exceptions, such as Jennifer Burns, for example, who states that it would be “impossible and, in any case, unproductive” to

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24 For example, Mengozzi (2013: 30-31) elaborates on the reason why the scholars find it so hard to set exact boundaries for the phenomenon of Italian migration by stressing the following aspects: different trajectories of migration that distinguish individual writers who also originate from the most different parts of the world; differences on the level of linguistic skills that can also determine the differences in the artistic quality of the works. These aspects are indicated as the most relevant to explain the difficulty, the impossibility of constraining this vast corpus of texts into one single macro-category. Drawing on Salman Rushdie's critique of the notion of Commonwealth Literature (1991), Mengozzi stresses the underlying presumptions of the attempt to "contain writers inside passports" that can lead to literary ghettoization of migrant writers, a presumption that the writers themselves often feel very strongly about. Some comments, ranging from a starkly polemic stance that denounces the academic racism through which only non-Western European writers are labelled as migrant, to others in which writers express their suspicion on the convenience of separating migration literature from Italian literature as an operation that 'protects' autochthonous writers, and other, more moderate positions that recognise the potential and the attractiveness of the label for the publishing houses that would like to capitalize on this popular trend, are reported in the book (2013: 83-84). Rosanna Morace (2012: 7-11) offers another, albeit shorter summary of the most recent developments in the critical debate around the notion of Italian migration literature. Similarly to Mengozzi, she stresses the ghettoizing effect of the label, especially when it is applied to authors who have resided in Italy for a very long time already. In addition, she also points out to the rigid expectation that concern the thematic level of narrative that borders on prejudice against migrant authors who are supposed to produce only one kind of literature. Morace's own solution to the problem of denomination and the method of analysis of this literary field, original for the Italian context, is the proposition that the category of *littérature monde* generated and theorized in the French context in the collective volume co-edited by Jean Rouaud and Michel Le Bris (2007) be adapted for the Italian one. For a detailed overview of the genesis and applicability of this concept in Francophone literature cf. Hargreaves et al. (2010).

“extract the analysis of Italian migration literature from its social and political context”(2013: 3), thus representing one of the few voices<sup>25</sup> who supports maintaining 'migration' as part of the denomination of the field and thus continuing to identify this group of texts as a specific category in contemporary Italian literature.<sup>26</sup>

In practice such recent calls for removing the component of 'migration' from the denomination of the field would lead to the de facto absorption of this body of texts into the category of contemporary Italian literature, which is exactly the proposal that Giuliana Benvenuti, among others, has expressed:

A sound critical consciousness is necessary to avoid emphasizing literature's possibility for being a place where traumas are elaborated and divided memories reconciled. [...] I [merely] wish to point out that there exists a concrete risk of establishing new, arbitrary, borderlines, fencing off migrant literature, however gilded that fence may be. This is the risk of attributing to it a social function more important than its necessary yet limited literary function, that of making us aware of the alterity surrounding us and allowing us to imagine the possibility of living together in peace. [...] This is why I consider it essential to begin studying migration literature as contemporary Italian literature that, migrant or otherwise, confronts the contradictions in the relation between the local and the global, avoiding the traps set by new forms of subjugation and the risk of proclaiming that reconciliation has already taken place, something shockingly disproved by Italian policies regarding the Mediterranean. (Benvenuti 2013: 12).

It is not surprising that Benvenuti (as well as others) should stress the importance of recognizing this literary phenomenon as a constitutive part of contemporary Italian literature. If we remember that as recently as in 2001, in a chapter dedicated to Italian literature of the last fifteen years of the twentieth century, Giulio Ferroni included the following lines on the subject of Italian migration literature:

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25 Burns' position is specified in the following passage: “To talk of migrant writers and migration literature encompasses more accurately the range of material which is my focus, although, by the same token, to describe some texts as migration narratives when their context is clearly postcolonial is also to force an elision. However, the notion of migration is the one which best articulates both the lived experience of the writers concerned and the figures which animate their writing, and it encompasses diverse contexts of, motivations for, and directions of travel” (2013: 7-8).

26 Morace, for example, summarizes the positions held by the scholars who contributed to the collective volume edited by Pezzarossa and Rossini (2011) by emphasising their almost unanimous desire to “underline the necessity to go beyond the interpretative parameters that served, quite rightly, to investigate the first phase of 'literature of migration' but that by now have lost their hermeneutic potential, inapt to be applied to the field that has undergone changes when it comes to its force, narrative quality and *status*” (2012: 8, emphasis in orig.)

There have, in any case, already been some instances of immigrants from outside the European Union who have written in Italian: this conquest of our language by subjects who come from very different cultural and linguistic contexts may develop into an interesting phenomenon [...]. At the moment, however, these cases are too few and too marginal to be accounted for in this survey. (Ferroni 2001: 303).

While it is arguably true that at the time when Ferroni was preparing this material, the field of Italian migrant literature was not as diverse and rich in writers and works as it has become by the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the field had already established itself as a new and thought-provoking phenomenon by the late 1990s, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two.<sup>27</sup> Seen in this light, the passage quoted above offers a good indication of the (continued) marginality of this type of literary production in the mainstream academic circles,<sup>28</sup> as Cristina Mauceri has confirmed even more recently:

Contemporary migrant writers encounter indifference in the institutionalized literary world [...] at most they are considered to be an ethnic and exotic phenomenon exploited by a few publishing houses that follow contemporary market trends. Moreover, they are ignored in their countries of origin and as such, they find themselves in the position of writers without a motherland. (Mauceri 2006: 79).

Contradictory as it may seem, in the contribution that so unequivocally dismisses Italian migration literature, Giulio Ferroni also devotes some space to Helena Janeczek, a writer of Jewish-Polish-German origins who has lived in Italy since 1983.<sup>29</sup> Janeczek represents a paradigmatic case of a number of Italian migrant authors whose literary activity, for varying reasons, is almost never interpreted by positioning them within the same political and cultural context in which Italian migration literature emerged.<sup>30</sup> To

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27 See notes 20 and 21 for the references on the authors and the works of Italian migration literature.

28 Corroborated, among others, by Sonia Sabelli in one of the first doctoral theses written in Italy on the subject of Italian migration literature (2004: 2).

29 Biographical information on the author can be found online at <http://www.guanda.it/scheda-autore.asp?editore=Guanda&idautore=4041> (last access December 12, 2013).

30 Cf. Mauceri (2004) who offers a very interesting comparative investigation of the works of Helena Janeczek and Helga Schneider, a German-Italian writer who emigrated to Italy in the 1960s and who has since published numerous books in Italian.

conclude the discussion of Ferroni's contribution, it is worth mentioning that his treatment of the Italian writer Mario Fortunato does not contain any references to Fortunato's collaboration with Salah Methnani on their book *Immigrato* (1990), rightly considered to be one of the founding texts of the tradition of Italian migration literature and Italian fictions of immigration.<sup>31</sup>

The critical debate on the inadequacy of the label of Italian migration literature, together with the calls for treating texts written by migrant authors as Italian literary tout court, has to be commented on (at least) two separate accounts. Firstly, it could be argued that the effort to formulate an alternative label to that of Italian migration literature over the course of the more than two decades of the phenomenon's existence has proved a failure and the term's longevity is probably the best proof of its validity, as well as its heuristic utility.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the increasing attention that the phenomenon has started to receive in the academic circles, combined with the much improved range of methodological approaches and the expansion of the corpus of works that are being studied, promises well for future integration of the literary field of Italian migration literature as an independent branch of contemporary Italian literature. In fact, a brief

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31 However, some positive signs indicative of the future possibility of Italian migration literature being incorporated as a well-established branch of Italian literature can be found, for example, in the fourteen volume work on *The History of Italian Literature* edited by Enrico Malato. While in volume IX of the series (Malato 2005a), dedicated to Italian literature in the twentieth century, we find several non-native Italian writers, such as Edith Bruck and the Pressburger brothers, anthologized alongside their Italian counterparts, Volume XII bears the title *Italian Literature Outside Italy* (Malato 2005b) and is dedicated to the phenomenon of Italoophone Literature across centuries and beyond Italian borders. Moreover, this volume includes a chapter entitled "Italian Literature and Minor Cultures" (Paccagnini 2005: 1019-1072) that focuses on Italian literature in the period after WWII and, more specifically, on "authors with Italian voice but not (Italian) biographical data." On the basis of such a definition, Paccagnini identifies three categories of writers: 1. children of non-Italian parents born in Italy with Italian as first or second/third language; 2. those born in Italy but emigrated elsewhere; 3. those born elsewhere but immigrated to Italy and writing now in Italian. Part 4 of the chapter is dedicated to the Literature of Migration in Italy in the period between 1980s and 2000. Alongside Edith Bruck and the Pressburger brothers, who have already been included as Italian authors in Volume IX of the series, the chapter presents a number of other important contemporary writers of non-Italian origins who are introduced by the title of "Migrant Writers in Italy between 1945 and 1989." Another important reference is a special issue of the magazine *Nuovi Argomenti* (2005) that dedicated a section to migrant authors.

32 Cf. Mengozzi (2013: 86) who confirms that the majority of scholars as well as some migrant writers find it hard to discard the term while Sandra Ponzanesi writes the following: "Even if the term 'migration literature' is often criticized and is in conflict with other definitions such as Italoophone literature, postcolonial, creole literature, Afro-Italian writing, that are more specific and at the same time more limiting, the term seems to be the most encompassing and accommodating, requiring a lesser degree of specification" (2011: 94).

overview of scholarship published after 2010 in Italian as well as in English, bears testimony to degree of attention and dedication to the study of Italian migration literature.<sup>33</sup>

Three recent studies distinguish themselves in the endeavour to introduce new theoretical frameworks and methodologies in order to shed light on less-studied aspects of Italian migration literature. Chiara Mengozzi, who acknowledges the existence of Italian migration literature as a “kind of a textual macro-category” (2013: 7), offers a reading of the selected corpus that focuses on the specific dimension of self-narration (*narrazione di sé*).<sup>34</sup> Self-narration, in Mengozzi's analyses, is identified both as the key topic and simultaneously the main narrative device that functions as the distinguishing feature of the corpus. Her analysis emphasises the potential for counter-narrative (or “talking back”, to borrow Graziella Parati's fundamental definition<sup>35</sup>) of the texts in the corpus. At the same time, in Mengozzi's analysis, these texts are subjected to the constraints exercised by the Italian interlocutor in the guise of the editor/publisher, co-author, or reader/consumer responsible for defining the outcome of the artistic product. The merit of the study undoubtedly lies in its emphasis on what Mengozzi defines as the essential paradox or double-bind of the immigrant torn between personal aspiration to self-narration and the necessity to conform to requests on the part of the Italian interlocutor who requires him/her to fulfil the role of an authentic witness (ibid.: 131-136).<sup>36</sup>

In a different recent investigation of Italian migration literature, Jennifer Burns is

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33 It has to be observed that so far the analysis of scholars has focused on prose genres in Italian migration literature, while other genres have received much less attention.

34 Mengozzi does not set any rigid criteria for the selection of her case-studies. In fact, she discusses a wide range of texts, including several of the novels that will be analyzed in this dissertation, as well as a number of other novels and short stories.

35 Presented and elaborated on in Parati 2005.

36 In fact, the main question of the study is the following: “To what extent does the possibility to offer one's personal narrative represent an opportunity for emancipation of the immigrant subject in the context of the receiving and hosting country and, on the other hand, to what extent, does this opportunity transform in a symbolic prison?” (Mengozzi 2013: 146). She leaves the question to a certain degree unanswered, although she does stress the potential in a number of texts in the corpus of Italian migration literature to “effectively contrast dominant discourses interested only in very specific kinds of narratives apt to satisfy curiosity and thirst for exoticism” (ibid: 148).

interested instead in tracing the presence of specific figures, emotions and operations of the imagination, on putting emphasis on the interior experience of the migrant subject as well as turning attention to “the body as the site of engagement between subject and world” (2013: 11-14). Burns, in fact, introduces such innovative theoretical approaches to the study of the corpus of migrant texts as Sara Ahmed's and Judith Butler's work on affect emotion and body.

From yet another perspective, Rosanna Morace (2012) proposes a more philological approach in her analysis of a range of authors, that include writers such as Julio Monteiro Martins and Carmine Abate. Moreover, Morace presents another solution to the categorization problem with her proposal of adapting the French coinage of *littérature monde* in order to investigate the phenomenon of writers who cross borders in many different ways.<sup>37</sup> However, her analysis actually provides a solid and thorough model for the study of migrant writers from the comparative point of view at the intersection of national and world literatures.<sup>38</sup>

The examples of the studies above show how the increasing heterogeneity and richness of the material in the corpus of Italian migration literature is testing the flexibility and the innovative potential of the critical enterprise, which, in turns, yields extremely fruitful results by contributing to a more in-depth study of the phenomenon. While the three scholars in question can, in a way, be taken to represent different attitudes towards the use/abolition of the label of Italian migration literature, as well as different research strands, my approach to the study of this literary phenomenon will illustrate yet another possibility.

The direction of my research might be considered to go against the most recent

37 See note 24 for more details on Morace's approach.

38 A number of other meritorious studies would have to be mentioned at this point. Barbarulli (2010), as well as Camilotti (2012a) have devoted their attention to women migrant writers specifically, following the earlier studies by Sabelli (2004), Curti (2006) and Camilotti (2009). Barbarulli introduces her study by stating that “migrant writings in Italian have to be positioned in the complex global scenario. [The study of such texts] requires different methodological toolkits and approaches in order to be able to come to terms with the dislocation and the intertwining of imagination, subjectivity, identity and the formation of new cultures between the language and the body” (2010: 13). All of these contributions draw on feminist critique of the canon, in an attempt to identify the specificities of female writing. From a different perspective, several studies have recently concentrated on the connection between Italy's colonial past and contemporary migrant writing, such as Sinopoli 2013, Lombardi-Diop/Romeo 2012, Fracassa 2012, Derobertis 2010, as well as the already quoted collective volume edited by Andall and Duncan (2010a).

general trend of “[the loosening of] the connection between migration literature and the empirical socio-economic event of migration” (Burns 2013: 10) by attempting to emphasise the temporal dimension that sees the emergence of Italian migration literature coincide with the start of the social transformation of Italian society in the early 1990s. I would like to introduce my reflections on the necessity of preserving the label of Italian migration literature with a reference to Anna Belozorovitch, an author of Russian origins, who has written and published novels, as well as short stories and poetry in three languages; Russian, Portuguese and Italian.<sup>39</sup> In reply to the question on her opinion as regards the heated debate on whether it is appropriate or not to institute such a category as 'migrant writers', Belozorovitch replies in the following way:

I imagine that the impulse to classify, to categorize stems from the necessity to process, to study, to grasp a new phenomenon. This has a neutral value, neither positive nor negative. Taking a closer look, I realise that the difficulties of categorization are many: sometime writers of the so-called second-generation, children of immigrant but who grew up, are classified as 'migrant' [...] In the grouping together of such 'non-native speakers' one often ignores the fact that any individual has many languages at disposal [...] But all this is relevant up to a certain point: we need to see what is the overall scope of the classification is and, when it is drawn, different features must be taken into consideration, without attempting to accommodate everybody within one single category. Even the most sincere interest needs a classification as a starting-point. (Taddeo 2013, online).

Belozorovitch rightly points to the linguistic dimension that provided such a clear basis for classification for the texts that constituted the first corpus of the emerging Italian migration literature in the 1990s. At the same time, she immediately problematises even such a seemingly straightforward categorisation as that as the basis of native versus non-native writer status. Even when it comes to the first Italian migrant authors, in addition to possessing differing linguistic abilities in Italian, they also had differing linguistic skills in other languages as well. This holds true also for some of the second-generation migrant authors today, whose native language might be Italian, or Italian and another language, or Italian and an Italian dialect, and so on. As such, the linguistic criterion alone was never sufficient to propose a well-founded classification. A

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39 More information on Anna Belozorovitch can be found on El-Ghibli website, in a dedicated supplement accessible online at [http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/index.php?id=2&issue=10\\_42&sezione=0](http://www.el-ghibli.provincia.bologna.it/index.php?id=2&issue=10_42&sezione=0) (last access December 30, 2013).

classification which, as Belozorovitch herself affirms, is a welcome endeavour that foregrounds the study of a given subject.

In the light of these reflections, my argument for maintaining the label of Italian migration literature is based on the need to acknowledge the main contextual, extra-literary factor in the emergence of this phenomenon. The factor in question is the temporal connection that binds together the gradual increase of the impact that global migratory flows started to exercise on Italian society in the early 1990s and the publication of the first Italian fictions of immigration. This temporal connection remain valid given that, as I will show in the analytical chapters of the dissertation, Italian migration literature, or, more specifically, that part of its corpus that I will designate as fictions of immigration, closely interact with the most recent developments connected to the influence of immigration on Italian society.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the triangular relationship between the given historical context, the biographical experiences of (very different trajectories) of migration, together with the thematic focus on immigration (its causes and consequences, as well as its experience), allows me to perform a selection of novels from the field of Italian migration that will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six of this study.

As I have already discussed elsewhere (Shvanyukova 2013: 255-257), the generic label of fictions of immigration can be fruitfully used to investigate a distinct category of texts within the more general phenomenon of Italian migration literature. The genre of fictions of immigration emerged with the publication of the first autobiographical

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40 In the first section of this chapter I have already attempted to make clear my strong disagreement with frequently heard statements that the primary function of Italian migrant literature is that of a 'mirror' that provides a different perspective on Italian society, as if from the 'outside', by the critical gaze of a foreign observer. Cf. Pivetta: "I believe that it is precisely foreign literature in Italy that can help us discover our country offering us different perspectives" (2011, online) or Camilotti in the introduction to the volume that analyses novels by Jarmila Očkayova and Gabriella Ghermandi: "The works that will be discussed here, just as migratory flows that 'produce' them, represent heralds of change: they are, on the one hand, "a product of time", forecasting, on the other hand, future literature and future societies. In this sense they deserve to be studied with great attention, especially because they can say more about and to our society. Literature has the potential of reproducing social phenomena, what is more, it represents the terrain for experimenting on which the foundations may be laid of what can come next, within and beyond the literary context." (2012a: 9). In the quotation, the function of Italian migration literature is given as that of providing an alternative, but necessarily outside perspective on Italian society, which, in my opinion, leads to drawing of a line between migrant and non-migrant authors. My conviction is that texts in Italian migration literary enter in a special dialectical relationship with their readers, as positioned within the society and participating in the most critical cultural debates on equal terms with those of Italian writers.

novels written by immigrant authors in collaboration with linguistic experts in the early 1990s, and for a number of years it was representative of the entire phenomenon of Italian migration literature. Formally, fictions of immigration can be presented as a generic super-term that incorporates various traditional genres associated with autobiographical writing, such as autobiography, diary, life-writing, *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation, novel of (im)migration, to name just a few. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Two, in spite of this formal diversity, texts such as Bouchane/De Girolamo/Miccione (1991), Khouma/Pivetta (1990), Chohra/Atti di Sarro (1993), Methnani/Fortunato (1990), de Albuquerque/Jannelli (1994), Salem/Mauritano (1993) can be identified as the models that made the genre of fictions of immigration emerge in the Italian context. In line with the recent scholarship,<sup>41</sup> I will argue that the publication of these early fictions of immigration was determined by important extra-literary factors, with the most urgent of these being the desire of the reading public to gain access to 'first-hand' accounts of the migratory experience at a time when the impact of global migratory flows on Italian society was becoming more and more visible.

The choice of adopting the term fictions of immigration rather than fictions of migration, which represents a more consolidated alternative in other national contexts,<sup>42</sup> aims at underlining a key specificity of the Italian context. Major scholars of Italian migrant literature, such as Parati/Tamburri (2011) or Parati (2012)<sup>43</sup> have repeatedly emphasised the interconnectedness of the phenomena of historical Italian emigration abroad, internal immigration from the South to the North of Italy and the recent immigration to Italy. In this light, I see fictions of migration as a potentially ambiguous term when used in the Italian context, since it may also be applied to discuss literary

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41 Mengozzi, for example, points to some of the key factors that had a decisive impact on the configuration of the first (as well as subsequent) texts written by immigrant authors in Italy. Among these factors we find the linguistic dimension of writing in Italian, the existence of target audience and the pressure exercised by the publishing market, which have had a significant impact on producing a very specific "horizon of expectation" that regulated the writing and the publication of the texts (2013: 17).

42 Cfr. Sommer (2001). I will dedicate more space to Sommer's generic typology of fictions of migration in the British context in the second chapter of the dissertation.

43 These two references represent the most recent contributions on the subject. Already in the first English-language anthology of texts of Italian Migrant Literature that Graziella Parati edited in 1999, the scholar makes the connection between the literatures of Italian emigrants and of that of the recent Italian immigrants (14).

works produced by Italian who emigrated abroad in the Post-Unitarian period. The term fictions of immigration, on the other hand, seems to be the most precise and accurate categorization for the kind of works that will be analysed in this dissertation.<sup>44</sup>

While I dedicate the next chapter to the novels that led the genre of fictions of immigration to emerge and quickly consolidate itself in the Italian context, this will be in order to provide adequate contextualization for the case-studies that will be covered in the analytical chapters of the dissertation. As I will show, the contemporary fictions of immigration that represent the main focus of this study, are firmly embedded in the generic tradition initiated by the first, prototypical texts that were published in the early 1990s. Moreover, as I have established in the first section of this chapter, my primary interest will be on the exploration of the interrelationship between hybridisation in contemporary fictions of immigration and the current social transformation of Italian society.

### **1.3 Aims and Structure of Study**

The main goal of this study will be to investigate the ways in which contemporary fictions of immigration actively participate in the critical debate on belonging and the meaning of Italianness in an increasingly hybrid Italian society. More specifically, the focus of the analysis will be on the choice of innovative narrative strategies and hybrid textual features that point to a deeper level of engagement with the complex social issues discussed in the texts in the corpus. Original linguistic features, such as, for example, the use of Italian dialects, will come under scrutiny in the analysis of the linguistic level of the texts, while ruptures with various generic conventions and diversification of the genre spectrum within the genre of Italian fictions of immigration will be systematically explored diachronically, tracing the evolution of the genre since its emergence in the early 1990s to contemporary hybrid fictions of immigration.

Manifestations of and the search for cultural hybridity on the textual level will be

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<sup>44</sup> Even though I agree with Burns (2013: 8) on the strong negative connotation of the term 'immigration', I believe that terminological precision requires the use of fictions of immigration in this case.

discussed in the close readings of novels. Overall, the thesis will present new methodological approaches to the study of fictions of immigration through its use of hybridisation as the main conceptual tool, as well as in the extensive theoretical support taken from Genre theory. As will become clear in the second chapter of the dissertation, my focus on genre will privilege the study of the processes of semanticization of specific generic forms and their connection with intra-, as well as extra-literary factors that have exercised significant influence on particular configuration of the novels. In this chapter I will provide a thorough contextualization for the hybrid novels that will be discussed in Chapter Four to Six of the dissertation by taking a closer look at the first, by now canonized novels of immigration published in the 1990s, as well as a number of related fictional and non-fictional works published around the same time. As I will show in the close readings of a number of selected novels in Chapter Two, contemporary fictions of immigration and the question of the extent to which they contribute to today's discussions on Italianness, have to be interpreted against the background of the earlier novels of immigration. Similarities on the thematic level, in the choice of specific generic forms (even if these are modified in the contemporary hybrid examples), a high degree of intertextuality, represent among other aspects represent a clear indication of the embeddedness of more recent novels of immigration in the generic tradition that came into being when the first male and female narratives of migration were written twenty years ago.

In Chapter Three I will elaborate on the applicability of the concept of hybridisation in the context of a study of fictions of immigration. Hybridisation will be discussed as a textual phenomenon, treating the multiple dimensions of its manifestation in the step by step discussion of distinctive linguistic and generic features, and specific narrative techniques that aim at representing cultural hybridisation. As such, this chapter will enable me to devise a methodological tool-box for the subsequent analysis of the seven case-studies. It must be highlighted here that the choice of the corpus has been determined by the fact that all of the novels manifest contain more than one dimension of textual hybridisation. Arguably, at least the majority of them exhibit all three levels at the same time. The division and the grouping of the case-studies reflect, on the one hand, my interest in analysis of the individual levels of textual hybridisation, and on the

other the prominence of one level over another in specific novels, as well as how this can be linked to the particular aspect of the discussion on belonging and Italianness that the text pursues. In discussing the first two novels in Chapter Four, Tahar Lamri's *I sessanta nomi dell'amore (Sixty Names of Love)* and Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio (Clash of civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio)*, I will pay special attention to the degree of experimentation with the Italian language which, in my reading, will reveal itself as indicative of the desire to shed light on the inherently multicultural, hybrid nature of Italian identity. Generic hybridisation will also have been touched upon in Chapter Four, but will be fully developed in the following chapter with the discussion of hybrid texts written by Pap Khouma (*We Black Italians: Stories of Ordinary Racism*, 2010) and Igiaba Scego (*My Home is Where I am*, 2010). In this case, denunciation of practices of marginalisation, racism, and the exclusionary features of the dominant construction of Italianness, together with strong political attitudes find their expression in the breaching of generic conventions in a combination of journalistic and essayistic writing with autobiographical narrative. The last analytical chapter will be devoted to a hybrid fiction of immigration, *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno: storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista (Perhaps I Won't Kill Anyone Today: Light Tales of a Young Muslim Woman Who, Oddly Enough, is not a Terrorist)*, written by Randa Ghazy (2007), a work in which the protagonist seeks to grasp the meaning of cultural hybridisation and the ways in which the notion of Italianness can be re-negotiated in order to accommodate new minority groups in Italian society.



## **2 Fictions of Immigration in the Italian context: Emergence and Configuration of the Genre 1990 – 1994**

As stated in the introductory chapter of my dissertation, in the analytical chapters of this study (Chapter Four, Five and Six) I will focus on a selection of hybrid novels of immigration published in the period between 2001 and 2010. The main overall aim of my investigation will be to shed light on the ways in which the dominant notion of Italianness is explored, challenged and re-shaped in the contemporary works that, as I will demonstrate, represent the most recent, hybrid stage of the development of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration. Since a thorough analysis of my case-studies cannot be performed without first contextualising these later novels within the generic tradition of fictions of immigration in Italy, the present chapter will provide a more in-depth investigation of the emergence and configuration of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration in the early 1990s, as well as of the processes of consolidation and the diversification of this genre in its earliest stages. In the following pages I will present a number of textual examples in order to identify the factors that can be said to have had a decisive impact on the genre's emergence, as well as the shaping of its initial configuration in the prototypical texts published in the 1990s. In the last section of this Chapter I will provide briefly discuss a number of non-fictional works and other text types also published in the early 1990s. These works also deal with the topic of immigration and, as I will show, constitute a larger cultural framework in which the early fictions of immigration are embedded.

Following Basseler/Nünning/Schwanecke, the constructivist nature of genres has to be acknowledged as the first step in an investigation that sets itself the task of testing the heuristic utility of a generic approach to the study of a particular literary phenomenon: “The ways in which we fabricate constructs such as genres, literary history and cultural history depend on the theories, models and concepts we employ” (2013b: 5). Defining genres as “bodies of shared knowledge’ (cf. Wesseling 1991: 18) and ‘institutionalised’

cognitive constructs” (ibid.: 9) further stresses the role that the concept of genre plays in making literary communication and scholarly investigation of literary artefacts possible.

As I have already mentioned in Chapter One of the dissertation, the category 'Italian fictions of immigration' in this study will function as a generic super-term used to designate a specific corpus of texts produced by migrant writers in Italian in the two decades between 1990 and 2010. I will argue that it is possible to refer to this selection of texts as a specific genre, already well-established in some other national literatures at the time<sup>45</sup> but new for the Italian context, thanks to a number of factors. Firstly, the early Italian fictions of immigration were written and published in the period that registered Italy's gradual transformation from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Moreover, starting with the first examples of this genre in the Italian context which appeared in the period between 1990 and 1994, these texts, as I have pointed out elsewhere,

pursued specific, primary representational goals or purposes (cf. Pavel 2003). These goals aimed at engaging with, exploring, questioning and challenging the impact of recent migratory flows to Italy with a focus (although not exclusively) on the perspective of migrant subjects themselves (Shvanyukova 2013: 257).

In order to demonstrate that the contemporary, hybrid fictions of immigration that I have chosen as my case-studies are firmly rooted in the generic traditions of the earlier, 1990's fictions of immigration, it is necessary to recall Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of *Familienähnlichkeiten*, or 'family resemblance', whose fruitful application in the field of genre theory is explained by Basseler/Nünning/Schwanecke in the following manner:

According to this fruitful and suggestive metaphor, works within one genre, just like members of a family, share certain characteristics or features, but no attribute needs to be common to all of the members. These overlapping sets of traits belong to the prototypical 'core' of the genre. Both distinctive, necessary features and less constitutive characteristics at the 'fuzzy' margins define individual genres (as open and fluctuating as they may be) (2013b: 10).

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45 For example, Sommer's typology of intercultural British fiction will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. If we take into consideration the German context, the existence of Italian-German literature of migration (cf. Amodeo 2006) also points to a history which has been scarcely acknowledged in Italian cultural debates.

Generic diversification and the manifestation of multi-level textual hybridisation that characterises contemporary fictions of immigration represent a new generic development if compared to the prototypical texts that appeared in the early 1990s. Yet the continued thematic focus on the impact of (much changed) patterns of immigration, such as, for example, the necessity to deal with the everyday problems of exclusion that face Italians who belong to new minority groups, or the preference given to specific formal solutions, such as first-person (semi)autobiographical narrative that represents a common component in the generically hybrid contemporary novels, allow the categorisation of contemporary hybrid novels, alongside the first, prototypical examples, within the genre of Italian fictions of immigration.

In the following sections I will endeavour to account for the key factors in emergence of this genre in the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> In this exploration, I take into consideration the four categories that have been distinguished by Marion Gymnich and Birgit Neumann as “linked to the formation of a genre and which shape its formation and transformation: (1) genre's textual level; (2) its cultural and historical dimension; (3) the cognitive factors of their recipients; and (4) the influence of all categories on a genre's functional aspect” (cf- Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 116).

## 2.1 Delimiting Generic Borders

While it has become conventional to identify certain (quite rigidly defined) phases in the overall development of the phenomenon of Italian migration literature,<sup>47</sup> it is important to observe that the most recent critical contributions in the field express their

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46 Basseler/Nünning/Schwanecke make a similar point when it comes to “accounting for changes within genres: no matter how comprehensively one tries to contextualize any instance of generic change, it is obviously impossible to ever sufficiently account for all the factors that may have had an impact on the development of a particular genre” (2013b: 4), a statement, which, I believe, applies also to the contextualisation of the factors that contributed to the emergence of a particular genre.

47 Cf. Ponzanesi who affirms that three separate phases, with the first one representing the early years of the 1990s and autobiographical writings, the second one identified as “the phase of consolidation and diversification in the late 1990s”, and the most recent that corresponds to the wave of the second-generation migration literature that occurred in the twenty-first century characterise the development of the phenomenon in the Italian context (2011: 94).

dissatisfaction with the arbitrariness of making these kind of divisions.<sup>48</sup> For example, Mengozzi states that “a partial revision has to be attempted when discussing the idea of the progressive emancipation of migrant writing from the [native-speaking] co-author [...] as well as the idea of an evolution of migrant writings in the direction of full artistic maturity achieved thanks to gradual renunciation of the autobiographical genres” (2013: 122).<sup>49</sup> As I will demonstrate in this and the following chapters, introducing a generic approach to the study of the corpus of Italian fictions of immigration lays the foundation for a more systematic, rigorous analysis of the phenomenon that focuses on the development and diversification of genre and narrative techniques, accentuating the interrelationship between new formal solutions and changing cultural dynamics in the Italian context.

As I have explained in the first section of this chapter, the term 'fictions of immigration' in this study will be used to refer to narrative production of migrant writers in Italian that focuses on the (changing circumstances of) the experience of immigration in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century Italy. Within this general category, 'fictions of immigration' groups together autobiographies, diaries, hybrid novels, etc. that started to be published in the 1990s and continue to be published in the twenty-first century.

The first texts by immigrant authors,<sup>50</sup> some of which I will deal with in more detail in the following sections, have become models to follow and re-configure as the genre developed and diversified itself. These novels can be said to have been shaped by

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48 The manifestation of such arbitrary, if not to say prejudiced, attitudes, especially towards the early (as well as more recent) first-person autobiographical fictions of immigration is strictly connected to the questioning of the aesthetic qualities, the 'literariness' of this kind of literature that I have already discussed in Chapter One.

49 Cf. also Burns, who speaks of “the tendency to cordon off certain areas, specifically the early texts and especially co-authored or co-edited ones which narrate in the first person the individual migration story”, highlighting the “critical value in placing the earlier texts in relation to later ones across multiple axes of connection” (2013: 15).

50 *Chiamatemi Ali* (1991) by Moroccan Mohamed Bouchane, co-authored with Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione, *Immigrato* written by Tunisian Salah Methani together with Mario Fortunato (1990), *Io, venditore di elefanti* (1990) by Senegalese Pap Kouma and Oreste Pivetta and Saidou Moussa Ba and Alessandro Micheletti's *La promessa di Hamadi* (1991), *Volevo diventare bianca* (Nassera Chohra and Alessandra Atti di Sarro, 1993), Salwa Salem and Laura Mauritano's *Con il vento nei capelli* (1993) and *Princesa* (1994), written by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Jannelli constitute by now an established canon of the first Italian fictions of immigration.

individual experiences of immigration. However, as I will argue in the following, many authorial choices, such as, for example, the selection and sequencing of specific events to be told or the length of the books, were dictated (and, one can argue, manipulated) both by the demands of the reading public to hear specific kinds of stories and the editing work performed by publishing houses. On the other hand, a strong, unbroken connection to the immediate social reality of the Italian context has been and remains the main distinguishing trait of Italian fictions of immigration. This connection is explicit in many of the texts in the abundance of references to specific events on Italian political scene, such as, for example, laws on immigration passed at the time of the narration. The influence of the historical and social context on the configuration and re-configuration of the genre of fictions of immigration has been, undeniably, a source of inspiration for the authors. However since this same connection to Italian reality has also proved itself to be a heavy burden on the shoulders of the authors. The attention to such extra-literary factors (demands of the reading public, role of the editors, pressure to continue to tell 'authentic' life-stories of immigration) is crucial for the analysis of the first novels of immigration, as well as in the discussion of the later hybrid novels. Hence in the following I will argue that the introduction of the generic approach in this case is particularly fruitful as it makes the study of both intra- and extra-literary factors equally important and compulsory.<sup>51</sup>

A novelty in the Italian context, the generic approach to the study of multicultural literature has been successfully applied by Roy Sommer (2001). *Fictions of Migration: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Gattungstypologie des zeitgenössischen interkulturellen Romans in Großbritannien* was and remains an important contribution to the study of intercultural British novels. While the historical and political contexts, as well as migratory dynamics, in Britain and Italy are extremely different, when it comes to literary texts that represent experiences of migration, a number of similar patterns, such as the use of the same types of narrative texts, can be observed.<sup>52</sup> The generic typology

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51 As I have already mentioned in Chapter One (see note 41), Mengozzi (2013) also points to such key factors in shaping the configuration of the genre of fictions of immigration as the pressure exercised by the editorial market, as well as the rigid horizon of expectations of the reading public.

52 Jan Rupp's study (2010) provides another excellent example of fruitfully introducing the generic approach for the study of black British Literature. Black British Literature is dealt with as a generic

proposed by Sommer for contemporary intercultural British novels includes four major sub-types of novels: the novel of migration, the multicultural *Bildungsroman*, the revisionist historical novel and the transcultural hybrid novel. In the case-studies presented in *Fictions of Migration*, novels of migration have as their main object the investigation of the experience of immigration,<sup>53</sup> while multicultural *Bildungsromane* feature mainly Black British protagonists in search of an identity.<sup>54</sup> Revisionist historical novels in Sommer's study stress the connection between the present situation of newly arrived immigrants (and subsequent generations) and in the British colonial past.<sup>55</sup> The last genre discussed, the transcultural hybrid novel, is the most complex narrative form, in which fragmented representation of historical experience is enacted together with re-configurations of collective identity.<sup>56</sup> As such, Roy Sommer maintains fictions of migration as a generic super-term that unites the different genres that are most popular in the corpus of intercultural British novels.

