

# The Transcultural Italophone Literature from its Beginnings Through to the Third Millennium: Italy's Transnational Role Model for Europe

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## ABSTRACT

This paper intends to contextualize methodologically the concept of *transnationalism* with that of *transculturality* while focusing on Italophone literature. Going back to the transcultural theorem as introduced in 1940 by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz (*transculturación*), at the turn of the millennium the term has been seized, adapted and revisited in German and English language by the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (*transculturality*). After the final proclamation of a *Transcultural Turn*, the notion of a 'Transcultural Italophone Literature' is applied, used and disseminated also in Modern Italian Studies, opening up new possibilities to revisit Italy's literary canon. Starting from these theoretical premises in chapter 1, a historic overview enables us to recode the literary evolution of the Italophone sphere, analyzing it through a transcultural lens: to begin with the Sicilian School in chapter 2, through to postmodern times in chapter 3, featuring the upraising Italophone migration literature nowadays. Pinpointing the diasporic heterotopias around the globe in chapter 4, I will argue in the last chapter 5 that the Italophone role model might be connected with selected parameters that are symptomatic for the transnational literary criticism, concluding that Italy acts as a "transcultural laboratory" both at a macro-historical and a micro-historical level on the European transculturalization process.

## Keywords

Transcultural Italophone Literature, diaspora, migration, globalization, re-reading the canon, Transnational Europe.

## 1. Introduction: The Transculturality of Italophone Literature

When using the term 'Italophone literature', we normally intend to mark all texts written in the Italian language, either in Italy or beyond its borders. More specifically, we consider this literature to be

“transcultural” (Welsch 1999)—according to Wolfgang Welsch’s network metaphor—if it reflects a transcultural way of life, i.e. if it is primarily defined by hybrid parameters as Homi K. Bhabha puts it in *The Location of Culture* (1994) and refers to a postcolonial *Third Space*, so that it can be located culturally in an intersectional or “in-between space” (Reichardt 2018a, 78)

The Cuban cultural theorist Fernando Ortiz (*Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, 1940) was the first to conceptualize, in 1940, the transcultural paradigm both as a transdisciplinary and as an aesthetic and sociological cross-over phenomenon, coining the neologism of *transculturation* (Ortiz 2003, 97). In the 1990s, Welsch picked up Ortiz’ term and adapted it, introducing it to the English- and the German-speaking world and spreading its postmodern use since then. While Welsch was developing further his theoretical concept of *transculturality* in a consequent manner, refining its methodology in the field of cultural philosophy (cf. Reichardt, 2006a, 2018a), German cultural theorists such as Bernhard Wadenfels (*Topographie des Fremden*, 1997), researchers in didactics like Johannes Eckerth and Michael Wendt (*Interkulturelles und transkulturelles Lernen im Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 2003) or socio-linguists such as Jürgen Erfurt (*Transkulturalität und Hybridität*, 2005) as well as the American cognitive scientist Mark Turner (*The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*, 1996) additionally helped to shape and develop this theoretical approach into a *Transcultural Turn* (Bond & Rapson 2014). Even if these studies did not always refer literally to the term of transculturality, they conformed to it and shed light on some of its specific aspects in so far as meanwhile the transcultural approach has been systematically applied in German-language contributions to Italian Studies (cf. Borsò & Brohm 2007, Kleinhans & Schwaderer 2013) as well as in wider literary and cultural research (cf. Langenohl 2015), before it was programmatically introduced in Italian Studies with a specific collection authored in Italian language (cf. Reichardt & Moll 2018b).

## 2. Historical Paradigms

### 2.1. The Sicilian School (12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Century)

Welsch imagines not only that the essential premises of transculturality imply that it is inclusive, cosmopolitan and decentralized but assumes also that history has always been transcultural (cf. Reichardt 2006a, 36). When speaking of *transcultural* Italophone literature, we need to bear in mind that we are dealing with a relatively new term, shaped mainly by German scholars—first of all by Welsch, who took the term coined by Ortiz and elaborated it theoretically in German philosophy—that has subsequently been applied to Italian cases, such as literary genres and cultural artefacts. Thus, the term of a *Transcultural Italophone Literature* (cf. Kleinhans & Schwaderer 2013) refers to an implementation in Literary Studies that originated and matured, academically speaking, in an intellectual environment based on both Italian and German reflections.

