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**Disseminating Migration Literature:  
A Dialogue with Contemporary Italy**

**by**

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degree of  
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## Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Declaration.....	7
Abstract.....	9
Introduction .....	11
Why 'migration literature' .....	13
A network of initiatives.....	18
Sources and interviews .....	22
Chapters .....	25
Chapter 1. Narrating migration literature through its cultural intermediaries .....	29
1.1 The notion of 'cultural intermediaries' to discuss migration literature in Italian.....	30
1.1.1 'Critici, editori, associazioni': cultural agents in the scholarly debate.....	30
1.1.2 'Cultural intermediaries' from Bourdieu to recent studies.....	33
1.2 Three narrations by cultural intermediaries.....	36
1.2.1 Literary prizes: Lingua Madre and Eks&Tra .....	38
1.2.2 Publishers and distributors: Edizioni Dell'Arco and the Gruppo Solidarietà Come .....	46
1.2.3 Collective writing for theatre: the Compagnia delle poete .....	52
1.3 Conclusion.....	58
Chapter 2. Sagarana's Seminari: Sharing and debating contemporary Italian literature.....	61
2.1 The 'mondo Sagarana': the interaction between the journal, creative writing classes, and the website. ....	62
2.2 The Seminari .....	66
2.2.1 Migration literature as a movement? The end of the nineties/early 2000s .....	66
2.2.2 Structure, topics, and speakers: translingual authors within contemporary Italian literature .....	72
2.2.3 The end of the Seminari.....	78
2.2.4 Transcripts online and the use of the internet .....	81
2.3 Conclusion.....	84
Chapter 3. Migration literature between local and global: La Tenda's book launches.....	87
3.1 Migrant communities in Milan: the Scuola di italiano per stranieri and its networks	90
3.2 The Incontri di Narrativa nascente as a site of dissemination for migration literature .....	95
3.3 The journal <i>El-Ghibli</i> as a movimento letterario? .....	102
3.4 Conclusion.....	110

Chapter 4. Migration Literature on Television.....	113
4.1 Enaiatollah Akbari on ‘Che tempo che fa’ (25 April 2010).....	116
4.2 Jhumpa Lahiri on ‘Pane Quotidiano’ (11 February 2015) .....	122
4.3 Nikola Savic on ‘Masterpiece’ (October 2013 – March 2014) .....	128
4.4 Conclusion.....	134
Chapter 5. Migration literature in the classroom: Materials and writers’ visits for school students .....	137
5.1 Books, anthologies, and pedagogy essays: migration literature entering the curriculum .....	139
5.1.1 Why intercultural education .....	139
5.1.2 Migration literature for teachers: centri interculturali and didattica interculturale .....	144
5.1.3 Students working on texts: <i>La promessa di Hamadi</i> and <i>Parole di Babele</i> .....	152
5.2 Writers in schools.....	156
5.2.1 Gabriella Ghermandi.....	160
5.3 Conclusion.....	162
Conclusion.....	165
‘Ho scoperto [...] che esisteva la “letteratura italiana della migrazione” e io ne facevo parte’ .....	167
‘Un amico scrittore diceva: “Sono anni che scrivo, ho pubblicato vari libri, ho sentito dire di tutto sui miei libri. Ma finora nessuno mi ha detto se scrivo bene o male”’ .....	169
‘A seconda delle occasioni di esibizione e delle poete in scena, [la Compagnia delle poete] modifica e adatta di tappa in tappa la formula di base sulla quale è costruito lo spettacolo’. .....	171
Bibliography .....	175

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.



## **Abstract**

This thesis engages with migration literature in Italian keeping at the centre of the analysis its dissemination. I argue that this approach offers new insights into the ways migration dialogues with contemporary Italian literature – and, more generally, with contemporary Italy – with a focus on the work of translingual authors writing in Italian. The aim of this research is not to engage critically with the body of texts written by migrant writers. Rather, it focuses on sites of dissemination of this production, analysing the aims, content, and outcomes of selected case studies from this perspective. Key concerns are the public perception of migration and growing attention in the media: this thesis seeks to explore to what extent these tensions emerge when migration literature is communicated to a wide public audience and whether they affect the way in which these writers and their works are presented.

This thesis considers these case studies in relation to the scholarly debate on transnational and migration literature in Italian. Thanks to the notion of ‘cultural intermediary’, I discuss the role and prerogatives of agents involved, for example the creative nature of their work.

The case studies cover a range of time that spans from the early nineties to 2017 and they include: initiatives devoted specifically to migration literature such as series of book launches and workshops (Centro culturale Multietnico La Tenda in Milan, Seminari della Sagarana); television broadcasts (with a focus on three television broadcasts on the Italian public television channel RAI 3); educational materials for schools; and writers (Compagnia delle poete and Gabriella Ghermandi).

Thanks to this approach, this thesis inserts some crucial moments of the dissemination of migration literature in Italian into a polycentric network of initiatives that uses the internet as a means to communicate and as a repository of materials. The thesis demonstrates the impact that these modes of dissemination have had not only on reception, but also on artistic practices and the production of literary texts.



## **Introduction**

This study explores migration literature in Italian through the lens of the agents that have played a role in its dissemination. The aim is to engage with migration literature and its protagonists thanks to an analysis of some cultural projects open to non-specialists, such as users of public libraries, school students, and national television audiences. This thesis suggests that a shift from a focus on the texts to their sites of dissemination can be instrumental not only to discuss the circulation of migration literature, but also to investigate in what ways this production has flourished from a perspective that problematizes the public perception of migration in contemporary Italy.