The example of Sommer's seminal study and typology are most relevant for the present investigation of the genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context. In the following sections I will analyse the first, prototypical examples of this genre, paying specific attention to the differences in the male versus female models of early fictions of immigration.

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label that encompasses a wide range of genres and Rupp's specific focus is on the genre's "relationship with the [overall] memorial discourses" (2010: 5).

53 Sommer's case-studies here include Kiranjit Ahluwalia's *Circle of Light* (1997), Caryl Phillips's *The Final Passage* (1985), Joan Rileys' *The Unbelonging* (1985) and other examples from the field of British-Caribbean Literature.

54 Novels discussed in this part are, for example, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995); Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996).

55 Individual sections are dedicated in this case to Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1999). The introductory and the concluding sections of Sommer's chapter on the revisionist historical novel deal with this genre's general strategies for approaching the historical past, as well as African Holocaust and British travel literature.

56 Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) are discussed by Roy Sommer in his concluding analytical chapter.

## 2.2 Formulaic Patterns in Early Male Fictions of Immigration

To demonstrate that the generic approach can help us gain new insights into the literary production of immigrant authors in Italy, I am going to start by analysing the male fictions of immigration published in Italian in the early 1990s. As I have explained in the first section of this chapter, I will argue that the two texts in question<sup>57</sup> pursued a specific primary representational goal or purpose (cf. Pavel 2003). This goal was to present the story of the 'authentic' experience of individual male immigrants in the historical and political context of the late 1980-early 1990's Italy. More specifically, these texts were published in order to render familiar and make accessible the reality of life as an immigrant to contemporary Italian readers.

My main interest here lies in the authorial and/or editorial choices that have determined specific patterns of configuration of the genre of fictions of immigration in the historic and cultural context of the early 1990's Italy. These first 'novels of immigration', a term that, following Roy Sommer and his novel of migration, most adequately designates the first stage of the emergence of the genre, were written in the form of diaries. These diaries can be said to follow conventionalised, quasi-formulaic patterns. These patterns can be observed when it comes to the length of the book (about 120 pages each), division into short chapters (although division is performed on the basis of different criteria), and the choice of a first-person narrator. The most striking feature of these texts on the thematic level is the preoccupation with finding a job that becomes the driving force in the protagonists' existence.

The discourses related to the job market and the role of immigrants in it, together with the nexus between immigration and criminality, represent two major strands in the political and cultural debates on immigration in Italy. In the historical conjecture that sees unemployment as the main social challenge, debates on immigration in Italy often register two prevailing, yet contrasting, opinions immigrants, namely that, on the one

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<sup>57</sup> For reasons of space I restrict my analysis to these two novels only, focusing in more detail specifically on Bouchane et al. (1991) and excluding such other paradigmatic examples of first male fictions of immigration as *Immigrato* written by Tunisian Salah Methani together with Mario Fortunato (1990)

hand, they should be allowed to stay as long as they have a job and make their contribution to society by paying taxes, and on the other hand, that these same immigrants are the ones stealing jobs from Italians.<sup>58</sup> What is certain, in any case, is that the connection between immigration and the labour market (especially, the saturation of the latter) is well established in the public imaginary and this is well-documented by the two novels that I will now take a closer look.<sup>59</sup>

The two novels, both written as first-person narrative, start with the protagonist's departure from his home town and journey to Italy. Khouma and Pivetta's 1990 novel of immigration *Io, venditore di elefanti: una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano (I Was an Elephant Salesman: Adventure between Dakar, Paris and Milan, VE* in the following), for example, starts with the following lines that describe the protagonist's journey from Senegal to Italy:

The plane has taken off and now we are high in the air. By this time Dakar must be far behind us. The sky is blue and I can make out the outline of the tubab's, or white people's, country below, the land of happiness. I am calm. The fortune-teller's words had been clear: "Boy, you will go to the tubab's country." So what could happen to me? Dear me, what would happen to me?  
[...] I step down with the correct foot, as prescribed by the fortune-teller. And as a matter of fact, they let me through without a problem. We continue on to the Customs sign. They peer at our things, our documents, our bags. And that's it. We have really gotten in. So this is finally Italy! I am outside the airport, on the street, out in the open air and in the sun. (15-16).<sup>60</sup>

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58 These kind of discourses are represented, as well as mocked, for example, in Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà* that will be analysed in Chapter Four.

59 The nexus between Italy's rising to become one of the major global industrial nations, the toughening of immigration policies in traditionally immigration-oriented European countries such as Germany, the UK and France, has led to the country's progressive transformation from a country that represented a labour-force exporting country for the greater part of its history into a destination for global labour migration flows. The globalisation of the world economy (De Filippo/Carchedi 1999) has led to the segmentation of the job market where low-skilled, low-paid jobs such as cleaners, and carers, are allocated to the recently arrived immigrants. The internal demographic changes, such as, for example, the progressive ageing of the population paralleled by the state's inability to provide adequate care for this vulnerable section of the population, have led to the creation of certain niche segments in the Italian job market. The spread of the profession of *badante*, (carers for the elderly) a specific group of Italy's migrant population made up, for the most part, of Eastern-European women, is emblematic of the new employment possibilities in the contemporary Italian job market. Recent contributions discussing the impact of migration on the Italian labour market include Casotti/Gheido (2010) and Chiuri et al. (2007).

60 This formulaicity represents a connecting link to, for example, texts written by Italian emigrants in the early twentieth-century, which typically included a similar passage describing the first days spent

The opening scene in *VE*, as well as in *Chiamatemi Ali* (*Call me Ali*, Bouchane et al. 1991, *CA* in the following), takes place in the protagonist's home country, Senegal (Morocco in *CA*). The reader is introduced to the protagonist's familiar environment and gets some insight into what the immigrant leaves behind and what motivates him to go to Italy. In the passage above taken from *VE* the references to the fortune-teller's words immediately signal the presence of a different, non-Western culture. The use of the Wolof word 'tubab', as a designation for 'white people', is another indicator of the foreign origins of the speaker.

This arrival, which Khouma and Pivetta make sound almost magical (or at least fairy-tale like) contrasts sharply with the hardships of immigrant life in a completely unknown environment that await the protagonists. Endless and hopeless searches for a stable, properly paid job and fixed accommodation, and problems with the police and unscrupulous employers, as well as other immigrants, are episodes that recur in all of these novels. These autobiographical narratives are extraordinary representations of the lives of people whose existence has become subordinate to a constant preoccupation with finding an honest way of making money in order to maintain one's dignity as a human being. This quest for a job takes the protagonists from town to town (in *VE*, as well as in *Immigrato/Immigrant* by Fortunato and Methnani, 1990), and leads them to accept any kind of job offer, even illegal ones.<sup>61</sup> There is hardly any space for anything else in these experiences of immigration other than the overwhelming need to survive, to find shelter, to earn one's daily meal. Although the novels themselves do not mention it, it is hard not to imagine how the lives of these young men, all in their early twenties, radically differ from those of their Italian or European counterparts. The latter ones can, of course, also find themselves in situations of great distress and contemporary Italian literature has produced many examples of characters living on the margins of the

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in the country of destination (cf. Mignone 2008: 207-231).

61 Mohamed in *CA* works as a street vendor, brick-layer, etc., while in *Immigrato* the protagonist accepts to become a drug-dealer, although he fails on his first assignment.

mainstream society.<sup>62</sup> However, the processes of social exclusion always work in different ways for those who arrive from the outside and who very quickly become treated as 'non-persons', to borrow Alessandro Dal Lago's influential definition.<sup>63</sup>

*CA* can be presented as a published version of a diary that Mohamed Bouchane kept in Arabic and which Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione helped re-write into book-form in Italian. It is probably the least studied of the early fictions of immigration, and, unlike the other example of the first male novels of migration, it has never been re-published. The contents of the book are very well summarised on its back cover:<sup>64</sup>

Mohamed, a twenty-four year old Moroccan student, leaves his family, his friends and his studies, in order to try his luck in Italy. He keeps a diary of his experience of immigration. As soon as he reaches Milan, which represents “the city of Gullit” for him, every evening he writes down his own impressions, the events of the day and the stories about the people he meets. It is not an easy life for Mohamed in this new city. The days go by slowly, the search for a job is always the main preoccupation, everything is temporary, impossible, unrewarding. He spends nights sleeping in abandoned cars or trains parked overnight at the station, he has to deal with the police, with the bureaucracy, with the squalor of council hostels, the humiliation of random jobs..

The source of his moral support is mainly, if not exclusively, his faith. The diary starts with: “In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful”. Mohamed's faith is likewise the foundation for a well-defined cultural identity that he carries with pride. In the everyday life, in hurtful encounters with a different style of living, with a different civilisation, the protagonist comes to grips with the concept of diversity. With this understanding, he realises the importance of keeping his human dignity intact.

*CA* is divided into nine chapters, each of which contains diary entries made on a regular basis, although at times the gap between the entries amounts to several days. Mohamed is very meticulous in recording major and minor events that happen in his life as an undocumented immigrant in Milan. In fact, the main bulk of the narration is dedicated to the daily routine, to what the protagonist does, where he goes, who he meets, what he buys, as in the following passage:

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62 I am thinking, in the first place, of the young protagonists of Tondelli's *Altri libertini* (1980).

63 Dal Lago has elaborated on this concept in his seminal 1999 study.

64 On the back cover, the reader finds some basic biographical information on Mohamed Bouchane, together with a couple of lines dedicated to the two co-authors of the book, Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione. The front cover features a photograph of a part of an Italian identity card that belongs to Mohamed, while the title of the book is rendered as a stamp over the identity card. In the top left corner we read: “A year in Milan in the life of an illegal immigrant from Morocco” (“*Un anno a Milano nella vita di un clandestino venuto dal Marocco.*”)

Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October

Yesterday I asked Antonio to pay me at the end of each month and not once a week. This way I can go to the post-office and deposit all the money at the same time. This morning I have nothing to do, that's why I am going to the market in Cordusio square. There is a man selling a windbreaker that is almost new and that I like a lot. It costs only 10,000 lira, it's a very good bargain and you can see that it is not a "scam" like the leather jackets sold by the man from Naples. But I am undecided, because if it costs so little then it might have been stolen. To buy stolen property is almost like to steal it yourself because you encourage future thefts. Once again, however, the temptation is stronger than my will. I buy the jacket. Taufik once told me that at the metro-station of the Central station there is a dry-cleaner's that is open also on Sundays. I take the jacket there, because even if it's in a very good condition, I prefer to have it cleaned. I pay 7,000 lira and I am given a receipt and asked to come back to pick it up in a week. ( 81)

First-person narration, the technique of internal focalisation, the zooming in on the decision-making process in this particular passage, even if it concerns such, at first glance, insignificant events as buying an item of clothing, create the effect of watching a real-life TV transmission, a reality show, in which the reader/spectator follows the ordinary, quotidian actions of the protagonist. Undoubtedly, this is a monotonous life, lacking in any kind of excitement, scarce in dreams and ambitions, and the style of writing significantly contributes to making the text overall rather tedious, with its simple syntax, limited vocabulary, preference for verbs and for the description of actions (*I have nothing to do, I go to the market, I see a man with a jacket, I am undecided but I buy the jacket and then I take it to the dry-cleaner's*). Needless to say, this kind of analysis inadvertently confirms the presumption that fictions of immigration, such as *CA*, cannot be considered literature because they are badly written.

However, bearing in mind first and foremost what kind of immigration experience these texts sought to represent, they could hardly have been written in any other way. The tediousness, and monotony of the text perfectly reflect the living conditions of an undocumented immigrant in a specific historical context. The reader gets sucked into this routine, trapped in the text and its repeating sequences of events, its endless lists of actions, stuck in these diaries that document insignificant, minor details just as the immigrant protagonist is stuck in his meaningless, often solitary existence in this hostile environment, completely subordinate to the imperative need to find a job in order to survive.

This kind of detailed diary was probably the only possible formal solution to tell the life-stories of this kind of protagonist. The repetitive, circular trajectories of their daily routine in Italy defied the notions of both artistic creativity and plot structure. This is not to affirm, however, that the three texts in question are identical. While structural and stylistic affinities are immediately evident, the individuality of the single novels is guaranteed by specific narrative strategies of world-making that take place in each novel.<sup>65</sup> The selection of episodes, their specific arrangement and the prominence given to single events over others varies significantly from text to text. For example, the strong presence of religion in *CA* dictates certain patterns of story-telling (such as incorporation of prayers, descriptions of frequent visits to the mosques, the observation of the religious calendar and festivities, etc.) that are less prominent in the other two novels. What remains to be said is that the recurring patterns that I have discussed above have also clearly been imported and are heavily indebted to a number of well-established, traditional genres such as fictionalised autobiographical writing and the *Bildungsroman*, and they produced linear, chronological, first-person narratives that center on a (male) protagonist's recent experience of immigration to Italy.

In the next section I am going to take a closer look at the early fictions of immigration written by female authors. As I will demonstrate, the thematic focus of these texts, as well as their formal solutions are quite different if compared to the male novels that have been analysed in this section.

### **2.3 Establishing New Patterns: Female Protagonists in the Spotlight**

Although female labour immigrants already had a strong presence in Italy in the early 1990s<sup>66</sup>, the first Italian fictions of immigration written by female authors were only

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65 The fruitfulness of applying an expanded and supplemented framework of the theory of symbols as presented in Nelson Goodman's 1978 *Ways of Worldmaking* for the study of literature has been demonstrated in the essays collected in the volume *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives* (Neumann/Nünning/Nünning 2010).

66 In fact, female domestic workers, from Italian ex-colonies in the Horn of Africa, as well as from the Philippines, represented the first major immigrant flows that started to arrive in the late 1960s. Moreover, the feminisation of immigration is considered to be one of the most recent global trends (cf. Castles and Miller 2003) and this is particularly true for the Italian case.

published a few years after the male novels of immigration discussed in the previous section. Nasserah Chohra and Alessandra Atti di Sarro's *Volevo diventare bianca (I Wanted to Be White)* came out in 1993, at the same time as Salwa Salem and Laura Mauritano's *Con il vento nei capelli: una palestinese racconta (The Wind in My Hair: Story of a Palestinian Woman)*, while *Princesa* written by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Jannelli was published in 1994. Significant differences can be observed between these two waves of writing, the 1990-91 publications by male authors and the 1993-94 female texts. What is more, the latter texts, unlike the former, manifest a weaker 'family resemblance'. While thematically the common points between the first three female fictions of immigration are the focus on female protagonists' childhood and upbringing, their family histories and major life events in the period prior to the protagonists' arrival in Italy, linguistic and generic solutions vary, as I will show in this section.

The female immigrant autobiography, written by Nasserah Chohra in collaboration with Alessandra Atti di Sarro, shows strong divergences with the texts that have been designated as male novels of immigration. A writer of French-Arab origins, Chohra tells the story of her growing up in France as a second-generation immigrant in Italian, for the Italian audience. Daughter of two Algerian Saharawis, a nomadic population of Berber origins who immigrated to France, Nasserah (both the writer herself and the protagonist in her book) is different wherever she goes and whatever she decides to do. Too black to be considered either French or Arab and too French when she goes to see her relatives in the Sahara desert, at the end of her long journey in search of a fixed identity Nasserah settles down in Italy, where, however, her future remains far from clear.

As such, Chohra's text can be defined as a hybridised form of a multicultural *Bildungsroman*. The narration starts in early childhood and, in a strict chronological order, takes us through the most important (selected) stages of her life. This novel can also be presented as a retrospective quest for an identity that is composed of many parts and an attempt to come to terms with the otherness that has determined Nasserah's life from the earliest days that she can remember:

What I liked to do the most was to hang around with our neighbours' daughter. I was very proud of being friends with her. Her name was Corinne and she was a pretty

French child, blonde and plump, with rosy cheeks and big blue eyes. She looked very much like a doll. And she had lots of dolls, too. [...] Not that I was envious, but I had never had a doll. Not even an ugly, small or broken one. I remember that once I asked her to give me one of the dolls that she did not play with anymore. It was an old, broken and dirty doll, but she replied to me with a smirk: “No, because you are a nigger.”(10-11).

This excerpt is taken from the first chapter of Nassera Chohra’s novel. The chapter is tellingly entitled “To be black” and the reader meets the seven-year old Nassera/Naci, the protagonist of the book, and her family, shortly after they had moved to a new neighbourhood on the outskirts of Marseille in France. Nassera grows up in a tiny flat that she shares with her parents and six other siblings. She is incredibly fond of her father, while from the beginning of the narration her relationship with her mother seems to be much more complicated. The revelation that she is somehow different from her French friend Corinne, who is white and has got blue eyes, comes as a surprise that quickly translates into shock and the desire to get rid of her diversity.<sup>67</sup>

The choice of this episode to tell in the first chapter of her autobiographical book is undoubtedly very significant. By discussing her first and very traumatic encounter with her diversity, Nassera immediately introduces the reader to the most significant experience of otherness to impact the girl while she is growing up. The style in which the book is written also contributes greatly to a sense of direct contact with Nassera’s feelings and emotions. In fact, the choice of the first-person narration, syntactically and lexically simple sentences, the inclusion of direct discourse (as in the example above with Naci’s school teacher), and the frequent use of rhetorical questions and exclamation marks help the reader to instantly immerse herself in Naci’s world.

The use of rhetorical questions and exclamation marks in particular deserves closer attention. Nassera starts using these two devices at the same moment she receives the shocking news that she is a 'nigger' and that this is a good enough reason for her not to own any dolls. This new piece of information becomes the starting point for the girl’s

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<sup>67</sup> Once Corinne points it out to her, Nassera, who is a very intelligent child with exceptional analytical skills, starts looking for a solution that would allow her to be just like everybody else around her. With everybody else she refers to first of all to her own father, who is light-skinned, as well as the rest of her white classmates, but not her mother or her sisters, who, on the contrary, are even darker than Nassera is. After an unsuccessful attempt to solicit her school teacher’s help, Naci’s creativity and quick thinking make her realise that bleach, that makes clothes white, can also be the magic solution to the problem of her black skin (12-14).

analysis of her situation. Once she has to surrender to the evidence provided by the mirror that she is in fact black, Naci arrives at an important conclusion:

I was different from Corinne. She was white and I was black. This explains everything! – I concluded – here’s the reason why I have no dolls or anything of the kind that my white girlfriends have. I have to take care of this as soon as possible. I have to become white. (11).

The series of exclamations continues later once Naci sets herself the task to investigate the degree of the gravity of her situation. While watching her favourite cartoons in the evening, she realises that her situation is very serious indeed:

[A]mong the characters in the cartoons there were no blacks. All princesses are white, and even the sirens and the pretty girls from the fairy tales! The princes all have fair hair and there isn’t a story where the king has curly hair and black skin! (12).

Moreover, the most important rhetorical question in this chapter deals, once again, directly with Nasser’s family situation. Once the girl starts sneakily comparing her own skin colour to that of her father, a very difficult question pops up in her head: “Why would my father, so white, so beautiful, marry that woman, who is so black and who has nothing whatsoever to do with him?” (14). These examples not only reveal the bewilderment of a seven-year old and the difficulties of coming to terms with a major shocking discovery, but also convey the impact of the painful inference that the girl makes as well as the impossibility of finding an answer to such serious questions as the last one.

Chohra and Di Atto Sarro's text is an important stage in the development of the genre of fictions of immigration when considered in the light of subsequent generic developments. Arguably, precisely this novel can be considered the predecessor, on the thematic level, to contemporary novels that feature protagonists born to immigrant parents and/or raised in Italy, who are questioned on the issue of symbolic belonging and identity.<sup>68</sup> Even more importantly, as I will show in Chapter Five, the thematic focus

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68 Another candidate for the role of this kind of predecessor would be Bambo Hirst's novel *Inchiostro di Cina* (*Chinese Ink*), published in 1987. As Mengozzi notes, this text is often overlooked and left out

on blackness, its visibility and incompatibility with the (presumably) white European identity, represents an even stronger connection between this particular text and the later hybrid fictions of migration, while the religious aspect, underlined by Nassera's reflections on her being black and Muslim, is again thematised in Randa Ghazy's novel that I will discuss in Chapter Six.

The diary form, such a prolific generic model for the male fictions of immigration, was also chosen for the novel *Princesa*.<sup>69</sup> Published in 1994 with a second edition in 2009, this diary documents the life of Fernanda born as Fernando/Fernandinho in a remote Brazilian village. From her first sexual experiences with slightly older boys and the joys of cross-dressing during the Carnival, to running away from home and experiences of internal migration in the home country, Fernanda starts to accomplish her dream of becoming a woman. Becoming a sex worker is a necessity because its a profession that pays well and Fernanda needs the money for the gender reassignment surgery. However, it is also a true vocation for the protagonist who enjoys giving her shows in the streets on both sides of the Atlantic.

Read against or together with Bouchane/De Girolamo/Miccione's *CA*, analysed in the previous paragraph, this female version of a diary of immigration exhibits a number of new features. The flat, mechanical style in *CA*, with its punctilious rendering of

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of the corpus of Italian migration literature because it had come out before 1990, the conventionalised chronological start of the phenomenon in Italy (2013: 156).

69 Fernanda was in prison for attempted murder at the time of writing the book. The genesis of the book has a very special history, as it may be said to be the outcome of the collaboration between three people. In addition to Fernanda and the other 'official' author on the title page, the ex-Red Brigade activist Maurizio Jannelli, also a Sardinian shepherd, Giovanni Tamponi is said to have contributed to the first draft of the book, which was written in the mixture of Portuguese, Italian and Sardinian (See Di Maio 2001, 2009, Portelli 1999). In the preface (entitled 'Brevi note di contesto' / 'Brief Remarks on the Context') written by Maurizio Jannelli, the latter comments on this experience of collaboration as "an extraordinary encounter, born of three different stories, three people who are imprisoned for different reasons." (2009: 7). At the end of the book the authors also included an interview that Jannelli conducted, while still in prison, with Fernanda. More condensed and later versions of Fernanda's story can be read in two 1997 newspaper articles available online at <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1997/08/22/princesa-la-bella-una-vita-da-trans.html> and [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1997/agosto/22/Dietro\\_sbarre\\_anche\\_Princesa\\_musa\\_co\\_0\\_9708226\\_696.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1997/agosto/22/Dietro_sbarre_anche_Princesa_musa_co_0_9708226_696.shtml). On cinematic adaptation of *Princesa* by the Brazilian Henrique Goldman see Shvanyukova (2012) where I also mention the documentary film shot in 1997 in which Fernanda is interviewed, as well as the musical adaptation of Fernanda's life into a song written by Fabrizio De Andrè. A video tribute, with excerpts from the 1997 documentary which seems to be impossible to find, can be watched on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McO4eblZoj8>.

sequences of everyday actions and events carefully divided into days, strongly contrasts with the fragmented, at times outright confusing narration in *Princesa*. The text does not present any formal divisions, in chapters or even days. Instead the narration flows interrupted only by a single blank line that separates the individual paragraphs which vary considerably in length. As the plot develops the reader also 'hears' different voices, which intervene in the first-person narration by means of unmarked direct discourse. These voices provide an outside perspective on what is happening in the passage, as in the following example, where the protagonist presents her recollection of a dialogue that took place between herself and an older boy called Aldir:

Listen Fernandinho, is it true what the other kids say about you? What? They say you like to do things that women do. No, it's not true, Aldir! But you do it with Genir! Take off your pants, and let's go to the river for a swim. I ran away scared from the woods. Two jumps, and Aldir caught up with me. He was the strongest of all of us, he threw me to the ground. He tried, he forced himself upon me. He gave up. He got frightened by my fright. I was seven, he was fifteen. Do not say anything to Cícera! Or I'll kill you! (17)

The blending together of direct discourse and narrator's comments, as well as the shifting of the perspective that is reflected in the change of the verbal tenses, disorient the reader, who needs to put in an extra effort in order to be able to follow the events represented, if compared to the reading experience of *CA*.<sup>70</sup>

The last example of early female fictions of immigration, Salwa Salem and Laura Maritano's *Con il vento nei capelli* (*The Wind in My Hair*), can be positioned at the cross-section between a novel of immigration and a revisionist historical novel, given that she offers us the perspective of a politically-engaged Palestinian exile who witnessed some of the most crucial phases in the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Salwa Salem's life-story is presented as a linear, chronological narration. The narration starts before the birth of the protagonist, in 1930s, in order to shed light on the

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70 Another text, often overlooked in the investigation of the phenomenon of fictions of immigration and that can be presented in the interim position between *CA* and *Princesa*, is *La tana della iena*, written by Hassan Itab with the collaboration of Renato Curcio, one of the very first volumes published by Sensibili alle foglie, the same publishing house that edited *Princesa*, in 1991. In it the story of a fifteen-year old Palestinian boy, who arrives in Italy on a mission to blow up the offices of the British Airways in Rome, is told in the same fragmented style, without any formal divisions in the text apart from single blank lines in between the paragraphs, together with a considerable number of flashbacks that go back to his childhood.

origins of the Israeli-Palestinian, presented from the perspective of the members of Salem's family. It is a detailed narration that focuses on real historical events that are shown from the point of view of the Palestinian people. The book starts with a short preface entitled 'The Death and the Memory' in which the narrator introduces her life-story and how she came to reconstructing it. The following five chapters each focus on a specific period in the life of the protagonist. These chapters have clear chronological borders and are often connected to a specific location. The last one, 'Italy 1970-1992', is dedicated to the last years of Salwa's life spent with her family in Italy.<sup>71</sup>

The title of the first sub-chapter dedicated to Italy is 'New Life.' Salwa and her family arrive in Parma directly from Vienna, where they lived for four years. Her stay in Austria has been a source of bitter disappointment and, contrary to other protagonists of the early fictions of immigration, her first impressions of Italy are put in comparison with Vienna, together with her country of origin. In this experience of intra-European transmigration, Italy of the 1970s reveals itself to be a welcoming, joyful country:

We arrive in Parma. My brother-in-law is waiting for us there and he takes us to a hotel in the town centre. Finally I get to see some warm spring sun again. There are a lot of people out and about, young people having fun, talking loudly. There's liveliness and cheerfulness of a market. It reminds me of the centre of Nablus. Everything is different from the rainy, gloomy and silent Vienna. (118)

Salwa talks about her life in Italy as a happy period. The pain for her lost motherland is always with her. However, she manages to create a space for herself in Italian society, to establish contacts, to set up a network of social relations. The realisation that Italy has become a true second home for her comes to Salwa during the time when she decides to go to Saudi Arabia to earn some money. The closed life-style of the country, rigid regulation of behaviour and separation between the lives of the two sexes quickly become unbearable:

Very soon I realised that it was not worth it. I missed Muhammad, I missed Italy, I missed a society that was freer, more civilised, where human beings had more value. I

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71 In addition, the book contains two concluding chapters. The first one is written by Elisabetta Donini, a close friend of the author, while the final chapter, together with the bibliography on the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict is written by the co-author of the book, Laura Maritano.

wanted to teach my children to be strong, independent, responsible in their dealings with life, capable of taking their own decisions. But in a society such as Saudi Arabian, you had to endure things in silence, giving up your own voice. The price for economic stability was too high. (140).

On the next page of the book Salwa makes the connection between her maturity as a human being, and as a women, more explicit with her new life in Italy:

In Italy, then, I no longer felt myself like a foreigner. I felt this way much more in some Arab countries, such as Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. I realised that my dignity as a woman, my freedom as a human being, the simple facts of being able to go away, to come back, to make decisions, to do things were essential for me. I simply could not do without. I didn't want my children to do without these things. It was not worth giving them up for a bank account in Saudi Arabia. (141)

The remaining pages of the book are dedicated to Salwa's activities connected with her commitment to the Palestinian question. She talks about her return to the role of an activist in Italy, and about her participation in numerous events and conferences in which she shares her knowledge of the history of her motherland.

This brief analysis of the female novels should suffice to show how female immigrant writers have chosen different models if compared to the male fictions of immigration analysed in section 2.2. In a way, the three later female texts complemented the first male novels immigration by representing the complexity of global migratory trajectories bringing immigrants to Italy. In other words, while the male protagonists offered an inside perspective on the experience of immigration once in Italy, the focus of the female texts on the protagonists' lives before coming to Italy gives the reader a broader perspective on the dynamics that take people from countries as diverse as France, Palestine and Brazil, often via other European countries (Austria for Salem and Spain for de Albuquerque), to finally arrive in Italy. As such, the female novels significantly expanded the range of available stories of immigration written in Italian. No longer exclusively made up of young male immigrants from the Maghreb and Senegal, the protagonists of Italian fictions of immigration became a second-generation French-Algerian woman, a political refuge from Palestine , and a transsexual sex worker from Brazil.

The significant differences between the thematic content and even formal properties of the first male versus first female novels of immigration in Italian can be explained

and interpreted as being a result of a combination of cultural forces at work in the specific historical moment in which these texts appeared. The progressive criminalisation of new migratory flows to Italy and the general alarmist attitude manifested in the media towards the more and more visible presence of especially young, male, non-white immigrants<sup>72</sup>, undoubtedly contributed to creating a specific niche on the editorial market. This niche had to produce texts for the general public that would tell 'authentic' stories of immigrants that belonged to the group judged as the most problematic in the contemporary public imaginary. Problematic in terms of the (presumed) danger associated with young, male, non-white and Muslim immigrants, who were also seen as representatives of a completely different culture, almost a different civilisation.<sup>73</sup> As such, these texts had to fulfil the cultural function of 'familiarising' with, rendering more 'human' the subjects that were perceived as threat or as completely alien to Italian society and culture.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, this process of 'familiarizing' with the other would hardly translate into empathy with the narrators in the male novels. This failure can be accounted for, first and foremost, by the formal solutions adopted by the authors (and the editors). The mechanical rendering of hardships of immigrant life in the form of a diary was as alien to the canons of contemporary Italian literature as this life-style itself was alien to mainstream Italian society (to which, I would venture to suggest, the main bulk of the readers of Italian

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72 The media coverage of issues related to immigration and the manipulation of unreliable statistical data on immigration numbers even by the representatives of official institutions is documented, for example, by Maciotti and Pugliese in the first, 1991, edition of their book *Gli immigrati in Italia* (cf. their notes on p. 8, p.22). Alongside a few other sociologists, the pioneers in the field Maciotti and Pugliese have analysed the phenomenon of new immigration to Italy continuously since the late 1980s, with the most recent, fourth edition of their *L'esperienza migratoria: immigrati e rifugiati in Italia* coming out in 2010. They have repeatedly highlighted the irresponsibility of the media in depicting insignificant, statistically speaking, immigration flows as 'invasion' especially through the drawing of attention to the presence of the most 'visible' immigrant groups.

73 I will come back to the topic of the 'clash of civilisations' in Chapters Four and Six in more detail.

74 The male texts also contain examples of other attitudes on the part of Italians towards their protagonists. Pap Khouma reports episodes in which Italians showed curiosity and a certain degree of benevolence towards ambulant Senegalese vendors on the beaches of the Adriatic sea. However, the curiosity and the benevolence was quickly replaced with irritation and anger, once the number of vendors increased. Bouchane, on the other hand, does not fail to report an episode in which one of his employers kept addressing him as 'bestia', a beast. It was a word that the protagonist did not know. After he had asked a fellow Italian about its meaning, he found it very hard to believe that such a thing was possible in the 'civilised' world.

fictions of immigration belonged). Ironically and tragically at the same time, the immediate marginalisation of Italian migrant literature from the canons of contemporary Italian literature on the basis of its presumed non-literariness, reflected perfectly the marginalisation of its protagonists in contemporary Italian society.

These cultural dynamics become even more complex in the case of the female authors of fictions of immigration. The fact that female immigration has always attracted less public attention (with the exception of sex workers who always make good headlines in the media) because it is perceived as less problematic, as more 'normal',<sup>75</sup> was a deciding factor in the production of such texts, so that, for example, no diary of a female domestic helper appeared in Italian in the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> The lack of Italian women writers in the national canon generally also serves to highlight the predominantly male literary landscape of the country. My brief analysis of the two novels of immigration written by female authors in the early 1990s showed that, although undoubtedly products of contemporary global migratory flows, these texts represented very peculiar trajectories of immigration if compared to the male ones. As a provisional conclusion, I would venture to affirm that the shaping of the genre of fictions of immigration was heavily influenced by the demands of the editorial market. While the male novels of immigration attracted attention precisely because of their immediate connection with the contemporary reality (and controversy) of immigration in Italy, the first female texts bore a much more indirect witness to this connection. Yet the female texts were the product of the same global migratory flows and their publication drew attention to the truly multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of immigration in Italy.

## **2.4 Immigrant Voices in Non-fictional Accounts of Migratory Experiences**

In this section I would like to take a closer look at a number of texts that, as I will argue,

<sup>75</sup> Especially because the major part of female migrants in Italy were employed as domestic help, conforming to well-established gender stereotypes of women confined to the invisibility of the domestic space.

<sup>76</sup> In a way, this gap was filled in with Sorina (2006). However, the Italian version of the best-selling in Germany Justyna Polanska's books (2011, 2012) have not yet been written.

provide a larger contextual picture for both early and contemporary fictions of immigration. The interest in the topic of immigration in the early 1990s gave rise to a number of initiatives, such as sociological studies, literature on immigration for children and young adults, and surveys and interviews with immigrants published by Catholic organisations, all of which aimed at investigating and spreading knowledge about the new and complex phenomenon in the Italian context. These texts complement and expand the field of Italian migration literature by highlighting the fact that the complexity of the contemporary phenomena of migration cannot be fully grasped by focussing on only one dimension (economic, political, social, etc.).<sup>77</sup> Likewise, it is important to take into consideration these other kinds of texts because their influence can also be traced in contemporary fictions of immigration.

In 1994, four years after the publication of *I Was an Elephant Salesman*, Pap Khouma took part in a different editorial project. The book, published by a recently founded (1993) publishing house Edizioni Ambiente based in Milan together with Arcisolidarietà from Rome, is entitled *Nato in Senegal, immigrato in Italia: parlano i senegalesi che vivono nel nostro paese (Born in Senegal, Immigrant in Italy: Stories of the Senegalese Who Live in Our Country)*. As the editor of the volume, Anna Bruno Ventre explains in her introduction, “this book would like to represent a first incentive towards learning directly about a 'different' world that has a lot to tell us and to which we can tell a lot of things” (1994: 12). The book is divided thematically into separate sections, such as, for example, 'Family in Senegal', 'Decision to go away', 'Religion', 'What you think about Italians', etc. and the material in each section is based on the excerpts from the interviews conducted with Senegalese immigrants who live in Italy. Pap Khouma is introduced as “a privileged interlocutor” in his role of “a young Senegalese writer who has been dealing with the problems connected with immigration for several years” (1994: 8). In addition to the material gathered from the interviews with the rest of the participants, a number of lengthier interviews with Pap Khouma are inserted in between the sections. Not the only study of this kind,<sup>78</sup> that incorporates

77 Mengozzi (2013: 111) also comments on the necessity of studying the interrelationship between these two groups of texts, although she does not develop this argument further.

78 *Nato in Senegal* was supposed to be the first volume in the series that would be dedicated to the most significant immigrant communities in Italy. I found only one more book in the same series, very

sociological research with the intention of attempting to create “a dialogue with people who are far too seldom called to present their point of view publicly” (10), it can be read together with, or as an extension or a necessary supplement, to *I Was an Elephant Salesman*. The figure of Pap Khouma in this case already functions as a bridge between a novel of immigration and a preliminary field-study carried out by sociologists. This combined reading helps underline the challenges encountered both by the authors of the novel and the sociologists dealing with the topic of immigration. These challenges, to a large extent, concerned (and still concern) finding the best possible way of representing dramatic human experience.