However, as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, various paradigmatic texts in Italophone literature, indeed whole literary movements, display transcultural characteristics, to name only the example of the Sicilian School (circa 1166–1266) or *Scuola siciliana*, in the Italian-German context. This community of poets at the court

of Frederick II (1194–1250), the Hohenstaufen king and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, is considered the foundation of Italian literary history and mixed literary and cultural influences of Occitan troubadour poetry with stylistic elements of the Sicilian *volgare* and the Greek, Arab and Norman legacies. The *Canzoniere*—known as a ‘song book’ or as ‘scattered rhymes’ (*Rime sparse*)—is a collection of poems by Giacomo da Lentini (circa 1210–1260), which introduced the sonnet as a poetical art form (cf. Reichardt 2006b, 89), is a case in point.

## 2.2. Ludovico Ariosto: *Orlando furioso* (1516)

Another work that we can re-read in a transcultural way is the epic poem *Orlando furioso* (1516), written by Ludovico Ariosto and based, among others, on the early medieval *Song of Roland* in Old French, that was received and adapted all over Europe by such diverse writers as William Shakespeare, Bernardo de Balbuena or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, to name just a few. This Italophone versification, that Ariosto conceived as a sequel to the *Orlando innamorato* (1494) by Matteo Maria Boiardo, addresses transcultural themes like the coexistence of mixed ethnic groups (embodied by the Chinese, i.e. heathen princess Angelica), and European trends toward religious conflict and peace culture, in connection with the war between Charlemagne and the Saracens (personified by the character of Agramante) who, originating from the Arab world, tried to penetrate from the Mediterranean region further into Europe. The *Orlando furioso* merges these issues in a creative synthesis by referring back to a transfiguration and the use of a fantastic hyperbole in the story line. A typical characteristic of the epic is its transmediality, which fully unfolds due to the popularity of the reception of the epos, inspired by the North Italian humanist: the *Orlando* was not only turned into opera in France by Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault, in Italian-speaking Europe by Antonio Vivaldi, in Britain by the German-born composer Georg Friedrich Händel or in Austria by Franz Joseph Haydn. But transcultural adaptations of the *Orlando* can also be found in later visual art, in theatre, in comic strips, and in television and cinema productions.

## 2.3. Giambattista Vico: *Scienza nuova* (1725, 1730, 1744)

In his magnum opus *Scienza nuova* (1725, revised in 1730 and 1744), the *Settecento* Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico analyzes—both at a theoretical and practical level—transcultural foundations and relationships that also date back to the Middle Ages, Graeco-Roman antiquity and even early human prehistory. Vico adopts an explicitly comparative approach, tracing transversal thought patterns, thus anticipating the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, which later inspired Welsch (cf. Reichardt 2018a, 73). In Vico’s understanding of cultures, these patterns of thought go far beyond the systematic comparisons of the historical diverseness between various peoples, their heterogeneous cultural practices and their collective imagination that are typical of the comparative approach. Rather, in the *Scienza nuova* Vico establishes systematically one of the key works of the modern age in the West, proposing the first complex, transdisciplinary method that combines approaches from many fields. He combines and correlates sociological with historical, theological, metaphysical, mythological, astrological, poetic, linguistic, archaeological, numismatic, scientific, ethnographic or legal approaches in the frame of a *network*, connecting them, one with the other, in a philosophically proactive, programmatic and transcultural manner.

## 2.4. The Extended Definition of a Text: The *Grand Tour* and Opera Libretti (circa 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Century)

We may certainly state that Giambattista Vico, author of the well-argued and ingeniously written *New Science*, was not only one of the pioneers of Cultural Studies as we use the term today, but also, at least in the philosophical sense, his country's first true Italophone cosmopolitan. However, what is more, directly after the publication of the *Scienza nuova*, we see the emergence in modern Italy of two more phenomena of literary transculturality *avant la lettre*, both of which suggest an extended definition of texts (in the sense of a critical discourse analysis that Michel Foucault described in *L'ordre du discours* in 1970). First, there was the European literature of the *Grand Tour*, which during the classicist period and the nineteenth century focused on Italy. Second, already before, a culture of opera libretti had emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and resulted in librettology, increasing and amplifying emotionally a general romantic longing for the south.