The starting point of this research is an analysis of some initiatives that over the past twenty-five years have promoted migration literature in Italy, as well as played a role in nurturing the debate (Sagarana in Chapter 2; La Tenda in Chapter 3). The materials considered have shown that performing an in-depth study of such prominent cultural projects is necessary to contextualize this production. Whilst some of these initiatives are mentioned by scholars and critics, they have not yet been at the centre of a dedicated study. This thesis aims to fill a gap in the existing scholarship by providing a framework that addresses and includes these initiatives in the current debate around migration literature. In this sense, the choice to develop this thesis through the analysis of some case studies intends by no means to offer a comprehensive survey, rather to select some key experiences and issues that may be employed to expand this work.

The chapters of this thesis investigate narratives and contexts through which migration literature has been disseminated, aiming at incorporating the work of the agents involved into the scholarly debate around migration literature. A further step that will be tackled when discussing each of the case studies concerns in what ways these agents have created a network that connects writers, scholars, activists, educators, publishers, and other figures who have played a role in the dissemination of migration literature. All these figures will therefore not be depicted as part of a homogeneous, systematic literary movement, but rather as being part of a set of initiatives with their specificities, whose aims depend on the needs of their respective

audiences.<sup>1</sup> The connections among them will be signalled across the chapters and discussed in the conclusion.

A second element that has emerged in this thesis regards how such dissemination activities have affected the creative process of some authors. The modes and rationale of some recent productions are closely linked to the fact that writers are asked to present their work to a variety of audiences. This tendency will be discussed in some of the case studies (Compagnia delle poete in Chapter 1; Gabriella Ghermandi in Chapter 5) that were selected because of the attention that these artists pay to the tensions between written and oral form, in particular when considering in what ways their production has moved from printed publications to performances. This perspective opens this thesis to further development that may explore artistic production by migration authors by emphasizing the close link to the contexts in which they are performed. Similarly, the case studies discuss in what ways the proximity to an audience plays a role in the dissemination dynamics, and analyse the close interaction between production and reception.

This introduction discusses three points that are preliminary to the specific issues raised in each chapter. First, the choice to use the rubric ‘migration literature’ and the reasons why it is instrumental to examine a range of sites of dissemination of different kinds. I will argue that such a definition expresses the tensions between the two keywords of this study, stressing in what ways ‘migration’ and ‘literature’ are put into dialogue with each other in the cultural projects examined. Second, the concept of ‘network’ will be discussed considering the selection of case studies. This introduction will conclude with a reflection on the sources of this thesis, as well as an overview of the main research questions and findings of each chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> The production by migration writers in the Italian language has not been characterized by a shared view in terms of purposes of artistic projects. For example, when referring to the production of authors of African origin writing in Italian, Sinopoli reflects on the fact that these authors ‘non hanno elaborato un’autoimmagine identitaria comunitaria’. As she puts it, the ‘eterogeneità [of migration writers] non sembra autorizzare una facile etichettatura che ne definisca una volta per sempre identità, finalità poetiche e temi comuni’. Franca Sinopoli, ‘La critica sulla letteratura della migrazione in Italia’, in *Nuovo planetario italiano: geografia e antologia della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa*, ed. by Armando Gnisci, (Troina (En): Città Aperta, 2006), pp. 87-110 (pp. 92, 95-96).

## Why 'migration literature'

Labels such as 'migration literature', 'migrant literature', as well as '*letteratura della migrazione*' or '*letteratura migrante*', have been used in many ways to refer to the production of writers of non-Italian origin who started to use Italian after and because of their movement to Italy, and specifically to texts that were published from the early nineties onwards.<sup>2</sup> The use of *scrittura* or *letteratura* is a controversial element of such definitions, especially because of the hierarchical dynamics between genres. For example, Quaquarelli defines 'scritture migranti' as a 'particolare famiglia diasporica di testi redatti in una lingua in cui agiscono più lingue, in uno spazio culturale sociale e storico in cui agiscono più culture, più società e più storie, e che scavalcano e frantumano i canoni letterari nazionali in forza dell'uso diffuso di tradizioni letterarie diverse', highlighting the coexistence of multiple languages and cultural backgrounds as well as the tensions among different literary traditions.<sup>3</sup> Following Burns, in this thesis literature 'functions simply as a description of a written text which envisages a readership and not as a vehicle for the conferral of artistic or cultural merit'.<sup>4</sup> The lack of general agreement on how to define this production, and more specifically the use of the abovementioned labels, has made it necessary for scholars to state clearly the boundaries of the criteria used to identify the corpus of texts that they examine, depending on their focus, as Chapter 2 will discuss.

In this thesis the field of enquiry is not a corpus of texts, rather a set of initiatives open to a public of non-specialists. The range of different contexts that are considered – as well as the intention not to limit this framework to these case studies, but envisaging the possibility to consider more case studies at later stages – raises the question of how to refer to the literary works that they disseminate. In other words, the need here is not to establish a definition based on a certain corpus of authors or texts, for example depending on whether the writers were born in or outside Italy and their use of Italian as their first or second language. 'Migration literature' serves here

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<sup>2</sup> See Chiara Mengozzi, *Narrazioni contese: vent'anni di scritture italiane della migrazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 81-87. These labels are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lucia Quaquarelli, 'Chi siamo io? Letteratura italiana dell'immigrazione e questione identitaria', in *Leggere il testo e il mondo: vent'anni di scritture della migrazione in Italia*, ed. by Fulvio Pezzarossa and Ilaria Rossini (Bologna: CLUEB, 2011), pp. 43-58 (p. 45).

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 9. Burns's remark is also echoed by Brioni in Simone Brioni, *The Somali within: Language, Race and Belonging in Minor Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2015), p. 5.

as a label that may encompass the literary texts that are at the centre of a heterogeneous set of initiatives whose aims, contexts, and organizers are different from each other.

What these cases have in common is that they can be identified as forums to discuss and disseminate contemporary literary texts and authors, as well as discuss and disseminate their focus on what can be identified under the umbrella term 'migration'. As the analysis of the case studies will show, to what extent there is more interest in specifically either migration or literature varies from case to case, as if there were a continuum in which 'migration' and 'literature' are at the endpoints. Positioning the case studies along this continuum can be instrumental to engage with the aims of the cultural project, as well as foster the discussion on the aims of the various agents involved in the realization of these initiatives. To sum up, the analysis of these case studies determines in what ways a focus on migration may intersect with a discourse around contemporary literature in Italy. More specifically, to what extent one or the other element is expected to attract participants affects their target and aims, and creates a response.