The concern with this challenge is likewise familiar to Luigi Perrone, the author of *Porte chiuse. Culture e tradizioni africane nelle storie di vita degli immigrati* (*Closed Doors. African Cultures and Traditions in Immigrant Life-Stories*, 2003 [1995]). This volume, first published in 1995 with a second edition in 2003, is the result of a research study performed by a group of sociologists in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This research study, like *Born in Senegal*, was carried out while the first fictions of immigration were being published in Italy, with only a few years in between its publication and the publication of the first male fictions of immigration. The group of sociologists in question set themselves the task of studying the most recent trends in migratory dynamics in Italy. They were especially interested in immigrants with African origins (as the title highlights) who had recently come to settle in Italy. In their research the scholars used interviews with African immigrants. These interviews were then incorporated into the book in the form of monologues that presented individual life-stories.<sup>79</sup> These monologues or life-stories are preceded by the introduction written by Perrone, in which he comments on the monologue we are about to read. He picks out the most significant parts of the monologue and uses them to provide the reader with some information, as in the following example:

For Abdou, as for many immigrants, especially the young ones, this is the first true work experience and the impact is not the softest one. He discovers that he is not

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similar in its format to the first one, dedicated to the Moroccan community (Bruno Ventre 1995).

<sup>79</sup> The second edition has a new concluding chapter by the author in which he also tells us what happened to some of the people he had interviewed for the first edition of the book.

particularly tough or resistant: 'I worked for one day only, because it was extremely hard work and I already felt sick. In Morocco I had never had such a job, the only job I had was to sell used clothes in a small market in Casablanca.' (160).

In this passage the author comments on Abdou's first work experience and makes conclusions as regards the situation of the job market for young, recently arrived immigrants. After this introduction with Perrone's comments we get to read Adbou's monologue in full. It goes on for almost fourteen pages in which the reader receives information on Adbou's childhood, on his reasons for coming to Italy, on his first and later work experiences once in Italy, as well as his own general reflections on his culture, religion, country and family. It is a first-person narration and a number of episodes described by Adbou are very similar to those included in the male fictions of immigration presented above. Overall, *Porte chiuse* gives us another good example of the network composed both of fiction and non-fictional works of which the early and later fictions of immigration make part.

An important project that lies at the cross-roads between the sociological studies of the phenomenon of immigration in the early 1990s and the fictions of immigration that I have analysed in this chapter is the book series *Mappamondi (Globes)*, which was launched in 1991 by the publishing house Sinnos, based in Rome. The initial scope of this particular series was to tell life-stories of immigrants, some of which were published in bilingual format, targeting an audience of younger schoolchildren. In fact, on the back cover of the very first books of the series you could read the following lines:

People who sell lighters, clean the windscreens at the traffic-lights. Salesmen of elephants, cleaning ladies from the Philippines. Cooks from Egypt and women from Cape Verde. The Moroccans and the Albanian. Chinese wooden sticks and the mosques. Gullit's dreads and One Thousand and One Nights. The Orient is knocking at the door. Also on that of the school and of the library.

The Mappamondi books are book for schoolchildren who have classmates from abroad. But they are also books for schoolchildren from abroad who have Italian classmates.<sup>80</sup>

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80 The first three books of the series had both of these paragraphs on the book cover. Starting from Mappamondi 4 the first paragraph was taken out and replaced with: "Bilingual books written by immigrant authors for Italian schoolchildren who have classmates from abroad and for schoolchildren from abroad who have Italian classmates: books that are bridges between stories, languages, traces of other cultures."

As such, the books were meant to tell life-stories of people from different countries who have recently immigrated to Italy and be used for didactic purposes by school teachers. Bearing in mind the target audience, the life-stories had to be rendered in a simple, accessible form. What distinguished this book series from the very beginning is that the stories were presented in the bilingual format, in Italian and the language of the country of origin of the immigrant. The first book, however, was not, as the following ones, authored by an immigrant writer. *Io sono filippino (I am Filipino, 1991)* is authored by Vinicio Ongini, a teacher who was also the project creator of the *Mappamondi* series. Very much like the second book, *Noi veniamo dall'Albania (We Come from Albania, Chiaramonte 1992)*, it contains very short and simple stories, made to seem as if they had been written by one of the immigrant schoolchildren, in the first part of the book. The other parts contain information on the country in question, basic data on its geography, history and culture, together with recipes, short selections from the national literature as well as a bibliography and a list of useful contact addresses.

Quite significantly for my investigation, in 2003 Igiaba Scego published a bilingual (Italian, with translation into Somali language) novel entitled *La nomade che amava Alfred Hitchcock (The Nomad Who Loved Alfred Hitchcock)* as part of the *Mappamondi* series. In this book Scego tells the life-story of her own mother, from the birth in a nomadic tribe in Somali until immigration to Italy. The book, just as other texts in the series, contains historical, geographical information on Somalia. It also introduces the young reader to the aspects of specific cultural traditions of the country and even discusses the practice of female genital mutilations. The last part of the book takes place in Italy and features Scego herself. In fact, Scego's own perspective is given on the episodes in which she documents racist attacks she had been subjected to as a black schoolgirl in Italy in the 1980s. One year later, in 2004, the same publishing house, Sinnos, also printed Scego's first novel *Rhoda*, which, however, was not part of the *Mappamondi* series. In Chapter Five, in my analysis of Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono (My Home is Where I am, 2010)* I will bring up again the question of continuity between all of the author's four book-length works, starting with *La nomade che amava Alfred Hitchcock* (2003), *Rhoda* (2004), *Oltre Babilonia* (2008) as well as Scego's most recent 2010 work..

The *Mappamondi* series was a successful project, with over twenty books published, some of which went through several editions. It can be said that the project has changed significantly in time, by expanding its target audience and producing more complex and dense narratives. This attention to the phenomenon of immigration from the didactic point of view already as early as the beginning of the 1990s is further evidence of the attention paid to this phenomenon at different levels within Italian society. This attention, in fact, has contributed to making the textual network of fictions of immigration and related texts more broad and diversified.

## **2.5 Tradition, Innovation and Hybridisation**

The main objective in this chapter was to delineate the specificities of the emergence of the genre of fictions of immigration in Italy in the early 1990s. I have closely analysed several texts which represent the early male and female fictions of immigration respectively. The close readings demonstrate that the coincidence of these texts with the start of major social transformation in Italy, as well as their thematic focus on migration and unique narrative solutions, justifies their inclusion in the new, for the Italian context, genre of fictions of immigration.

The initial configuration of this genre in the Italian context was characterised by strong attachment to certain models of immigrant experience and its representation in the male novels of migration, while texts written by female authors showed how these formulaic patterns could be reconfigured and the genre itself diversified. In the previous section I have expanded on the traditional corpus of the first fictions of immigration in order to provide a fuller contextualisation by discussing texts that blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, presenting immigrant life-stories in innovative ways. The non-fictional sources, as well as books targeted at specific audiences, such as children and young adults, represent an important part of the contextualisation of Italian fictions of immigration. In the next chapter I will move on to provide a theoretical background for the concept of hybridisation and build up a methodological toolkit that will be applied in my analysis of contemporary hybrid fictions of immigration.

### **3 Hybridisation as a Conceptual Tool: Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Insights**

In the previous chapter I explored the processes that led to the emergence and configuration of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration in the 1990s. My aim was to investigate the influence of the intra- as well as extra-literary factors that have had a determining impact on the dynamics of production and publication of the early male and female fictions of immigration. I also attempted to shed light on the embeddedness of the early fictions of immigration within a larger network of sociological studies and children and young adult's literature devoted to the topic of immigration and published during the same period. As the textual examples given in Chapter Two demonstrated, the genre of fictions of immigration functions well as a generic super-term that incorporates several narrative models that emerged in the early stages of the development of this genre. My aim in the following chapters will be to shed light on the continuity, on the one hand, of contemporary fictions of immigration with these first models in terms of generic and linguistic modes and, on the other hand, on the ruptures and innovations that characterise the more recent texts.

These ruptures, as I will argue, are best analysed by employing hybridisation as the main conceptual tool in my investigation. By drawing on a number of theoretical framework which will be introduced in the individual sections of this chapter, I will be able to devise a methodological toolkit that will be used in the close readings of a selection of contemporary fictions of immigration. As I will show, the high degree of textual hybridisation in contemporary fictions of immigration, which manifests itself on several levels, has to be investigated in its interrelationship with the exploration and challenging of the dominant notion of Italianness performed in these texts. It is precisely the possibility of exploring the interrelationship between the phenomena of social and textual hybridisation which has been a deciding factor in my choice to work with the concept of hybridisation in this dissertation. In the present chapter I will start by giving a brief overview of the history of the use of the concept in the fields of

Literary and Cultural Studies and proceed by exploring individual levels on which textual hybridisation manifests itself specifically in contemporary Italian fictions of immigration.

### 3.1 A Brief History of Hybridisation in Literary and Cultural Studies

In the course of the twentieth century the concept of hybridisation has been fruitfully applied to study the interaction between cultures, as well as interactions between different groups in a given society.<sup>81</sup> Scholars from a wide range of social sciences have investigated and interpreted the processes of cultural transformation with the help of this versatile conceptual tool, in spite of its recognised ambiguity and controversial nature. hybridisation as a term and as a concept is often used interchangeably with hybridity. In the fields of Cultural and Literary Studies this concept is associated most prominently with the contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi K. Bhabha on the topic.

Andreas Ackermann (2012: 5-26) presents an outline of the history of the concept of hybridity/hybridisation<sup>82</sup> by delineating the main trajectories of its application. Initially a biological conceptualisation, since being adopted by social sciences the concept has gradually gained a strong cultural and political meaning. Following Robert J.C. Young, Ackermann points to the underlying racist connotation of the term, which, from the second half of the nineteenth century was used to denote 'half-breeds', that is people born of mixed unions (2012: 6). The connection to the original biological

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81 Scientific use of the concept is traceable further back in time, to discoveries in natural sciences in the second half of the eighteenth century when botanical experiments with cross-breeding of plants started to be performed. This technique of cross-breeding, named hybridisation, was successfully used in the work of such important natural scientists as Joseph Gottlieb Kölreuter. Kölreuter, in fact, suggested one of the founding principles of hereditary transmission in plants by establishing that each parent makes an equal contribution to the formation of the characteristics of common offspring. It is important to trace the origins of the scientific use of the concept to botany given that the discoveries related to the morphology of plant reproduction greatly influenced the later theories of both Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel. For example, the foundational volume *Versuche und Beobachtungen über die Bastarderzeugung im Pflanzenreich* published by Carl Friedrich Gaertner in 1849, which provided the first detailed study of the mechanisms of plant reproduction and plant hybridisation exercised great influence on the work of the two scientists. Gallerani (2012: 22- 31) provides a detailed historical outline of the use of the concept of hybridisation in scientific disciplines and its subsequent adoption in the realm of cultural and literary studies. Gallerani discusses contributions such as Darwin's use of the term in his seminal *Origins of Species*, as well as the impact made by reflections on cultural hybridity in Nestor Garcia Canclini's 1989 work *Culturas Híbridas*.

82 The two concepts are used as synonyms in the essays of this edited volume (Stockhammer 2012), which sets itself the task of exploring the use of the concept(s) across a wide range of disciplines.

conceptualization that stressed the sterility of hybrid plants and animals, provided fertile ground for the racist theories on the negative outcomes of interracial unions. Hybridity quickly started to function as the negative counterpart of purity, explicitly associated with the ideal of racial whiteness and high Western-European civilisation and culture.

In the Italian context among others, the racist ideas on miscegenation found their concrete expression in the promulgation of specific laws banning interracial relationships during the fascist period (cf. section 3.4). Ackermann further highlights the fact that in spite of the later re-evaluation of the mechanisms of cross-breeding and hybridity in natural sciences, the strength of the concept's negative connotations in the humanities did not diminish significantly in the course of the twentieth century. In the rest of the article Ackermann traces the usage of the term to the work of sociologists such as, for example, Robert Ezra Park, together with a number of prominent anthropologists. “A strategic re-positioning of the term hybridity”, occurred, according to Ackermann, in “the 1980s, in the area of the so-called post-colonial studies” (2012: 11). Here, Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha are identified as the three key figures who contributed to the (re-)awakening of the academic interest in the concept. Ackermann demonstrates how fruitful Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of intentional hybridity has revealed itself to be once re-elaborated by Homi Bhabha and applied to the colonial situation (2012: 13).<sup>83</sup>

In my choice of hybridisation, rather than hybridity, as the conceptual tool for my investigation, I follow Nünning/Schwanecke who explain that:

[i]n the realm of literary studies and cultural theory, 'hybridisation' usually refers to the dynamics and processes involved in the mixing of genres or other cultural phenomena, while the term 'hybridity' typically designates the results of these processes (Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 122)

I find that, specifically for the investigation of contemporary fictions of immigration, hybridisation, that as a term stresses the dynamic, ongoing, unfinished components of processes of social as well as textual transformations and innovations, is more suitable as a conceptual tool than the more static notion of hybridity. In the section on generic

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83 In Ackermann's concluding paragraphs, hybridity/hybridisation is presented as a fruitful, albeit one of the many analytical tools that may be applied in the investigation of the processes of cultural transformation (2012: 21-23).

hybridisation, I will explore in more detail the conceptual distinctions to be made between hybridity and hybridisation, as well as my decision to give preference to the latter, which owes much to recent work in the field of Genre Theory that specifically investigates the potential of hybridisation as a catalyst of generic change.

### **3.2 Strategies and Functions of Linguistic Hybridisation in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration**

In the discussion of the great parodic literature of the Middle Ages, Mikhail Bakhtin investigates the phenomenon he designates as “the problem of the intentional hybrid” (2008: 75, emphasis orig.). This intentional linguistic hybridity of the parodic text is, in Bakhtin's analysis, achieved through the dialogic juxtaposition of two languages, the former being the parodied language and the latter the language that parodies the former. These two languages merge and thus can be thought of as “crossed with each other” (ibid.)<sup>84</sup> In his analysis of the specific dialogical nature of the relationship between the two languages that participate in creating “an intentional dialogized hybrid”, Bakhtin stresses the fact that this “is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other” (ibid.: 76).

The subversive potential of such dialogues between two individual speaking subjects is a phenomenon that is also rendered in the texts in my corpus by specific techniques of linguistic hybridisation hence I believe Bakhtin's insights into these processes to be an important starting-point for the analysis of language(s) in contemporary fictions of immigration. Moreover, Bakhtin's fundamental notion of heteroglossia, his identification of the struggle between the centralising or unifying tendency that privileges the dominant literary language, and the decentralising tendency that sees the

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84 Bakhtin's analyses this process in the following way: “Every type of parody or travesty, every work 'with conditions attached,' with irony, enclosed in intonational quotation marks, every type of indirect word is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid – but a hybrid compounded of two orders: one linguistic (a single languages) and one stylistic. In actual fact, in parodic discourse two styles, two 'languages' (both intra-lingual) come together and to a certain extent are crossed with each other: the language being parodied (for example, the language of the heroic poem) and the language that parodies (low prosaic language, familiar conversational language, the language of the realistic genres, 'normal' language, 'healthy' literary language as the author of the parody conceived it). This second parodying language, against whose background the parody is constructed and perceived, does not – if it is a strict parody – enter as such into the parody itself, but is invisibly present in it.” (2008: 75)

prominence of extraliterary languages, which reflect multi-level linguistic stratification,<sup>85</sup> can help shed light on the communicative exchange that takes place in the novels and in their common attempt to explore the meaning of Italianness in a moment of major social transformation.

### **3.2.1 The Use of Language(s): Re-visiting Linguistic Heterogeneity and the Italian Language Question**

The textual examples provided in the second chapter of this dissertation and devoted to the early fictions of immigration in the Italian context demonstrate the preference accorded in these texts to a standard literary language, often simplified in terms of syntactic structures and limited vocabulary. Whether or not specific linguistic solutions are ascribable to the intervention of native-speaking co-authors or editors, it is appropriate to point, as I have done in my analysis, to the specific function of these kinds of linguistic choices. In the conclusions I made regarding specific linguistic solutions employed in the early fictions of immigration, I stressed how redolent these choices are of the mechanistic, automated routine of an immigrant's quotidian existence these texts depict. This is especially prominent when it comes to the first male fictions of immigration (cf. section 2.2). A somewhat greater degree of linguistic experimentation, for example, in *Princesa* (cf. section 2.3), can be indicated as a tentative forerunner to the later migrant writers' attempts to reconfigure the genre by performing acts of linguistic hybridisation.

The choice of standard written Italian in the early fictions of immigration can also be related to the thematic content of the works on a different level. The protagonists of the first texts, in fact, manifested a lack of both knowledge of and concern with the particular linguistic situation in Italy, given that they focused predominantly on the experience of immigration, often in circumstances that severely limited their contact with Italians outside professional contexts. Interestingly, it is mainly in the first male fictions of immigration that the topic of language is thematised and receives more

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85 This stratification is to be observed not only on the formal level, as in the presence of dialects, but on the socio-ideological level, in the presence of “languages belonging to professions, to genres, languages peculiar to particular generations, etc.” (Bakhtin 2008: xix).

attention, if compared to the first female texts.<sup>86</sup>

Quite on the contrary, the complexity of linguistic variety in Italy starts to gain increasing attention in contemporary fictions of immigration.<sup>87</sup> The discovery or awareness of the presence of the dialects, for example, is a very particular feature in this later production, rendered, for example, by inclusion of linguistically idiosyncratic characters. Italian linguistic complexity, both in its diachronic and synchronic dimensions, is a multifaceted phenomenon which continues to receive an extensive amount of scholarly attention.<sup>88</sup> Some aspects of this area of study are particularly relevant for the discussion of linguistic hybridisation in fictions of immigration. In very general terms, Italian as a shared national language only started to establish itself only in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> The impact of migratory processes, both internal migrations and Italian emigration abroad on this rapid linguistic development, was first analysed in Tullio De Mauro's seminal study published in 1963. The

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86 For example, Parati (2005: 175-176) discusses the author/protagonist of Fortunato/Methani's *Immigrato* (1990) whose excellent command of Italian becomes an obstacle in his interactions with Italians, who are puzzled and alarmed by an encounter with an immigrant who does not conform to the stereotype of a person with poor linguistic skills. As a result, Methnani has to employ mimetic strategies of survival and learn how to speak broken Italian. In *VE* (Khouma/Pivetat 1990) we find testimonies of a different kind of linguistic mimetism, visible the protagonist's dealings with the police officers. Khouma's protagonist learns quickly that the communication with "the Uncles", the name he uses for the policemen, demands a strict linguistic protocol that limits his input to a number of well-rehearsed, short sentences used to express his agreement and compliance with whatever requests are made of him. Ceola (2011: 132-133) draws attention to an interesting episode from Bouchane/De Girolamo/Miccione's *CA* (1991), in which the protagonist is asked to teach his native language, Arabic, to an Italian couple. This is a case in which the roles of linguistic informant and student are reversed. Moreover, an interesting parallel can be drawn between this episode and the novel by Tahar Lamri that will be discussed in Chapter Four.

87 Giulio Lepschy (2002) gives a brief but detailed summary of how complex the Italian linguistic situation is. In the second chapter of his book he discusses the terminological issues relevant to the investigation of standard Italian, as opposed to Italian dialects and minority languages (35-48), while his third chapter illustrates an additional level of this complexity by introducing the concept of 'popular Italian' (49-70). In a more recent study, Michele Loporcaro (2009) argues that local varieties of standard Italian, or 'secondary dialects', have to be included in the already complex Italian linguistic model.

88 The so called *questione della lingua*, the language question in the Italian context, has been discussed throughout centuries, since the appearance of Dante's 1308 *De vulgari eloquentia*, which is considered to be the first sketch of Italian linguistic and literary history. Renzi (2012), Dardano (2011), Frasnedi/Sebastiani (2010), Trifone (2010, 2009), Loporcaro (2009), Lo Piparo/Ruffino (2005), Vanvolsem (2007), Serianni (2002) present the most recent strands of research in the subject.

89 Cf. De Mauro (2001: 144) who comments on the extraordinary rapidity of the processes of linguistic transformation of the period between 1950 and 2000 that saw an unprecedented closing of linguistic and cultural gaps between various social classes and geographical regions in Italy.

recognition of the connection between such fundamental social phenomena as migration and urbanisation, together with the spread of mass media, on the linguistic developments in Italy has led scholars such as Mari D'Agostino (2005) to investigate of possible influences of recent incoming migratory flows on the future of the Italian language.<sup>90</sup> Writing more recently, Lorenzo Renzi (2012) draws attention to the processes of social transformation triggered by the ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of Italian society. While any forecasts as to the future of a national language are indeed difficult to make, Renzi hypothesizes a possible future scenario in which the traditional Italian dichotomy between standard Italian (or, to be more accurate, one of its regional varieties) and local dialect is gradually replaced by one in which the latter is substituted for a foreign language passed on by immigrant parents to the next generation of Italian-speaking children.

This complicated triangular relationship between one's own or one's parents' mother tongue, standard Italian, and an Italian dialect is, in fact, represented and discussed in the case-studies of my corpus. The attention to this particular dimension of Italian linguistic hybridity, which has been reflected on as a phenomenon throughout the history of Italian literature, including in the most contemporary period,<sup>91</sup> can be identified as a novelty introduced in contemporary fictions of immigration that fulfils an important narrative function. This function is related to the necessity to explore the intrinsically hybrid nature of an Italian national identity that has come to incorporate multiple linguistic, cultural and ethnic elements throughout the history of the Italian peninsula. This exploration, as my textual examples will show, often takes the

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90 Barni/Villarini (2001) is an example of an early study of linguistic issues experienced by recent immigrants in Italy. It also contains a contribution by Menna that deals with the linguistic question in the texts published by immigrant authors in the period between 1990 and 2000 in some detail. More recent contributions on the topic include Grassi (2012), Diadori (2011), while D'Agostino (2005), quoted above, is interested specifically in the study of immigrants' learning of Italian dialects, which seems to be a particularly interesting, as well as practically challenging, topic in the field of Italian language acquisition (cf. Cuzzolin 2001).

91 In his seminal contribution to the study of dialectal literature, Herman W. Haller highlights the fact that in the panorama of European national literatures Italy is the only country to possess a double canon, one in standard Italian, and the other one in various dialects, both of which have a centuries-long tradition of interacting and confronting each other, and thereby shaping a uniquely Italian plurilinguistic literary tradition (2002: 13). Anna Bogaro's recent study sheds light on the contemporary developments of dialectal literature, including a chapter on Italian migration literature (2010).

protagonists far back in time, with attention focusing on the role of the peninsula as a perennial crossroads in the history of the Mediterranean region.<sup>92</sup> The inclusion of dialects and foreign words, however, does not only aim at establishing a connection with the tradition of Italian indigenous hybridity. As I will explain in the following subsection, a more general metacritical attitude represents another distinguishing characteristic in contemporary fictions of immigration.

### **3.2.2 Metacritical Reflections: Thematic Nuclei and Narrative Strategies in Discussions on the Role of Language**

Marion Gymnich's ground-breaking 2007 study of postcolonial and intercultural novels in English provides valuable insights on the mechanisms of representation and the employment of specific narrative strategies which can be used to engage in a critical confrontation with language. Metacritical reflections, which Gymnich identifies as one of the distinguishing features of contemporary postcolonial and intercultural literature, are defined in the study in the following way:

Unter dem Begriff 'metasprachliche Reflexionen' werden in der vorliegenden Studie sämtliche Äußerungen der Erzählinstanz oder einer Figur bzw. figurale Bewusstseinsvorgänge subsumiert, in denen die Sprache, ein Aspekt der Sprache oder der Umgang mit Sprache thematisiert wird (Gymnich 2007: 2).

Gymnich then stresses the fact that such a thematic engagement with the topic of language in specifically postcolonial and intercultural literatures can encompass all kinds of language-related comments or particular linguistic features, even of a seemingly 'neutral' nature.<sup>93</sup> These, as the scholar highlights, represent a critical attitude towards language and its role in society that can only be detected by paying specific

92 This aspect of Italian history was duly acknowledged and highlighted in the title *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, chosen by Graziella Parati (1999) for the first anthology of the texts of Italian migration literature in the English language.

93 Here Gymnich takes an example from a Chinese-American novel of migration in which protagonists make such “seemingly neutral comments” as remarks inserted in dialogues in which the narrator specifies what language has been used by the speaker (e.g., 'she said in English', 'she said in Chinese'). These accompanying remarks, as Gymnich emphasises, have to be interpreted as metacritical reflections that convey information on “die Kommunikationsstrategie des *code switching*, die in bilingualen Sprachgemeinschaften u.a. im Zusammenhang mit der Aushandlung von Gruppenidentität steht” (Gymnich 2007: 3, emphasis orig.).

attention to such instances of thematic enactment.<sup>94</sup>

This confrontation, this problematic relationship between speakers, language, and society can, as the scholar demonstrates, be conveyed in the employment of specific narrative strategies. Among these Gymnich lists the insertion of foreign words, the use of regional and other varieties of the standard language, as well as specific sociolects, and the representation of poor language command, together with more sophisticated strategies of creative language use, such as the introduction of neologisms.

As I have shown in the previous sub-section, some of the narrative strategies of metacriticality in Gymnich's definition are also observable in contemporary Italian fictions of immigration. Moreover, a strong degree of metacriticality, is further accentuated by the inclusion of metanarrative comments, or even a dedicated metanarrative framework, as in Tahar Lamri's text, proving the centrality given to reflections on the (multiple) role(s) of language(s) in these works. The fact that it is possible to identify multiple ways in which a confrontation with language takes place in contemporary fictions of immigration positions metacriticality as a compulsory, as well as innovative, distinguishing feature of contemporary fictions of immigration. Moreover, as I will show in section 4.3, metacriticality has also to be discussed as one of the catalysts of generic change in the case of Italian fictions of immigration.

As is the case with the inclusion of dialects or dialectal elements, the employment of other metacritical narrative strategies whose function is to draw the attention to language-related issues, varies in the two novels that display the highest degree of linguistic hybridisation in the corpus (cf. Chapter Four). What is common, however, to the majority of my case-studies is the strong focus on the role of language in nation-building and as a component of establishing one's national belonging.

Marion Gymnich also investigates the connection between the presence of metacritical reflections and the choice to use and hybridise specific genres. Processes of generic hybridisation described as “decolonizing genre” (cf. Lima 1993) can, according to Gymnich's study, be traced in the breaching and renewing of traditional conventions

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94 Gymnich specifies this in the following way: “Der Begriff metasprachliche Reflexionen bezieht sich im Folgenden also auf alle Formen der Thematisierung von Sprache, umfasst jedoch nicht metanarrative Kommentare, d.h. Äußerungen der Erzählinstanz, in denen 'der Prozess des Erzählens durch den Erzähler thematisiert wird' (Nünning 2001: 133)” (Gymnich 2007: 3)

of such established genres as the historical novel, the novel of migration and the *Bildungsroman* (2007: 144-276).<sup>95</sup> The re-negotiation of generic conventions performs a fundamental function in critically revising European literary traditions. An important, if not crucial role in the success of such a revision is carried out by the employment of specific linguistic strategies. For example, in the revisionist historical novels analysed by Gymnich confrontation between the languages of the colonisers vs. colonised acquires centrality and is both thematised and strongly criticised. Likewise, the textual presence of indigenous languages, in the use of specific words or linguistic references, is a significant component of the metacritical dimension of the text. In the Chinese-American novels of migration discussed by Gymnich these texts' engagement with language-related issues is identified by the scholar as the distinguishing generic trait of this literary production.<sup>96</sup> The revised genre of Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, lends itself particularly well as a generic form in which problems related to the particular linguistic situation in the region are enacted (ibid.: 15)

These insights into the interrelationship between the use of particular, hybridised generic forms and specific linguistic strategies in English-language postcolonial and intercultural novels provide an indispensable starting-point for the investigation of various levels of textual hybridisation in contemporary Italian fictions of immigration. Various strategies of metacriticality identified by Marion Gymnich will be examined in the analytical chapters of this dissertation. The following section will be devoted to the theoretical discussion of generic hybridisation, as well as the presentation of the

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95 Cf. Rupp who notes: “[This] question of the hybridisation of traditional genre patterns clearly deserves closer attention still. The bildungsroman is a classic example of this type of inquiry. It has been discussed in terms of 'decolonizing genre' (Lima 1993) in a larger bid to challenge genre as a manifestation of the Western canon, or in terms of the 'novel of transformation' (Stein 2004) in a black British context.” (2010: 38)

96 Several trajectories of engagement with the various linguistic aspects of migratory experience are taken into consideration in the analysis of the texts: “Die Erfahrung der Migration und die Konfrontation mit einer fremden soziokulturellen Umgebung, so betonen chinesisch-amerikanische Romane, besitzen stets auch eine sprachliche Dimension. Die Fremdheit der neuen Umgebung (aus der Sicht der Einwanderer) ebenso wie die Fremdheit des Heimatlandes der MigrantInnen (aus der Sicht der US-AmerikanerInnen, aber auch der in den USA aufgewachsenen Generationen) werden in der Sprache manifest [...] Auch die Gegenüberstellung verschiedener Generationen im Migrationsroman hat eine sprachliche Komponente, da die sprachliche Kompetenz der Generationen in der Regel sehr deutlich divergiert – in die Realität wie auch in der Darstellung der Generationenproblematik in der Literatur.” (Gymnich 2007: 206)

methodology I will employ in the analysis of processes of generic re-configuration in contemporary Italian fictions of immigration.

### **3.3 A Catalyst of Generic Change: Analysing Generic Hybridisation in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration**

The high degree of textual hybridisation which characterises the present stage of the development of the genre of fictions of immigration, points to a correlation between the developments of the genre in the Italian context and the ongoing social transformation of Italy. More specifically, generic diversification, complemented by or achieved with the help of innovative linguistic solutions as well as a strong thematic focus on cultural hybridisation, are a means of representing and reflecting on the changing dynamics of Italian society brought about by immigration.

The first generic sub-forms, as illustrated in Chapter Two, followed a number of well-established models in migration literatures, such as the (semi)autobiographical novel of migration, the first-person diary of migration, the *Bildungsroman* or the revisionist historical novel blended with the *Bildungsroman*, as in Salwa Salem's case (cf. section 2.3). Such generic configurations in the earliest stage of the development of the genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context could be explained by a number of intra-, as well as extra-literary factors (see section 2.1). The engagement of contemporary fictions of immigration in the debate on critical issues of hybridisation in Italian society and urgent questions related to the issue of national belonging of new minority groups in Italy reflect the continuity of the dialogical relationship between this particular genre and contemporary social reality. More specifically, the generic diversification which is seeing the introduction of sub-genres such as crime fiction, journalistic and academic writing, young adult novels into the genre, to name just a few, can be regarded as a second key feature of the most recent stage of its development. Moreover, it is important to note that in most case-studies analysed in the following chapters, this generic diversification is achieved through different strategies of hybridisation.

Christin Galster gives the following definition of hybrid genre:

Derived from the Latin word *hybrid* ('having a mixed character, based on heterogeneous or incongruous sources'), the term 'hybrid genre' is used to designate works of art which transgress genre boundaries by combining characteristic traits and elements of diverse literary and non-literary genres. (Galster 2008: 226).

The scholar especially stresses the potential contribution of hybridisation in transforming narrative fiction through its breaking and blurring of generic boundaries:

From its very beginning, narrative fiction has drawn widely from literary and non-literary discourses, adapting them to its specific historical and formal needs and often importing them unchanged into its own narrative structure [...]. Hybrid novels [...] combine, transform, and subvert the conventions of several narrative sub-genres; break down the boundaries between fiction, poetry, and drama; import non-literary discourses and text-types; and employ narrative strategies that strive to imitate the organising principles of painting, music, and film. (Ibid.: 227).

It is worth noting that Mikhail Bakhtin was the first to characterise the novel as “an inherently hybrid genre” (Fludernik 2008: 228) in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>97</sup> However, it is since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth-century that a major paradigmatic shift towards an ever-increasing degree of hybridisation in narrative fiction has become observable (cf. Nünning 1997). This paradigmatic shift has been defined by David Herman as part of a more general “cultural move towards hybridisation” in contemporary literature (cf. Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 117). The salient trends of the phenomenon of literary hybridisation have become prominent, for example, in the booming field of postmodernist historical fiction in the British context, a development that started to take place at the end of the 1960s (cf. Nünning 1997). For the Italian context, it is sufficient to quote Umberto Eco's 1980 *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*), as well as the more recent phenomenon of the New Italian Epic (cf. Ming 2009), which point to similar postmodernist developments on the Italian literary scene.

While Fracassa (2013), for example, emphasises the preference displayed by many Italian migrant writers for the technique of multiperspectivity, whose employment is

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97 Cf. also Nünning/Schwanecke who write: “From its very beginnings, the novel was never a ‘pure’ or unmixed genre but rather a new generic hybrid that was characterized by a strong proclivity to generic mixtures and that relied heavily on the combination of the conventions and repertoires of popular genres” (2013: 118). In the second section of this chapter the scholars provide an extensive overview on the paradigmatic role of novel as a hybrid genre (ibid.: 117-121).

characteristic of the most recent postmodernist and general cultural and literary tendencies of hybridisation, my investigation of contemporary hybrid fictions of immigration starts from a different premise. My hypothesis rests upon the conviction that contemporary fictions of immigration set themselves the task of re-negotiating Italian national identity by employing strategies of generic hybridisation. Hence the necessity to pay particular attention to the processes of generic hybridisation is determined by the intrinsic contrasting connection between “the notion of a hybrid identity, which is fluid, unstable, incessantly in search of and transforming itself” (Galster 2008: 227)<sup>98</sup> and the rigidity of the mainstream, dominant and exclusivist idea of Italianness. In this light, hybridisation and the re-configuration of generic models that have become associated with the genre of fictions of immigration can be interpreted as a textual manifestation of the wish to challenge this static notion of Italianness.

Nünning and Schwanecke's recent contribution to the exploration of hybridisation's potential as a catalyst for generic change represents an excellent starting point for my investigation of the processes of generic hybridisation in contemporary fictions of immigration (cf. Nünning/Schwanecke 2013). As the scholars emphasise, it is important to acknowledge such terminological distinctions as that between “hybridity as a basic characteristic of a genre and hybridity as a narrative strategy” (125). Following Christin Galster, Nünning and Schwanecke establish that

the former is a quality inherent in the genre, while the latter is a transgeneric technique of storytelling, which can be applied by any author at different times to various works in order to achieve numerous effects. (Ibid.)

It is precisely the proliferation of such strategies of hybridisation in contemporary fiction that lies at the origin of the emergence of new generic forms, or sub-generic forms, as exemplified by the case of Italian fictions of immigration. These strategies of hybridisation, as Nünning and Schwanecke rightly point out, cannot be exhaustively accounted for, since the developments in contemporary fiction have demonstrated that their range seems to be unlimited. Yet, a particular attention should be paid to what can be defined as “a newly emerging, special type of the novel” that is “the 'hybrid' novel”

98 Galster is the author of a 2001 monograph entitled *Hybrides Erzählen und hybride Identität im britischen Roman der Gegenwart* in which she investigates the connection between textual hybridisation and the notion of hybrid identity in contemporary British fiction.