The literati of the *Grand Tour* in the broadest sense (Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Stendhal, Charles Dickens, Henry Ibsen, Jonas Lie, Henry James, Maxim Gorky and many others) need to be mentioned here because they are the intellectual and creative originators of a travel literature that dealt with and drew its inspiration from Italy, while exerting a crucial influence on the quest for identity of the Italians themselves. It was an interplay of *regards croisés*, to use the metaphorical key term used by Montesquieu in his *Lettres persanes* (1754): the foreign writers reflected on Italy and Italian culture, while the Italians reflected on the foreigners and their opinions. This had a decisive influence on the way that Italian intellectuals sought to define themselves as a distinct culture, especially with regard to their rejection of foreign domination and forced cultural codification, thus empowering—on the contrary—their skills of self-reflection. Among the writers who played a big role in these efforts were, as is known, Alessandro Manzoni, the author of *I promessi sposi* (first published in 1827), Carlo Collodi, who wrote *Pinocchio* (1883), and Edmondo de Amicis, who authored *Cuore* (1886). Their impact synergized with the general national awakening during the Risorgimento that also played a central role in the transcultural exchange.

This multifaceted process of cultural transfer was supported by the success of classical opera libretti, which were not only in Italian but made this language the standard of the opera world. In fact, thanks to opera texts, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Italian had already established itself as the universal language of music (at least in the occidental world), of the *bel canto* and the Italian style of life, and this was long before Italy was established as a nation state in 1860-1861. In fact, from the Renaissance onwards, foreign music lovers had increasingly used the Italian language, and their libretti spread it throughout Europe.

At the same time, but in a different 19<sup>th</sup>-century trend, Orientalism introduced new themes to Italian culture. Throughout its history, Italian literature had excluded from its canon even those foreign cultures and languages, that came from parts of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe—all territories that had once belonged to the Roman empire. They now made an appearance in Italian opera, for instance in Gioachino Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* (1813), Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* (1871) or Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904). But in later decades, these cultural *contact zones*—as Mary Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992) calls them—would be mostly ignored again by the world of letters in Italy. This would only change under postmodernism, from the mid-1980s on, when they suddenly gained new influence: now that immigration was increasing, a new Italophone discourse was taking shape that perceived people and cultures from abroad abruptly also as aesthetic themes and subjects once again.

### 3. The Boom Phase of Transculturality in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

The assumed peripheral status within the canon taken by the works, school of thoughts, movements and genres that historically constitute transcultural Italophone literature, suggests that decentralization needs to be added to the properties of the transcultural paradigm. We must consider the peripheral—and hence minoritarian and subordinated alterities—just as much a part of the transcultural “way of life” advocated by Welsch (1999, III,1), as we regard the themes of power, violence and oppression as a leitmotif of transculturality.

#### 3.1. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Another key property of transculturality is gaining prominence in the postmodern age, namely the synergies of translation and transmediality. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel *Il Gattopardo* (1957) and Luchino Visconti’s homonymous film adaptation (1963), surprise hits around the world, successfully bridge the gap between the Risorgimento and postwar Italy. The synergies of translation (e.g. Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel was translated into many languages) and transmediality, i.e. the diffusion of transcultural parameters via media channels across borders (e.g. via Visconti’s internationally distributed film) produced additional transcultural effects and a kaleidoscopic syncretism. In the postmodern era, this is illustrated by, amongst other things, the worldwide bestselling success of Umberto Eco’s historical novel *Il nome della rosa* (1980) and the subsequent German-Italian-French co-production of the (again homonymous) film title *The Name of the Rose* (1986), directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud.

A distinctively Italian phenomenon is the balancing debate, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the transcultural thought in relation to the issue of national identity, also touching on the North-South question. It is not without political polemics that the northern Italian writers Gerhard Kofler and Norbert C. Kaser deconstruct, in the context of the South Tyrol question, the concept of homeland (*Heimat*) in their multilingual, polyglot poetry. They design new cultural parameters of belonging, or hyphenated identities, within a transcultural *Third Space* located *between* the cultures (or *in between*, as Bhabha would say) in the border area, where both German and Italian are spoken (Reichardt & Moll 2018b, 24).