'Migration literature' therefore encapsulates literary production of various kinds and of various origins. The reason why these works need to be grouped or labelled in this thesis is because this is instrumental to identify the areas in which the initiatives at the centre of the case studies may operate. Using 'migration literature' in this thesis is a tool to keep at the centre of the analysis the keywords that make these case studies talk to each other, despite the variety of fields that are considered, and without specifying *a priori* the texts and authors that each single case study includes or excludes. Accordingly, the case studies are not selected depending on the labels that each of them uses to define or identify the literary works that they disseminate.

Some of the criticisms against the label 'migration literature' help when discussing why its alleged inadequacy when describing literary production may prove effective for the purposes of this thesis. Brancato states:

I reject the concept of 'literature of migration' (even having used it myself in the past and still using it occasionally for specific purposes) because of its ghettoising implications. There exist migratory narratives (i.e. stories that tell of a migration experience) and there exist transnational authors (authors clearly linked to various national and cultural

contexts, whatever their nationality), but the literature of migration itself is a not a very sensible and useful invention.<sup>5</sup>

Brancato recognizes that ‘migration literature’ may be used to refer to (at least) two different criteria, and stresses that it is not a clear definition in itself, suggesting that other, more specific labels may prove more effective. This point stresses one of the concerns that arise when analysing a set of cultural initiatives of different kinds, in which each agent establishes his or her own focus, including or excluding authors and texts depending on their specific purposes. For this reason, the vagueness and insensitivity of ‘migration literature’ can be seen as a fruitful tool to encompass the spectrum of initiatives that this thesis intends to cover. Similarly, Polezzi argues:

Focusing on the migrants specifically, [I use] ‘migrants’ in the plural, with their baggage of diversity and difference rather than on an abstract notion of migration and an equally impersonal image of ‘the migrant’.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of this thesis, several scenarios may exemplify instances in which ‘migration’ and ‘migrant’ may be communicated as an ‘impersonal’ and ‘abstract’ category. For example, when attempting to summarize the binary immigration and e-migration, considering that the occurrences of the term in these case studies show that it mainly refers to immigration to Italy. ‘Migration’ is also presented as a generic label in a range of social and political contexts. For example, it appears on the political agenda of parties and institutions, as well as defining the area of interest of associations and initiatives. Finally, as Chapter 4 will discuss thanks to a focus on television, recent studies have reflected on the representation of migration in the Italian media. In *Destination Italy*, the rhetoric of ‘emergenza’ and ‘sbarchi’ is described as being not necessarily related to the presence of more established foreign communities that have been living in Italy for decades.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the volume stresses that the use of a single term at institutional level that includes such different experiences of mobile subjects reinforces the dichotomy between migrants and non-migrants, non-Italian and Italian people. This oversimplification, together with narratives shaping an Italian national identity that is not aware of its colonial past,

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<sup>5</sup> Sabrina Brancato, ‘Introduction’, in *Afroeuropae@n Configurations: Readings and Projects*, ed. by Sabrina Brancato (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 1-15 (p. 8).

<sup>6</sup> Loredana Polezzi, ‘Translation and Migration’, *Translation Studies*, 5 (2012), 345-356 (p. 347).

<sup>7</sup> *Destination Italy*, ed. by Emma F. Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 7.

results in monolithic representations of Italianness.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of this lack of awareness may be found, for example, in the recent debates on the *legge di cittadinanza*, appearing on the political agenda of Italian left-wing parties but constantly postponed.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, *Destination Italy* also explores the efforts that were made in Italy to regulate the terminology and content that the media use to speak about migration, the main achievement being the *Carta di Roma*.<sup>10</sup> This deontological document has been adopted by the national *Ordine dei Giornalisti*, but, despite its content and authority, it is often ignored by the Italian media.<sup>11</sup>

Thanks to the focus on contexts in which migration literature is disseminated, the case studies analysed in this thesis refer to ‘migration’ as an element that permeates the public discourse in Italy. Migration is not to be seen only as a theme or as an element that characterizes the biography of the writer and therefore allows a wider focus on the role that it plays in the literary industry in contemporary Italy. A parallel could be made with Frank’s work, when he discusses Adelson’s claim that *migration writing*, to be read in opposition to *migrant writings* written by non-native authors, is a definition that can be applied to all literary production of the ‘age of migration’.<sup>12</sup> Because of its being part of a contemporary discourse around migration, he argues that all literary production can be seen as part of a single frame.

In this sense and for the purposes of this thesis, migration literature can be seen as the literary mirror of a wider discourse around migration. Writers who participate in many ways in current debates on migration or close themes and sub-themes, such as citizenship rights and legislation, may be included in this corpus, as they are asked to take part in the debate at different levels. Particularly interesting is the case of translingual writers, and the extent to which they are asked to speak about their personal experience. But equally worth discussing is the role played by Italian-born authors engaging with migration at many levels: although they are not necessarily

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<sup>8</sup> *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford ; New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Movements and campaigns have been promoted, for example the one on Twitter using the hashtag #italianisenzacittadinanza.

<sup>10</sup> Associazione Carta di Roma, Website <<https://www.cartadiroma.org/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>11</sup> Anna Meli, ‘Training Journalists on Immigration: Experiences and Reflections’, in *Destination Italy*, pp. 165-182.