(ibid.), which can be distinguished, primarily, by a kind of “distinct (sub-)generic 'unclassifiability'” (ibid.), that has already been highlighted by Galster (quoted above).<sup>99</sup> Changes triggered in the genre system by processes of hybridisation, of which the emergence of new generic forms such as the 'hybrid' novel represents one outcome have to be studied, as Nünning and Schwanecke highlight, in the broader perspective of “coming to terms with the cultural dynamics of generic change” (ibid.: 131). According to the hypothesis presented in their contribution, an explanation of the cultural dynamics of generic change has, first and foremost, to take into consideration the three stages of a hybrid genre's development. In the first stage, a hybrid work of art is perceived as 'deviating' from any stable generic mental construct. In the second stage, with the appearance of a number of similar works, a process of 'consolidation' is initiated, which eventually leads to the 'conventionalisation' of a new hybrid form (ibid.)<sup>100</sup>

In order to be able to come to terms with the ways in which hybridisation can function as a catalyst of generic change, Nünning and Schwanecke provide a detailed, if provisional,<sup>101</sup> typology of the most important hybridisation strategies in

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99 The scholars provide several reasons that account for the impossibility of arriving at a more precise definition of this new type of novel: “Firstly, the micro- and macro-systems are so complex and the concrete hybrid artefacts so numerous and diverse that they are not even remotely graspable and '(re)constructable' in their entirety; there will always be instances and cases of generically hybrid novels theorists fail to include to their definition [...] Secondly, different ways of theoretical conceptualization may conflict and exclude each other [...] Thirdly, literary theory must always lag behind practice. New hybrid novels are developed almost by the minute, not only in printed but also in digital form” (Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 126)

100 The example made by the scholars here regards the genre of novel: “The evidence provided, for example, in the history of the novel proves that, before a hybrid becomes known as a genre itself (like the novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), the literary industry and its recipients are faced with individual artefacts, with concrete products and textual formations ('textual level') which have not yet been encountered ('cultural-historical level'), which are perceived as new and, thus, 'counter' our experiences ('cognitive level'). These artefacts do not fit our available mental schemas; they 'deviate' from what we know; yet as more and more similar artefacts crop up which share the same (distinctive) features [...], these individual artefacts might be slowly seen – after a 'phase of consolidation' – as representative of a new, hybrid genre. Through 'processes of conventionalisation,' familiarization and canonization from the perspective of the receiving public and its institutions, markers of hybridity, once strongly perceptible, might be neutralized over time and, ultimately, forgotten.” (Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 131). The scholars, of course, acknowledge the possibility of a number of alternative scenarios and moreover stress the fact that the three stages of the generic development are known to follow a spiral-like trajectory, rather than a linear one, “in which the same phases are repeated over and over again at different instances in time” (ibid. 131-132). In this light the genre of fictions of immigrations in the Italian context, as I will show in the analytical chapters of the dissertation, represents a particularly suitable case-study for the analysis of generic change.

101 As the scholars explain, the dynamism of this new generic form is the main reason for the

contemporary fiction, which is of utmost importance for the purpose of the present investigation.

Their work on the typology starts with an important distinction that has to be made between hybridisation as manifested on the paradigmatic versus syntagmatic axes in a work of art. The paradigmatic integration of fictional genres, sub-genres, non-fictional genres or alter-medial categories alone, as Nünning and Schwanecke stress, “does not seem to suffice in 'making' a work of art a hybrid work of art” (ibid.: 127). Only with the integration of the paradigmatic (alter-generic or alter-medial) components on the syntagmatic level is it possible to speak of a truly 'hybrid work of art'.

In developing a methodological toolkit for the analysis of hybrid works of art, Nünning and Schwanecke (2013: 128-130) draw upon three out of the four categories, that Gymnich and Neumann (2007) have indicated as

linked to the formation of a genre and which shape its formation and transformation: (1) a genre's textual level; (2) its cultural and historical dimension; (3) the cognitive factors of their recipients. (Ibid.: 116)<sup>102</sup>

The multi-level analytical set proposed here represents a combination of the typology of five generic types, that can be integrated on the paradigmatic level in a novel,<sup>103</sup> and the categorisation of hybridisation strategies on the syntagmatic levels.<sup>104</sup> As such, for establishing a 'toolkit' for the analysis of hybrid genres presented in Nünning/Schwanecke's contribution the following levels of investigation have to be taken into consideration:

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impossibility of drawing “an exhaustive taxonomy of existing hybrid novels or ways of hybridisation” (ibid. 127).

102 The fourth category, which is also designated as 'the functional', refers to more broad contextual questions that have to be dealt with on a different level of analysis (Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 130).

103 Nünning and Schwanecke here follow Christin Galster and her typology of the five generic types first described in the scholar's 2002 book (Galster 2002: 84-88).

104 The categorisation of hybridisation strategies observable on the different syntagmatic levels was introduced by Klaudia Seibel (2007). This categorisation is particularly useful in establishing the relative degree of hybridity of an artwork. Moreover, to Seibel's original five analytical categories, Nünning and Schwanecke add three more levels (the level of 'linguistic and stylistic texture'; the 'level of narrative texture' and the meta-level of 'textual self-reflexivity', Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 129).

Paradigmatic level:

1. intrageneric mixtures;
2. subgeneric blends;
3. supergeneric interfaces;
4. extra-literary genre crossings;
5. intermedial transgressions.

Syntagmatic categories:

1. The 'textual world' (characters, properties, inventory etc. in the story world) -on this level, if a fusion of elements from different generic sources does not deviate from each other, the degree of hybridisation is perceived as low. In the opposite case, the grade of hybridisation is high
  2. The 'textual structure' level is related to plot patterns. Once again, the smooth integration of different plot types determines weakness of the work's hybridity, which grows, if deviation on this level increases;
  3. On the level of 'textual texture', the degree of compatibility between different haptic materials is assessed: if the form and function of a target genre (e.g., a fictional text) resembles that of a source genre (e.g., a letter), the grade of hybridisation appears as low and vice versa;
  4. The level of 'linguistic and stylistic' texture on which the number of styles and the discrepancy between them account for the work's heterogeneity and lower/higher degree of hybridity;
  5. The 'level of narrative texture' which refers to the possibly hybrid approaches to narration in fiction;
  6. The meta-level of 'textual self-reflexivity' that refers to the combination of metaisation with other kind of hybridisation strategies;
  7. The 'textual dynamics' level refers to the reception of the generic product by the reader. The stress here lies on genre as a cognitive category and a low degree of hybridity is associated with a less frequent necessity to switch between two mental schemata in works that present two or more distinct cognitive genre representations;
  8. With 'textual tagging' it is the link of particular genres to certain social groups and institutions that come under scrutiny, meaning that if boundaries between genres that have been linked by cultural and historical conventions to opposite groups are crossed, the degree of hybridisation is perceived as strong.
- (adapted from Nünning/Schwanecke 2013: 128-130)

Given that the genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context is distinguished by the rapidity with which it established and consolidated itself in the early 1990s, as well as for ever-accelerating tendencies towards diversification through a number of hybridisation strategies, the taxonomy presented by Nünning and Schwanecke can be fruitfully applied to investigate the key trends that characterise the most recent stage of the development of the genre.

Another important trajectory for the investigation of generic diversification in

contemporary fictions of immigration is presented in Jan Rupp's study of black British fiction (2010). Rupp stresses the necessity to apply double perspective in the analysis of “the intertextuality of new genres critically explored, and the intertextuality of the black British genre” (2010: 33).<sup>105</sup> On the one hand, the scholar draws attention to “the dynamic relations between texts (as members of a genre)” (ibid.), i.e., a kind of internal intertextuality which becomes the means to explore the dialogical nature of the relationship between the texts within a given genre. On the other hand, it is the outward intertextuality, traceable especially in the introduction of new genres in the spectrum of more traditional generic models associated with black British fiction in Rupp's case that deserves special attention:

The appropriation of genres into the black British literary corpus and the way they are transformed in the process is a major focus of this study. But this question will also be reversed, in order to ask how these new genres in turn transform the genre of black British literature. There is a self-reflexive engagement within black British fiction of its own formal and thematic range, undertaken from the vantage point of other genres appropriated. Likewise, generic hybridisation, and the way it impacts on generic and literary development, has to be seen as a reciprocal, two-way process. (Ibid.: 38).

As will become evident in the analysis of my case-studies, a similar process designated by Rupp as “a self-reflexive engagement” plays an important role both when it comes to establishing continuities with the generic tradition of Italian fictions of immigration, and in the ways in which the appropriation of previously disregarded traditional generic patterns (such as, for example, crime fiction or journalistic writing) transform the genre of fictions of immigration.

As such, my investigation of generic hybridisation will follow the above-mentioned trajectories, by focusing on the processes of generic hybridisation and the transformative potential of double intertextuality in Jan Rupp's sense. The next section will outline the theoretical framework for my analysis of cultural hybridisation, represented and reflected upon in the case-studies.

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<sup>105</sup> Rupp devotes a dedicated section in his study (“The Genre of and the Genres in: Intertextuality and/versus Genre, and the Example of Black British Fiction”) to the investigation of intertextuality and genre as two distinct heuristic concepts (2010: 33-38).

### **3.4 Reflecting (On), Staging and Boosting Cultural Hybridisation**

In addition to exploring the two main levels of textual hybridisation in contemporary fictions of immigration, the term 'hybridisation' in this study is employed to designate the processes of social transformation that have been taking place in contemporary Italian society since the last decades of the twentieth century (cf. section 1.1). The final dimension of textual hybridisation that I set out to discuss in this section is most closely linked to the thematic, contextual level of contemporary fictions of immigration in which several elements in the textual world (such as characters, settings, etc.) are presented as culturally hybrid in the sense, for example, of protagonists with hyphenated identities. What is more, individual life-stories presented in the novels are embedded in contemporary social reality that sees ongoing social hybridisation as the main challenge for Italian society today. This in turn means that protagonists actively reflect on various aspects of present, as well as the past and the future, cultural and social hybridisation in Italy. This is done, as the textual examples will show, in the form of explicit comments and reflections, as well as by using more covert metanarrative strategies of storytelling.

The (tentative) three-group division of the case-studies has been determined by the relative prevalence of particular perspectives on the problems of contemporary social and cultural hybridisation in Italy and, more specifically, on the question of national belonging and the concept of Italianness. In the following sub-sections I will attempt to explicate the reasons for this tripartite division by shedding light on the central trajectories that the texts follow in their exploration, challenging and re-negotiation of Italianness.

#### **3.4.1 Old Hybridity and New Hybridisation in Today's Encounters**

As I have already hinted, all of the texts in the corpus focus their attention, albeit in very different ways, on a more and more hybrid, that is to say ethnically, linguistically, and culturally heterogeneous, contemporary Italian society. Most of the novels in the corpus, and this is the main reason to insist on the provisional nature of the three-group division, also highlight the fact that the diversity of minority ethnic groups does not in itself represent a novelty for the Italian context. Quite on the contrary, the many

historical references and individual life-stories that bear testimony to the peculiarities of the Italian case which, with its long and troubled history of political fragmentation and relatively recent unification, together with the forgotten histories of emigration, internal migrations and colonialism, is at the heart of many novels in the corpus.

Yet the persistent linguistic fragmentation (cf. section 3.2) that remains among the key distinguishing features of the long tradition of 'indigenous' Italian hybridity is a dimension that also provides opportunity for the exploration of contradictions in the mainstream, dominant notion of Italianness, which the two novels discussed in Chapter Four set out to interrogate. In his skilled close reading of Adrienne Rich's poems (1991), Homi K. Bhabha speaks of "a world rendered restless by its transhistorical memories":

[B]y placing herself at the intersections (and in the interstices) of these narratives [...] Rich emphasises the importance of historical and cultural re-visioning: the process of being subjected to, or the subject of, a particular history 'of one's own' – a *local* history – leaves the poet 'unsatisfied' and anxious about who she is, or what her community can be, in the larger flow of a transnational history. If we look at the relation of cultures in this way, then we see them as part of a complex process of 'minoritarian' modernity, not simply a polarity of majority and minority, the centre and the periphery. (Bhabha 1994: xx).

Similarly to ways in which Rich engages in the activity of re-visioning, most of the texts in my corpus focus on the tensions between local, national and transnational flows of history that have determined the specific conditions of the Italian context. The exploration and critical re-visioning of the roots of uniquely Italian cultural and linguistic hybridity is necessary in order to shed light on contemporary processes of social hybridisation. Forgotten histories that tell the story of past connections are brought back to life and presented as the backdrop to contemporary developments in the novels that emphasise Italian linguistic disunity (Lakhous 2006, Lamri 2006).

While Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]) convincingly demonstrates how a modern nation can successfully establish itself even in the absence of a common national language, Italian writers, scholars, intellectuals have repeatedly stressed the necessity of an Italian linguistic unity that would strengthen and accelerate the nation-building processes (see section 3.2). It is significant then, that contemporary fictions of immigration draw attention to the phenomenon of persistent Italian linguistic hybridity, endeavouring to provide a comparative perspective on the hidden, but still unresolved

tensions in the construction of homogeneous, monolingual, monocultural, Italianness. The presumption, for example, that Italianness can be associated with the use of a specific variety of Italian, does not stand up to scrutiny in contemporary fictions of immigration. The clash of different languages and cultures, to paraphrase the title of Amara Lakhous' novel, does not only take place between the so called 'indigenous' Italians and the newly arrived. On the contrary, and both Lakhous and Lamri highlight this, the richness of Italian plurilinguistic tradition, even if strongly mitigated in the most recent period by the spread of (varieties of) standard Italian at the expense of the knowledge of local languages, continues to distinguish the Italian case. The exploration of *la questione della lingua*, the language question, in Amara Lakhous' and Tahar Lamri's novels respectively is carried out in two different ways when it comes to the works' thematic, linguistic and stylistic levels. However, it is precisely these two novels that devote particular attention to the relationship between the traditional Italian linguistic hybridity, which clearly undermines the possibility of constructing one compact notion of Italianness, and the necessity to re-negotiate the dominant notion of Italianness by providing a contribution to the renewed discussion of the language question.

### **3.4.2 Longing for Belonging: Claiming Space for Diversity**

Many voices that are heard in contemporary fictions of immigration belong to what are conventionally denominated either as first- or second-generation immigrants. While the first label seems to be self-explanatory, the second definition is necessarily associated with a number of unresolved theoretical, as well as political and ethical issues. The perceived injustice that is associated with being designated a 'second-generation' immigrant resurfaces as one of the red threads throughout the novels in my corpus. To define someone as a second-, third- or fourth-generation immigrant on the account of, for example, their being born to non-Italian parents means, first of all, to ignore the range of possible trajectories of migration and secondly, to automatically exclude the person in question from the category of Italians.<sup>106</sup> The novels that I discussed in

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<sup>106</sup> In sociology these categorisations are specified even further, taking into consideration factors such as the number of foreign-born parents or the years of schooling in the country of destination (cf.

Chapter Two have already convincingly demonstrated how labels such as immigrant, first-generation migrant, etc. fail to account for the diversity of individual human destinies.<sup>107</sup> According to the hybrid texts that will be discussed in Chapter Five the operation of categorisation which pigeonholes second/third/fourth-generation migrants as a coherent, homogeneous group acquires a strong political connotation once the richness of human diversity is reduced to a simple label. Moreover, this labelling also automatically places individuals with culturally hybrid identities outside the realm of the national, as Fatima El-Tayeb eloquently explains:

The national is often the means by which exclusion takes place; minorities are positioned beyond the horizon of national politics, culture, and history, frozen in the state of migration through the permanent designation of another, foreign national identity that allows their definition as not Danish, Spanish, Hungarian, etc.” (2011: xx).

The hindering of access to symbolic citizenship is at the centre of reflections in hybridized autobiographies/semi-autobiographical narratives written by Campobasso (1980), Makaping (2001), Khouma (2010) and Scego (2010). When, in 1996, Denny Mendez participated and went on to win the Miss Italia beauty pageant as the first ever black finalist and naturalised Italian competitor, this event attracted an unprecedented amount of public attention. As Stephen Gundle explains, the heart of the matter lay in debating whether “a woman of colour could adequately represent ideals of Italian beauty,” as some members of the jury had questioned, and, secondly, whether it was possible to be black and Italian “in anything other than a legal sense” (2005: 253-265). The problematic nexus between the category of race and the notion of Italianness is repeatedly challenged in the texts analysed in Chapter Five. The focus here is on the colour line that continues to rigidly demarcate spaces of in-/exclusion for new minority groups in Italy. These texts denounce practices of exclusion that are founded on the

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Ambrosini 2005).

107 In the first chapter of this dissertation I provided a brief outline of the trends of immigration (such as its recent beginning, the very heterogeneous ethnic composition of immigrant community, the large proportion of female migrants) that distinguish the Italian case (and seem to be comparable with some other Southern-European cases, such as Spain or Greece) from other European countries with much longer histories of immigration (such as, for example, the UK, France or Germany).

restrictive notion of Italianness which, in its mainstream version, is presented as 'white' and Catholic only. Claiming space for diversity is accomplished here by calling for a move to re-configure such exclusivist notions of Italianness which cannot accommodate new ethnic minority groups in Italy.

In the wake of Critical Whiteness Studies in the Anglo-American context, a number of scholars have recently dedicated important contributions to the specific construction of Italian racial identity (Giuliani/Lombardi-Diop 2013, Knudsen 2012, 2010, Cassato 2011). The four texts that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five approach the problematic legacy of Fascist ideology, the uniquely Italian position as Western Europe's historical 'Other', as well as the multiple intersections between the history of Italian emigration, internal migration and recent immigration from a range of different perspectives. This investigation into the historical amnesias is much needed in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of the underlying dynamics of contemporary processes of exclusion and marginalisation of new ethnic minority groups in Italy. Differently from the two novels analysed in Chapter Four, in which forgotten or remote episodes of Italian history are explored on the level of linguistic texture, the authors of the second group of texts rely more on generic hybridisation. Hybridisation processes in which the literary boundaries are transgressed by the incorporation of journalistic or academic writing serve to communicate the complexity and multifacetedness of the critical issues that these texts investigate.

Moreover, a further red thread that runs through the texts in this second group is the topic of belonging. Critical scholarship on the issues of symbolic national belonging, exemplified in the work carried out by Yuval-Davies (2006), stresses the potential for resistance that discourses of belonging have in counteracting various forms of symbolic, as well as socio-spatial marginalisation. The discussion of *belonging*, however, is often complemented by reflections on *longing*. Longing here may be understood as referring to the desire to be recognised as a full member of the national community. Elspeth Probyn's work (1996) on the desire to belong, in which the scholar discusses belonging "as a matter of being" and as a matter of desiring to be (1996: 8), is an important starting-point in the investigation of this major thematic component of the novels that will be analysed in Chapter Five. In the decisive move of separating the "be", as in

'being', and “longing” as the 'desire to belong' in the word 'belonging', Probyn's work speaks directly to the texts in which new Italian citizens express their wish to be part of the national community which is, in fact, theirs.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, the notion of symbolic citizenship as opposed to legal citizenship, according to Avishai Margalit, is directly linked to the individual's feeling of belonging in a society. The scholar stresses the fact that belonging does not concern “the issue of formal acceptance”, such as, for example, Italian citizenship and the legal, political, and social rights that are part of the package of legal citizenship (1996: 156-157). To talk about the different kinds of rights of a citizen in a nation-state, Margalit takes the tripartite model of citizenship elaborated by T.H. Marshall (cf. section 1.1) as the starting-point which allows him to identify three groups of rights that a citizen of a nation-state can and should be able to benefit from: the legal rights that refer to all matters involving the law; the political rights, such as the right to vote or to be elected in a democratic system and social rights, which include access to social benefits such as health services, education, employment and social security (1996: 157). To achieve the sense of full belonging in a society, according to Margalit, in addition to being able to benefit from all of these three groups of rights, a fourth group of rights must be taken into consideration as well. This fourth group corresponds to the additional, symbolic dimension that Margalit's model of citizenship contains (ibid.). This symbolic dimension points to the importance of aspects of life that have to do with religious faith, language and sexuality as well.

While many of the authors whose texts I will discuss in Chapter Five have also been actively involved in the political debates on the much needed reforms of Italian legislation on citizenship, it is the symbolic dimension of national belonging that is at the forefront of the reflections in their texts.<sup>109</sup> Once again, to discuss the tensions

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108 Probyn writes: “I slide from 'identity' to belonging in part because I think the latter term captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught up within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state” (1996: 19).

109 Fred Kuwornu, an Italian producer and political activist, has recently filmed a documentary entitled *18 ius soli: il diritto di essere italiani* (*18 ius soli: The right to be Italian*, Roma; New York: Struggle Filmworks, 2011), in which eighteen young men and women born in Italy to foreign parents talk about their experience of having to deal with the extremely long and complicated bureaucratic

between the individual longing to belong symbolically and the impossibility, or at least, difficulty of fulfilling this desire in a society that does not welcome cultural diversity, requires new ways of writing fictions of immigration. These new ways are also multiple, as the singularity of each text's perspective, in spite of strong thematic affinities, is textually rendered by introducing different kinds of generic hybrid in individual instances. Generic hybridisation, in these cases, functions as a catalyst for generic change, further diversifying the genre of fictions of immigration with the ultimate aim of producing strongly socially and politically engaged works.

### 3.4.3 Re-visioning and Re-negotiating Italianness

The young adult novel analysed in the last interpretative chapter (Ghazy 2007) addresses a number of important topics, such as challenges to the mainstream notion of Italianness and issues of symbolic national belonging, that have been previously discussed in other works. What is different in this text is the emphasis on the perspective of a young, female, Muslim-Italian subject. The novels discussed in Chapter Four feature a younger generation of *new* Italians, male and female alike. Some of these characters, especially the alter-ego protagonist of Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010), already show the ways of successfully re-inventing and inscribing oneself in a re-negotiated notion of Italianness. Ghazy's female protagonist also embodies an example of a new Italian who has been able to reconcile the desire for symbolic belonging in the Italian community with other forms of attachment, such as her religion and the cultural traditions of her parents.

It is significant that Ghazy's novel on the success of cultural hybridisation is targeted specifically at a younger generation of readers. Even readers who are not Muslim like the protagonist are given the opportunity to identify with someone who is different but who is aware of the potential that diversity has for enriching an individual life, as well as the shared life of a national community. This success story is not obstacle or

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procedure of applying for Italian citizenship once they turned eighteen. As Kotic/Triandafyllidou (2007) explain, current Italian legislation on citizenship is tailored on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, which privileges descendants or spouses of Italian citizens over long-term or permanent residents, second-generation migrants included.

challenge-free as marginalisation and exclusion are experiences that the young Muslim Italian woman has to endure. Yet building up on the acknowledgement of the intersections and the interstices, to borrow Bhabha's words again (see section 3.4.1), by critically engaging in claiming the space for one's diversity, this novel actively positions itself in the critical contemporary debate on the ongoing hybridisation of Italian society and the need to re-negotiate the notion of Italianness.

The theoretical frameworks and methodological insights presented in this chapter will be applied in the analysis of the case-studies in my corpus. My investigation of the ways in which contemporary fictions of immigration thematise and textually render the social and cultural hybridisation of today's Italian society will start with two novels that employ innovative strategies of linguistic hybridisation with the aim of critically exploring the limits of the mainstream notion of Italianness.



## 4 Who is a Real Italian? Exploring the Linguistic Dimensions of Italianness

The two novels that will be discussed in this chapter, Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*) and *I sessanta nome dell'amore* (*The Sixty Names of Love*) written by Tahar Lamri, were both published in Italian in 2006. These two books can be treated as two prominent examples of new hybridisation tendencies in contemporary fictions of immigration. Strategies of hybridisation employed in these texts are necessarily linked to an engagement with the critical contemporary issues of what Italianness means and how it has to be challenged and re-negotiated. Both texts can be considered hybrid on more than one level. In fact, in my previous work (Shvanyukova 2013), I have discussed in more detail the role of generic hybridisation in Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* specifically. I will devote the concluding section of this chapter to highlighting the most salient aspects of generic hybridisation in Lakhous', as well as Tahar Lamri's 2006 novels. The focus of the present chapter will be on the strategies and the functions of linguistic hybridisation that can be said to be among of the defining features of these texts.<sup>110</sup> In the following, I will focus in more detail on identifying the strategies of metacritical reflections, as defined by Marion Gymnich (cf. section 3.2.2), and establishing the function of the novels' linguistic hybridity in the light of Bakhtin's theoretical reflections (cf. section 3.2), in order to shed light on two separate, yet closely interlinked issues. Firstly, my interest lies in investigating the ways in which, with the help of strategies of linguistic hybridisation, the two novels, on the one hand, renew and reconfigure the genre of the fictions of immigration whilst manifesting, on the other hand, strong continuity and indebtedness to the established generic tradition that I discussed in Chapter Two. Secondly, my aim will be to interpret the employment of specific metacritical strategies as a means to engage in the investigation of the meaning and potential re-negotiation of Italianness.

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<sup>110</sup> Some important points concerning the strategies and the functions of linguistic hybridisation in these two texts have been previously introduced in Mari/Shvanyukova 2012.

#### 4.1 Intersections of Global and Local Perspectives in Amara Lakhous' *Clash of civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (2006)

*Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* is a best-selling novel by the Algerian-Italian author Amara Lakhous, published in 2006. In 2008 the book was translated into English under the title of *Clash of civilisations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (CC in the following). The Italian-language version of a novel represents a revised version of an earlier work written in Arabic and entitled *How to Be Suckled by the She-Wolf without Being Bitten* (Lakhous 2003). Adapted for the cinema by director Isotta Toso in 2010 under the original Italian-language title, the novel can be considered as one of, if not the most popular and commercially successful book in the entire corpus of Italian migration literature.<sup>111</sup>

The setting for the novel, referred to in the title, is one of the most popular and multiethnic squares in today's Rome, namely piazza Vittorio. This particular square, situated in the historical district of Esquilino, is, as Cristina Mazzoni notes, “as emblematic of the new Rome as the she-wolf is of the ancient city” (2010: 163).<sup>112</sup> In fact, the choice of this urban setting, paradigmatic in its contemporary role as a showcase of the ongoing social hybridisation of Italian society,<sup>113</sup> is charged symbolically on a number of levels. Firstly, if we follow Graziella Parati, who has recently explored Lakhous' novel by focusing on the spatial dimension and “space as a malleable context inevitably hybridized by that difference that migrants embody” (2010: 432), the emphasis on the potential for conflict in new forms of living together in

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111 Since its original publication in 2006, the publishing house E/O has reprinted the book sixteen times, with the last edition dated 2011. In addition to the English-language version, CC has also been translated into French and German.

112 Mazzoni's investigation focuses on the iconic image of the Roman She-Wolf and its significance across a selection of ancient, modern and contemporary texts, including CC.

113 When it comes to testifying to Piazza Vittorio's role as such a paradigmatic example of the impact of recent migratory flows, the creation of a multicultural orchestra entitled precisely L'Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio (The Orchestra of Piazza Vittorio) has to be mentioned. The activity of this orchestra discussed, for example, by Bouchard and Ferme in the light of music hybridity (2013: 116- 120), has prompted the filming of a documentary released in 2006 and directed by Agostino Ferrente.

contemporary Rome becomes immediately evident. The clashes mentioned in the title can be taken as referring to the ways in which migrants, in Parati's reading, appropriate the urban space. The urban setting in this perspective becomes

filled with the anxieties and the tensions inherent in the act of appropriation between the native and the non-native. What is at stake is the construction of new urban proximities. (Ibid.: 433).<sup>114</sup>

The anxieties and tensions that accompany the ongoing process of urban hybridisation on the local level are framed, once again, in the title of the novel, which explicitly takes its cue from Samuel Huntington's controversial work *Clash of civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996). The so called global cultural conflicts which Huntington claims will replace past ideological rivalries in contemporary international politics are mocked in the title of *CC* by amending the second part of the original title. The unexpected and puzzling reference to the dispute over an elevator, a dispute which in fact represents the major source of conflict in the lives of the characters who either live or frequent the same building in piazza Vittorio points to the satirical potential of the book.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, such a drastic downsizing of Huntington's clashes of civilisations can indeed be interpreted as an expression of a strong political stance that refuses to comply with the scenario proposed in the controversial intertext (cf. Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 117-118). The twofold connection with the local dimension of the hybridisation process, made explicit in the choice of a particular urban setting and the title's reference to the global discussion of the role of cultural difference, thus highlights the two major components of the larger framework within which the text challenges the mainstream notion of Italianness.

The discussion of the title cannot be complete without also acknowledging Lakhous' tribute to one of the masterpieces of Italian literature of the twentieth century, Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (*That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1946, 1957). Gadda's work is undoubtedly a source of inspiration for *CC* and

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114 Parati's analysis draws on the interpretative frameworks proposed by Giuliana Benvenuti in her work on the concept of 'perceived space', together with Giorgio Agamben's reflections on the new ethical dimension of the concept of proximity. As such, Parati concentrates on the questions of access to space, spatial domination, segmentation, and exclusion in the novel.

115 For a detailed discussion of the role of the elevator in the novel see Parati 2010.

once again, the connection between the two texts is made evident by the significant choice of the same Esquilino neighbourhood as the setting for the two stories. It is likewise necessary to highlight that both authors, albeit in two very different ways and to a different extent, adapt the conventions of the crime fiction genre in order to offer a socially critical portrayal of a specific historical context.<sup>116</sup> A number of other important intertextual references to contemporary Italian culture, such as the work of the musician Fabrizio De André, one of the greatest Italian singer-songwriters,<sup>117</sup> as well as one of the major Italian directors of all times, Pietro Germi,<sup>118</sup> constitute further important

116 Mari/Shvanyukova (2012: 124-125) devote more attention to other points of connection and divergence between Gadda and Lakhous, such as their use of dialects and the alternative ways in which they adapt convention of the detective novel genre. The authors ultimately identify a lack of textual evidence to support the hypothesis that strong thematic and stylistic affinities truly exist between the two authors. However, Lakhous' intention to connect with the tradition of this particular strand of high literary Italian crime fiction is evident also in the choice of some lines from Leonardo Sciascia's 1961 *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl*) as one of his novel's epigraphs. The intertextual reference to this seminal work on the activity of Sicilian Mafia can be deemed problematic, given that the quoted excerpt on the elusiveness of truth is pronounced in Sciascia by the boss of the local Mafia. It is Don Mariano himself who utters the affirmation of the truth that one can only find by throwing oneself to the bottom of a well during the key interrogation with Captain Bellodi (1993: 102-103). Amedeo/Ahmed, the protagonist of *CC*, is in perennial search of the truth related to his past and his partial amnesia of the traumatic events that preceded his emigration to Italy. Likewise, Amedeo/Ahmed's diary entries defy the idea of the possibility of arriving at absolute truth so that in this case the quotation from Sciascia appears to be an insight. Yet, this particular connection also establishes a direct association between the protagonist in Lakhous' novel and the Mafia boss in *The Day of the Owl*, which raises some questions regarding the ways in which the latter text has been interpreted in the former. As I will show in the concluding section of this chapter, the author's interest in the history and present situation of various criminal organisations in Italy has been further developed in his more recent work (Lakhous 2013).

117 Most importantly, De André's song 'Cantico dei drogati' from the 1968 album *Tutti morimmo a stento* is evoked in one of Amedeo/Ahmed's diary entries (Lakhous 2010: loc.): "Illness stirs up the devil of homesickness, or the beast – as we call it – that is the fear of dying: dying far from the eyes of our dear ones, dying alone, dying far from our mother. 'How can I tell my mother I'm afraid?' De André wonders in a song of his." In a critical moment of physical ill health that worsens the protagonist's mental condition, Amedeo/Ahmed turns to De André in order to come to grips with his situation. The choice of this particular musician is also significant because of De André's connection to one of the early fictions of immigration, *Princesa*, discussed in Chapter Two (see section 2.4). As such, this reference completes a circle that joins the immigrant protagonist and his author to one of the pillars of contemporary Italian singer/song-writing tradition, who, in his turn, is connected to the first texts of Italian migration literature.

118 Pietro Germi's work and especially his Oscar-winning 1961 *Divorzio all'italiana* (*Divorce Italian Style*) are particularly significant for the construction of the crime plot in the novel (see section 4.3). Moreover, Lakhous' subsequent novel (*Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* translated into English as *Divorce Islamic Style*, 2010, 2012) explicitly references the film in its title. Another important cinematic reference in the novel is to Vittorio De Sica's 1948 classic *Ladri di biciclette* (*The Bicycle Thief*) which is mentioned in the truth-telling chapter of the Dutch student Johan Van Marten, who is an expert in Italian Neorealist Cinema: "Some scenes from *The Bicycle Thief* were shot right here in Piazza Vittorio. That's what inspired me to rent a room in the building where Amedeo lives in Piazza

indicators of the historical and cultural network in which the novel is embedded.

A brief synopsis of the novel is necessary before I turn to the detailed analysis of linguistic features and metacritical reflections in the text. Five immigrant characters and five Italian characters, most of whom live under the same roof in a building in Piazza Vittorio, are featured in the narrative, which revolves around the murder of another resident.<sup>119</sup> The structure of the novel is rather complex. Eleven separate chapters are written in a diary form by one of the immigrant characters, whose real Arabic name is Ahmed but who is universally known as Amedeo and thought to be Italian. His real name is Ahmed Salmi and he is Algerian, while a misunderstanding is the reason for his becoming known as Amedeo.<sup>120</sup> Amedeo/Ahmed is the protagonist of the story and his diary entries are inserted after each of the rest of the eleven individual chapters. This second group of chapters upon which the diary chapters comment and expand, can be presented as first-person monologues recited in turn by the rest of the characters. All the chapters in this second group are entitled as “The truth according to..” followed by the name of the individual character.

The first “truth-telling” chapter is told by one of the immigrant characters, the Iranian asylum seeker Parviz Mansoor Samadi. Parviz starts his monologue by describing how much he hates Italian pizza. As the chapter develops, Amedeo/Ahmed, who is Parviz's best friend in Rome, becomes an ever more present element in this narration that otherwise touches upon numerous topics. The topics discussed range from the way that Roberto Bossoso (alias for Umberto Bossi, the then leader of the Northern League right-wing political party) speaks Italian, to Parviz's troublesome relationship with Benedetta Esposito, the concierge in the building where his friend Amedeo/Ahmed

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Vittorio “(Lakhous 2010: loc. 1036).

119 Two additional Italian characters are the assassinated Lorenzo Manfredini, whose murder occurs before the start of the narration, and Inspector Mauro Bettarini, who is in charge of the murder inquiry, but not a resident of the building in Piazza Vittorio.

120 The first time Ahmed walks into Sandro Dandini's bar, the owner asks what his name is. Ahmed documents this encounter in the following way: “Something to remember: when Sandro asked me my name I answered, 'Ahmed'. But he pronounced it without the letter 'h', because 'h' isn't used much in Italian, and in the end he called me Amede', which is an Italian name and can be shortened to Amed” (Lakhous 2010: loc. 1235). As such, Ahmed does not intentionally choose to be called by an Italian name, but names are a notoriously troublesome issue for many immigrants, as the examples of two other immigrant characters, Iqbal Amir Allah and Abdallah Ben Kadour, demonstrate.

lives in piazza Vittorio. Reading attentively, it is possible to deduce that Amedeo/Ahmed, who is missing, has been accused of murder and that most likely Parviz's monologue is a statement that he is in the process of giving to the authorities:

It's impossible! Amedeo a murderer! I will never believe what you're telling me. I know him the way I know the taste of Chianti and gormeh sabzi. I'm sure he's innocent. (loc. 162)<sup>121</sup>

All of the individual “truth-telling” chapters follow a similar pattern of story-telling, in which the character indulges in a series of digressions on various topics, which are interrupted by short comments that defend Amedeo/Ahmed's innocence in front of the interlocutor, as the following examples show:

Let's get back to Amedeo. He's not the murderer! He can't have had anything to do with this crime. Amedeo is not stained with the Gladiator's blood. I'm sad because of his absence. (loc. 204, Benedetta Esposito's truth-telling chapter)

Signor Amedeo a murderer! That's ridiculous. I'm sure he's innocent. (loc. 813, Johan Van Marten's truth-telling chapter)

I mean, Amedeo has nothing to do with this horrible crime. Amedeo is good and generous, “good as bread,” we say in Rome. (loc. 1180, Sandro Dandini's truth-telling chapter)

Even if the range of topics discussed in addition to Amedeo/Ahmed's disappearance and innocence is very broad and varies from one “truth-telling” chapter to another, certain themes emerge in almost all of them. Some of these are directly connected to the exploration of Italianness and, quite specifically, to the investigation of the nexus between language and national identity.<sup>122</sup> In the following sub-section I will take a closer look at the first group of this kind of metacritical reflections.

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121 All references in the following are to CC's Amazon Kindle digital edition (Lakhous 2008).

122 Other important sub-themes that are common to several chapters are reflections on the connection between the issues of unemployment, criminality and the presence of immigrants in Italy, as, for example, in the following passages: “A lot of young Italians can't find a good job, so they're forced to steal for a piece of bread. The immigrant workers should be thrown out and our sons should take their place” (Lakhous 2008: loc. 351) or “Me, an old Italian woman, ill, I have to work hard, while she, that chubby young immigrant, is the picture of health. She eats what she wants and sleeps as much as she wants” (ibid.: loc. 374). These kinds of utterances bear testimony to the fact that the problematic connection between immigration and the labour market that was already so prominent in the early fictions of immigration (cf. Chapter Two) continues to remain so almost two decades later.