Coming from Sicily, which like South Tyrol has a special statute and enjoys special autonomy, the simultaneous ‘doctor as poet’ and ‘poet as doctor’ Giuseppe Bonaviri (ibid., 21-22) deliberately inserts transcultural elements of style in his works (cf. *Il dottor Bilob*, 1994, and *Gli uccelli: The Birds*, 2005). Bonaviri, who originates from the Sicilian rural commune of Mineo (near Catania) and emigrated in the 1950s to central Italy (Frosinone, Lazio), can be seen as the exponent of an intermediate generation between Leonardo Sciascia, who wrote the first contemporary anti-mafia novel *Il giorno della civetta* (1961), and Andrea Camilleri, the author of a series of crime novels about the fictitious Sicilian detective superintendent Salvo Montalbano. At the same time, in light of his migration background, it is also fitting to call Bonaviri paradigmatically ‘the founding father of contemporary Italian migration literature’ (Reichardt 2014, 195), as a broad range of transcultural stylistic elements distinguish his sophisticated writings from the 1960s through to the 2000s, always balancing a variety of topics in motion, oscillating between nature and culture, normal daily life and cosmologic order, or discourses about crude reality and human fantasy.

As a matter of fact, in migration literature we often find that transculturality and violence are two issues interwoven in a multifaceted way in terms of history (cf. Reichardt et al. 2017). After Ennio Flaiano in his *Tempo di uccidere* (1947) had quasi-autobiographically described the horrors of the Second World War from

the imminent violent perspective of Italy's fascistic colonial war in the Horn of Africa, Sciascia's novels in the second half of the century go beyond by mercilessly denouncing mafia violence in Southern Italy, previously considered taboo, thus formulating a comparable anti-oppression critique. Regarding its aesthetical motifs Sciascia's counter-discourse is, though, completely different from the literary topoi that are related to the two world wars in which Italy has been actively involved both in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The invisibility of the mafia's violent practice serves Sciascia acutally as a pattern to describe a world that is increasingly getting more and more complex and inscrutable since the situation of radical change at a political and social level from 1968 onwards. Criticizing the deeply rooted local problems that result from the manifestations of violence and power, Sciascia bridges the gap to global agency, defining not Italy but Sicily as a metaphor for the world in his famous interview book about *Sicily as Metaphor (La Sicilia come metafora, 1979)*. As a former member of the European Parliament and then-Palermo city councilor, he does not have an insular mentality, but extends his universalist political and social commitment to the population of the whole world, thus thinking explicitly transcultural. Since the turn of the millennium, the intensified immigration flow from Africa reflects the—now clearly postcolonial and *glocally* connoted—correlation between local parameters of violence and transnational aspects of globalization, giving it a dramatic boost under the buzzword of *Lampedusa* (cf. Reichardt & Moll 2018b, 18). The social conflicts that result from this migration wave materialize artistically in the upraising Italoophone migration literature (the so-called *letteratura della migrazione*) since its beginnings in the 1990s: it is written from the perspective of alterity and of the (colonial) victim—i.e. the Other—giving an innovative aesthetic impetus to the Italian self-reflection mode and to the Italoophone literature from a stranger's point of view. Parallel to this climactic tendency, due to the refugee crisis in Europe escalating in 2015/2016, the upraising transcultural Italoophone literature is underscored by the topicality, gaining continuously more attention also on the scale of research through theoretical-critical publications (e.g. as the key German-language collection edited by Kleinhans and Schwaderer in 2013 does) and thus stimulating dynamic scholarship in this field at a regularly updated international level. transculturality.