<sup>12</sup> Søren Frank, ‘Four Theses on Migration Literature’, in *Migration and Literature in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Mirjam Gebauer and Pia Schwarz Lausten (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2010), pp. 39-57 (p. 52); Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

offering a first-hand story, their expertise derives from their being writers who have tackled migration in their work. Recent critical contributions show that in the last few decades migration has been emphasized in the work by Italian-born authors.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the voices of authors belonging to the so-called ‘second generation’ have played an important role in the public debate around migration, and they are asked to disseminate their work in contexts open to a general public. An example could be the articles that Igiaba Scego publishes regularly in newspapers such as *Internazionale*.<sup>14</sup>

The case studies presented also discuss contexts in which authors develop public engagement and policy-making activities around migration, and to what extent they have established a position to participate in current public debates around migration. In this respect, Mazzara’s analysis of the presence of migration in the Italian media offers some insight into the power dynamics in place.<sup>15</sup> Focusing in particular on Lampedusa and the coverage that recent shipwrecks have had in the Italian media – which is emblematic but does not exhaust the spectrum of types of news and cases that could be taken into account – she claims that its representation is not only constructed by, but also invested with, an ‘institutionalized racism’, and argues that visibility and power can be ‘gained relying on the realm of aesthetics’.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, aesthetics – for example, artistic products such as literary works – can be a means that allows migrants to reappropriate their voices. On the other hand, the migrant subject is described as ‘other’ and as being part of a generalizing narrative of migration. In this sense, the presence of an ‘institutionalized’ entity that defines and constructs the migrant subject constitutes the filter through which the wider public has access to it.

For this reason, the audiences of the case studies here are a central concern to identify any ‘different level of involvement’, as Kolb puts it, of participants.<sup>17</sup> In this

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<sup>13</sup> Maria Cristina Mauceri and Maria Grazia Negro, *Nuovo immaginario italiano: italiani e stranieri a confronto nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Rome: Sinnos, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> For example the recent Igiaba Scego, ‘Storia personale della guerra in Somalia’, *Internazionale*, 6 November 2017 <<https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/igiaba-scego/2017/11/06/guerra-somalia-mogadiscio>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>15</sup> Federica Mazzara, ‘Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa: The Counter Narrative of the Aesthetic Discourse’, *Italian Studies*, 70, 4 (2015), 449–64.

<sup>16</sup> Mazzara, 449–64 (p. 460).

<sup>17</sup> Bonita M. Kolb, *Marketing for Cultural Organisations: New Strategies for Attracting Audiences to Classical Music, Dance, Museums, Theatre & Opera* (London: Thomson Learning, 2005), p. 47; see also Bonita M. Kolb, *Marketing Strategy for the Creative and Cultural Industries, Mastering Management in the Creative and Cultural Industries* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

sense, this study offers the opportunity to explore the apparatus of people involved in the cultural industry around contemporary literature, as well as its audiences.<sup>18</sup> When ‘literature’ is a central element in the narrative of an initiative, the case studies investigate in what ways literature positions itself with respect to, and intersects with, other media, especially the internet (Chapters 2, 3) and television (Chapter 4), thanks to the work performed by agents in the cultural industry whose role is to understand how to make literature ‘marketed and consumed as a product’.<sup>19</sup> Particular attention is therefore paid to the challenges that authors face in their interplay with the various agents of the cultural industry, and in what ways the interaction with readers and potential readers has changed with the internet and social media. In particular, Chapter 3 discusses how the readers of a book do not coincide with the expected audience of the cultural event, and Chapters 1 and 5 consider contexts in which the writer is present at the dissemination event, with a focus on the expectations and reasons behind this choice and in what ways they are asked to take part in the initiative. It is also crucial to consider the ‘cultural industry’ not necessarily as a profit-related definition: first of all, because of the presence of voluntary work, which is the essence of some of the case studies that will be analysed; second, because the insecurity in the arts job market makes the distinction between paid and non-paid positions extremely blurred, and it would be hard to distinguish which parts of a task were performed by paid agents and which by un-paid workers or volunteers.

#### A network of initiatives

The focus on a selection of initiatives and the work of the agents who have coordinated them raises questions on the agency of the migration authors whose work was presented in such contexts. In particular, this thesis asks to what extent writers had the chance to play a role in the organization of these initiatives, and whether there is an attempt from their end to organize themselves into a literary movement. While focusing on translingual writers in Italian, Pezzarossa discusses

la disponibilità dei nuovi autori, proprio per la pluralità delle  
loro provenienze, a convergere, seppure in termini informali e

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<sup>18</sup> I am using ‘cultural industry’ to refer to a wide range of initiatives around the publication and dissemination of migration literature, focusing in particular on the publishing industry, literary prizes, artistic projects run by writers, cultural associations, the work of professionals in the field of communication and information, and initiatives promoted by school teachers.

<sup>19</sup> Kolb, *Marketing for Cultural Organisations*, p. 3.

transitori come invece è avvenuto nelle altre situazioni europee, come la francese o la tedesca, in scuole, cerchie, o gruppi, capaci di elaborare ed esprimere una documentata condivisione di sensibilità e una strategia largamente partecipata, capace di incidere sulla politica culturale.<sup>20</sup>

He suggests that the reason behind this scenario could be imputed to a tendency to ‘assorbire del costume italico l’individualismo scarsamente solidale’.<sup>21</sup> Although the Italian case is not comparable to similar initiatives organized by groups of translingual authors in other languages, such as the manifesto of *littérature monde*, the case studies in this thesis challenge the idea that what prevails is an ‘individualismo scarsamente solidale’.<sup>22</sup> Initiatives such as the Seminari della Sagarana (Chapter 2) and *El-Ghibli – Rivista di letteratura della migrazione* (Chapter 3) have played a pivotal role in building connections among authors, facilitating an encounter between them and critics, and most importantly making this production available to a general public. Similarly, experiences like that of the collective of female performance poets Compagnia delle poete (Chapter 1) shows that there are cases in the Italian context of shared projects among writers, following specific creative and political agendas. In this sense, the focus of this thesis on these initiatives gives us the chance to identify some specific contexts in which authors and specialists collaborate to develop and realize cultural projects. Although these are independent from each other, the relevance and temporal extent of some of these contexts have created a platform for discussion that could be compared to that of a circle of writers. Moreover, initiatives such as that of the team of the Concorso Lingua Madre (Chapter 1), who keep track of the winners’ subsequent activities and publicize them through their channel, promotes the idea that there is a unifying experience that makes these writers part of a community.