### 4.1.1 Challenging the Myth of Linguistic Supremacy

As Marion Gymnich has highlighted (cf. section 3.2.2), metacritical reflections on language-related issues can be textually enacted in a number of different ways. The narrative strategies employed can in fact range from explicit metacritical comments made by characters to seemingly “neutral” metanarrative comments. What becomes immediately evident in the case of *CC* is the preference given to extended metacritical comments on linguistic matters, which each and single of the individual “truth-telling” chapters contain. Moreover, these comments concern two closely linked issues. The first issue concerns everybody's conviction that Amedeo/Ahmed is Italian. This misconception rests upon the acknowledgement of the excellent command of the Italian language that the protagonist demonstrates. The second issue relates more directly to the question of what it means and takes to be considered Italian in today's Italy and what role language plays in ascertaining or undermining one's symbolic national belonging.

As regards the first issue of the protagonist's origins, almost all of the characters<sup>123</sup>, reject outright the possibility of Amedeo/Ahmed's immigrant background, precisely on account of his linguistic abilities in Italian and his general knowledge of the history and culture of the country:<sup>124</sup>

I find it hard to believe what you're telling me. Amedeo is an immigrant like Parviz the Iranian, Iqbal the Bangladeshi, Maria Cristina the fat maid, Adbu the fish seller, and the Dutch kid who makes me laugh when he repeats like a parrot, “I am not *gentile*.” You don't know Amedeo the way I do. (loc. 1185).

Now, at least, it's enough for you to know that Amedeo knows Italian better than millions of Italians scattered like locusts to the four corners of the earth. (loc. 53).<sup>125</sup>

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123 With the exception of Amedeo/Ahmed's wife Stefania Massaro and another Algerian immigrant, Abdallah Ben Kadour, who has known the protagonist since their childhood days in Algeria.

124 Moreover, the chapters contain a number of episodes that document Amedeo/Ahmed's knowledge of the history and the geography of Rome, which are two more points that support their conviction he is Italian (Lakhous 2008: loc. 920, loc. 1105, loc. 1265).

125 This specific quotation is one of the several examples of how the novel introduces the topic of the interconnectedness between the processes of historical Italian emigration and recent immigration to Italy. As the protagonist himself spells out, “[t]he life of Italian immigrants in the past closely

Amedeo speaks Italian better than my son Gennaro. In fact, better than the professor at the University of Rome, Antonio Marini, who lives on the fifth floor, No. 16. (loc. 319).<sup>126</sup>

These statements on the protagonist's linguistic skills are further supported by the opinion of wife, who is a teacher of Italian. Amedeo/Ahmed and Stefania meet for the first time at an Italian course for immigrants where she becomes his teacher:

I know that Amedeo speaks Italian better than many Italians. It's his own doing, his will and his curiosity. I have nothing to do with this miracle, although it's usually attributed to me. (loc. 1313).

What is interesting in these quotations is the frequent references to those “other Italians” whose level of the knowledge of Italian is deemed as inferior to that of Amedeo/Ahmed. In one instance above, this comparison is made even more explicit by evoking the names of Gennaro, Benedetta Esposito's son, together with Antonio Marini, the professor of history. Gennaro, just like his mother, comes from Naples, while Marini has moved to Rome from Milan. In the chapters of these two Italian characters it is possible to find traces of linguistic idiosyncrasy, exemplified in the insertion of short phrases or passages in the respective dialects. For example, in the following passage Antonio Marini reports his father's words said in a version of a Lombard dialect:

The decision to leave Milan and come to Rome wasn't a wise one. I gave in to pressure from my father: “Antonio, te ghe d'andà a Ròma, lassa minga scapà l'ucasiun de laurà quand gh'è l'ucasiun, fièu! Laurà l'è pregà!” (“Antonio, go to Rome, don't lose the chance to work when you have it, son! Work is precious!”). (loc. 942, the Italian version in Lakhous 2010: 104).<sup>127</sup>

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resembles the life of the immigrants arriving in Italy today. Throughout history, immigrants have always been the same. All that changes is their language, their religion, and the colour of their skin” (ibid.: loc. 858). In the same diary entry Amedeo/Ahmed introduces another cinematic reference, this time to Luigi Zampa's 1971 film *Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata* (*Handsome Honest Emigrant in Australia Would Marry Chaste Fellow-countrywoman*) that tells the story of Amedeo Battipaglia, one of the many Italians who have emigrated overseas after the end of World War II. This reference sheds some light on the choice of the protagonist's name, which connects him to the Italian emigrant in the film.

126 The characters also use a number of attributes to describe the way Amedeo/Ahmed speaks the language, as, for example, “elegant Italian” (ibid.: loc 130).

127 The recollection of how the decision to move to Rome was reached is preceded by Marini's description of his arrival in Rome. This arrival is represented as a traumatic experience, along the

The attention to the existence of dialects which, on the one hand, resulted in a rich tradition of dialectal literature in Italy (cf. section 3.2) but, on the other hand, has also had a determining impact on the persistence of Italian linguistic fragmentation into the present day, soon hits home for some of the immigrant characters. Once again, explicit metacritical comments are made, as in the following example:

I'm not the only one who doesn't know Italian in this country. I've worked in restaurants in Rome with a lot of young Neapolitans, Calabrians, and Sicilians, and I've discovered that our language level is about the same. Mario, the cook in the restaurant at the Termini station, wasn't wrong when he said: "Remember, Parviz, we're all foreigners in this city!" (loc. 65)<sup>128</sup>

Parviz here draws significant parallels between his own poor command of Italian and the linguistic marginalisation experienced by some Italians, especially those come from

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lines of two recent Italian comedies (*Benvenuti al sud/Welcome to the South*, 2010, which in its turn is a remake of a French 2008 film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, and its follow-up, *Benvenuti al nord/Welcome to the North* that came out in 2012). Marini's first day in Rome is depicted using a number of well-established clichés of laziness and unwillingness to work, supposedly typical for Southern Italy, contrasted with the punctuality and hard-working nature of the northerners, such as Marini himself. At one point Marini's desperation leads to the following outburst: "Where in the world are we? In Mogadishu or Addis Ababa? In Rome or in Bombay? In the developed world or the Third World? Pretty soon they'll throw us out of the club of rich nations. These things don't happen in the north. I'm from Milan and I'm not used to this chaos" (Lakhous 2010: loc. 942). The choice to list Mogadishu and Addis Ababa as the two first cities that came to Marini's mind can be interpreted as an implicit reference to Italy's colonial connection to the Horn of Africa, in which case Marini's ridiculous outcry contains deeper underlying meaning, a way to draw attention to a forgotten page of Italian history.

128 In the same truth-telling chapter, Parviz from Iran delivers an important piece of political satire, making a slightly camouflaged, easily identifiable reference to Umberto Bossi, the ex-leader of the Northern League political party. Parviz in fact expresses his surprise on hearing the way Roberto Bossoso, alias Umberto Bossi speaks Italian. He then reports how, when he tried to ask his Italian colleagues for explanation of the way that Bossoso speaks, he received stern rebuke for not having sufficient linguistic skills to be able to understand Bossoso (ibid.: loc 56). The Northern League is a right-wing party that since its appearance on the Italian political scene in the late 1980s has become famous for putting forward legislative proposals aiming at secession of the northern part of the country from the rest of the peninsula. As regards the Northern League's attitude towards immigration, it is sufficient to quote Paul Ginsborg's passage dedicated to Umberto Bossi's 1989 speech made at the first national congress of the party: "Bossi was shockingly explicit on the subject [of immigration]: assimilation 'could not apply to black immigrants, for whom integration is not foreseeable even at the distance of many centuries. With them the classic mechanisms of social integration, which are marriage and children, do not function, with the result that it would be impossible to build an ethnic link without generating grave racial tensions within society'" (Ginsborg 2003: 176). See Mari/Shvanyukova (2012) and Polezzi (2012) for a discussion of the Northern League's linguistic policies connected specifically to immigration and the teaching of local Italian dialects.

the south of the country and who use either their own dialect or a heavily accented regional Italian. Mario, like Gennaro and Benedetta Esposito, is a character identified as Neapolitan, and thus belonging to a group of people who, according to Marini's view "are symbols of the south, with their sadness, their chatter, their underdevelopment, gossip, credulousness, superstition" (loc. 955). Reciprocal mistrust characterizes the relationships between the Italian characters, with the Southerners accusing Marini of treating them as "a tribe of Zulus" (loc. 1187), thus confirming the existence of regional divisions that go beyond linguistic heterogeneity.

As a consequence of this conflictual behaviour the Italian group takes the issue of Amedeo/Ahmed's supposedly Italian origins further by trying to establish where exactly in Italy he comes from. The North/South divide and rivalry also come to the surface on this occasion, with Marini appearing incredulous at the thought of Amedeo/Ahmed's (presumably) Southern Italian origins:

When the concierge told me that Amedeo was from the south I didn't believe it, because his way of speaking, of greeting, of walking resembles that of the Lombards, the Piedmontese. I didn't ask where he was from. Such things have to do with his private life, and I have no right to meddle. Once I heard him say, "I'm from the south of the south." (loc.912).

In the "truth-telling" chapters, during the interviews with the authorities, the confusion on Amedeo/Ahmeds origins often functions as a pretext for the characters to ask very important questions regarding the nature of the connection between linguistic skills, Italianness and symbolic national belonging, such as in the following two examples:

And so what, if Signor Amedeo is a foreigner, as you say, then who's a real Italian? I'm not even sure about myself. Maybe the day will come when someone will say that Benedetta Esposito is Albanian or Filipino or Pakistani. (loc 319).

It's pointless to persist with this question: is Amedeo Italian? Whatever the answer is, it won't solve the problem. But then who is Italian? Only someone who was born in Italy, has an Italian passport and identity card, knows the language, has an Italian name, and lives in Italy? As you see, the question is very complicated. (loc. 49)

This last passage especially, which is uttered by Parviz, sums up the most critical questions related to the issue of symbolic national belonging in the midst of an

increasingly ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse Italian society. Amedeo/Ahmed seems, on the surface, to fulfil the criteria of having an Italian name, even if he has not chosen it for himself, speaking excellent Italian, living in Italy, and these three qualities seem to suffice already. But the unasked question here is whether or not Amedeo/Ahmed wants to be Italian, whether or not he wishes to belong in the Italian community or not. At the same time, what has to be highlighted here is that the impact of the new radical social hybridisation represents only the most recent layer of Italian social, cultural and linguistic hybridity which has had such serious repercussions on the success of the enterprise of 'making Italians':

The soccer world championships, for example, demonstrate how the Italians discover they are Italians: they hang national flags in the window, on balconies, in stores. How marvellous, soccer creates identity! Is it really useful to have a single language, history, a common future? What is the point of Italian unity? Where are we? Is this how things work in an underdeveloped country? God damn! (loc. 952)

Once again, it is Antonio Marini here who is highly critical of the idea of the Italian unity, in a way conforming to the stereotypical portrait of a northerner who would like to see the North and the South of the country as two separate states.<sup>129</sup> Soccer, and not shared language or history, according to this passage, becomes the only phenomenon powerful enough to guarantee, for Italian unity, even temporarily. Overall, the metacritical passages quoted in this section depict a gloomy picture of a fragmented country in which some foreigners can pass as Italians while others, in the company of certain other Italians, are confined to a marginal space outside the realm of the national.<sup>130</sup>

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129 Benedetta Esposito's perspective on the problem of Amedeo/Ahmed's origins is quite different. She is convinced that the protagonist is a Southern Italian and becomes very angry with her interlocutor when the latter "accuses" Amedeo/Ahmed of being an immigrant. Esposito insists on Amedeo/Ahmed's roots somewhere in the South of Italy and concludes that "we all come from the south. What's the harm, in the end we're all Italians! Rome is the city where people come from all over. Do me a favour, don't accuse Amedeo of being an immigrant. We Italians are like that: in tough times we don't trust each other, instead of helping we do all we can to hurt each other" (ibid.: loc. 407). The concierge continues with a short overview of the key events of the twentieth-century Italian history, pointing out over and over again to the existence of many unresolved issues, such as corruption and the Mafia, that continue to have a major impact on Italian politics and society in general.

130 For a more detailed discussion of the mechanisms of 'passing' and 'posing' see Mari/Shvanyukova

#### 4.1.2 Forgotten Histories and Language as Dwelling-Place

Amedeo/Ahmed's point of view on the connections between Italian linguistic hybridity and the notion of Italianness is presented in his diary entries. The chapters that contain the protagonist's diary are entitled "Wails" (First Wail, Second Wail, etc.).<sup>131</sup> Night-time wailing within the safety of his bathroom walls is an activity that Amedeo/Ahmed engages in and documents in his writing:

Today my hatred of the truth has increased, and so has my passion for wailing. I'll wail for the rest of the night from this confined space, and I know that no one will hear me, To this small tape recorder I'll entrust my ceaseless wailing, then console myself by listening to it. Auuuuuuuu....(loc. 263)<sup>132</sup>

Wailing, as Mazzoni points out to, connects Amedeo/Ahmed to his adoptive mother, the Roman She-Wolf (2010: 163), as he himself also explicitly states: "I suckle on the wolf with the two orphans Romulus and Remus. I adore the wolf, I can't do without her milk" (Lakhous 2008: loc. 1511). In the same diary entry, the protagonist elaborates on the two types of wailing, typical of immigrants he has met since his arrival in Rome. These two types are the grieving and the joyful wailing respectively (loc. 1510). The first one strikes those who have not been able to adjust to life in the new country, those for whom "the wolf's bite is painful" (ibid.). This does not seem to be Ahmed/Amedeo's case. Quite on the contrary, he compares himself to a newborn and this comparison can be interpreted as someone who has managed to start over, to build a new life. Amedeo/Ahmed has managed to do so by feeding on the wolf's milk, which is his new language: "I'm like a newborn, I need milk every day. Italian is my daily milk" (ibid:

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(2012).

131 Here I am following the official English translation, however the Italian word *ululato*, used in the Italian-language version would be more accurately translated as 'howl' as Mazzoni also observes, since "in Italian, *ululare* is something only wolves do" (2010: 164).

132 The protagonist is haunted by the traumatic memories of the circumstances that led to his escape from Algeria. He is undecided on whether it is better to keep the memory of the assassination of his fiancée and the outbreak of civil war in his native country alive, or whether these traumatic memories are best dealt with by wailing. Before he marries Stefania, Ahmed asks her not to ask him any questions concerning his past: "My love, my memory is like a broken elevator. Or rather, the past is like a sleeping volcano. Let's try not to wake it, so we can avoid eruptions" (Lakhous 2008: loc. 1314)

loc. 1373).

Metacritical reflections, rendered, just as in the 'truth-telling' chapters, as explicit comments on linguistic issues made by the protagonist, reach their apex when Amedeo/Ahmed makes a note of his reading of the aphorisms written by the Rumanian-French philosopher Emil Cioran. Amedeo/Ahmed comments on one of Cioran's aphorisms, that has struck him particularly. The aphorism in question is 'We inhabit not a country but a language.' (ibid: loc. 1403) Reflecting on the meaning of this aphorism, Amedeo/Ahmed is prompted to ask himself whether the Italian language has in fact become his "new dwelling place"(ibid.)

The fact that Amedeo/Ahmed is, as I demonstrated in the previous two sub-sections, universally thought of as an Italian would seem to lead to this conclusion. According to everybody's opinion, Ahmed left his past behind when he moved to Rome and became Amedeo.<sup>133</sup> Even his wife seems convinced on this point, affirming that "[h]e learned Italian for me, he loved Italian cooking for me, he called himself Amedeo for me, in other words he became an Italian to be close to me" (loc. 1279). In 'The Ninth Wail', which is the chapter that follows Stefania's truth-telling account, Amedeo/Ahmed confesses his love for his wife. Yet the focus of the diary entries in this chapter rotate once again around the linguistic issues exemplified in Amedeo/Ahmed's reading of Cioran's aphorism. Moreover, another intertextual reference serves as a justification to read this 'Wail' as a more broad discussion on identity. The reference is to Amin Maalouf's 1986 novel *Leo Africanus* and the choice of reading the life-story of this historical traveller, described as a "Granadan who had been circumcised at the hand of a barber [...] baptised at the hand of a pope and [spoke] several languages of the Mediterranean, including Hebrew" (Shammas 1989) is quite significant. Amedeo/Ahmed writes how he has learned the following opening passage of the book by heart:

I, Hasan the son of Muhammad the weigh-master, I, Jean-Leon de Medici, circumcised at the hand of a barber and baptized at the hand of a pope, I am now called the African, but I am not from Africa, nor from Europe, nor from Arabia. I am also called the

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133 Stefania even claims that "Amedeo has sacrificed everything for me. He gave up his country, his language, his culture, his name, and his memory. He did everything possible to make me happy" (loc. 1279).

Granadan, the Fassi, the Zayyati, but I come from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am the son of the road, my country is the caravan, my life the most unexpected of voyages. (Ibid.: loc. 1378).

Leo Africanus in Amedeo/Ahmed's reading is hailed as an example of a man who is free “from the chains of identity” (ibid.), and the protagonist is envious of the historical figure, asking himself the rhetorical questions: “Who am I? Who are you?” (ibid.). However, while it is tempting to see Leo Africanus as a paradigmatic cosmopolitan figure, with a fluid identity and no strong attachments to any given place or memory, this historical character is also representative of those “transnational flows of history” (cf. section 3.2) that are characteristic for the centuries-long interactions in the Mediterranean region. The juxtaposition of these two characters, Amedeo/Ahmed and Leo Africanus, can in this case be interpreted as a way to draw attention to the common history that the former's country of origin (Algeria) shares with its Mediterranean neighbour and Amedeo/Ahmed's new dwelling place, Italy. In this reading, and in the very doubleness of his name, Amedeo/Ahmed becomes a paradigmatic culturally hybrid new Italian. His Algerian origins do not hinder him from being accepted as an Italian and this fact challenges the opinions of the other characters in the novel who refuse the idea of an Italianness that has originated from without the national borders. Amedeo/Ahmed shows how new or forgotten cultural affinities can emerge in the encounters between Italians and immigrants in newly multi-ethnic Rome, without leading to a clash between cultures. The topic of significant historical encounters and their interconnectedness with the present, which in *CC* are exemplified in the figure of Leo Africanus, is further developed in the next novel that will be analysed in the following section.

#### **4.2 Encountering and Embracing Diversity in Tahar Lamri's *The Sixty Names of Love* (2006)**

Tahar Lamri's 2006 novel *I sessanta nome dell'amore* (*The Sixty Names of Love*, *SNL* in the following) can be presented as a modern re-working of a framing narrative.<sup>134</sup> The

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<sup>134</sup> As Maenze-Vanderboegh has remarked, the choice of a framing narrative in *SNL* has been modelled

book opens with four short emails between the two protagonists, an Italian writer Elena Romagnoli and Tayeb Saadi, an Algerian intellectual, who lives in Italy. Elena contacts Tayeb to ask him about the sixty ways of saying 'love' in Arabic, which she would like to use as inspiration for a collection of short stories. The email exchange starts and as the correspondence progresses, the two of them gradually fall in love and start a relationship. The book's structure develops on two levels given that the series of messages between the two characters are separated by eighteen short stories, which treat a wide variety of topics and are in no explicit way connected to the events narrated within the metanarrative framework. These stories, which have been written by Tayeb, become starting-points for the metacritical discussions held between the two interlocutors in the emails.

The genesis of this book can be traced back to 1995, when Tahar Lamri published the first of the short stories that were later incorporated in the novel's structure. The short story in question is “Solo allora, sono certo, potrò capire” (“Only Then, I Am Sure, Will I Be Able to Understand). This short story actually won the first prize in the first edition of the famous literary competition for migrant writers entitled Eks & Tra.<sup>135</sup> In 1999 Graziella Parati included the translated version of this short story in the first English-language anthology of Italian Migration Literature. A more recent anthology of works by Italian migrant writers (Orton/Parati 2007) contains another short story from *SNL*, “Il pellegrinaggio della voce” (“The Pilgrimage of the Voice”) which was first published in Italian in 2002.<sup>136</sup>

“The Pilgrimage of the Voice” can be considered the centre-piece in the novel's structure. It is positioned almost exactly half-way through the email exchange and is also the longest story among the eighteen. Its significance in terms of the prominence of

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on such excellent predecessors as *The Thousand and One Nights* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (2009: 1).

135 The title of the collective volume containing, in addition to Lamri's short story, works by other participants in the first edition of the competition is *Levoce dell'arcobaleno (The Voices of The Rainbow)*, edited by Alessandro Ramberti and Roberta Sangiorgi (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1995). Parati (2005: 74-75) provides an attentive reading of this short story.

136 The Italian-language version was part of another collective volume, *Parole di sabbia (Words of Sand)*, edited by Francesco Argento, Alberto Melandri and Paolo Trabucco (S. Eustachio di Mercato S. Severino : Il grappolo, 2002).

metacritical reflections has been discussed by Parati (2005: 61-76), as well as Mari/Shvanyukova (2012: 126-130). To summarise briefly the findings of these studies, which are useful to introduce the main linguistic innovations presented by Lamri, it is necessary to document the polylinguism featured in the short story.

“The Pilgrimage of the Voice” contains lengthy excerpts in a number of Italian dialects, such as Mantovano, Romagnolo and Venetian dialects. Some of these excerpts, such as, for example, the following passage recited by a fairy-tale like character called Zanubrio (cf. Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 129-130) in Romagnolo dialect, deal explicitly with the topic of historical Italian hybridity and the importance of remembering these hybrid roots in a newly multi-ethnic contemporary Italy:

A me invézi u m' piés d'pinsé che in Rumagna uié dal zite pio antichi d'Roma, caglie stedi os averti ae' mond luntan, che da no l'è pas i Fenici, j'Etruschi, i Greci, i Rumèn, gli arab, i Tedesch, i Franzis, i Cinis, j'Ebrei e pu 'na massa d'etra zent.

Um piés d'pinsé che nò a sen i fiul d'tota sta zent.

U m' piés d'pinsé che stal fazzi novi ch'al zira per la Rumagna i s'porta 'na massa d'stori ch'a n'cnusen, e che i nostar fiul, se no a sem bon, i sarà piò furtuné che no, parchè j arà dal zitè piò antichi cun 'na massa d'stori, d'lezendi, d'rasunament, prema ngn'avema, e ades sè (119)<sup>137</sup>

(Instead I like to think that in Romagna there are cities that are older than Rome. These cities have kept their doors open to far away worlds. Our land has been walked by Phoenicians, Etruscans, Greeks, Romanians, Arabs, Germans, French, Chinese, Jews, and a whole lot of other people.

I like to think that we are the children of all these people.

I like to think that all these new faces you see around Romagna bring with them a lot of stories that we don't know, and that our children, if we do it right, will be luckier than we were. That's because there will be older cities with a whole bunch of stories, of legends, of arguments, that we didn't have before. Trans. in Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 130)

The character establishes a possible connection between some of the forgotten pages, or *stories*, of Italian history and the new stories, new cultures and new languages that can be heard or met in the Italian region of Romagna, as well as in the rest of the country, in the present historical moment. Such an elaborate metacritical comment is rendered much more powerful precisely by using an Italian dialect instead of standard Italian. As Graziella Parati has noted, the dialect-speaking characters in this short story represent

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137 In the notes in the book Lamri acknowledges his collaboration with a number of Italian writers who have helped him with linguistic editing of the excerpts written in dialect (Lamri 2009: 130).

socially marginalized groups in Italian society, who use their local dialect in order to denounce social injustice (2005: 61). A similar use of dialect is in line with what we have already seen in Lakhous' *CC*, where the marginalized Italian groups are made up of those with a lower social status (such as cooks or waiters that Parviz meets in the restaurants in Rome) and especially internal migrants, who have come to Rome in search of a job from somewhere in the South of Italy.

Yet the function of the use of dialects in this short story is not limited to the denunciation of social injustices. The second function of this use, observable in the passage quoted above, is the fact that the dialect is employed to make a reflection precisely on the ongoing social hybridisation. The positive attitude towards the newly arrived, “these new faces you see around Romagna”, expressed by the dialect-speaking subject, can be interpreted as a rejection of localist political attempts to draw a clear line between the so called indigenous, dialect-speaking population of (northern) Italian villages and the newcomers who are not welcome. In this instance Zanubrio provides a more subtle, but at the same time, more powerful reply to the activity of such Italian political leaders as Umberto Bossi, who was much more explicitly mocked in the first chapter of *CC* (cf. section 4.1.1). If, for localist political leaders such as Bossi, the preservation of dialects is part of a xenophobic programme of safeguarding a fictional, pure and supposedly centuries-old original identity, Zanubrio defies such claims by using his dialect to discuss the positive outcomes of encounters with new ethnic minority groups living in Italy. His curiosity and willingness to embrace cultural hybridisation makes dialect the perfect weapon of resistance against xenophobia, racism and marginalisation.

As such, the strong presence of Italian dialects in the linguistic texture of “The Pilgrimage of the Voice” is paradigmatic of *SNL*'s contribution to actively finding ways of promoting cultural hybridisation. This specific metacritical technique is, however, not the only one employed in the work and in the next two sections I will take a closer look at other instances of linguistic hybridisation in the text that aim at triggering a debate on the notion of Italianness.

#### 4.2.1 Exchanging Metacritical Reflections: Discussions of the Role of Language in the Metanarrative Framework

Even if the email exchange between Elena Romagnoli and Tayeb Saadi can be read as a stand-alone novella (cf. Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 125) based on a romance plot between the two interlocutors, its function as the metanarrative framing for the eighteen short stories has to be investigated in more detail. Maenze-Vanderboegh (2009: 3) has suggested that the love story can be interpreted as “an allegory [that shows] how human beings from different countries must learn to cohabitate with their reciprocal cultural and languages, if they want to enjoy peaceful and loving relationships.” The scholar's attentive close reading of the developments in the relationship (ibid.: 4-12) seem to support this initial hypothesis,<sup>138</sup> yet some of the conclusions made in the piece can, in my opinion, be used to overturn such an allegorical interpretation. For instance, when Maenze-Vanderboegh writes that, “Tayeb seems to treat Elena like raw material. The substance is there but it must be polished” (ibid.: 6) and makes statements such as that the Algerian intellectual “is the vortex in the relationship” (ibid.), it seems to be the case of a misguided interpretation, for reasons that I will provide later in this section. Moreover, while some degree of metacriticality in this email exchange is acknowledged in this interpretation,<sup>139</sup> the connections between, on the one hand, the discussions on language, literature and culture in the emails and, on the other hand, the continuation of these discussions in the short stories, is not investigated properly.<sup>140</sup>

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138 In short, Maenze-Vanderboegh treats Elena and Tayeb's interactions as an “inter-cultural love story” which, according to this analysis is used to “depict [the author's] desire as a migrant writer to cohabitate harmoniously in a culture distant from his native one” (2009: 4). This line of investigation is, of course, a plausible one. However, when we think that Tahar Lamri has repeatedly acknowledged the strong influence of *The Song of The Songs* on his work (for example, Lamri 2000), the dialogue in the email exchange between Elena and Tayeb, where each of the participants has equal status and respects and values the other's opinion, can also be said to be modelled on this distinguished work, once again contradicting Maenze-Vanderboegh's claims of Elena's passive role in the relationship.

139 Maenze-Vanderboegh rightly points to the fact that the correspondence is initiated upon a pretext of a clear linguistic nature, and she also pays careful attention to the instances in which the lovers discuss the meanings of particular words (2009: 4-12). However, this analysis is for the most part limited to words that are part of the list of the sixty names of love in Arabic, that is to say that the scholar is only interested in the linguistic issues that are directly connected to the development of the love story.

140 In one instance only, the scholar stresses Elena's interest in learning more about the transposition of an oral story in the written form (Maenze-Vanderboegh 2009: 8), without, however, developing this

The presumed passivity that is attributed to Elena in Maenze-Vanderboegh's interpretation is contradicted by the Italian writer's active role in starting the protagonists' thought-provoking metacritical discussions. Elena guides Tayeb in their shared journey of exploration of the role of language in human communication by asking him precise questions, as in the following passage:

From: Elena  
Date: 18<sup>th</sup> August 2004 7.44  
To: Tayeb  
Subject: Zarani Taifuha<sup>141</sup>

Hello Tayeb,

I like discovering myself in the music of “Alla”<sup>142</sup> that I am not familiar with and that I would like to find out more about together with you as soon as possible. [...] But isn't it true that music is not like breath or language that does not follow a precise direction, so differently from the linearity of a narrative? Can you tell me why this music reminds you of me? (105)

Tayeb replies to this email with the short story “L'idioma gentile” (“The Gentle Tongue”), that I will analyse in the following section. However, what is important to highlight here is how Elena's curiosity leads Tayeb to make elaborate metacritical comments, which are later fleshed out in the short story that follows their conversation. This steering of the conversation in the direction of metacritical reflections, represents, in my opinion, the main function of the metanarrative framing created through their email exchange. In fact, reading the series of emails in order to discover the depth of the metacritical discussions being held seems to be a much more rewarding exercise than simply treating Elena and Tayeb's relationship as an allegorical inter-cultural love story.

As I have already demonstrated, the positioning of specific short stories after or before a certain conversation does not take place randomly. Quite on the contrary, a

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reflection and discussing the short story which follows Elena's email. In fact, the short story in question is “The Pilgrimage of the Voice” and, for example, Mari/Shvanyukova (2012: 126) elaborate in more detail on the function this particular message from Elena to Tayeb.

141 “Zarani taifuha”, as Tayeb explains in the message preceding this one, is a poetic Arabic expression that can be roughly translated as “your breath has come to visit me”, where the Arabic “Taif” actually stands for a phenomenon that combines the ideas of soul, spirit and breath (Lamri 2009: 104).

142 An Algerian musician who plays the traditional instrument called oud, whom Tayeb mentions in his previous message (Lamri 2009: 105).

strong connection can be established between Elena's interest in a specific topic and Tayeb's willingness to provide his point of view on the matter by means of a story that fleshes out his ideas. Such a strategic use of the short stories has already been discussed in the case of "The Pilgrimage of the Voice" (cf. Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 128), but the wider conclusion must be that all of the short stories have been inserted within the metanarrative framework according to the contribution they make to the metacritical conversation between Elena and Tayeb, as I will show in two more examples in the following section.

One more episode that takes place in the email exchange deserves particular attention as part of the investigation into the ways in which *SNL* approaches critical linguistic issues. Towards the end of the book, in a series of messages dated September 9<sup>th</sup>,<sup>143</sup> the two lovers discuss the etymology and the lexical affinities between the Italian word *abitare* (to live) and an Arabic word *Habibati* which means "my love" (169-170). Previously, Tayeb has introduced this Arabic word to address Elena (156). Elena, on her part, is the one who starts the following reflection by making observations on the Latin roots of the word *abitare*, which comes from *habitāre* and is also related to the Italian *avere* (to have):

From: Elena  
Date: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2004 15.13  
To: Tayeb  
Subject: Strong sweet infinite

"Abitare is a word that says much of us [...] Habitare, etymologically related to 'avere', belongs to a different time, the time of love, if we think it over well and especially if we know how to inhabit. I learned from you that one may inhabit a language [...] this is why I like the assonance *habibati* and *habitat*. (145, emphasis in orig.)

The word play that Elena discusses and especially her thought on learning from Tayeb that "one may inhabit a language" subtly connects this reflection to the episode in CC,

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143 The email exchange starts on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004, with Elena's first message in which she explains that she would like to ask Tayeb to provide her with information about the sixty names of love in Arabic. The frequency of emails is constant as the relationship develops, but an argument in the middle of September is a breaking point, after which there are only a few emails, with considerable periods of silence in between. The last few emails are dated October 1<sup>st</sup>, December 12<sup>th</sup>, January 20<sup>th</sup> and finally, on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2005 Tayeb sends Elena the list of the words she had asked for in her first message (Lamri 2009: 218-222).

discussed in section 4.1.2, in which Amedeo/Ahmed is greatly struck by reading Emil Cioran's aphorism on inhabiting a language, rather than a country.<sup>144</sup> While it is true that the context in this particular instance is different, in that Elena's words can be used to describe the love relationship between the two. Yet, in the light of this extraordinary connection between the two novels, another interpretation is possible as well. It is worth pointing out that in *SNL*, differently from *CC*, it is the Italian character who makes this statement. It is the Italian writer who shows herself to be open to embracing diversity and recognising the value of her interlocutor's culture, becoming a paradigmatic example of how Italianness can be re-negotiated in a transformation from within.

Cultural difference is strong, as the entire email exchange shows by shedding light on the basic incompatibilities of two different language systems, in this case Italian and Arabic. To mediate between Italian and Arabic, which is what the lovers are endeavouring to do, often requires using a whole sentence or passage of text to communicate the meaning of a single word in the other language. Yet this operation is not doomed to failure a priori. On the contrary, these obstacles can be removed and a clash of civilisations can be avoided. But in order to do that, as *SNL* shows, it is imperative to show a cultural sensitivity that presupposes, among other things, knowledge and respect of the other country's history and culture.

Tahar Lamri develops this last point further in his novel and in the next section I will look more closely at two of the eighteen short stories in which this cultural sensitivity is introduced textually through intertextuality and strategies of linguistic hybridisation.

#### **4.2.2 Re-visiting the Language Question: Intertextuality and Strategies of Linguistic Hybridisation in Short Stories**

As I have already pointed out to, the eighteen short stories interspersed between the

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<sup>144</sup> Another interesting parallel that can possibly be drawn between *CC* and *SNL* at this point is the fact that both novels feature two “inter-cultural” love stories, in both cases between an Algerian intellectual and an Italian woman, writer in *SNL*'s case and language teacher in *CC*. The significance of this choice, in my interpretation, lies in the fact that both couples meet through a language-related pretext, which, in Amedeo/Ahmed and Stefania's case is a free Italian language course for the immigrants. In *CC* too this must be interpreted as an additional means to implicitly draw the reader's attention to the importance of linguistic issues.

series of Elena and Tayeb's emails, cover very different topics. The stories, in fact, include some that are set in the Arab world and depict issues such as Islamic divorce (“L'henné” / “The Henna”) or ritual practices (“Il figlio”/ “The Son”), some which are dedicated to the experience of immigrants in contemporary Italy (“Foglio di via” / “Order to Leave”), and some which discuss the terrorist attacks in Madrid in March 2004 (“Undicizerotreduemilaquattro” / “Elevenzerethreetwothousandandfour”), as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (“Le stanze sgombre” / “Empty Rooms”). The wide variety exists in addition to metacritical stories such as, for example, “The Pilgrimage of the Voice” that was discussed in section 4.2.

This density of *SNL* would deserve a more thorough investigation.<sup>145</sup> In this section I will have to limit my analysis to the discussion of two short stories that are directly relevant to *SNL*'s exploration of the peculiarities of the Italian linguistic situation and its impact on the construction of the notion of Italianness. The short stories are “Occhiacci di legno perché mi guardate?” (“Wicked Wooden Eyes, Why Do You Look at Me?”, WWE in the following) and “L'idioma gentile” (“The Gentle Tongue”, GT in the following).