### 3.2. The Third Millennium

Indeed, the contemporary Italoophone literature unmistakably shows how migration and postcolonialism are interrelated, as since 1990 various immigrant authors are publishing a rapidly growing number of literary texts, most of them being released in the third millennium (cf. Comberiat 2010, Sinopoli 2013, Gnisci 2014), after that the pioneering work of the Italian scholar Armando Gnisci had identified the phenomenon of the *letteratura della migrazione* already in 1998 (Gnisci 2003 [1998]). True to the fundamental political and social paradigm, according to which sociocultural minority discourses and influential increases of migration flows can often be explained by referring first to the colonial and then to the postcolonial history of a country, also Italy's postcolonial history has given rise to growing immigration of individuals, families and social groups from former Italian colonies. Hence, also the number of immigrants from the former Italian colonies writing literary texts in Italian language has risen, their themes often being connected to the hegemonic, colonial and fascist past of Italy (this is particularly the case in Italian East Africa, Italian Libya, nowadays Greece, Slovenia, Dalmatia, Albania and Montenegro). Other immigrants from various European (e.g. from Romania or Hungary) and international trouble spots are fleeing from war and poverty to Italy, thus shaping the new Italoophone migration literature, too.

Here are some examples of immigrant writers or writers whose texts are coined predominantly by cultural diversity, here listed with their seminal book titles in a transnational overview, sorted not chronologically but by their geographical origin or family background in an alphabetical order of the relevant countries of origin:

From Albania	Ornela Vorpsi, <i>Il paese dove non si muore mai</i> , 2005 Elvira Dones, <i>Vergine giurata</i> , 2007
From Algeria	Amara Lakhous, <i>Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio</i> , 2006 Tahar Lamri, <i>I sessanta nomi dell'amore</i> , 2007 Karim Metref, <i>Caravan to Bagdad</i> , 2007
From Armenia	Antonia Arslan, <i>La masseria delle allodole</i> , 2004
From Eritrea	Erminia Dell'Oro, <i>L'abbandono. Una storia eritrea</i> , 1991 Ribka Sibhatu, <i>Aulò. Canto-poesia dall'Eritrea</i> , 1993
From Ethiopia	Gabriella Ghermandi, <i>Regina di fiori e di perle</i> , 2007
From India	Gabriella Kuruvilla, <i>Milano, fin qui tutto bene</i> , 2012 Laila Wadia, <i>Algoritmi indiani</i> , 2017
From Iraq	Younis Tawfik, <i>La straniera</i> , 1999
From Jordan (Palestine)	Sumaya Abdel Qadar, <i>Porto il velo, adoro i Queen. Nuove italiane crescono</i> , 2008
From Morocco	Mohamed Bouchane, <i>Chiamatemi Ali</i> , 1990 Mohammed Lamsuni, <i>Porta Palazzo mon amour</i> , 2006
From Senegal	Pap Khouma, <i>Io, venditore di elefanti</i> , 1990
From Somalia	Garane Garane, <i>Il latte è buono</i> , 2005 Cristina (Ubah/Ubax) Ali Farah, <i>Madre piccola</i> , 2007 Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, <i>Nuvole sull'Equatore</i> , 2010 Kaha Mohamed Aden, <i>Fra-intendimenti</i> , 2010 Igiaba Scego, <i>La mia casa è dove sono</i> , 2010
From Togo	Kossi Komla-Ebri, <i>Imbarazzismi. Imbarazzji in bianco e nero</i> , 1999
From Tunisia	Salah Methnani, <i>Immigrato</i> , 1990

This overview could be largely expanded, of course. Historically founded, as known (cf. Gnisci 2003), in 1990/91 by the triad Salah Methnani, Pap Khouma and Mohamed Bouchane, the literary school of the Italoophone *letteratura della migrazione* is composed, in its beginnings, only by writers who write in Italian and live (basically) in Italy. They all have developed a transcultural hyphenated identity in conjunction with their being Italians: some as defined by culture, others by residency, citizenship or nationality, place of birth, and/or profession, and/or social belonging etc. The first immigrant authors wrote their books with the help of co-authors who were native speakers (as Salah Methnani with Mario Fortunato or Pap Khouma with Oreste Pivetta etc.), but the turn of the millennium saw the emergence of the New Italians or *nuovi italiani* (cf. Gangbo 1999, 135), a younger, up-and-coming generation of literati—the Second generation (*la seconda generazione*)—who are creating the corpus of a contemporary, genuinely transcultural Italoophone literature (cf. Moll 2015). They often hold down a job as journalists, doctors, academics, teachers or consultants, one of their most prominent representatives being Igiaba Scego, born in Rome of

Somali parents, who has attained the status of a media icon as a truly transcultural citizen of Italy. It is striking how actively women are involved in this new literary movement (cf. Comberiat 2009, Barbarulli 2010), one of them—Sumaya Abdel Qadar—becoming in 2016 the first Muslim city councilor of Milan.