For this reason, describing this set of initiatives as a polycentric network helps in visualizing the dynamics within this industry. ‘Polycentric’ reflects the variety of fields that compose the cultural industry around migration literature in Italian, considering that this production has been disseminated in various contexts and through

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<sup>20</sup> Fulvio Pezzarossa, ‘Altri modi di leggere il mondo. Due decenni di scritture uscite dalle migrazioni’, in *Leggere il testo e il mondo*, pp. VII-XXXIII (pp. XVII-XVIII).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Pour Une Littérature-Monde*, ed. by Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, and Eva Almassy (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

a range of media and modes. It also highlights the lack of a recognized, centralized context serving as a core for this production. I am using ‘network’ in a descriptive rather than analytical way, in order to stress the existence of ‘relationships between entities (such as persons, organizations, states, and even concepts)’.<sup>23</sup> The idea of network helps depict the connections and collaborations among these centres and the different roles that certain operators may play in different contexts, as well as the way in which they have built connections to reinforce their presence. Moreover, considering the case studies of this thesis as part of a network of cultural projects helps in positioning them in the panorama of similar initiatives that could be added to this research. Not only could other cases of the same typology be considered – such as other series of book launches, or other publishers, or other television broadcasts. This network could also include other cases that expand the mapping of the initiatives that disseminate migration literature towards other directions that have not been explored in this thesis, for example other steps in the publication process, or focusing on other fields such as dedicated literary festivals, which are only mentioned but not analysed as specific case studies. In this sense, the attempt of this thesis is not to provide a full mapping of the cultural industry around migration literature, but to develop a mode of enquiry based on some case studies that aims to explore a type of literary production from the point of view of its dissemination.

Whilst the close connection to the specific territory in Italy in which the initiatives are active is a recurring pattern in the case studies, the network is interestingly enriched by the presence of online activities of different sorts. As the analysis of the case studies shows, the internet offers a non-physical space that not only plays an essential role in promoting this literature through events and the web, but, most importantly, it has become the medium through which a narrative of these events is created and transmitted (see Chapter 2). The presence of migration literature on the internet starts with more static webpages – such as authors’ personal pages, and the websites of publishers, associations, and literary prizes, which function as repositories of the activities – and expands with the use of social media in recent years.

The case studies selected are not representative of all regions and their geographical spread is not homogeneous. Rather than choosing examples that could

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<sup>23</sup> See Neha Gondal, ‘Culture and Networks’, *Oxford Bibliographies*, last modified 27 June 2017, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/id/obo-9780199756384-0204> > [accessed 15 June 2018].

offer an overview of how the dissemination of migration literature operates throughout the Italian territory, this thesis focuses on specific initiatives that are organized in smaller centres (Sagarana, Chapter 2) and peripheries (La Tenda, Chapter 3), are mobile (Compagnia delle poete, Chapter 1; Gabriella Ghermandi, Chapter 5) and active in various cities (sellers of Gruppo Solidarietà Come, Chapter 1), and include a project that revolves specifically around migration within major literary festival (Concorso Lingua Madre, Chapter 1). Although these choices have caused inevitable exclusions – for example, only minor case studies refer specifically to events promoted in the South of Italy – this attention to the peripheral and mobile nature of the case studies relates closely to their political aims. In addition, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on national television broadcast and school materials respectively, in order to present some examples with a national-level range of action.

The choice of narrowing the field of research to case studies located in Italy was made both to give some homogeneity to the case studies in terms of circuits and the cultural industry and to stress the connection between these initiatives and the contexts in which they are performed, which is a specific, national public debate around migration. However, excluding activities taking place outside Italy would prove insufficient if attempting a mapping of these initiatives. First, the networks that some of these case studies have established involve foreign centres, such as the Italian Cultural Institutes all over the world. Second, the use of the internet has blurred geographical borders and distances: online projects not only receive the contribution of people and institutions outside Italy, but they are also designed to be accessible to an international public and to give these audiences access to events held in Italy.

Third, a key portion of this network is constituted by academics, both in Italy and abroad. Despite a general critique around the ‘scarsa attenzione dell’*accademia a cogliere [...] la dinamica che investe il campo letterario, stante la scarsa disposizione ad innovare oggetti e metodi di studio*’, to put it in Pezzarossa’s words, the role of some academics has been crucial to disseminate migration literature beyond the university walls and circuits of specialists.<sup>24</sup> The work of Armando Gnisci, for example, crosses the pages of this thesis in many ways; suffice it to mention his decision to institute the Fondo Armando Gnisci, which is based in Lanuvio (Rome) and has made published and unpublished texts of migration literature available to the

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<sup>24</sup> Fulvio Pezzarossa, ‘Altri modi di leggere il mondo’, pp. VII-XXXIII (pp. XII-XIII).

general public. The reason why this work does not include initiatives primarily promoted by academics as case studies follows the attempt to include narratives of agents that have not been traditionally included in the scholarly debate. Moreover, these have access to different circuits and funding schemes, although some initiatives organized by academics were open to the general public and other academic conferences were organized in collaboration with other initiatives organized for the general public.<sup>25</sup>

The intersection between the initiatives promoted by academics and non-academics raises questions about the positioning of scholars working on a reading of migration literature from the point of view of its dissemination. Scholars may be involved in the decision making of these initiatives – for example, some members of the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli* are academics – or may serve as co-organizer. In the case of this thesis, I had the chance to be involved to some extent in some of the cultural projects that are discussed, including the collaboration with the Centro culturale Multietnico La Tenda as language teacher and the editing of the book *Madrigne in un'unica partitura* by the Compagnia delle poete.<sup>26</sup> These and other experiences have not only contributed to shaping and identifying the broad research questions for this project, but have also played a role in the selection of the case studies of the thesis.