The titles of the two short stories contain very explicit intertextual references to the works of two nineteenth-century Italian authors who greatly contributed to the spread of written Italian language in the period that followed the political unification of the peninsula. The first title is a quotation from Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, a book that has not stopped being immensely popular since its first publication in 1883.<sup>146</sup> The second title is borrowed directly from Edmondo De Amicis' treatise on Italian language question, whose first edition dates back to 1905. While scholars such as Anna Laura and Giulio Lepschy give a very critical evaluation of this book, presented as “an urbane and in many ways not unreasonable book, but on the whole superficial and banal in its view of Italian linguistic problems” (2013: 28), it has

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145 As has already been noted elsewhere, the richness of explicit and implicit intertextual references to fundamental religious texts, major works of Italian literature as well as classical Arabic poetry, to name just a few, makes of *SNL* a dense and multi-layered work (cf. Mari/Shvanyukova 2012: 126)

146 Tahar Lamri is not the only Italian migrant writer who has offered a re-writing of this particular Italian classic. In 2006 Jarmila Očkayová published her fourth novel in Italian entitled *Occhio a Pinocchio (Pay Attention to Pinocchio)*, structured as a first-person narrative that gives Pinocchio's version of the events told in the original story (cf. Camilotti 2012).

to be remembered that De Amicis' most significant contribution to Italian literature is another immensely popular children's book, *Cuore* (*Heart*, 1886). Lamri's attention to the two key figures of post-Unitarian cultural scene is another way of starting a debate on the relationship between language, national identity and literature. Moreover, the connection to the language question is explicit in the choice of these two particular authors who wrote in the period when common Italian language existed almost exclusively in the written form and the vast majority of the population of the country used a local dialect.<sup>147</sup> As such, *SNL* once again privileges the discussion on indigenous Italian linguistic hybridity. This time, however, metacriticality is achieved through the means of intertextuality, which is employed in the titles, as well as in the body of the short stories.

In fact, *WWE* (Lamri 2009: 41-42) is written in form of an internal monologue of a child whose family has recently moved to live in Italy. He talks of his experience of going to school, of how this new environment is different from what he was used to back in his country. We do not know the boy's name or where exactly he comes from.<sup>148</sup> The reference to Collodi's *Pinocchio* is explained by the episode that takes place in class one day. The teacher tells the boy that he is supposed to look into people's eyes when he speaks to them. However, the boy recalls how his grandmother has taught him not to do that (42). The situation in the original story was exactly the opposite. Geppetto felt very uncomfortable when Pinocchio started to stare at him and told the puppet not to do that. The protagonist in *WWE* is told to do the opposite and he clearly perceives it as an imposition. An imposition which goes against the rules he has learned while growing up and which he is forced to reject in the new environment. Most importantly, it seems that his new Italian teacher does not show any particular sensibility in handling the situation with the new boy.

In the concluding part of the story the boy tells us of his attitude towards the new

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147 Although collecting statistical data on the spoken, as well as written, linguistic usage for the second half of the nineteenth century is an extremely difficult task, it is generally agreed that the percentage of Italoophone native speakers in period around the Unification of Italy cannot have been higher than approximately 10% of the population (cf. Lepschy/Lepschy 2013: 36-40).

148 The few references we find in the text make it possible to imagine that he comes from an Islamic country, since he mentions the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice, and a classmate called Ahmed, who is "also from my country" (Lamri 2009: 42).

language he is expected to master:

In order to help me look into people's eyes, Ahmed, who also comes from my country, has been sitting next to me for one week now. When he introduced himself to me, speaking our language, the sound of it seemed so strange to me that I almost could not understand what he was saying. He told me, "don't you worry, you'll learn Italian quickly" but when I heard him speak the language I got anxious immediately, because for my part, in my head I know the language very well and I understood immediately that he speaks the language very badly. Who knows why they didn't put an Italian next to me, so that I could learn from him. Anyway I must learn it quickly because Mum needs it when she has to do shopping. Me, I know Italian very well. In my head (ibid.)

The insistence on "knowing Italian very well in his head" makes the reader realise that at school the boy does not utter a word. He is confined to silence and it is probably not too far-fetched, given *SNL*'s general concern with Italian linguistic heterogeneity and the role of dialects throughout the history of Unified Italy, to recognise in the story of today's immigrant boy the many stories of Italian dialect speaking children who have had similar experiences of marginalisation and exclusion in an environment in which they were supposed to speak a language they did not know. The phenomenon of attributing a lower social status to the dialect, which is automatically transferred to the people who are monolingual dialect-speakers has been well researched in the Italian case (cf. Loporcaro 2009: 174-182, Ruffino 2006). In the case of schoolchildren who first hear Italian, albeit most likely in one of its regional varieties, when they start school, negative attitudes towards the use of dialect have very strong repercussions not only on their scholastic achievements, but on their general well-being as well (cf. Ruffino 2006).

The drawing of attention to the history of the Italian language question is also evident in the second story that I wish to discuss. As I have already mentioned, in GT (Lamri 2009: 109-110) Lamri makes explicit reference to the title of Edmondo De Amicis' treatise on Italian linguistic issues.<sup>149</sup> The story, however, starts with a long quotation from a different, much earlier linguistic treatise, namely Niccolò Macchiavelli's *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua (A Discourse or Dialogue Concerning Our Language)*, that can be dated to 1524-1525. The quotation is indicated

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<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, Tahar Lamri acknowledges this borrowing directly by adding a note that follows the short story (Lamri 2009: 110).

as direct speech attributed to a character called Ndjok: “Ndjok, eyes wide-open, lips more black-and-blue and pulpy than usual, said it all in one breath almost. Without punctuation and in Italian” (Lamri 2009: 109).

The next character who speaks is called Cheikh Mamadou. Mamadou pronounces what seems to be a formula of a ritual in Arabic that begins with the words “bismillahi errahmani errahimi”, in the name of Allah (ibid.). The reply of Ndjok to the formula in Arabic is another quotation, this time from the thirteenth-century allegorical poem entitled “Dalla giostra delle virtù e dei vizi”, one of the earliest examples of Italian literature.<sup>150</sup> At this point Ndjok's mother explains to the reader that what we are assisting in is a ritual that is meant to cure her son from “speaking in this way” (ibid.: 110). It seems that Ndjok cannot help reciting from the Italian classics, in fact, he immediately orders his mother to be silent and continues quoting from the poem. The remaining silent character in this surreal scene is Ndjok's wife, Francesca, who is a mute observer, frozen in her shock.

Rosa Piro (2013: 98-99) highlights how a close intertextual reading of the two Italian intertexts and the short story shows the importance of a mother-tongue in cultivating patriotic love for one's country. In her interpretation, Ndjok has been affected by madness, which manifests itself in his reciting of founding texts of Italian literary tradition, as a result of leaving his own country. “Speaking in this way” thus becomes a kind of punishment for “going away from his country, daring to transgress the borders”, i.e. betraying his motherland and his mother-tongue (ibid.: 99). The analysis of the two intertexts clearly supports such a hypothesis. Yet the symbolic dimension of choosing precisely these two texts in the rich tradition of treatises on the Italian language question points in a different, additional direction as well.

In fact, it is necessary to pay attention to the two historical periods to which the two intertexts refer. The allegorical poem is dated roughly to the thirteenth century, a period in which Italian literature as such started to emerge. As for the language, it will suffice to mention Dante's 1308 *De vulgari eloquentia*, which most likely followed “Dalla giostra delle virtù e dei vizi” by only a few decades. Dante's seminal work, treated as

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<sup>150</sup> The authorship of the poem is generally attributed to a Franciscan friar and is included in the most important anthologies of the early Italian literature, such as, for example, *Poeti del Duecento*, vol. 2 (ed. Gianfranco Contini, Milano: Ricciardi 1960).

the first sketch of Italian literary and linguistic history, provides valuable insights into the roots of Italian linguistic hybridity. As such, the period between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century marks the emergence of the debate on the Italian language question. This centuries-long debate, which continues into the present day, reached one of its first peaks in the sixteenth century and Niccolò Macchiavelli can be rightly considered as one of the most distinguished of its participants. While at the end of the fifteenth century the debate on the language question mainly concerned the rivalry between written Italian and Latin, during the sixteenth century it came to revolve around the question of which variety of Italian should be chosen to become the common written standard. In 1525, around the time of Macchiavelli's *Dialogo*, with the publication of Pietro Bembo's three-volume work, *Prose della volgar lingua*, the process of the codification of the Italian language began.

While the strategy of incorporating quotations from the two intertexts contributes to making the text visibly hybrid from a linguistic perspective, it is once again the story's metacriticality and potential to trigger reflections on the role of language, not only as a means of communication but as a tool of nation-building, that make GT a very interesting case-study. With this story, *SNL* once again stresses the importance of historical knowledge, of not forgetting about the origin, in this case, of the language question crucial to Italian history. In this way, GT connects both to “The Pilgrimage of the Voice”, by recontextualising Zanubrio's recollection of the many different peoples that once brought their stories with them (cf. section 4.2.1), and even more so to WWE, which draws the reader's attention to another of the key periods in the debate on the codification of the Italian language.

In the series of email that directly precedes GT, Elena and Tayeb discuss the poetry of the great Persian scientist, philosopher and writer Omar Khayyám. In a previous message Tayeb sent Elena one of Khayyám's poems as a way of introducing her to this important part of his cultural heritage. On this occasion, the discussion of Khayyám serves to embed the short story GT in a larger inter-cultural framework, which goes beyond the specific Italian context. As such, *SNL* does not privilege either of the two cultures, or languages, but aims at building a dialogue between the two. This dialogue, to paraphrase one of Tayeb's lines, will be successful only if the interlocutors can “learn

how not to use one's initiative because it is only through listening [that one] can hear what [the other] is saying” (ibid.: 132)

### **4.3 The Innovative Potential of Metacriticality in Investigations of Italianness**

In the two novels analysed in the previous sections, it becomes immediately evident that both authors have been able to fully exploit the polyphonic potential of the genre of the novel in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense of the term (cf. Bakhtin 2006). In Lakhous' case, the polyphony is achieved not only by employing the technique of multiperspectivity or by introducing idiosyncratic features into the characters' language, but through the deliberate orchestration of those multiple voices.<sup>151</sup> This careful combination of voices and consciousnesses is accomplished precisely with the help of metacritical reflections, whose examples have been given in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, and its aim lies in drawing the reader's attention to the problematic relationship between language and the mainstream notion of Italianness. Immigrant and Italian characters alike approach this complex question from different and seemingly conflicting positions, yet the dialogism of their interaction is undeniable.

Whether, as most immigrant characters do, the characters express their bewilderment at Italian linguistic heterogeneity, or incredulity at the discovery that a foreigner has been able to master the language “better than many Italians”, these reactions serve the same textual purpose. By making the culturally hybrid Amedeo/Ahmed, an Algerian who seems to be more Italian than anybody else in the book, *CC* mocks the superficiality of the dominant notion of Italianness. This dominant notion, in fact, accommodates only those who can be thought of as Italian on the surface, where surface is represented by linguistic knowledge and the colour of skin. At the same time, *CC* also highlights the strong exclusionary potential of such a notion of Italianness. By drawing attention to persistent regional fragmentation, and to internal divisions of the social and linguistic kind between the North and the South of the country, *CC* paints a grotesque, yet more

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<sup>151</sup> Dialogism and orchestration, in addition to the polyphonic novel, make part of the range of the fundamental concepts that have been elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin (cf. Bakhtin 2006, 2008 and section 3.2 of this dissertation).

tragic than comical, canvas of newly multi-ethnic Italy that has still not been able to find a way of coming to terms with its indigenous cultural hybridity.

The linguistic and stylistic texture of *CC* is, at the first glance, highly innovative, if compared to the language of the early fictions of immigration that were discussed in Chapter Two. In addition to the linguistic differentiation of the characters,<sup>152</sup> it is the abundance of metacritical reflections, presented in the form of explicit comments on linguistic issues, which make it possible to speak of *CC* as a hybrid novel of immigration.

In Lamri's *SNL*, the linguistic and stylistic differentiation is prominent, and the techniques used range from the incorporation of longer passages in several Italian dialects and the inclusion of Arabic words to the use of direct quotations from works of Italian literature. However, as I have shown in the previous section, it is not just the innovative formal linguistic and stylistic features that distinguish the work. A strong degree of metacriticality at the level of the framing narrative as well as in the individual short stories, predominates in the text, and it is thanks to this particular strategy that *SNL* represents another highly innovative hybrid example of contemporary fictions of immigration.

Textual hybridisation manifests itself also on a different level in the two works. Generic diversification is especially evident in the case of Lakhous' *CC*, in which the conventions of the crime fiction novel are borrowed in order to transform the genre of the novel of immigration (cf. Shvanyukova 2013 and section 5.4 in the present study).<sup>153</sup>

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152 As I have shown in the sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, the inclusion of words or short excerpts in the native dialect is used in order to distinguish the Italian characters from each other and to mark their regional origin. Moreover, when it comes to the linguistic characterisation of the immigrant characters, Lakhous employs certain techniques to render their way of speaking more idiosyncratic also. For example, the speech of the Iranian refugee Parviz in the first chapter of the book is artificially orientalist and made more poetic through the constant employment of metaphors, such as in the following passage: "I'm not saying that Amedeo is an enigma. Rather, he's like a poem by Omar Khayyam: you need a lifetime to understand its meaning, and only then will your heart open to the world and tears warm your cold cheeks" (Lakhous 2010: loc. 51). The entire chapter is full of metaphors, especially when Parviz speaks of his friend Amedeo, who is compared to hot tea, to the taste of fruit, etc.

153 *CC* can probably be treated as the first part of Amara Lakhous' trilogy of fictions of immigration, with the other two parts being *Divorce Islamic Style* (Lakhous 2010, 2012) and *Contesa per Maialinio Italianissimo a San Salvario /Dispute Over a Very Italian Piglet at San Salvario* (Lakhous 2013). These three works use similar strategies of generic hybridisation, blending a novel of immigration with a detective novel or spy story and arguably making Amara Lakhous the founder of

In *SNL* the degree of generic hybridisation is comparatively much lower. While it is true that the novel's level of structural complexity is high, it nonetheless uses a well-established, traditional model of the framing narrative. Moreover, although the correspondence exchange between Elena and Tayeb is composed of emails, rather than traditional letters, this does not make it possible to speak of an intermedial or 'e-mail novel' (cf. Kusche 2011), since the emails do not in any significant way alter the textual texture in this case.

In the novels analysed in the following chapter, generic hybridisation becomes the main catalyst in the process of diversification of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration. As I will show in the close readings of the novels, in these novels generic hybridisation becomes the means to engage in the discussion on such critical contemporary issues as symbolic national belonging and the re-negotiation of Italianness.

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the genre of multi-ethnic crime fiction in Italian.



## 5 The Blurring of Generic Boundaries as a Challenge to Italianness

While this chapter was being drafted, an historic event took place on the Italian political scene. Two months after the inconclusive February 2013 parliamentary elections, a new government had finally been sworn in. The list of the new cabinet ministers included the Congolese-Italian Cécile Kyenge who thus became the first black Italian minister. Kyenge was appointed as the Minister of Integration, with the task of handling various questions related to immigration and the integration of new minority ethnic groups in Italian society.<sup>154</sup> It is hard to underestimate the significance of this event. The election of a naturalized, black and female candidate as a minister in the Italian government is undoubtedly one of the key events in recent Italian political history. Moreover, it can be interpreted as a positive indicator of the ongoing process of social transformation in Italy. The symbolic significance of this appointment lies, first and foremost, in providing yet another confirmation of the trend that sees the ever-increasing visibility of new ethnic minorities on the Italian public scene, with members who actively participate in the political, social and cultural life of the country.<sup>155</sup>

Even if the publication of *Noi italiani neri: storie di ordinario razzismo* (*We Black Italians: Stories of Ordinary Racism*, Khouma 2010) and *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I Am*, Scego 2010), which will be discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively, preceded Cécile Kyenge's appointment, the thematic focus on the experience of living in Italy as black Italians symbolically connects these two texts to this historic event. Both texts set themselves the task of showing how the growing presence and visibility of black Italians has not yet brought the recognition of their right

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<sup>154</sup> It has to be specified that Kyenge was appointed as a Minister without portfolio, i.e., so far no independent Ministry of Integration has been constituted in the Italian government.

<sup>155</sup> In section 5.3 specifically this event can be read against the statements made by different characters in Igiaba Scego's oeuvre who discuss the symbolic baggage associated with blackness in the collective imagination of the Italians.

to belong symbolically in the Italian community.<sup>156</sup> In a moment of transition for contemporary Italian society, a moment when social hybridisation is leading to radically new levels of demographic heterogeneity, the investigation of the concept of symbolic belonging acquires unprecedented urgency. These two texts engage in an in-depth exploration of the concept of Italianness by paying specific attention to the problematic nexus between the concept of national belonging and the category of race.

In this chapter I will show how the complexity of the issues discussed in these two texts, as well as in a number of earlier novels that dealt with the same argument (section 5.1) has required the introduction of a new strategy of hybridisation of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration. In the analysis of the two novels performed in Chapter Four I have demonstrated how the investigation of the concept of Italianness is textually enacted through the means of linguistic hybridisation and metacriticality yet, what we find in the case of the contemporary fictions of immigration discussed in this chapter is a much stronger degree of generic hybridisation. These texts blur the generic boundaries by, for example, integrating different kinds of extra-literary material, interspersed, in turn with (semi)autobiographical life-stories.

As such, these generic hybrids introduce new ways of innovating and re-configuring the genre of Italian fictions. In this case, the generic hybridisation performed in this group of texts is introduced not only as a means to reflect *on* the ongoing process of hybridisation of Italian society. The texts' generic complexity can also be treated as a way of textually rendering the complexity of the issue of symbolic national belonging being dealt with and the debate surrounding the re-negotiation of the current concept of Italianness, whose rigidity excludes 'visibly' diverse new Italian citizens from the space of the national. In other words, this new hybrid way of writing has become, for the authors of these texts, the only possible formal solution which would allow them to shed light on the topics of exclusion, marginalisation and lack of recognition as full members

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<sup>156</sup> The series of open racist attacks by the members of Italian government and the Italian Parliament that targeted the new black Minister proved to be representative of mainstream public opinion on who can and who cannot be considered eligible to become an Italian. Moreover, in Minister Kyenge's case, the gender factor has also played a significant role, as James Walston explains: “[A] woman like Cecile Kyenge would be acceptable if she was a docile house servant on the lines of the 30s Hollywood stereotype. The fact that she is a successful eye surgeon and now a self-assured cabinet minister is threatening.” (quoted in Johnston 2013, online).

of the Italian community. Moreover, the different strategies of generic hybridisation employed in these texts serve to demonstrate that the discussion of such a complex issues as symbolic national belonging cannot be approached from one perspective only. In order to engage in the discussion on who is and who should be considered as eligible to be called Italian today, these texts, as I will show in the analytical sections, explore different ways of triggering such a discussion.

Before I turn to the analysis of the two main texts (Khouma 2010 and Scego 2010), I would like to briefly discuss two earlier texts (Campobasso 1980 and Makaping 2001), together with the novel by Chohra/Di Atti Sarro (1993), already dealt with in section 2.3. These three texts, together with some other recent examples of fictions of immigration,<sup>157</sup> have contributed significantly to making questions surrounding the categories of race and symbolic national belonging one of the key topics in contemporary Italian migration literature.

### **5.1 Denouncing the Exclusionary Force of the Colour Line: Three Examples from 1980, 1993 and 2001**

In Chapter Two, devoted to an analysis of the emergence and the initial configuration of the genre of fictions of immigrations in the Italian context, I discussed the novel *I Wanted to Be White* (Chohra/Di Atti Sarro 1993). This text, as I have demonstrated, can be considered to be one of the examples of the early female fictions of immigration in Italian (cf. section 2.4). It is also important to mention this novel in connection with Khouma's and Scego's texts given that the story told by Chohra and Di Atti in many ways anticipates some of the obstacles to symbolic national belonging that the later texts discuss. In the passage from the novel's first chapter, quoted in section 2.4, the young protagonist recalls the day when she was, for the first time in her life, confronted with her blackness. It is the girl's playmate Corinna, a white French child, who announces that Nassera (the protagonist) is “a nigger” and she cannot be allowed to have one of Corinna's old and broken dolls (Chohra/Di Atti Sarro 1993: 10-11). By an extensive use of rhetorical questions and exclamation marks, the girl conveys her initial

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<sup>157</sup> Such as Komla-Ebri (2002, 2004), see Bellusci (2008) on the work of this author, or Gangbo (1999), whose book is discussed in detail by Parati (2005: 76-85).

surprise at learning about her diversity<sup>158</sup>, a fact that has a profound impact on the rest of her life.<sup>159</sup>

What is different in *I Wanted to Be White* is the fact the autobiographical story of growing up as a black Arab and Muslim woman is set in as France, where Nasserah Chohra comes from, rather than in Italy. In addition to becoming one of the first texts in the corpus of Italian fictions of immigration, the text also represented a novelty by telling the story of a so called second-generation migrant. At the time of the novel's publication, in fact, the existence of the so called second-generation new Italians did not represent such a serious political and social issue, given that statistically relevant incoming migratory flows only started affect Italy in the early 1990s. However, another text, published even earlier than *I Wanted to Become White*, deserves special attention here.

Antonio Campobasso's 1980 novel *Nero di Puglia (Black from Puglia)* is a book that has recently started to receive critical attention from the scholars of Italian migration literature.<sup>160</sup> This fictionalised autobiography tells the story of a black Italian boy born to an Italian mother and an African-American soldier, who was stationed in a small Southern Italian village during the Allied Operations of the Italian campaign. The protagonist is born on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946, the day the referendum was held to formally approve the institution of the Italian Republic. His personal, "local history" thus contains references to the layers of national and transnational histories (cf. Bhabha quoted in section 3.4.1), such as WWII, the development and the outcome of the conflict in the Italian case, the birth of the Italian Republic, and the history of the South of Italy. This last connection is very important. Antonio's narrative, in fact, unfolds against the backdrop of the extreme poverty of the rural South of the 1950s, where his

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158 See section 2.3 for the examples from the text.

159 It is important to mention that this novel also bears resemblance to Randa Ghazy's book, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, on account of the centrality of the antagonistic relationship between the protagonist and the protagonist's mother. One of the key structural elements in Nasserah's narrative is, in fact, represented by a series of conflicts with her mother. In these conflicts it is issues such as blackness, religion, choice of profession, that repeatedly undermine the relationship between the two women. The function of such conflicts in the narrative texture becomes precisely that of introducing these critical topics in the novel, in a similar manner to what is done by Ghazy in her 2007 book.

160 Cf. Pezzarossa 2012, Burns 2013.

old grandmother is raising him on her own.<sup>161</sup>

When his grandmother becomes too old to take care of him, he is sent off to an orphanage, which marks the start of his troubled adolescence. Part of his teenage years is passed in young offender institutions. In encounters with the outside world, on the personal, as well as on the institutional level, the colour of Antonio's skin provokes wariness and immediate stigmatisation. In the following passage, for example, Antonio is summoned in front of a judge on a charge of public disorder. Antonio's frustration and rage at the treatment he continues to receive because he is black is rendered by employing the technique of the shift of focalisation. In this case, the reader can follow the flow of the judge's inner thoughts:

Questioning of Antonio Campobasso, previous offender, twenty-year old, black, one meter and seventy-five tall, with frizzy hairy. Non-questioning which the aforementioned Antonio Campobasso withholds for himself: He is a nigger, I am disgusted by him, I am a magistrate, Your Honour Magistrate So and So, I am not disgusted by myself at all, I look at myself in the mirror every morning and I say to myself: how attractive you are, how bright you are, how many things you know [...]. But let's get back to this nigger. What are his jaws like? What is the measure of cranium? Isn't his earlobe slightly abnormal? But what do I care? He has got black skin. This is enough for me. (65-66).

I agree with Jennifer Burns (2013: 2) on the fact that *Black from Puglia* should be treated as “an isolated literary event”<sup>162</sup>, which almost certainly had no impact on the emergence of the genre of fictions of immigration in the early 1990s. Yet this text is particularly interesting to look at in this investigation of contemporary generically hybrid fictions of immigration due to its attempts to transgress the boundaries of the narrative by integrating lengthy passages written in verse. In these poetic passages Antonio elaborates on his experiences, as in the following example with which the author chooses to conclude the book:

As in the codices of assassinated memories

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161 Antonio's parents never got married. His mother subsequently married a British Italian man and moved with her husband to the UK, leaving Antonio behind. Antonio is also stigmatised in the village on the account of him being born out of wedlock.

162 The book was reprinted for the last time in 1984 and is currently available for sale only on the used books websites.

I have a right to glory,  
the one that so far  
you have trampled on.  
Do not send me away  
to foreign lands  
because my skin is different.  
My heart is hanging  
with its intense rhythm  
from the walls of the south.  
You men sitting in armchairs,  
do not construct me,  
you makers of absurd violence,  
new bars put on freedom  
which I have conquered  
in a hard ordeal,  
do not throw me away into far-away worlds  
which I know nothing of,  
son of the Republic  
I am entitled to living here  
and to re-asserting my assassinated self  
and to telling you that I am a person. (114-115).

The last lines of the poem represent a strong statement on Antonio's claim to belong in the country where he was born and to be treated with due respect, regardless of the colour of his skin, regardless of him being different from what the dominant construction of Italianness prescribes. The inclusion of poetry in *Black from Puglia* can be interpreted as a means to approach the complexity of this topic from multiple perspectives, by complementing the story in prose with the power of poetic verse.

The last text that I would like to briefly discuss in this section is a thought-provoking work written by Geneviève Makaping (2001) and entitled *Traiettorie di sguardi: e se gli altri foste voi? (Trajectories of the Gaze: And What If You Had to Trade Places with the Other?)*. This book can be presented as a hybrid artefact that blends together materials from a sophisticated anthropological essay<sup>163</sup> and an autobiographical fiction of immigration,<sup>164</sup> in its turn interspersed with episodes that present real-life examples of

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163 The academic parts of the book contain notes with bibliographical references.

164 The book starts with Makaping's journey from Cameroon via France to Italy, where she settles down. She leaves Cameroon in order to be able to marry the man she wants, against the decision of her family. They emigrate to France where her husband dies. After his death, she arrives in Italy, has to take various jobs in order to survive, motivated by her ambition to study. Even though she has to start from the very beginning by taking her high-school diploma, she eventually goes to university and receives a doctoral degree in Multimedial Didactic Technologies and Communication Systems (25).

cases of racism that took place in the period when Makaping was working on the book.

It is a book that explores the female author's grappling with her identity as a black woman living in the "sea of whiteness" (Ahmed 2006: 133). This is an anthropological exploration of Makaping's construction of "radical black subjectivity", her "quest to find ways to construct self and identity that are oppositional and liberatory" (hooks 1990, online).<sup>165</sup> As I will show later in the analysis of Igiaba Scego's text (cf. section 5.3), in this work Makaping is interested first and foremost in finding her own critical voice, as the title of the book's first part pre-announces: 'I want to be the one who decides how I want to be called.'<sup>166</sup> By drawing on the work of key African-American black intellectuals and theorists, such as bell hooks or Malcolm X, Makaping adopts an unequivocal position:

*A woman of colour* is not my name. If you really want to call me by a generic name I am a *Negro* and you are not a woman or a man without colour. I am not being polemical. It should not be you to tell me what I am to be called. Do not stigmatize me further. I am not making any claims. I speak and I take action. (53-53, emphasis in orig.)<sup>167</sup>

I have chosen this particular passage from this dense and complex text to illustrate how the stance Makaping takes here resonates with Antonio Campobasso's powerful demand to be treated with dignity.<sup>168</sup> The individual life experiences depicted in Makaping's and Campobasso's texts respectively most certainly cannot be conflated on account of their common quest for radical black subjectivity (cf. hooks above). Key factors such as gender, class and education have determined completely different life trajectories in

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165 This quotation is taken from a passage in an article devoted to the discussion of the ways in which postmodernist theories can be applied to the theorisation of the specificity of the black experience (hooks 1990).

166 The second part is entitled 'The fallacy of Race.'

167 "Of colour" is a direct translation of the Italian *di colore*, an expression used to designate non-white people, and which is considered politically correct. Yet, as Makaping stresses, she, as a black woman, has not been given the possibility to express her opinion on whether this is or is not a suitable label to define her identity. She continues this passage by reporting that, "[s]omeone protests: 'No, I can't possibly call you a Negro, the word has such a negative connotation. It makes me think about the slave trade.'" (54) To which Makaping mentally replies, "[b]ut who is responsible for the negative connotation of this word? Surely it wasn't me."(ibid.)

168 Makaping's work is discussed in more detail in Sabelli (2004) and Romeo (2012).

these two cases. Such factors account for the multiplicity of experiences of lived black identity which can, under no circumstances, be essentialised as a fixed, homogeneous entity. However, what these texts share is the common goal of resisting and struggling with injustice in the form of implicit and explicit racism and social exclusion inflicted on an everyday basis upon someone whose skin colour is not white. In other words, these texts aim to make their strong critical voices heard.

As such, these three texts serve as important points of reference in the exploration of the ways in which the category of race intersects with the notion of symbolic national belonging. This issue will be discussed in the analysis of the two contemporary fictions of immigration in sections 5.2 and 5.3. As I will demonstrate, different narrative strategies are employed in hybrid texts written by Pap Kouma and Igiaba Scego, both of whom approach the investigation of the meaning of Italianness by giving space to critical voices of black Italian citizens.

## **5.2 Multivocality as a Counter-Response to Marginalisation: Blending of Generic Sources in Pap Kouma's *We Black Italians: Stories of Ordinary Racism* (2010)**

[I]t's a given that in the condition of an immigrant in Italy factors such as the level of education or the individual situation in the country of origin are not taken into consideration. Once you are here and your skin is black or even only blackish you automatically become something else. You simply become one of many. And discrimination does not discriminate against anyone. (Guarino 2010: 44)

This excerpt from an interview with a Senegalese born, naturalised Italian citizen Pap Diaw, confirms that the issues of racial discrimination and social exclusion discussed in the three texts presented in the previous section have not yet been resolved.<sup>169</sup> The visibility of new minority groups in Italy, regardless of whether their legal status is that of undocumented immigrant, temporary resident, permanent resident or Italian citizen, continues to represent a major challenge in the ongoing social hybridisation of Italian

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<sup>169</sup> This interview makes part of seventeen conversations with immigrants in Italy that the Italian writer Daniele Guarino has included in his book *I Am Italian, a Black Italian: Who They Are, What They Think: Stories, Lives, Journeys Told by Those Who Have Come to Italy to Work* (2010). The book is an interesting example that continues the tradition of exploring the phenomenon of immigration through a sociological investigation complemented by the inclusion of life-stories told directly by the immigrant subjects themselves (cf. section 2.5).

society.<sup>170</sup> The focus on blackness and its perception in the contemporary collective imaginary of Italians as the main obstacle to recognising the right to symbolically belong in the national community is at the centre of the reflection in Pap Kouma's 2010 book *Noi italiani neri: storie di ordinario razzismo* (*We Black Italians: Stories of Ordinary Racism*, *WBI* in the following).

It has to be pointed out immediately that racism, explicitly mentioned in the second part of the title of the book, is discussed in this text specifically in the forms it affects people who have been raised and often also born in Italy, who have been through the Italian school system and who hold legal citizenship. To a certain degree, the life-stories we find in *WBI* can remind us of Antonio Campobasso's life trajectory in *Black from Puglia* (cf. the previous section) yet there is one major difference between the two texts which concerns the historical context that provides the setting for the respective narratives. While in Campobasso's novel we learn about the struggles of an individual subject, whose life-story can be presented as an exceptional case in the historical context of the mid-twentieth century Italy, Kouma sets himself the task of assembling a multitude of exemplary life-stories of black Italian citizens which together characterise the present moment of the social transformation in Italy. These life-stories can be designated as exemplary in the sense of their ability to represent the multitude of different life trajectories of black Italian citizens, who, in their everyday lives, have to struggle for their recognition as part of the national community. In this light, *WBI* has to be read as a work which actively engages in exploring and challenging the concept of Italianness in a historical moment which registers an ever-increasing diversity of Italian society.

This discussion in *WBI* is held in the form of a hybrid fiction of immigration which, as I will show in the following, blends together a semi-autobiographical narrative, journalistic writing and, finally, passages which could be included in a historical revisionist novel. *WBI* is Pap Kouma's third book-length work. His 1990 novel *I Am an Elephant's Salesman*, co-authored with Oreste Pivetta, was introduced in Chapter Two of this dissertation as one of the first examples of male fictions of immigration of

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<sup>170</sup>In the same interview, Pap Diaw further speaks of his individual experience of living in Italy as a naturalised black Italian citizen. He shows no hesitation in describing his condition as that of a “second-class citizen” (ibid.: 45).

the genre which emerged in the Italian context in the early 1990s (cf. section 2.2).<sup>171</sup> In Chapter Two I also mentioned Pap Khouma's contribution to a sociological study on Senegalese immigrants in Italy. The results of this study were published by Bruno Ventre (1993) who presented Khouma's participation in the project as that of “a privileged interlocutor [...] and a writer who has been dealing with the problems connected with immigration for several years” (Bruno Ventre 1993: 8).

The fact that Khouma has been part of very diverse literary and non-literary projects prior to writing *WBI* is important for a comparative analysis of his most recent work with his earlier contributions on the topic of immigration. The autobiographical novel of migration published in 1990, the participation in the sociological study, Khouma's work as a journalist,<sup>172</sup> all of these components constitute the wider textual framework within which *WBI* must be positioned. However, this most recent text manifests a degree of narrative experimentation uncharacteristic of the earlier writing. Even if scholars such as, for example, Patrizia Ceola, read *WBI* mainly as “a collection of short stories contained within the narrative framework of a tirade directed by the protagonist towards a judge” (2011: 154), such a presentation of the book clearly fails to account for the text's complexity. The complexity, density and innovative potential of the work is most evident, as I have already alluded to, in the strategies of generic hybridisation employed.

The tirade, mentioned by Ceola, opens the book. It is voiced by a first-person narrator, whose name is Paolo Diop Ravenna.<sup>173</sup> In presenting himself to the judge, Ravenna makes it immediately clear that his life-story can be treated as one of the exemplary cases of the multitude of life-trajectories of black Italians which I mentioned above:

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171 Khouma's second novel, *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti (Grandfather God and the Dancing Spirits)*, was published in 2005. In addition to his activity as a writer, in Chapter One I have already mentioned Pap Khouma's position of the editor-in-chief of the *El-Ghibli*, one of the most important online magazines which deals with Italian migration literature.

172 See the previous note.

173 As Ceola rightly notes, the first-person narrator repeatedly addresses the imaginary judge by inserting “Your Honour”, as in example quoted above or in the following passage: “Your Honour, I am here today to defend myself from the accusation of contempt and aggression that has been filed against me by ticket inspectors.” (9)

Your Honour, my name is Paolo Diop Ravenna, my father is white and my mother is black. The colour of my father and of my mother have blended in in my skin. My somatic traits are African, European, proudly hybrid. [...] I am an Italian citizen and I am black. I could be called Ibrahim Ramazzotti, or be an imagined character, an alter ego created ad hoc for this story of mine. Myself, my father Pietro, my mother Mamy, my uncle Gorghi, my wife Rama and my son Mademba – we could be called in a thousand other names and be protagonists of a thousand other stories [...]. What really matters is that in the everyday life there are a lot of real Paolo Diop Ravennas, with a white father and a black mother. They are the new Italian citizens! (1)

Paolo Diop Ravenna is an imagined character, although he would like us to make the reader believe that he is not, but the purpose of this statement remains precisely to draw attention to existence of specific problems which real new Italian citizens face on a daily basis. In the rest of the first chapter, entitled 'The Peoples of the Mediterranean', Ravenna presents the facts of the charges which are the reason for his court appearance. He has been charged with contempt and aggression, a complaint that has been filed against him by ticket inspectors of the Milan city transport network.<sup>174</sup> Ravenna claims his innocence and asserts that he has been targeted by the public officials because he is black. The incident, according to the narrator, has to be qualified as a racially-based aggression in which Ravenna is a victim.

Since no 'real' witnesses who were present at the time of the incident can corroborate Ravenna's statements, he decides to choose an alternative strategy for his defence. What follows in the rest of the chapters is, in fact, a collection of the life-stories of different characters, fictional and non-fictional, who figure as witnesses in Ravenna's fictional court case. These witnesses have nothing to do with the actual facts of the case; rather their stories are included in order to paint a larger picture of the episodes of ordinary racism which on a daily basis target non-white Europeans, such as Paolo Diop Ravenna. Ravenna introduces them in the following way insisting, as he has already done in his own presentation, on the fact that these people are 'all real':

I beg for your pardon, You Honour, but as I will be speaking in my own defence, I will call as my witnesses these young new Italian and European citizens. Yassin, Saba, Matteo, Adama, Francesco. And also Yao, Karima, Patrick, Hermann Ebongué, Claude.