This shows that in times of globalization, migration can open up a hybrid Third Space in democratic countries which not only promotes crossover subcultural encounters and movements, transcultural intersections and/or co-ethnic interactions, but in fact *implies* these a priori, also due to its inherent gender perspective. In a three-step process, postcolonialism, advancing hand-in-hand with postmodernism, leads to transculturality, and by doing so, it provides an audience in Italy for a multi-ethnic, Italoophone second generation of writers. Most of them are Italian-born, like Kuruvilla, Scego or Ali Farah, or born abroad but raised since their early childhood in Italy, as the cases of the two black writers Tommy Kutu (*Ci rido sopra. Crescere con la pelle nera nell'Italia di Salvini*, 2019) and Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti (*E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italiana*, 2019) paradigmatically show already one year before the killing of George Floyd (May 25, 2020) in Minneapolis and the global *Black Lives Matter* movement gained international media attention.

For these more politically explicit Italoophone articulations and social implementations the way had been thoroughly paved before: both at the literary, more historically oriented but yet exigent level with Igiaba Scego's assertive publications that poetically claim more visibility for people of color demanding narratively for their cultural and civic rights in Italy (*Roma negata. Percorsi postcoloniali nella città*, 2014; *Adua*, 2015; *La linea del colore*, 2020)—often also in a collective format and/or with essayistic intonation (cf. Albanese et al. 2020)—and at the research level in terms of political enlightenment (Colucci 2018) or social inclusion (Massari 2017). It is generally agreed (cf. Kleinhans & Schwaderer 2013, 17; Comberiat & Pisanelli 2017, 9 ff.; Linardi 2017, 12 ff.; Contarini 2019, 91 ff.; Meineke et al. 2019, 19 ff.) that the literary production of these *nuovi italiani* has already reached a level of reflection and aesthetic refinement superior to the mainly autobiographical focused texts of the founding trio of the Italoophone migration literature Methnani-Khouma-Bouchane. Yet, we find among the authors of both generation's writing quite a few well-educated Italoophone transcultural intellectuals, who often even hold academic titles and belong to distinct circles of a prospective Italoophone intelligentsia.

The awarding in 2018 of the most important Italian literary prize, the *Premio Strega*, to the German-Italian writer of Polish descent Helena Janeczek (*La ragazza con la Leica*, 2018) underscores the strength of these literary and publishing trends and is testimony to the way that Europe is coming together transculturally. In 2003, writers like Pap Khouma and Cristina Ali Farah had already established the literary magazine *El-Ghibli. Rivista di letteratura della migrazione* in order to provide a media platform for transcultural Italian migration literature, following the example of *Kuma Creolizzare l'Europa*, the first Italian review for migrant writers founded in 2001. Earlier, from the mid-1990s onwards, the association *Eks & Tra* was already active, at first in the Rimini and Mantova areas, and from 2004 onwards, was affiliated with the Italian Studies program of the University of Bologna, organizing a wide program of transcultural events and activities. Clear evidence for the fact that Italy's transcultural migration literature has long begun to perform a direct impact on Italian literary history can be found today, for example, in state institutions like *Roma multiethnica. La guida all'intercultura delle biblioteche di Roma*: this is a culturally active library association in the capital city that has been producing exhibitions, language courses, publications, workshops and online information since the 1990s.



### 3.3. Heterotopias of the Diaspora

Transcultural Italoophone literature is, however, not only defined by comparative and interdisciplinarily networked methodological approaches in terms of creative production and of literary or social criticism within Italy. It also addresses historically coded and culturally accentuated relations of violence, power and domination with a global, transnational view of future transversal societies in general. This vision is gaining more and more importance in Italoophone literature, especially delving into the colonial and postcolonial history of Italy, into the (fascistic) wars of expansion in the Mediterranean region and into the migration flows from and to Italy, both at an aesthetic and at a political level.