### Sources and interviews

The sources for this study range from secondary literature to paraliterary texts, such as interviews, transcripts and videos of events, and public lectures.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, the multiple perspectives offered by the scholarly debate around migration literature in Italian constitutes the central body of literature of the study, with a focus on recent critical contributions that articulate both a postcolonial and transnational 'turn' in

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Pezzarossa specifies that 'il Convegno ha avuto un incontri di letture in comune con l'iniziativa *Alta Voce. Voci che leggono, città che ascoltano*, coordinata dallo scrittore Tahar Lamri'. Pezzarossa, 'Altri modi di leggere il mondo', pp. VII-XXXIII (p. VII, footnote 2).

<sup>26</sup> Compagnia delle poete, *Madrigne in un'unica partitura*, ed. by Gioia Panzarella (Milan: Ledizioni, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer', in *Immigrant Fictions: Contemporary Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. by Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 527-545 (p. 535).

Italian Studies.<sup>28</sup> A range of disciplines, such as media studies and cultural policy, have been instrumental to perform an analysis of the case studies, for example when considering the representation of migration, the audiences of the cultural projects, and their relationship with local and national public institutions. Similarly, Chapter 5 examines a body of literature that includes education and the teaching of literature. Finally, the sociology of literature has offered some insights to engage with the narratives emerging from the paraliterary texts and to contextualize them within the field of Italian studies. In particular, the use of the term ‘cultural intermediary’ in Chapter 1 proves the necessity to introduce terminology that allows a shift from textual analysis to a different approach to the literary text, to be seen as a product in a specific cultural industry.

On the other hand, the narratives of the initiatives emerge from an analysis of the cultural projects, as well as from the materials produced by the agents themselves. Websites and online materials, among the others, are essential to discuss in what ways these narratives are communicated to the general public and the degree to which materials or information on their activities are made available. Although the internet is generally characterized by its volatile nature, if compared for example to printed sources, these websites work as repositories of information and have been maintained for years with the specific purpose of collecting data for future reference. In particular, the archives of the online journals *El-Ghibli* and *Sagarana* serve as open-source resources for scholars.

Such materials are integrated with other sources, such as written or recorded interviews and newspaper articles. These epitexts provide a wide context that helps discuss aspects such as the platforms that have allowed a critical discussion around migration literature outside strictly academic environments. As Negro points out, ‘attraverso l’analisi diretta delle affermazioni rilasciate dagli scrittori [...] emerge un quadro più sfaccettato rispetto a quello unanime proposto dalla critica’.<sup>29</sup> Although Negro refers specifically to the scholarly debate around postcolonial writers – as the chapters in this study show, the debate on migration literature is not ‘unanime’ on

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<sup>28</sup> *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); *L’Italia Postcoloniale*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (Milan: Le Monier Università, 2014); Emma F. Bond, ‘Towards a Trans-National Turn in Italian Studies?’, *Italian Studies*, 69 (2014), 415–24.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Grazia Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola: la questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana* (Florence: Franco Cesati editore, 2015), p. 9.

several fronts – her approach shares with this thesis the intention to encompass a corpus of sources that are as multifaceted as possible. These are made available not only on the internet, but also thanks to the archives of published and unpublished texts hosted at a few dedicated libraries, such as the Biblioteca Rionale Dergano-Bovisa in Milan (see Chapter 3).

To some extent, some primary literature is considered as a source to discuss the cultural industry on migration literature, especially when the texts present autobiographical accounts of the activities that the writers perform. For example, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel affirms that ‘insieme ad altre associazioni ho iniziato a farmi coinvolgere in attività sociali [...] abbiamo iniziato ad andare in diverse scuole’, while Mohamed Ba mentions his involvement in projects in the social services commenting: ‘mi appiccicarono addosso l’etichetta di mediatore culturale, un modo pomposo per chiamare quelli che tentano di tenere a tempo i battiti delle esistenze’.<sup>30</sup> These texts are not used consistently and systematically throughout this study, for example the way in which narratives and *récit de vie* are incorporated in sociological research.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the fact that writers have mentioned dissemination events – and, in particular, their willingness to take part in them – is instrumental to stress the key role that such initiatives have played.

Lastly, the chance to discuss the work of some professionals with the professionals themselves has been included in this thesis through the form of open interviews conducted by me. This needs to be seen not as the main source for this research, but as a tool to integrate pieces of information that are missing from other sources, or to clarify and comment on such information. The data that was collected through interviews is incorporated in the analysis of the case studies and signaled as such in footnotes. Although these are the ‘visible’ parts of the interviews that appear in this study, it is important to stress that interviewing professionals has also been key to verify information that was collected from other sources. In this sense, the use of interviews as a means of analysis is integrated in the examination of textual materials throughout the thesis not only by inserting specific data, but more generally to discuss and engage with the narratives performed by the agents operating in the cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Far from Mogadishu/Lontano Da Mogadiscio* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), section ‘Incontri ravvicinati’; Mohamed Ba, *Il tempo dalla mia parte: romanzo* (Cinisello Balsamo (MI): San Paolo, 2013), p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> See Laura Zanfrini, ‘L’uso delle storie di vita nella ricerca sociologica’, *Studi di Sociologia*, 37, 1 (1999), 55-76.

industry in each case study. As Aberbach and Rockman point out when describing the conversation between interviewer and interviewee, ‘such an interview has a more conversational quality to it than the typical highly structured’ one, which allows the interviewer to explore points that the interviewee would raise, as well as the interviewee being able to expand towards new details or providing new references and contacts when relevant.<sup>32</sup> In this case, ‘respondents are selected on the basis of what they might know to help the investigator fill in pieces of a puzzle or confirm the proper alignment of pieces already in place’, especially if considering their role in the network of initiatives that this thesis analyses.<sup>33</sup> For these reasons, the interviews performed can be defined as ‘elite interviews’, which put the interviewee in a position of sharing his or her knowledgeable and competent views with the researcher. The interviewees are professionals, writers, critics, often researchers themselves, used to speaking to the press and aware of what a research project at doctoral level is. From an ethical point of view it was necessary to explain the aims of the thesis, to allow interviewees to appreciate the contexts in which their statements were needed and discussed.