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<sup>174</sup> The autobiographical stamp of the narrative is easily traceable in this episode. An episode involving ticket inspectors of Milan city transport network happened to Pap Kouma in real life (Kouma 2006).

People in flesh and blood who will tell real stories, stories of people who have been embraced by two worlds, who have taken root in the new one but are not indifferent to the world of their origins, young people who have broader horizons and who will be the future, in an ever more hybrid world. (12)

Even more importantly, the reflections do not stop at the topic of racism, which is of primary concern in all of the life-stories presented throughout the narrative, but directly touch upon the notion of symbolic national belonging:

What makes someone from Italy an 'Italian'? The language? Whoever can learn it well in a few years. The religion? What about the Italians who convert to Islam? Do they stop being Italian? Alimentary habits? But also a young woman with North-African traits born here might love spaghetti and pizza just as much or even more than peers. So what? How can one measure belonging? By how much one loves this country? (15-16)

This series of rhetorical questions express genuine bewilderment at the difficulty or even impossibility of finding a definite answer to any of these queries. However, what becomes obvious as the narrative progresses is that it is the new Italian citizens who are forced to ask themselves these impossible questions, the new Italian citizens who are marginalised and excluded, and treated as second-class citizens, all on account of the colour of their skin. Theirs is a colour deemed incompatible with the notion of artificially 'whitened' Italianness.<sup>175</sup>

Fatima El-Tayeb's recent study of the mechanisms of exclusion of new ethnic minorities across different European contexts proves to be a valuable aide in getting to grips with the dynamics of marginalisation of black Italians which Khouma focuses on in *WBI*. More specifically, following the work of Avery Gordon (1997, 2008), El-Tayeb's investigation aims at shedding light on the process defined as "haunting".<sup>176</sup>

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175 In section 3.4.2 I mentioned some of the recent studies that have investigated the specificities of the construction of Italian national identity as 'white', a process which, according to Giuliani/Lombardi-Diop (2013) originated in the historical period immediately subsequent to the political unification of the Peninsula in the second half of the nineteenth century. Parati (2005: 33) offers valuable insights into Italian colonial enterprise which she interprets in the light of "an attempt to 'whiten Italian identity'" which, for different historical reasons was not perceived as such. The fact that Italian immigrants, especially those who came from the South of Italy, were for a long period of time treated as 'non-white', for example, in the United States, is another indicator of the complexity of the intersections of race, colour and national identity in the Italian case.

176 El-Tayeb here quotes directly from Avery Gordon's seminal study: "What this book attempts to do by creolising, reappropriating, and extending theoretical concepts drawn from among others women of colour feminism, African diaspora studies, and queer of colour critique is to capture what Avery

Haunting can be described as the outcome of “an active process of suppression”, or of the decontextualisation of the presence of non-white Europeans which is unacknowledged on the level of collective memory among 'indigenous', white European. This means that

every acknowledgement of a nonwhite presence always seems to happen for the first time, giving each incident a spectacular character, signifying a threatening state of exception, but at the same time voiding it of any lasting consequences [...]; a nonwhite native speaker of Danish, Polish, or Greek again and again appears as a curious contradiction, never quite becoming unspectacular and commonplace. Europeans possessing the (visual) markers of Otherness thus are eternal newcomers, forever suspended in time, forever 'just arriving,' defined by a static foreignness overriding both individual experience and historical facts. (El-Tayeb 2011: XXIV-XXV).

What El-Tayeb evaluates as “[t]he continued inability or rather unwillingness to confront [...] the glaring whiteness underlying Europe's self-image” (ibid: XXV), produces, in her opinion, two closely related strategies of exclusion and marginalisation of visibly different Europeans in contemporary Europe:

In the current construction of a European identity and history, the haunting of Europe's silent racialisations and ethnicisations continues to place people of colour outside the limits of the new, inclusive, “postnational” community. (El-Tayeb 2011: XX).

Racialisation, in El-Tayeb's analysis, points to the contradiction between the official politics of colourblindness, which proclaim the inexistence of the category of race and officially condemn discrimination on the basis of the 'visible markers of Otherness', and the everyday practices of exclusion of new ethnic Europeans. Practices of racialisation which target the difference of the colour of the skin and the somatic traits are complemented by more sophisticated strategies of ethnicisation. The latter ones focus on factors such as visible markers of religious diversity, for example, the veil or other kinds of clothing conventionally associated with non-Christian religious practices.

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Gordon in *Ghostly Matters*, by now a key text of American studies on the after-shocks of chattel slavery, called 'haunting', that is the 'way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impact felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with' (Gordon 1997: XVI)” (El-Tayeb 2011: XVIII).

In the light of these theoretical findings, *WBI* offers its own perspective on the discussion of difficulties faced by the new minority group of black Italians in the struggle for the recognition of their symbolic national belonging. *WBI* approaches this difficult task by attempting to assemble a mosaic of life-stories, historic facts, pieces of family memoirs, and episodes from real-life news, to name just a few sources mentioned in the narrative. Five chapters and an epilogue follow the introductory section. Already in the titles of the individual chapters - 'Peoples of the Mediterranean,' 'Football's Dark Side,' 'Banlieue,' 'Young Black Italians,' 'Forgotten Heroes,' 'For the Love of Senegal,' - the reader gets a glimpse of the breadth of the topics discussed, the variety of the geographical locations featured, as well as the different historical periods covered. Inside the individual chapters we find accounts of real-life events featuring non-fictional characters<sup>177</sup> together with interview-like passages in which some of these characters are given the opportunity to talk about their lives themselves.<sup>178</sup>

Some of chapters are set in contemporary Italy, one in contemporary France and one in contemporary Senegal, while another one takes place in France during and shortly after WWII.<sup>179</sup> This variety of geographical locations; the presence of a diverse

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177 There are multiple examples throughout the book. To name just a few of them, in the chapter Ravenna introduces “the real story of Sarr Gaye Samba Diouf” (23), a Senegalese immigrant in Italy killed in cold blood by two young Italian men who were harassing customers in a bakery. Diouf tried to get them to stop, was attacked and stabbed twelve times by one of the two Italians. The second real-life episode told in the same chapter concerns another Senegalese called Cheikh Sarr who drowned in summer 2004 after rescuing another man in difficulty (24).

178 The following example illustrates how such interview-like passages are incorporated in the textual texture: “To conclude this reflection on young black Italians, I ask your permission, Your Honour, to let Adama Sanneh speak [...] Adama once told me 'I have had a complicated relationship with Italian society.’” (81) What follows is a five-page long account (81-86), presented as direct discourse in quotation marks, in which Adama retraces the key events of his life and presents his own reflections on the difficulties which young black Italians face in contemporary Italian society.

179 For example, in the third chapter entitled 'Banlieue' Ravenna talks about his visit to Paris and his trip to some of the Parisian suburbs where the 2005 riots took place. The chapter 'Forgotten Heroes' is devoted to Pietro Ravenna's, the protagonist's father, life-story. Pietro's parents emigrated to Alsace before the outbreak of the Second World War, one of many Italian families who left the country after its formal unification in 1861. After the start of the conflict, Pietro goes to France in order to look for his family. There he inadvertently witnesses the brutal assassination of the soldiers who composed the 25th Regiment des Tirailleurs Sénégalais at the hands of the German troops (Khouma 2010: 88-89), which leaves only one soldier alive. Pietro Ravenna befriends Gorgho Massamba Diop, who is the only survivor of the massacre and whose sister later becomes Ravenna's wife. This episode gives Khouma the opportunity to draw the reader's attention both to the forgotten histories of Italian emigration, and to the participation and the treatment of the colonial subjects in WWII.

constellation of characters; the shift in narration from one mode to another; all of these elements contribute to the text's textual hybridity. In fact, especially when it comes to the syntagmatic category of the 'textual dynamics' level (cf. section 3.3), the pressure on the reader is significantly high. For example, when the reader is confronted with the re-telling of real-life events which occurs while the protagonist is addressing the imaginary judge with his fictional tirade, this strategy of generic hybridisation requires frequent switching between the distinct cognitive schemata of the 'factual' versus 'fictional' generic representations.

In this light, *WBI* has to be read as an example of a generically hybrid contemporary fiction of immigration which applies its investigative potential in the exploration of a very specific dimension of the concept of Italianness in contemporary Italy. The text can be read as a political essay aiming to denounce the everyday practices of exclusion and marginalisation of black Italian citizens. In addition to the strong degree of social criticism of Italian, French and also Senegalese practices of racialisation<sup>180</sup> and ethnicisation, what the reader finds in *WBI* is the intention to draw attention to both forgotten histories (such as the events of WWII)<sup>181</sup> and contemporary phenomena such as racism in football<sup>182</sup> in an attempt to engage a wider reading audience in the discussion of the notion of symbolic national belonging. In other words, in bringing these topics to the forefront of the reflections on Italianness *WBI* attempts to counter and to uncover the mechanisms of haunting, by shedding light on the connection between past and present injustices, and their impact on the lives of new ethnic minorities in

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180 In the passage of the book entitled 'Black is Beautiful', which forms part of the chapter 'For the Love of Senegal' (108-149), the reader learns about the rigid hierarchical system of skin colours, which was introduced during the colonial period and still unofficially continues to have an effect: "White skin was considered the most esteemed, white-skinned people considered themselves the most intelligent ones and inevitably had to benefit from all possible privileges. Brown skin of the half-breeds had a slightly lower value than the white one. Black skin was considered the worst, and black people were supposed to be subordinate and nothing more." (134). The narrator proceeds by describing the practices of racialisation which targets specific ethnic African groups. Moreover, he also documents the existence of the practices of whitening of the skin, extremely dangerous for the health but still very popular among African women (134-135).

181 See the note above on the passages devoted to the protagonist's father's life-story which includes the descriptions of the events that occurred during WWII in France.

182 This phenomenon is discussed at length in the second chapter of the book entitled 'The Dark Side of Football' (25-58).

Italy. The call to re-negotiate Italianness by challenging historical amnesias and by shedding light on the intertwining of transnational histories directly connect *WBI* with the text which will be discussed in the next section.

### **5.3 A Journey Towards Italianness: Re-negotiating Symbolic National Belonging in Igiaba Scego's *My Home is Where I Am* (2010)**

*My Home is Where I am* (Scego 2010, *MH* in the following) is a text which falls within the generic category of Italian fictions of immigration as a work aiming to contribute to contemporary debates on the ongoing social transformation of Italian society by re-visioning the concept of symbolic national belonging. As I have alluded to above, the re-negotiating, or re-visioning of Italianness through uncovering of the interconnectedness between, for example, the history of Africa and Europe, along with the acknowledgement of forgotten histories of colonialism and oppression, represent the common goal which both texts set themselves. However, the narrative strategies employed to convey these important messages and to engage in the critical contemporary debate on the notion of symbolic national belonging, differ from one text to another.

The main difference lies in the fact that compared to the multiplicity of voices we find in *WBI*, the critical voice heard in *MH* is almost always the same one and is furthermore the voice of Igiaba Scego herself. Notwithstanding the text's self-proclaimed autobiographical stamp,<sup>183</sup> any attempt to collocate *MH* within a single, conventional generic category would prove to be an arduous task. On the one hand, the list of possible generic categories that can be suggested for the categorisation of the book would include a family memoir, an autobiographical novel of migration, a historical revisionist novel, as well as a tourist guidebook to the city of Rome. On the

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<sup>183</sup> In the concluding pages of the book we find the following passage in which the writer offers us an insight into the authorial intentions: "I have tried to tell here pieces of my story. [...] I have focussed on the first twenty years of my life because these have been the years during which the chaos in Somalia was being set up. The chaos, which hit me when I was a child and which I have been involved in since then. These have also been the years during which Italy has changed as never before. From a country of emigration to a country of destination for immigrants [...], from permanent contracts to temporary employment." (159)

other hand, the text's location within one of these generic categories would, in my opinion, overlook the book's engagement specifically with the re-negotiation of the concept Italianness. This engagement, as I will demonstrate in the following, relies to a great extent precisely on the blurring of generic boundaries, the borrowing and the blending of different generic codes. As such, in my reading of *MH* as a hybrid fiction of immigration I will pay specific attention to the ways in which strategies of generic hybridisation are employed, first of all, to discuss the notion of symbolic national belonging and, secondly, to re-fashion the concept of Italianness.

The autobiographical input is constant throughout the book. To summarise the text very briefly, the first-person narrative presents events in the life of the author, Igiaba Scego. At certain points the narration extends to include significant episodes from the lives of the author's most important family members, such as her parents, her paternal grandfather and her brother Mohamed. In the first chapter of *MH* we follow Scego on a trip to the United Kingdom, for a family reunion which brings together representatives of the Somali diaspora scattered all around Europe. What follows in the remaining seven chapters, is a narrative that defies linearity and chronological order. A series of flashbacks take us through Igiaba's childhood years, first bullying incidents in the kindergarten and in the primary school,<sup>184</sup> her difficult years of adolescence,<sup>185</sup> and her mother's two-year long absence from Italy around the time in which the Civil War in Somalia breaks out.

In addition to Igiaba's personal story, life-stories of her family members are incorporated in the narrative texture now and then. These stories include, for example, that of Scego's paternal grandfather, Omar Scego. Omar Scego served as an interpreter for the Colonel Rudolfo Graziani during the Fascist period, and his life-story offers an

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184 Scego tells of the following episode which happens to her in elementary school: "One day another child told me in the face: 'You've got black skin. It transmits germs and illnesses. My mother has told me never to play with you because if I do, I will get a nasty illness and I will die.'" (151). This episode is reminiscent of Nasserah Chohra's account of her white's friend refusal to share her toys with Nasserah, whom she called 'a nigger'. (cf. Section 5.1)

185 This is how the narrator remembers herself at sixteen: "At sixteen, my diversity was a burden to me. My skin, my hair, my butt which looked decidedly African. My diversity was a heavy cross to bear. I would have paid to be able to be like everybody else, anonymous. I have never dreamed of getting white skin, really never, but I dreamt of becoming transparent. Something that others could perceive as neutral.[...] When I was a young girl, I did not know that to have Africa inside me equals to being able to touch archangels' feet" (138-139).

opportunity to reflect on the forgotten histories of Italy's colonial past and the interconnectedness of the histories of Italy and the Horn of Africa (77-91).<sup>186</sup>

In the first chapter of the book, the family members who are gathered together decide to draw a map of a city. This city is Mogadishu, and with the help of this map the Scego family are trying to reconstruct it the way it used to be before the outbreak of the conflict which destroyed the city as they remember it. Once this map has been completed, the protagonist sets out to re-map the drawing of the Somalian capital. If this map is to be taken as metaphorically representative of her Somali origins, Igiaba confirms this hypothesis by feeling compelled to add an extra layer to the map which would represent her city of birth, Rome. This new layer comes to life with the help of Post-It notes, on which names of Roman places, significant for Scego's personal stories, are written down.

The narrative follows this operation of re-mapping. In fact, each of the six central chapters of the book is entitled after a specific Roman landmark.<sup>187</sup> All of these chapters start with the information on the history of the given landmark and in passages which are graphically separated from the main body of the narrative by the use of italics. The following passage from the beginning of the second chapter entitled 'Teatro Sistina' shows how a tourist guidebook-like description of a part of Rome smoothly merges with the author's personal life-story:

*Teatro Sistina is situated in the eponymous street. Here we are at the very heart of the city of Rome, exactly half-way between the Trinità dei Monti Square and the Barberini Square. The street joins these two worlds, which only seem to be distant. One part of the street is in the Campo Marzio district, which starts with the Trinità dei Monti and Francesco Crispi Street, while the remaining part of Sistina Street is already in the Colonna district.[...] This is an ideal place to start dreaming. To reconstruct one's life. On my map I mark a street full of chairs.<sup>188</sup> For all of the friends who will join. (35-36).*

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186 This historical character was one of the key participants in the various Italian military operations in the Horn of Africa known as "the butcher of Libya" (80-81).

187 These landmarks include, in the chronological order of the chapters: Teatro Sistina, the Square of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the Obelisk of Axum (more specifically, the empty space where the Obelisk used to stand before it was repatriated in Ethiopia in 2005), the Termini Station, Trastevere and the Stadio Olimpico.

188 Scego mentions the fact that Teatro Sistina is especially famous as the theatre where the popular musical comedy *Aggiungi un posto a tavola* (*Add a Seat at the Table*), written by Sandro Giovannini Garinei Pietro and Iaià Fiastri debuted in 1974. The title of the comedy, as Scego explains, has been

The map which is mentioned in the last line of the passage is the main key to unlocking the message conveyed by the book. The first layer of the map which features the lost city of Mogadishu points to the possibility of multiple symbolic national belonging. The narrator's Somali roots are a part of her identity she will never be willing to renounce. As such, what the narrator is trying to do by re-mapping the drawing of Mogadishu, is to find a way to re-negotiate her Italianness by claiming recognition of her Somali origins.

Shortly before the family starts drawing the map, Scego affirms her feeling of symbolic belonging by stating that “Italy is my country”, immediately adding that so is Somalia (17). This is perceived as a problematic double belonging in the first chapter of the book, where she expresses doubts over the integrity of her identity, as in the following passage:

What am I? Who am I?  
I am black and Italian.  
But I am also Somali and black.  
So am I Afro-Italian? Italian-African? Second generation? Undefinable generation?  
*Meel kale?*<sup>189</sup> A bother? A Saracen Negro? A dirty Negro? (31)

This is an issue which is gradually resolved by the protagonist as the narrative unfolds. In the concluding chapter of the book, significantly entitled 'Being Italian for Me', contrary to the expectations raised by the title, Igiaba Scego admits to her inability to provide an unequivocal answer to the question of what it actually means to be Italian for her. In fact, other than saying that,

[t]o be Italian, when you think about it, means to make part of an assortment of fried sea-foods. An assortment made up of mixtures and contaminations. In which I feel like a well-seasoned squid (158),

the writer feels she can answer only by invoking another literary work. Recalling the day she read Karen Blixen's 'The Cardinal's First Tale', whose title left an indelible

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adopted from the eponymous song featured in the play: “Add a seat at the table for another friend who has joined in.” (35)

189 An expression in the Somali language which can be translated as “elsewhere.”

impression on her, Scego decides to follow the character's classic rule. According to this rule, the only way to answer someone who asks you who you are is to tell a story. (158-159). Telling her story thus becomes a way to show the futility of the attempting to define someone who does not fit, who is difficult to categorise. What Scego shows in these final pages of *MH*, is the fact she has come to terms with her own unclassifiability, undefiniability. Which, in her interpretation, become the key concepts for re-negotiating Italianness:

I am Italian, but at the same time, I am not. I am Somali, but at the same time I am not.  
A crossroads. A junction. (158)

She is neither Italian nor Somali, and what is more important, she cannot be defined as Afro-Italian, Italian-African or any other similar category since a definition cannot reflect the complexities of a life trajectory of a culturally hybrid subject. As such, Scego here claims the recognition of symbolic national belonging for herself, as well as for all of those subjects who consider themselves to be “proudly hybrid”, as Paolo Diop Ravenna in Khouma's *WBI* introduced himself (2010: 11).

In the final pages of *MH*, Scego speaks of this book as a journey, an itinerary she has followed in order to reconstruct her own story and get to grips with her re-visioning of the concept of Italianness.(159) In a way, this final reflection can be taken to re-vision Igiaba Scego's entire oeuvre, in the period between 2003 and 2010, as a literary journey undertaken in order to develop an in-depth reflection on the meaning of Italianness and the concept of symbolic national belonging. Igiaba Scego's work has already been discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, where in section 2.6 I briefly introduced her first book-length work, the novel entitled *The Nomad Who Loved Alfred Hitchcock*, published in 2003 in the Mappamondi series for children and young adults. In the same year, which marks the start of her literary activity which I would like to re-vision as a quest for re-negotiating the concept of Italianness, Igiaba Scego received first literary award for a short story entitled ‘Salsicce’ (‘Sausages’, now in Kuruvilla et al. 2005).<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> She won the first prize in the Eks&Tra competition for migrant writers, which is the same competition whose first edition proclaimed Tahar Lamri as the winner (cf. Section 4.2). Interestingly, in 2011 she was awarded the prestigious Mondello Award for *My Home Is Where I Am*, the novel analysed in this section, in the category of Italian writers. This award can be considered an important acknowledgement of the writer's contribution to contemporary Italian cultural debates.

With the publication of these two works, the author starts to develop a number of topics which run as red threads throughout her oeuvre in the above-mentioned period.

The most important of these topics is probably the history of Somalia, discussed with the twofold intention of, on the one hand, spreading knowledge of Somalia as a country with a rich history of its own, and, on the other hand, of calling attention to the intertwining of the histories of Somalia and Italy during and after the colonial period. Telling the life-story of her mother in her 2003 book thus becomes a way to put Somalia's past and present history in the spotlight, an endeavour with which Scego has since continued. Somalia, in fact, is featured in all of her major works, in all of the four book-length works,<sup>191</sup> including, as I have demonstrated, her most recent *MH*. At the same time, the focus on blackness and the visibility of new Italian citizens in contemporary Italian society can be identified as the second most important topic throughout Scego's oeuvre.

This topic is introduced with the short story 'Sausages' (see above), in which the protagonist, a young black Italian Muslim woman starts reflecting on the meaning of Italianness and the (im)possibility of being black and Italian in more than just a legal sense. She recounts the story of her growing up, going to university, and at all stages of her life she remembers being repeatedly subjected to questions on her origins, on whether she loved Somalia or Italy more, etc. ('Sausages', 27).

To give one further example, in Scego's 2004 novel *Rhoda* we encounter the eponymous protagonist who develops this reflection on black Italian citizens, more specifically, black Italian women, and the difficulties they encounter in their quest for symbolic national belonging:

A black woman in the collective imagination of the Italians had precise connotations. You started from the top and went down to the gloomy underworld. Black women were soul or jazz singers, record-breaking athletes, dazzling models... at best. In the worst case they were lost women, females who were greedy for money and ready to sell themselves for a few filthy pennies. As a black woman I felt as if I had been labelled. (161-162).

These examples demonstrate how any in-depth reading of *MH* and its engagement with

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<sup>191</sup> In addition to the two books discussed in the dissertation, these include *Rhoda* published in 2004 and *Oltre Babilonia (Beyond Babylon)*, 2008).

issues of blackness, visibility and belonging can only be effective when positioned alongside Scego's other texts. Through them we can trace the development of the author's reflections on symbolic national belonging across her oeuvre. However, this development cannot be presented as a linear, evolutionary progression. Quite to the contrary, with *MH* a circle is completed by going back to the author's family history, already partially presented in her mother's life-story in the 2003 book, and by referencing the protagonist in 'Sausages' whose doubts on her symbolic national belonging<sup>192</sup> are finally resolved in the final pages of *MH*.

This resolution, as I have hinted above, consists in shifting the perspective from the attempt to 'define' and to 'categorise' one's belonging as an unequivocal 'either/or' (either Italian or Somali in this case), or a mixture of the two which would result in a questionable hyphenated identity (Afro-Italian? Italian-African?), to a more fluid and nuanced view of symbolic national belonging as multi-layered, hybridised notion which defies fixity and is best reconstructed in the form of a narrative journey.

To conclude this section on *MH*, it is important to mention that in 2012 the book was reprinted by the Italian publishing house Loescher. Loescher, based in Turin, is one of Italy's most important historic publishing houses, which today specialises in printing books for schools. The 2012 Loescher edition of *MH*, in fact, is a version expanded with different kinds of didactic material for scholastic use. The new edition, recommended for upper secondary school level, includes a thirty-two-page long guide to studying the text, exercises to check students' progress, a list of references for further reading and, finally, suggestions on how to approach the reading of this text from an interdisciplinary perspective. Moreover, on the website of the publisher additional online resources are available for free consultation.<sup>193</sup> The fact that Loescher have decided to offer such a

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192 'Sausages' is one of the most studied of Igiaba Scego's works (cf. Hanna 2004, Curti 2006, Bouchard/Ferme 2013) and one of the most famous passages from the short story is a list of things which make the protagonist feel either more Italian or Somali (2005: 29-30), pointing to her struggle to come to grips with her own concept of Italianness.

193 The online description of the book (in Italian) can be found at [http://www.loescher.it/dettagliocatalogo/O\\_30270/La-mia-casa-e-dove-sono#libro](http://www.loescher.it/dettagliocatalogo/O_30270/La-mia-casa-e-dove-sono#libro). The same webpage contains the links to the various online resources. These resources include a selection of mp3 files that contain recording of Igiaba Scego reading excerpts from the text, as well as an interview with the author, all of which can be accessed for free; historical documents on the outbreak of the Civil War in Somalia (1991-1992), and a selection of Somali fairy-tales, together with other material related to the history of Somalia and the decolonisation of the Horn of Africa.

product, is a significant recognition of the importance of the topics presented in *MH*. This publication can thus be presented as an important step towards a major revision of the Italian school curriculum, a revision in which, as both Igiaba Scego and Pap Khouma stress in their books, forgotten histories of colonialism, practices oppression and exclusion, which today haunt certain groups of Italian and European citizens, should receive due attention.

#### **5.4 Generic Hybridisation and Diversification in Contemporary Fictions of Immigration**

The books by Pap Khouma and Igiaba Scego analysed in the previous sections represent two particularly interesting cases of contemporary hybrid fictions of immigration. Together with Amara Lakhous' 2006 novel *Clash of Civilisations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (*CC*) discussed in Chapter Four (cf. section 4.1), these texts can be presented as examples which have made a significant contribution to the diversification of the genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context. Moreover, as I have shown in the analytical section devoted to these individual cases, the authors in question have employed different hybridisation strategies in order to innovate and re-configure the generic models which characterised the earlier stage of the development of the genre.

The rootedness in and the indebtedness to the generic tradition of the first male and female fictions of immigration is made evident in all three of these texts by the use of the (semi)autobiographical first-person narrative of migration as the main underlying generic model which gives the narrative its shape.<sup>194</sup> This main generic form of the individual story of migration interacts with other generic forms, very different ones if we compare *CC*, *WBI* and *MH*. In *CC* this individual life-story of an immigrant unfolds in the protagonist's diary chapters, as well as in the individual truth-telling accounts. The novel's generic hybridity is achieved through the integration of crime fiction conventions which modify the conventional structure of a novel of immigration.<sup>195</sup> The

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<sup>194</sup> The same conclusions also apply to Geneviève Makaping's *Trajectories of Gaze*, as well as Antonio Campobasso's *Black from Pugila* introduced in section 5.1.

<sup>195</sup> See Nünning (2008b) on the generic conventions in British and American crime fiction. For the development of the genre in the Italian context see Pieri (2011), Guagnini (2010), Sirtori (2004) and

multiplicity of voices and life-stories in *CC* is structurally held together by adopting the elements of the crime novel. These structural elements, such as the assassination of one of the building's residents, the investigation which provides the pretext for the interviews with the rest of the characters, and the solution given in the 'truth-telling' chapter by Inspector Mauro Bettarini (*CC*, 177-185) function as the internal narrative framework securing the smooth integration of the two plot patterns. The novel's overall degree of generic hybridisation can be evaluated as tending towards the lower end of the scale given that in the analysis of the individual categories on the syntagmatic level (cf. section 3.3) does not show strong discrepancies and divergences in the fusion of the elements and the features belonging to the novel's two main generic sources (cf. section 4.1).

Khouma's and Scego's texts, unlike Lakhous' *CC*, can be identified as strong generic hybrids. In both these cases, a number of different generic sources integrated on the paradigmatic level are combined with strategically introduced elements that disrupt the coherence of the narrative on the syntagmatic level. As I have demonstrated, such a strong degree of generic hybridisation is determined by the complexity of the issues at the thematic forefront of these texts. The function of generic hybridisation is precisely that of drawing attention to the many dimensions of the discussion on symbolic national belonging. Such a discussion, as the texts emphasise, cannot limit itself to recounting of a single (semi)autobiographical story of immigration, but has to be integrated with other narrative sources.

In this way, the two texts engage in the debate on the meaning of Italianness by diversifying and renewing the genre of fictions of immigration, attempting, at the same time, to present new perspectives on the possible ways of re-negotiating the concept of Italianness itself.

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Petronio (2000).

## 6 Heterogeneity, Multiplicity, Hybridisation: Re-configuring Italianness in Randa Ghazy's *Perhaps I Won't Kill Anyone Today* (2007)

My last analytical chapter is devoted to the analysis of Randa Ghazy's 2007 novel *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno: storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista* (*Perhaps I Won't Kill Anyone Today: Light Tales of a Young Muslim Woman Who, Oddly Enough, is not a Terrorist*, 2007, LT in the following).<sup>196</sup> The novel focuses on events in the life of a young Italian-Egyptian woman called Jasmine in contemporary Milan. Jasmine is in her early twenties, lives with her parents and is about to graduate from the university where she is studying to become a lawyer. The story is told in the first-person, in a diary-like format, with short individual chapters either used to describe concrete episodes in the protagonist's life or to present her reflections on such critical contemporary issues as what true cultural hybridisation means. The interspersal of the lighter, often outright comic episodes, which the title alludes to, with dense and thought-provoking passages is further accentuated by the shifts from an ironic to a more serious tone used by the first-person narrator.

Elisabetta Povoledo, who interviewed Randa Ghazy for the *New York Times* shortly after the publication of the novel in 2007, introduces the text as a “multiethnic tale” which “most young women, regardless of their cultural or ethnic extraction” will be able to relate (Povoledo 2007). If we take into consideration Ghazy's two earlier works, the best-selling *Dreaming of Palestine* (*Sognando Palestina*, 2002), written when the author herself was only fifteen,<sup>197</sup> as well as the 2005 *Prova a sanguinare: quattro ragazzi, un treno, la vita* (*Try to Bleed: Four Young Adults, A Train, The Life*), the writer can easily be defined as a young adult novelist. While I agree with the findings of Lorenzo Luatti

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196 The novel has so far been translated into Spanish as *Hoy no voy a matar a nadie: Historias minimas de una joven musulmana y no terrorista* (Madrid: Editorial Luis Vives, 2009). I am using the provisional English title suggested in *The New York Times'* article which discusses the novel and provides brief excerpts of an interview with the author (Povoledo 2007). In the same article the journalist also mentions the fact that Randa Ghazy and her mother are working on an Arabic-language version of the novel.

197 In addition to biographical information, the entry on Randa Ghazy in the *Enciclopedia de Estudios Afroeuropeos* (Gazzoni, online) provides a detailed account of the genesis of the writer's first book, as well as of the heated controversy caused by its publication.

(2010: 168-176), as well as Myriam Pettinato (online), who have identified key elements of continuity between the three texts on the thematic level, as well in terms of stylistic and linguistic texture, the categorisation of this latest novel as juvenile fiction does not do justice to the complexity of the text.

In the close reading of the novel in this chapter, I will show that Ghazy's novel should be considered as example of hybrid contemporary text that continues and at the same times renews the genre of Italian fictions of immigration. In fact, by adopting strategies of generic hybridisation already introduced by Amara Lakhous in *CC* (cf. section 4.1), with *LT* Randa Ghazy produces a subgeneric blend in which the conventions of a young adult novel are merged with those of a novel of immigration (cf. section 6.3). The high degree of textual hybridisation, characteristic, as I have shown in the previous chapters, of this most recent stage in the development of the genre of fictions of immigration, is made evident in linguistic and stylistic innovations. As I have already alluded to above, the light, ironic tone employed to depict the young woman's everyday routine purposefully contrasts with the critical nature of the issues discussed. Finally, the thematic focus on the perspective of a young female subject who is slowly getting to grips with her culturally hybrid identity necessarily calls for a strong degree of textual hybridisation. Such an intrinsic connection between textual hybridisation and the centrality of the discussion on hybrid identity has, in fact, already been pointed out to by Christin Galster in the context of contemporary British fiction (cf. section 3.3).

The innovative potential of the novel, however, is not limited to the presence of strong generic hybridisation or innovations on the stylistic and linguistic levels. In the next two sections I will conduct my analysis of the novel by exploring the two key trajectories of *LT*, both of which highlight the new ways in which the text engages in the discussion of the critical contemporary issues of symbolic belonging and the re-negotiation of Italianness.

## **6.1 Unmaking the Myth: The Meeting of Civilisations**

The main sequence of events in Jasmine's first-person narrative unfolds within the time-span of around three months. In order to give the reader the ability to reconstruct the

chronology of the events,<sup>198</sup> the text includes multiple references to real-life events. These references, most of them to newspaper articles published in the Italian press,<sup>199</sup> often abruptly interrupt the narrative that Ghazy herself has defined as being “about ‘the foolish problems that a girl my age can have living in Milan’” (Povoledo 2007).<sup>200</sup> The key points of reference that delimit the time-span of the narration are two.<sup>201</sup> The first one is the wedding of Jasmine's best friend Amira, which takes place at the very beginning of the summer, while the second reference, taken from the real world, is the death of Oriana Fallaci and represents an especially important factual reference for the exploration of this first trajectory of reading the novel. The Italian journalist and writer died on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006 and the novel ends with the protagonist reflecting on the significance of this event in her own life.

According to the interpretative line which I intend to investigate in this section, the novel can be read as a reply that Jasmine has never had a chance to give to Oriana Fallaci. More specifically, it is to the writer's last essayistic trilogy written in the

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198 The diary entries themselves do not contain dates, instead their titles have to be read as the first sentence of the individual chapter. Only the first chapter does not have any title, while the second one is entitled: “*For starters*) Once things were not this way” (11), and the third one: “*Secondly*) I don't understand why one should get married so young” (emphasis in orig., 13).

199 The text also contains a number of flashbacks some of which are connected to the discussion of certain political topics. In the chapter entitled “*It is a strange period*) but I will survive” (65-71) Jasmine and Leila make references to the Italian referendum on in vitro fertilisation that took place in June 2005 (69), the 2006 Italian general election (ibid.) and an article published in the Italian daily *La Repubblica* (Cafferri 2006) that deals with the fatwa against sculptors issued by the Egyptian religious authorities. These discussions between the two young women serve to introduce the important topic of the restrictive Italian laws on citizenship. Jasmine describes Leila as “more Italian than many people from Milan who I know” (66), and yet Leila cannot vote because she is still waiting for her father's citizenship application to be processed. The fact that she has no right to vote and to participate in the political life of the country that she considers to be hers, is extremely frustrating for the young woman. Jasmine comments on that matter thus: “I felt her wish to express her civic sense, to be somehow useful to the community she was living in. It was as if she needed in some way to take the place she deserved” (ibid.) The two friends also briefly discuss the case of another acquaintance of theirs, Jameela, who is forced, according to the current legislation on residency and citizenship, to find a job within the period of six months after her graduation. If she does not succeed, she will be expelled from the country where she has probably spent most of her life (67).

200 I will discuss some of these “foolish” elements of the plot line, such as the crush that Jasmine has on an Italian-Egyptian boy, who then asks her mother for help in setting them up, in section 6.3.

201 We also find occasional references to the 2006 Football World Cup and the night of the celebrations of the Italian victory as further points of chronological references (124, 145), as well as to the outbreak of the military conflict involving Israel and Lebanon in July 2006 (189-190).

aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and dedicated to the presumed clash of the civilisations between the Christian and the Islamic world.<sup>202</sup> Directly referenced in *LT*,<sup>203</sup> Fallaci's books and additional newspaper articles centre on the incompatibility, danger and inferiority of Islamic culture when compared to its Christian-Western counterpart. The former is presented by the Italian journalist as a homogeneous and monolithic entity, but it is the construction of the Muslim woman especially, as subjugated and outright stupid, that provokes Jasmine's rage.

The myth of the clash of civilisations, already thematised in Amara Lakhous' *CC*, has acquired strong political currency since the publication of Samuel Huntington's book in 1996 (cf. section 4.1). In a recent study of the mechanisms that regulate the success of certain political myths, Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand speak of “an increasing diffusion of discourses about a clash of civilisations” (2013: 1) which is taking place in the contemporary, ever more globalised world:

[P]recisely when geographical distance is overcome, an even more striking distance is recreated as a spectacular separation. Globalization unifies the world, but the spectacle divides it once again. Nation-states may be declining and so are the grand ideologies of modernity, but new and powerful boundaries are said to divide us and them, our civilisation and theirs. (ibid.)