For example, Italy's first major wave of emigration (1861–circa 1960), especially to North and South America, resulted in the emergence of Italian-speaking diasporas which to this day find rich literary forms of expression and exchange. From the 1950s on, US writers of Italian descent like Mario Puzo, John Fante or Don DeLillo discovered the model of the Italian family resettled in the United States as a transcultural representation pattern of Italo-American life in all its sociocultural forms, oscillations and transformations. In 2012/2013, the US Pulitzer prize winner of Indian origin Jhumpa Lahiri moved to Rome, where she made her second home and published her Italian-language books (*In altre parole*, 2015; *Il vestito dei libri*, 2016; *Dove mi trovo*, 2018), mediating between Indian, US and Italian culture. In Canada's Italian diaspora, which has been culturally active since the 1930s, Italian Canadians like Antonio D'Alfonso (*In corsivo italiano*, 2009) and Filippo Salvatore (*Terre e infiniti*, 2012) shine a light on the hyphenated identity of *italo-canadesi*. Meanwhile, there is also a lively heterotopic cultural exchange between the South American continent and Italy, exemplified by the Italo-Argentine writer Laura Pariani (*La traduzione*, 2004) and the Italo-Brazilian authors Christiana De Caldas Brito (*Viviscrivi*, 2008) and Márcia Théophilo (*Amazônia oceano di alberi*, 2011).

In the 1960s to 1980s, Germany had a 'guest worker' literature (*Gastarbeiterliteratur*), exemplified by Stefano Vilardo's memorable migration novel *Tutti dicono Germania Germania* (1975). Transcultural Italoophone literature was enriched from a German perspective by a group of critics and writers like Gino Chiellino (*Mein fremder Alltag*, 1984), Carmine Abate (*Il muro dei muri. Racconti*, 1993), Franco Biondi (*Giri e rigiri*, 2005), Marisa Fenoglio (*Vivere altrove*, 2010) or the Italian-German musician, transcultural singer-songwriter and postmodern *cantastorie* Etta Scollo (*Casa*, 2003; *Il passo interiore*, 2018), who lives between Berlin and Catania. Many more examples taken from Italoophone migration literature could be cited here of writers operating in the various hybrid, heterotopic intersection spaces reaching from the rest of the European continent to Japan, China, Australia and the Middle East (take here for instance the Hungarian-Italian-Hebrew writer Edith Bruck). A special geo-cultural case is the Italian literature of neighboring Switzerland, which since the 1970s saw an upsurge of lyric poetry by Giovanni Orelli, Fabio Pusterla, Pietro De Marchi, and others.

### 4. The Italoophone Model

The Italoophone transcultural model is thus oriented on one hand towards new impulses penetrating extrinsically from abroad into the indigenous cultural landscape and on the other hand towards humanistic values deeply rooted intrinsically in a Western antiquity that incorporates a plurality of original, even primordial elements. Although works with transcultural characteristics have existed since the beginning of Italoophone literary history, in actuality they become more prominently evident in the era of globalized postmodernism. Œuvres with a transcultural orientation written by native speakers of Italian include

Flaiano's hybrid colonial novel *Tempo di uccidere* (1947)—winning the first Premio Strega ever awarded in Italy—and its postcolonial sequel, Carlo Lucarelli's *L'ottava vibrazione* (2008), as opposed to syncretistic and polyphonic narratives of 'cultural hybrids' (Reichardt 2006a, 32), propagated for example by sub-Saharan poets and Italoophone cultural mediators like Kossi Komla-Ebri and Ndjock Ngana Yogo (*Nbindo nero*, 1994).