## Chapters

The selection of the case studies was guided by the need to consider two main areas. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 explore initiatives whose primary aim has been to promote and disseminate migration literature, especially translingual authors. On the other hand, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on examples in which professionals in the field of culture have served as intermediaries for this production. Although this is not a neat division, the order of the chapters attempts to follow a criterion pertaining to the degree of proximity and familiarity that the agents analysed may have with the field of migration literature.

Chapter 1 explores the narratives of the agents active in the dissemination of migration literature. After an overview of their presence in the scholarly debate, the chapter discusses the concept of ‘cultural intermediary’ as a tool to investigate the role and prerogatives of this diverse set of figures and their cultural production products. The chapter moves into analysing three case studies that both exemplify and challenge

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<sup>32</sup> Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, ‘Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews’, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35, 4 (2002), 673-676 (p. 674).

<sup>33</sup> Aberbach and Rockman, 673-676 (p. 673).

the idea of cultural intermediary when applied to the cultural industry around migration literature. The Concorso Lingua Madre is described as a highly visible project because of its institutional sponsors, and the focus on the award ceremony of the literary contest allows a reflection on the presence of authors on stage. The street book sellers of the Cooperativa Come granted the Edizioni Dell'Arco a different kind of visibility and dissemination, becoming a recognizable presence in Italian city centres. The experience of the Compagnia delle poete, founded and guided by Mia Lecomte, shows in what ways a group of writers decided to work together as performance poets serving as cultural intermediaries of their own work.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Seminari della Sagarana (2001-2011), emphasizing the opportunity given to writers and specialists to gather together in a forum to discuss migration literature. The chapter explores the range of topics that were at the centre of the sessions, with a focus on the protagonists of the debates and their contributions. The seminars are contextualized within the Sagarana project and the work of its director Julio Monteiro Martins, with an emphasis on his attention in promoting and disseminating migration literature through the online journal *Sagarana* and the publication of the transcripts of the nine editions of the Seminari online. Finally, the internet is discussed as a privileged tool to disseminate migration literature, which in the case of the Seminari della Sagarana has been instrumental to make the transcripts of the sessions available to a much wider audience than the participants.

Chapter 3 centres on the Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda in Milan and the series of book launches *Narrativa nascente*, which have run since 1993. The association was created to respond to the needs of an area with a high percentage of immigrants, and presenting and disseminating migration literature was identified as a way to promote cultural understanding among the different communities living in the area. The activities of La Tenda – which include the provision of free courses in the Italian language – are discussed in their interaction with the local library Dergano-Bovisa, but also as part of metropolitan and international networks, such as the Scuole Senza Permesso in Milan and the Plida Exam Centres coordinated by the Società Dante Alighieri. La Tenda also provided a fertile environment for the birth of the online journal *El-Ghibli*, in 2003, which plays a pivotal role in the publication of primary and secondary texts of migration literature.

In Chapter 4, three specific television broadcasts are chosen as case studies to discuss the presence of migration writers on the Italian public television channel Rai

3: Enaiatollah Akbari, whose biography *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli* was written by Fabio Geda, on ‘Che tempo che fa’ (2010); the Pulitzer prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri on ‘Pane Quotidiano’ (2015); and the literary talent show contestant Nikola Savic on ‘Masterpiece’ (2013-2014). The focus of this chapter is on narratives created by media professionals – who are not necessarily specialists of either migration or literature – when disseminating migration literature to a national audience. Reference will be made to recent studies on migration and the media, with a focus on the Italian case.

Chapter 5 addresses school materials and initiatives, with a focus on the extent to which migration literature has been considered in this context in relation to the urgency of introducing the topic of migration in school curricula. Textbooks and publications that may be identified under the umbrella term of *intercultura* have given space to migration literature and recognized it as part of a set of materials for school students. The selection of materials analysed shows that these were not created to address immigrant students specifically, but more in general to propose an approach that could promote intercultural teaching practices. The second part of the chapter addresses school visits by migration authors, to be intended not only as moments of dissemination of their work, but also as occasions when they have been invited to talk to students about ‘migration’ and cognate themes such as colonialism and racism. A focus on Gabriella Ghermandi and her performances discusses in what ways dissemination events have affected writers’ production.

In the Conclusion, the various connections and existing networks among these initiatives will be recapped and discussed with a focus on three specific areas: the question around the existence of a literary movement; the agency of writers in the dissemination of migration literature; and the impact that dissemination events have on migration writers’ work. These points highlight in what ways an analysis that explores the dissemination of migration literature can emphasize crucial points in the scholarly debate around migration literature.



## Chapter 1. Narrating migration literature through its cultural intermediaries

Whilst each of the next chapters focuses on homogeneous sets of figures working in a specific context – spanning from literary event organizers, to media professionals and teachers – the aim of this chapter is to identify questions and descriptors that may facilitate a discussion around the range of activities carried out in each site of dissemination. In the first section, the presence of agents working in significantly different sectors of the cultural industry is explored with reference to the scholarly debate on migration literature. The notion of ‘cultural intermediary’, from Bourdieu’s definition to more recent studies, is used to investigate in what ways their job impacts the dissemination and promotion of migration literature.