The scholars also give a very precise definition of what a myth in its politicised version represents:

A myth is not what is opposed to the reality of facts. People arguing this forget that the strength of a myth in general, and of a political myth in particular, lies in the fact that it cannot be falsified, because it creates the condition for its own realization. To give just one example taken from Nazism, a pure Aryan race may well not exist, but, once you have created a huge scientific, medical and state apparatus to 'select' such a race, you can easily create one, or at least the impression of its existence. (2013: 2)

Moreover, as Bottici and Challand point out, it is largely through the channels of

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202 The books are *The Rage and The Pride* (Fallaci 2001), *The Force of the Reason* (Fallaci 2004a) and *Oriana Fallaci Interviews Oriana Fallaci: The Apocalypse* (Fallaci 2004b). In Italy the first book sold over 800,000 copies in less than three months (Deaglio 2010: 608).

203 *The Rage and The Pride* (Fallaci 2001) was first published in article form (De Bortoli Ferruccio 2001) in the major Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*. The second article mentioned is a long piece on Fallaci published in *The New Yorker* in June 2006 (Talbot 2006) that also contains excerpts from the interview taken with the Italian writer (106-108).

popular culture, as well as through the media, that “the clash of civilisations has become a cognitive schema through which people look at the world [...] as well as an aesthetic figure which mobilizes and evokes passions and emotions” (Ibid.: 3). In this study Fallaci's *The Rage and the Pride* (2002) is presented as a “summa of icons of the clash of civilisations as they could be endorsed by the European intellectuals”(2013: 1443) and thus as an example of a text that has greatly contributed in the most recent phase of the myth's consolidation in the Western world.<sup>204</sup>

That yet another Italian fiction of immigration attempts and, if compared to Lakhous' *CC*, in a much more explicit manner, to unmake this myth is a clear signal of the desire to make Italian fictions of immigration resonate with a wider audience of readers. The protagonist of *LT* performs this task by establishing a very personal relationship with Oriana Fallaci. In the very last page of *LT*, upon learning of Fallaci's death, Jasmine writes:

My role-model has been taken away from me [...] that role-model who, since I was a young girl dreaming of becoming a journalist, before even trying to become a lawyer, motivated me to become somebody great and important, really great and important, and who, in more recently, urged me to diffuse the knowledge of what I represent. Of what I am. (202)

The sense of loss Jasmine experiences upon receiving this piece of news contrasts with the feeling of rage and pride she feels in the episode in which earlier in the narration we find the first explicit reference to the Italian writer:

I was crying while I was reading *The Rage and The Pride*, precisely because of that, I was crying of rage and pride.  
The rage for seeing how all attempts made by normal and moderate Muslims like myself were thwarted in such a crude and abrupt way by a journalist who, all of a sudden, became ignorant, reactionary and sanctimonious, who mouthed off big time [...], all that simply because thanks to who she was the crap she said became an opinion worth of paying attention to. (111-112)

This reference occurs almost half-way through the book, in a chapter significantly entitled with the famous line from Catullus: “*Odi et amo*) Quare id faciam, fortasse

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<sup>204</sup>In their analysis, the scholars stress the fact that this particular myth is not a Western-only phenomenon. On the contrary, the myth in question “is a narrative that is potentially working worldwide” (Bottici/Challand 2013: 5). This argument is also developed through the analysis of discourses which exist in Arab Middle Eastern countries.

requisis” (103). The long piece on Oriana Fallaci in *The New Yorker* (Talbot 2006), which Jasmine googles while discussing with her friend Leila whether it should be allowed to wear nail polish while praying, contains detailed biographical information on the legendary figure of Italian journalist. The author of the article rightly presents Fallaci as “one of the sharpest political interviewers in the world for the two decades from the mid-nineteen-sixties to the mid-nineteen-eighties” (Talbot 2006, online). Reading about the kind of work Fallaci has done and the kind of people she has interviewed and the way she was used to carrying out those interviews over the two decades, it is not hard to see why she was such an important point of reference, a fundamental role-model for a young strong-minded girl with tough opinions like Jasmine.<sup>205</sup> In other words, reading this piece it becomes clear why Jasmine admired and, maybe even loved Fallaci.

However this admiration makes Jasmine's experience of reading *The Rage and The Pride* all the more painful and humiliating. Profound disappointment with her former role-model, and the sense of betrayal and injustice done, provide an incentive for her to prove Fallaci wrong. In the following passage she expresses her disagreement with an image of the Muslim woman in which she does not recognise herself, together with her pride for being what she is:

And pride for knowing no, it is not like that. Our culture is not inferior, our contribution to the development of the sciences is not insignificant, our immigrants do not have fun when risking their lives to end up with an underpaid job in a country which in many aspects is very racist, there is no plan or project to make the entire of Europe an Islamic territory, and, most importantly, those poor frustrated and subjugated women are not 'idiots'<sup>206</sup>, they do not connive with their husbands' egoism, they are not happy with their own condition. (112)

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205 Just to name a few examples, Oriana Fallaci covered the events of the Vietnam War, the student demonstrations in Mexico City in 1968 during which she was shot. She interviewed politicians, most famously Henry Kissinger, and religious leaders such as Ayatollah Khomeini (Talbot 2006).

206 By using this word, Jasmine directly references a passage in which Fallaci presents her ideas on Muslim women: “So here's my answer to your question on the Contrast-between-the-Two-Cultures: I say in this world there's room for everyone. In your own home you can do whatever you want. And if in some countries the women are so stupid as to accept the chador, or rather the veil you peer out of through a close-meshed net at eye level, that's their problem. If they are such birdbrains as to accept not going to school, not going to the doctor, not having their picture taken, that's their problem. If they are such idiots as to marry some asshole who wants four wives, that's their problem. If their men are so silly as not to drink beer or wine, ditto.” (quoted in Bottici/Challand 2013: 71)

Before this episode occurs and the direct link to the major intertext is established, Jasmine has already started to perform the task of dismantling Fallaci's theories. In fact, all of the episodes that take place in Jasmine's life can be said to be connected with the main argument the protagonist presents in her diary entries. This argument is developed around Jasmine's conviction first of all that her Egyptian, Arabic and Muslim roots and cultural baggage deserve respect, as the last passage quoted demonstrates, and, secondly, cannot be treated as elements incompatible with her being Italian. In other words, in engaging in this fictional dialogue with Fallaci's books, Jasmine sets herself the task of promoting the possibility of true cultural hybridisation which the Italian writer excludes on various accounts.<sup>207</sup>

The novel reinforces this position through the 'light tales' of Jasmine's everyday life. These light tales, in giving account of seemingly banal events involving the protagonist, also contain significant episodes that are used to challenge Fallaci's statements. For example, in the third chapter Jasmine playfully introduces the question of wearing the veil. This complicated issue has recently sparked a very heated debate across many European countries, which has been given wide coverage in the media, as well as in the academic literature<sup>208</sup>. Jasmine starts elaborating on her point of view on the matter by

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207 Fallaci's position is probably best summarised in her own words, for example, in the following passage from the article in *The New Yorker* (Talbot 2006) in which the journalist includes an excerpt from an email Fallaci sends her: "She elaborated, in an e-mail, 'Look at the Muslims: in Europe they go on with their chadors and their burkas and their djellabahs. They go on with the habits preached by the Koran, they go on with mistreating their wives and daughters. They refuse our culture, in short, and try to impose their culture, or so-called culture, on us [...] I reject them, and this is not only my duty toward my culture. Toward my values, my principles, my civilisation. It is not only my duty toward my Christian roots. It is my duty toward freedom and toward the freedom fighter I am since I was a little girl fighting as a partisan against Nazi-Fascism. Islamism is the new Nazi-Fascism. With Nazi-Fascism, *no compromise* is possible. No hypocritical tolerance. And those who do not understand this simple reality are feeding the suicide of the West.'" (Talbot 2006)

208 Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) dedicates the third chapter of her book, which I discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation, to identifying some of the major trends of the recent heated debate on the practice of veiling and Islam. Among other key factors in the process of racialisation of religion first analysed by Bayoumi (2006), she points out the fact that "Muslim youths – the violent male and the veiled young woman – become the Central Other of the unifying Europe, exemplifying everything that it is not and cannot be, exactly at a point when the existence of a native European Muslim population has become an undeniable reality" (2011: 83). It has also to be stressed that recent anthropological studies demonstrate that veiling can also be conceived of as a cultural practice, rather than being necessarily connected to religious orientation. In the discussion of the practices of veiling in different countries, John Bowen writes that "there is nothing necessary about the meaning of an item of bodily decoration. People attribute meanings to objects against the background of earlier or broader meaning. It makes little sense anthropologically to ask what 'the meaning of the veil' is, as is so often

first acknowledging that “[t]he issue of the veil is a complicated one” (15), only to continue by very casually comparing the practice of adopting the veil to “waxing: do it when you want to, ignore what the others expect from you. When you think you can do it. When it does not feel like too big of a sacrifice” (16).

Running the risk of being accused of blasphemy, Jasmine draws this curious parallel, between having a cosmetic procedure and the decision to follow a specific religious dress code, in order to express her perspective on two issues which are extremely important to her. The first issue concerns her conviction that a religion can become a very personal practice. She is not afraid to affirm, for example, that the interpretation of the Qu'ran requires new tools in the modern age or to ask questions such as “Who decides who is a real Muslim?” (148).<sup>209</sup> Secondly, this somewhat problematic comparison between waxing and veiling is framed within a more general reflection on female subjectivity that Jasmine expresses in the following words: “Every single woman should do as she feels” (15). Initially employed in her interior discussion on adopting the veil, the sentence can be treated as the outcome in the process of coming to grips with her own and other female characters' cultural hybridity, which is a point that will be developed more in detail in the next section.

There are numerous passages in the book that aim at unmaking the myth supported and promoted by Fallaci, in which this task is performed by using a different narrative strategy. Instead of either explicitly referring to Fallaci's writing, or taking up precisely the questions that the Italian writer discusses, *LT's* protagonist highlights her own cultural hybridity, as an Italian-Egyptian and as a young Muslim woman who lives in

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done in Europe and North America today, but more sense to ask 'what do different actors think has been communicated' by choosing a particular way of presenting oneself.” (Bowen 2012: 74). Bowen's conclusions can be used to counter the Occidental construction of the fixed image of the veiled woman that El-Tayeb refers to.

<sup>209</sup> The protagonist develops this reflection in the same chapter (16-17) as well as elsewhere in the book. She discusses the dilemmas that Muslim women, who live in European countries, may encounter on a daily basis. Such seemingly banal issues as nail polish worn while praying (106), whether one can date someone, especially a non-Muslim (147), what an appropriate length of a skirt may be (148), etc., become serious issues in the difficult act of reconciling one's religious beliefs with the style of living one has been brought up with. Moreover, Jasmine makes a direct reference to the figure of Irshad Manji (146-147), a Canadian scholar and activist who is famous for her criticism of mainstream traditional interpretation of the Qu'ran. Manji is hailed by the protagonist as someone “who expressed her ideas with force, and who tries to become the voice to listen to, claiming to be what she is” (147).

contemporary Milan. In the interaction with her peers, Italian or Italian-Egyptian as herself, she claims recognition of her religious diversity and the richness of her cultural heritage, at the same time as she claims her symbolic national belonging by re-negotiating Italianness. Her life choices are partially determined by the influence of two cultural perspectives which merge to produce an outcome that sometimes Jasmine herself judges as “different”, “incomplete”(83), “strange” (199). She is different, for example, when she wants to behave like an average Italian young woman, to fall in love, to flirt and to have a romantic relationship. Yet she will not compromise on the issue of virginity because she has been taught to think of it “as a pure and wonderful gift to be shared with the man who will be your partner for life” (136). She goes through difficult times when the others point to her diversity,<sup>210</sup> yet her inner strength, combined with her best “weapon”, as she defines her irony, (199), do not allow her to give up fighting, to continue defending her diversity and her cultural hybridity.

It has to be mentioned that even if Jasmine explicitly identifies herself as “hybrid” (191), and on several occasions shows herself very critical both of the Western, Italian parts of her cultural baggage and of the Arab and the Muslim ones (161). What is important, however, is that she cannot renounce any part of this multifaceted baggage, and as such she should be considered a truly hybrid new Italian. Her way of being and her ability to cut out a space for herself are the best counter arguments to the theories that disseminate ideas of clashes and incompatibilities between cultures. The times are changing and social hybridisation in Italy is becoming stronger than ever. The so-called second generation, young people such as Jasmine and her friends, are finding ways of mediating between cultures, in part by challenging and re-defining Italianness.

As such, Jasmine and her generation become the Italian representatives of the global phenomenon of new youth cultures, a phenomenon recently explored in a study by Nilan and Feixa (2006). In that investigation, the researchers emphasise the potential of young people to function as creative social actors, capable of negotiating new forms of personal and group identity, of “creat[ing] their own culture distinct from, embedded in, or in opposition to, the dominant cultures” (Nilan/Feixa 2006: 2). *LT* is an important

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<sup>210</sup> Even her best friend Diana finds it difficult to grasp Jasmine's decision to remain a virgin until the wedding: “I mean, you are not a nun, really. Enjoy your life a little bit, Jas, get to know a boy. There's nothing wrong with it.” (136)

text because if, on the one hand, it depicts the difficulties that new young Italians have to overcome, on the other hand, it points strongly to the possibility of creating a new, distinctively hybrid identity and culture.

## **6.2 Generational Conflicts: Teaching and Learning Cultural Hybridisation**

The title of this chapter explicitly evokes an essay written by Lisa Lowe in 1991. Lowe's "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" (now Lowe 2004) is one of the scholar's seminal contributions to investigating the ways to account for the complexity Asian American culture. More specifically, Lowe introduces the following three key concepts, which can be deemed crucial in the exploration of any ethnic minority culture.<sup>211</sup> The definitions given to these concepts by Lowe in a later book on the same topic are as follows:

By 'heterogeneity' I mean to indicate the existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category—that is, among Asian Americans, there are differences of Asian national origin, of generational relation to immigrant exclusion laws, of class backgrounds in Asia and economic conditions within the United States, and of gender. By 'hybridity,' I refer to the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations; [...] we might understand 'multiplicity' as designating the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power, are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations. (1996: 67).

Lowe's contributions have proved very fruitful in the work of many scholars of Asian American literature. Given the importance of the trope of the mother-daughter conflict in Asian American literature, Silvia Schultermandl, for example, investigates and

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211 In this instance, Lowe is specifically interested in coming to terms with the complexity of "the material contradictions that characterize Asian American groups. [...] heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity are concepts that assist us in critically understanding the material conditions of Asians in the United States, conditions in excess of the dominant 'orientalist' construction of Asian Americans. Although orientalism seeks to consolidate the coherence of the West as a subject precisely through the representation of 'oriental' objects as homogeneous, fixed, and stable, contradictions in the production of Asians and in the noncorrespondence between the orientalist object and the Asian American subject ultimately express the limits of such fictions" (1996: 67).

“counteract[s] the practices of reading mother-daughter relationships in Asian American literature as mere instances of the commonplace generational conflict” (2009: 27) by elaborating further on Lowe's concepts of heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity. Among other critical aspects, Schiltermandl stresses the fact that

[t]o employ the generational conflict metaphorically for an evaluation of Asian American literature reiterates a binary opposition between Asian and American identities. With the mother as a stand-in for Asia and the daughter as a stand-in for America, this binary opposition conjures up ideas of culture that focus on purity and essentialism instead of hybridity and pluralism. It simply disregards the fact that every culture, as Homi K. Bhabha illustrates in *The Location of Culture* (1997), is sui generis hybrid. Instead, it locates America and Asia as cultural entities in clear opposition to each other without addressing the complex dynamics that constitute Asian American cultural productions and practices. (2009: 27)

This call for a more nuanced and sophisticated reading of the mother daughter conflicts in Asian American literature and the employment of concepts such as heterogeneity, multiplicity and hybridisation resonate very well with the second interpretative line of my reading of *LT*. The introduction of generational conflict as one of the key components of *LT*'s plot structure does not in itself represent a novelty in contemporary fictions of immigration. Once again, the internal generic intertextuality to which I allude in the introduction of this chapter, connects *LT* to *I Wanted to Be White* (cf. section 2.4 and also section 5.1), as well as a number of novels that have not been analysed in this study, such as Igiaba Scego's novels *Rhoda* (2004) and *Oltre Babilonia* (*Beyond Babylon*, 2008), both of which feature several mother-daughter pairings, as well as a number of other important female family members.

*LT* also presents the mother-daughter relationship as one of its focal points, at the same time putting a whole constellation of female characters at the centre of attention. The network in *LT* consists of the first generation of Italian-Egyptian, represented by Jasmine's mother, her best friend Amira's mother-in-law (nicknamed by Jasmine as 'the old giraffe'), as well as the sister of the latter (alias 'the reverend turkey'), while the younger generation includes Jasmine herself, Amira and her cousin Leila, and Jasmine's Italian friend Diana. These female co-protagonists, each with different life trajectories, opinions and beliefs, are introduced in order to textually enact the concepts of heterogeneity, multiplicity and cultural hybridisation to Lowe referred to above.

Moreover, the antagonistic relationship between Jasmine and her mother has the function of showing the reader how difficult it is to recognise and come to respect the existence of heterogeneity, multiplicity and cultural hybridisation, even for someone who has been brought up in a highly heterogeneous and culturally hybrid environment, as is the case with Jasmine.

When, in the beginning of the book, Jasmine writes in her interior discussion on veiling (and waxing) discussed in the previous section that, “[e]very single woman should do as she feels” (15), she does not really think so. At least, her actions disprove her words. In fact, in several instances throughout the narration, Jasmine adopts a position on best friend Amira's life choices which is clearly reminiscent of that of Oriana Fallaci on Muslim women (cf. previous section). Amira decides to get married at twenty-three, takes a leave of absence from university in order to spend more time at home, taking care of the house and of her husband. After the wedding, she seems to have become the living embodiment of 'a subjugated idiot who connives with her husband's egoism' (cf. section 6.1). Jasmine shows herself to be extremely judgemental and biased against the choices made by her friend. In this conversation with her mother, Jasmine realises just how shocked she is regarding what is happening with Amira:

[Jasmine] [I]t's just that I'm still shaken by how things have turned out for Amira. If she at least manages to graduate, that in itself will be an achievement.

[Jasmine's mother] Well, Jasmine, if she doesn't graduate it will mean that a university degree is not among her priorities. She has probably found what she has been looking for, and she is happy this way.

[Jasmine] What are you talking about?

[Jasmine's mother] Jasmine, not everybody has the same ambitions as you do [...] She is happy this way, don't you understand? (45-46)

Jasmine does not answer her mother's last question directly but continues to reflect on the situation, only to finally admit to herself that no, she does not understand (46). The fact of the matter is that Jasmine is not even making an effort to understand her friend's point of view. As she explains to her mother in the same conversation, when it comes to her priorities in life, a university degree comes first, a job is on the second place, and finding her 'prince charming' is at the very bottom of this list (45). She simply will not accept, as the passage above shows, that Amira can make independent and well-grounded decisions when these choices go against Jasmine's own ideas. This means that

she easily falls into the same trap of having a one-sided perspective, of being unable to even attempt to understand that somebody can be different:

It is as if once you have chosen a particular life-style, you automatically refuse to accept and to understand that there can be another way to look at things.  
It is as if all other ways of dealing with life were odd, unusual, incomprehensible. (136)

In this passage it is Jasmine herself who expresses her frustration at her friend's Diana's inability to see her point of view on prenuptial sex (cf. section 6.1). Yet this passage could easily be used to describe Jasmine's own inability to do the same when it comes to Amira's life decisions. As such, *LT* stages a situation in which the young and most certainly culturally hybrid protagonist is herself finding it problematic to come to terms with the existence of heterogeneity, multiplicity and different ways of being culturally hybrid.

Reading Jasmine's relationship with her mother in a more conventionally metaphorical way, it would be easy to identify Jasmine, with her desire for emancipation and strong feminist attitude,<sup>212</sup> as a “stand-in for” Italy and Occidentalisation, and her mother as a “stand-in” for Egypt, as well as more general Arab and Islamic cultures (cf. quotation from Silvia Schultermandl above).<sup>213</sup> This is, in fact, how Jasmine herself sees the “generational and cultural differences” between the two of them (22), but in the course of the narration her mother proves her wrong. In the antagonistic situations which involve the two women and which are always related to a controversial topic (such as, e.g., Amira's decision to get married or Jasmine's mother's attempts to find a husband for Jasmine<sup>214</sup>), it is her mother who patiently teaches

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212 Even if Jasmine finds it necessary to clear state that she is “NO FEMMINIST” (16, capital letters orig.), once again, she fall into the trap of constructing the feminist movement as a homogeneous and monolithic block. It is not clear why exactly she says that she does not consider herself to be a feminist, that is to say, which particular strand of feminism she has in mind and with which she cannot identify. Yet the fact that she expresses her respect and actually shares many of the ideas promoted by one of the major contemporary Islamic feminist thinkers, Irshad Manji (cf. previous section), probably points to her being a feminist, and a particular kind of feminist after all.

213 Jasmine's mother, in fact, does not share her daughter's list of life priorities, discussed in this section. On the contrary, she would like to see her daughter get married, probably just like Amira has done, and preferably before she has got “only two years to go before going on pension” (45). In order to fulfil this plan, the mother actively conspires with a young Italian-Egyptian man called Yusef and his relatives who is set on courting Jasmine in a more traditional Egyptian way (44, 124-133, 139-143).

214 See the note above.

Jasmine to show respect and attempt to understand diversity. It is first of all the mother who does not conform to an orientalist stereotyping of a Muslim woman as frustrated, subjugated and incapable of making her own judgements (cf. the previous section). On the contrary, she is depicted as sensitive and willing to listen to her interlocutor. First of all, it is the mother who tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to convince Jasmine of Amira's right to make her own choices (19-21, as well as the passage quoted above).<sup>215</sup> It is the mother who recognises that she should not interfere directly in Jasmine's decisions concerning the man she would like to date and marry (186-194).

In this way, *LT* depicts both of these two female characters as dynamic, changing and transforming in the course of the narration. While neither of them is perfect or always right, neither of them can be described as either on this side of the presumed cultural division, as either belonging to the Occidental or to the Oriental world. Both of them are capable of negotiating and mediating between their multiple belongings in a process of becoming culturally hybrid. In this process, cultural hybridisation points first and foremost to the capacity to open up to the diversity of the others, a requirement which must be fulfilled before one can come to terms with one's own diversity. Thus the mother's function in the novel is that of guiding her daughter. Although in the course of the narration this realisation hits home with Jasmine only towards the end of the book, the epigraph and dedication on the first pages of the book clearly point to the second line of reading of the novel that I have attempted in this section:

Paradise is At The Feet of The Mothers. (From the Qu'ran).

To My Mother,  
Under Whose Feet I Find All Of My Paradises.

### **6.3 Staging and Bringing Together Multiple Dimensions of Hybridisation**

In the introductory section to this chapter I have already alluded to *LT*'s strong degree of

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<sup>215</sup> In the end it is Amira herself who manages to make Jasmine see her point of view regarding the choices she makes as a married Muslim woman in Milan (183-185).

textual hybridisation. Multiple strategies of generic, linguistic and stylistic hybridisation are employed in the text in order to represent the complexity of the issues at stake in a culturally hybrid world of Italian-Egyptian, Muslim women.

When it comes to specific formal solutions, certain narrative techniques are used to textually develop the argument on heterogeneity, multiplicity and cultural hybridisation that I discussed in the previous sections. Among such frequently used techniques we find the alternation between first-person diary-like passages and dialogues between the characters. While in the diary-like passages, the privileged point of view on the events is that of the young protagonist, the inclusion of the dialogues allows for another perspective to be introduced, as the examples above have demonstrated.

Very importantly, the attempt of the protagonist to downplay the seriousness of some issues that she faces on a daily basis is performed through the inclusion of lengthy descriptive passages, some of which produce a certain comic effect. It is in these episodes that the conventional plot elements of the young adult novel gain prominence. Like most average women in their twenties, Jasmine is interested in certain “foolish things” (see the introductory section). In addition to problems with the cellulite and grappling with fashion trends, two young men take up significant space in the diary entries. Yusef is an Italian-Egyptian young man whom Jasmine meets at her best friend Amira's wedding, while her second love interest is an Italian boy called Thomas. I have already alluded to the conspiracy initiated at the young protagonist's expense, between Yusef, his relatives and Jasmine's mother (cf. section 6.2). When Jasmine comes back home one day and finds Yusef sitting in her kitchen and chatting amicably with her mother, Jasmine does not immediately realise that Yusef's visit has been coordinated so that the two young people can meet again, this time with their parents present. When Yusef's mother (alias 'the reverend turkey') and aunt (alias 'the old giraffe') join the party and are invited to stay for the dinner, Jasmine reports on what is happening in the following passage:

[I]n the meantime the two crazy ones arrive, the old giraffe and the reverend turkey, both of them in a single evening, for Goodness' sake, it's too much even for me, they have come back from their visit to the 'biuti' centre, that's how the old giraffe pronounces it, it seems there's a truce between the turkey and my mother, I mean, after the incident with the sherbet at the wedding, Yusef instead is gloating, he seems to be at

ease in this situation, with all these women, then my father comes back from work and he's forced to put up with them, but I do see his face as soon as he walks in, he looks like he's just unexpectedly landed on Mars just to discover that the entire planet is inhabitable but is covered with cactuses, something really hostile, my mother engages him in laying the table and the lasagne are eaten and it's a lot of chit-chat and Yusef is looking at me from the other side of the table, he is looking at me between one morsel and another, he is looking at me while I'm pouring him some water and then he is looking at me while my mother tells me to go and make tea for everyone, and so I clear the table and then I go to make tea and in the meantime Yusef keeps glancing over at me, and then he follow me in the kitchen. (130-131)

This lengthy passage is a good example of Ghazy's ability to disrupt the more linear progression characteristic of, for example, the earlier female novels of immigration. The inclusion of these almost filmic sequences has the function of emphasising the importance of a particular moment, which, at a first glance, could be deemed as less significant than instances in which Jasmine enters into dialogue with Oriana Fallaci's writings.<sup>216</sup>

Overall, the text distinguishes itself through its ability to intertextually connect the earlier, as well as chronologically later, fictions of immigration. This particular aspect of generic double intertextuality, in Jan Rupp's sense (cf. section 3.3), makes the conclusion of this dissertation with an analysis of this novel particularly apt. Formally, this first-person diary-like narrative immediately evokes some of the first fictions of immigration discussed in Chapter Two, as well as Ahmed/Amedeo's storyline, rendered as a diary in *CC* (cf. section 4.1.2). Affinities on the formal level are further substantiated by multi-layered thematic continuity. The importance accorded to topics of desiring to symbolically belong in the community of which you consider yourself part of can be traced back to Chohra/Di Atti Sarro's *I Wanted to Be White* ( cf. section 2.3 and section 5.1) as well as Antonio Campobasso's *Black from Puglia* (cf. section 5.1). A strong political commitment to claiming space for diversity connects *LT* to Khouma (2010) and Scego (2010), also discussed in Chapter Five. I have already mentioned the use of similar techniques of generic hybridisation in *LT* and *CC*, and the same conclusions regard incorporation of factual information and journalistic writing that characterise Khouma (2010) and Scego (2010). Finally, along with the two novels

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216 In this particular episode, Jasmine's mother's participation in the organization of Yusef's visit becomes the reason for the serious argument between the two women (cf. section 6.2).

analysed in Chapter Four *LT* demonstrates a strong interest in introducing the reader to the cultural heritage that the protagonist receives from her parents.

Ghazy's latest novel is thus firmly embedded in the generic tradition of the Italian fictions of immigration. At the same time, as this chapter has demonstrated, the novel stands out on account of its strong textual hybridisation, as well as the novelty of the perspective which it offers on the debate on cultural hybridity and hybridisation.



## 7 Literary Itineraries for the New Millennium: Conclusive Remarks

In the final pages of *My Home is Where I Am* Igiaba Scego includes the following lines:

I have tried to tell here pieces of my story. Of my journeys. Pieces because memory is selective. Pieces because memory is like a shattered mirror. We cannot (and we shouldn't) glue the pieces back together [...] I have focused on the first twenty years of my life because these have been the years during which the chaos in Somalia was being set up. [...] These have also been the years during which Italy has changed as never before. From a country of emigration to a country of destination for immigrants [...], from permanent contracts to temporary employment. I am the outcome of this chaotic intertwining of events. And my map is the mirror of these years of change. It is not a coherent map. It is the centre and the periphery. It is Rome but it is also Mogadishu. It is Igiaba but it is also you. (159-160).<sup>217</sup>

These lines, to a certain degree, sum up what has been said in this particular text. The journeys referenced in this passage can be taken as an allusion to the exploration and re-negotiation of the concept of Italianness in the changing political, social and cultural context of contemporary Italy performed by Scego, along with all the other authors discussed in this study. The present dissertation can also be conceived of in terms of a journey. A journey which, in its turn, has followed and attempted to shed light on the ways in which contemporary fictions of immigration engage in the debate on Italianness and the necessity to re-negotiate that notion in a historical moment which registers Italy becoming an ever more ethnically, linguistically, religiously and culturally hybrid society.

The investigation, undertaken in this study, set itself the task of mapping of the extremely vast, rich and heterogeneous field of Italian migration literature. The introduction of a generic approach to the study of the now over two-decades old phenomenon of Italian migration literature has enabled this undertaking. The act of extrapolating a group of texts, designated as fictions of immigration, from the larger

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<sup>217</sup> See section 5.3 for the analysis of this particular novel.

body of migrant writing in Italian, has hopefully opened up new perspectives on the contributions of Italian migrant writers to the most critical contemporary social, cultural and political debates. I have been able to demonstrate that the genre of fictions of immigration in the Italian context has remained faithful to its main representational goal of exploring the impact of recent migratory flows on the Italian society from the perspective of those who find themselves confined to the margins of this society. Moreover, I have also been able to trace the evolution and the re-configuration of the genre of fictions of immigration by drawing attention to the multiple dimensions of hybridisation which mark out the most recent texts.

Exactly twenty years have passed between the publication of first Italian fictions of immigration, such as Khouma/Pivetta (1990), Methnani/Fortunato (1990) and the hybrid texts of 2010 by Khouma and Scego. These twenty years have been, as Scego writes above, the period in which immigration has contributed significantly to the profound and ongoing transformation of the Italian society.<sup>218</sup> In 1990 Khouma and Pivetta concluded their book *I Was an Elephant Salesman* by offering a glimpse into the future of newly multi-ethnic Italy:

This is the life of a Senegalese, the life that I've known for a while now and that seems to go on forever. But I am also lucky because, as they say in my country, if you can tell the story of what you have been through, then it means it has brought you luck. Many Senegalese [...] return to Senegal because they want nothing more to do with Italy [...] Many stay. They work, they sell, they become manual labourers and factory workers, even if they are exploited more than others. Many stay and meet Italian girls. They fall in love. There are weddings and then separations and divorces, and still more marriages. Babies are born. (Khouma/Pivetta 2010: 137)

The babies have indeed been born in the twenty years that passed after the publication of *I Was an Elephant Salesman*. Moreover, these babies have grown up and many of them have also finished school, becoming at the same time protagonists of the three texts which I discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six of the dissertation. These new

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<sup>218</sup> Clearly, other factors have contributed greatly to the major re-design of Italian society in the period between 1990 and 2010. Suffice it to mention the Tangentopoli scandals of the early 1990s which led to one of the most profound and dramatic political crises in recent Italian history (cf. Ginsborg 2003) as well as, more recently, the impact of the global financial crisis triggered in 2008 by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank (cf. Pagoulatos/Quaglia 2013).

Italian citizens are, as these three texts have demonstrated, precisely the reason why the restrictive and rigid mainstream notion of Italianness needs to be re-visioned. Only this can guarantee the recognition and acceptance of new minority groups as full members of the Italian community. While reflections on the importance of granting access to symbolic national belonging are at the forefront of discussions in the most recent hybrid fictions of immigration, this does not mean that the earlier examples of this genre are no longer relevant and can be forgotten. On the contrary, and I would like to stress this fact, the route that this dissertation has sketched by selecting the most representative examples in the twenty-year long history of the genre of fictions of immigrations does not have a point of arrival. Rather, it is a circular journey in which particular innovative milestones have to be marked as we set out from the early male and female fictions of immigration of the 1990s and progress to the hybrid texts of the new millennium. Once we have read the most recent fictions of immigration devoted specifically to the struggles of new Italian citizens, it is imperative to go back to the earlier texts in order not to forget that in the age of “super-diversity”, as Steven Vertovec (2007) has defined it,<sup>219</sup> the complexity of the phenomenon of migration has reached an unprecedented level.

In fact, the acceleration of processes of social hybridisation in Italy today means that babies are born but, and this fact is probably one of the main challenges to future social unity and cohesion of the country,<sup>220</sup> at the same time, people keep arriving. As a result of such a “chaotic intertwining” (see Scego above) of different migratory trajectories,

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219 In this paper Vertovec discusses various aspects of the impact of the most recent migratory trends in the British context. He thus introduces the concept of 'super-diversity' in order to “underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. 'Super-diversity' is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables, including: *country of origin* (comprising a variety of possible subset traits such as ethnicity, language[s], religious tradition, regional and local identities, cultural values and practices), *migration channel* (often related to highly gendered flows, specific social networks and particular labour market niches), and *legal status* (including myriad categories determining a hierarchy of entitlements and restrictions) (Vertovec 2007: 1025, emphasis in orig.). The concept of 'super-diversity' can also be fruitfully applied for the study of the impact of the most recent migratory trends in the Italian context, which, according to the 2013 Statistical Dossier on Immigration (Accorinti et al. 2013), presents very similar developments to those observable in the British context.

220 Cf. Amrbosini/Molina (2004) and Dalla Zuanna et al. (2009), which represent two examples of sociological studies devoted specifically to the young generation of children of immigrants in Italy, whose presence is investigated in terms of the challenges this group faces in contemporary Italian society.

Italian society is slowly starting to change. For the past twenty years Italian fictions of migration have been keeping their fingers on the pulse of the Italian society, by shedding light on this major transformation, by offering a different perspective on new cultural dynamics and, most importantly, by actively participating in this transformation. By mapping this rich and heterogeneous field and suggesting an itinerary of reading, this dissertation has hopefully achieved its primary goal of showing the potential of Italian fictions of immigration to interact and participate in the dialogue on the future of increasingly super-diverse Italian society. The dialogue I have in mind is, of course, also the individual dialogues these texts enter into with their readers. Given the marginality of the literary phenomenon of Italian migration literature, still largely unacknowledged in the histories and anthologies of contemporary Italian literature, the number of these readers is not growing as fast as could be hoped for. In spite of a lack of formal recognition, which will be possible only once school manuals such as Ferroni (2007) begin to include a dedicated section on this important literary phenomenon, new hybrid fictions of immigration continue to be written and published.<sup>221</sup>

This means that other scholars of Italian migration literature will soon have to re-map and expand the itinerary that I have suggested here. With new fictions of immigration the journey from the margins will continue and it remains to be seen if these literary works succeed in finding ways to speak to a broader audience of readers. In other words, it is still unclear whether the journey of Italian fictions of immigration will one day take them to the centre of the cultural debate on citizenship, belonging and Italianness in the new millennium.

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221 Just to make one example, a project such as *Babel Hotel: vite migranti nel condominio più controverso d'Italia* (*Babel Hotel: Migrant Lives in the Most Controversial Building in Italy*, Parmesan 2011) bears testimony, on the one hand, to the continuity and literary vigour of the genre of Italian fictions of immigration, whilst demonstrating, on the other hand, a strong propensity towards further innovation through different strategies of hybridisation. It is a project which can be presented as a collection of short stories, poetry and songs written by different writers, both migrant and non-migrant, who have taken the inspiration from recorded real-life interviews, conducted by the editor of the volume with the immigrant residents of the building nicknamed *Hotel House* situated in a small Italian town of Porto Recanati.

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