Now that German researchers have introduced the Italian concept of *transculturalità* in international Romance Studies (cf. Reichardt 2006a and 2006b, Kleinhans & Schwaderer 2013), it is increasingly being adopted and received also in Italy (cf. Gnisci 2011, Moll 2015, Merlini & Fabiani 2016, Reichardt & Moll 2018b). Alain Le Pichon and Letizia Caronia were the first, in their book *Sguardi venuti da lontano. Un'indagine di Transculturata* (1991), to introduce the term *transculturata*, even if despite a preface by Umberto Eco, the application of their concept had little impact on scholarship. But as one of the first theoreticians the Rome-based cultural scholar and comparatist Armando Gnisci (*Creolizzare l'Europa*, 2003; *Decolonizzare l'Italia*, 2007) started dealing with Italoophone literature in Italy in a critical and sustainable manner in the first decade of the 2000s, adding in 2011 the epithet *transculturale* to the title of his electronically-published *Manifesto* (cf. Gnisci 2011). In 2013, translating Ortiz's term *transculturación* into Italian (*transculturazione*), Gnisci published another title (*Via della Transculturazione e della Gentilezza*, 2013) that picks up this lexical field. However, Gnisci's approach is different from Welsch's, as Gnisci focuses more on postcolonial and migratory aspects, while Welsch is more concerned with aesthetics and the history of philosophy.

Even today, Italian monographs dealing with literary history or practical applications (cf. e.g. Comberiat 2010, Moll 2015, Bartoli-Kucher 2019) mostly revert directly or between the lines to Gnisci's approach, not to Welsch's. Alternatively, they are based on the concept of transnationality favored in the English-speaking world and focused also in the specialist anthology edited by Franca Sinopoli and Nora Moll, *Interpretare l'immagine letteraria dell'alterità* (2018), stressing the core notion of alterity and how to deal with it from a literary point-of-view. While in the volume *Medien-Welten Wirklichkeiten* (1997), published in German language together with the Turin philosopher Gianni Vattimo, Welsch is more concerned with visual arts as a case study (cf. Welsch 2017) and incorporates the parameter of mediality into his concept, altogether, slowly but surely the interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity—that are characteristic of Cultural Studies and methodologically connect aspects of the study of philosophy, literature, arts, music and culture—lately are winning recognition and becoming more common, also in the field of Italoophone literature, partly by exploring further declinations of the lexeme and semantic field of Ortiz's neologism *transculturation*, e.g. introducing the concept of *transculturalism* (cf. Reichardt & Scego 2020).

While—despite of some affinities of thought—the works of Alessandro Baricco (*Next*, 2002) and Stefano Rodotà (*Solidarietà*, 2014) remain conceptually vague and do not use the term 'transculturality', more and more new Italian publications are offering scholars new definitions and re-readings: just consider the idea of an Italoophone *Pluriverso* (cf. Carotenuto et al. 2018), or the wholesale re-design of Europe as a 'transcultural laboratory', i.e. as a "transkulturelles Laboratorium" (cf. Reichardt 2006b, 93). They all try to take Italy as a crucial model, both in the past and in the present, using it to elaborate Ortiz's and Welsch's intellectual innovations in order to extend their application, especially to transcultural Italoophone literature, and, more generally, to advance Transcultural Studies throughout the ages both at a macro-historical and a micro-historical level.

## 5. Conclusion: Italy as a “Transcultural Laboratory”

In spite of Italy’s perceived peripheric geographical position at the southern border of Europe, at this point it is worth noting that significative processes of cross-cultivation and amalgamation of discourses have continuously taken place on Italian soil since classical antiquity and that they have been instrumental as a role model in coining the bedrocks of the western world to date. Furthermore, over centuries foreign rule as well as the communicative use of waterways and shipping lanes facilitated diversity and the fusion of various cultures due to Italy’s topographic location in the Mediterranean Sea. This effect was even fostered by the pacifistic, culturally eager gaze of foreigners and travelers at the Italians over the centuries in the frame of the *Grand Tour* that has a long transcultural and literary tradition since the Renaissance. Last but not least, since the nation building period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Italians have a lead over other countries in terms of their experience as emigrants by re-shaping not only the Italian culture and society but also greatly impacting the cultural memory of Europe and other continents.

The interplay between these factors and the turn from a country of emigration to one of immigration in postmodern times, culminating in the European migrant crisis in 2015/2016, generated the literary movement of Italoophone migrant writings, in the form of the *letteratura della migrazione*. This new age of the transcultural Italoophone history of literature pinpoints the gradually developed process of a special case of Italoфония that may be considered as a paradigmatic attempt to project a *transcultural laboratory* regarding facilities both for creative writing and critical Literary Studies serving as a benchmark not only in the European sphere but also well beyond.

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