The second section of this chapter is an analysis of three specific areas of the existing cultural industry, namely the organization of literary festivals, the production of theatre performances, and the distribution of books, with a focus on the cases of the Concorso letterario Lingua Madre, the performance poets Compagnia delle poete, and the street sellers from the Gruppo Solidarietà Come respectively.<sup>34</sup> This section shows in what ways each case can be analysed keeping at the centre of the analysis the role played by specific agents of the cultural industry while promoting migration literature. In particular, and thanks to a reference to the notion of cultural intermediaries, these cases reveal to what extent a focus on the work of these agents is key to analyse the dissemination of this production, for example considering their capacity of selecting texts and authors and their marketing choices to promote migration literature. In the study of these contexts, specific attention will be paid to the physical presence of writers and agents, both in performances and as a tangible element of encounter with the public, which can be seen as a *trait d’union* that could offer some additional insights.

The choice to insert three different case studies into the second section of this chapter exemplifies the use of case studies from various areas in this thesis: these cases explored do not exhaust the panorama of literary prizes, publishers, or theatre

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<sup>34</sup> Founded in 2009, the Compagnia stresses that their being translingual is one their main distinguishing features. On their website they describe themselves as a group of poets ‘straniere e italostraniere, almeno in parte italofone o residenti per un periodo dell’anno in Italia’, and they specify that they come from ‘diversi continenti, accomunate da una particolare storia personale di migranza e transnazionalità’. See Compagnia delle poete, ‘Homepage’ <[www.compagniadellepoete.it](http://www.compagniadellepoete.it)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

initiatives, and other examples could have been added and analysed. At the same time, analysing these cases is instrumental to propose a frame of analysis that can be expanded. Not only do these initiatives refer to different sectors of the literary industry, but they also differ from an economic point of view: the cases that have been analysed are funded by public funding or sponsors (Concorso Lingua Madre), self-funded (Compagnia delle poete), or find innovative strategies to support themselves and create job opportunities (Gruppo Solidarietà Come).

The focus on these specific experiences also establishes in what ways the work of such figures is intertwined with the existence itself of some literary and artistic projects. The case study on the Compagnia delle poete, in particular, shows that the performances of the Compagnia have developed progressively from collecting and combining existing works by each member of the Compagnia in order to compose the script of a performance, to new poems that were written with the specific purpose of being part of a script. In this sense, the Compagnia can be seen as a group of authors who serve as cultural intermediaries of their own work, not only because they oversee the marketing and promotion of their performances, but more interestingly because their process of creating performances is nurtured by the proximity to their audience.

## 1.1 The notion of ‘cultural intermediaries’ to discuss migration literature in Italian

### *1.1.1 ‘Critici, editori, associazioni’: cultural agents in the scholarly debate*

The work of the agents who are at the centre of this research has already been mentioned and recognized at different levels in scholarly contributions around migration literature in Italian. These studies are critically signalled throughout the thesis, and this section discusses some general issues raised by Mengozzi, Sinopoli, and Burns. Nevertheless, the cultural projects at the centre of this chapter have not yet been the object of a study that aims to rediscuss migration literature in Italian as a production that has received significant input from a diverse set of figures working in the cultural industry (see Introduction).

Referring particularly to migration literature in the nineties, Mengozzi states:

il numero delle pubblicazioni in italiano degli “immigrati”  
aumenta considerevolmente grazie alla sensibilità e  
all’impegno di alcuni critici letterari, dell’associazionismo e

della piccola e media editoria. Critici, editori e associazioni non si sono limitati a “dare spazio e voce” [...] ma hanno promosso, incoraggiato e sollecitato queste pratiche di scrittura, creando al tempo stesso le cornici e i contenitori entro i quali circoscrivere un fenomeno che loro stessi contribuivano a tenere in vita e indirizzare.<sup>35</sup>

Although Mengozzi does not use a term to define *critici*, *editori* and *associazioni*, in this excerpt she identifies some of the prerogatives of the figures that are analysed in this thesis. She points out that in the nineties the role that critics, cultural associations, and small and medium publishers played was crucial in encouraging this production. She also notes that, thanks to their work, the number of texts that were published has since increased.<sup>36</sup> Among other initiatives, in those years the literary prize Eks&Tra (see next sections of this chapter) was established and the cultural association La Tenda started to organize the dedicated series of book launches ‘Narrativa Nascente’ (see Chapter 3). Such initiatives became a landmark for writers, both established and emerging: as Mengozzi explains, not only did they actively encourage and promote writers, but sometimes they also urged new projects and publications that could fit the frames they had created. This point highlights the relevance of discussing these cultural projects not only when considering the dissemination phase of migration literature, but its existence itself and the way in which it developed. It also suggests that the relationship between the organizers of such initiatives and the writers is characterized by power dynamics, which emerge clearly in terms of the expectations to be met by authors in order to be part of such a network, especially in the case of emerging authors. In this sense, the word *fenomeno* encapsulates well the idea that there has been a set of elements perceived as fixed and consistently characterizing this production. Mengozzi pushes this idea forward and highlights that these agents were giving directives on the developments of this production, stressing the active role that they have played at decision-making level.

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<sup>35</sup> Mengozzi, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> The database Basili – Banca dati sugli Scrittori Immigrati in Lingua functions as the main repository to access data on this production, especially the early texts. After a few years off-line, its management was recently taken over by *El-Ghibli* in April 2017 and the database has been renamed Basili&LIMM – Banca dati degli Scrittori Immigrati in Lingua Italiana e della Letteratura Italiana della Migrazione Mondiale. It can be consulted at <<http://basili-limm.el-ghibli.it/>> [accessed 15 December 2017]. See Chapter 3.

Similarly, Sinopoli refers to these agents as *critici 'compagni di strada'*, identifying teachers, *operatori interculturali*, and journalists as the first figures who published on this production in a variety of forms, such as book prefaces or articles in specialized publications. When tracking the beginnings of the body of critical contributions on migration literature in Italian, Sinopoli also highlights that writers were invited to take part in such initiatives so that they could offer their first-hand experience: 'i testi letterari pubblicati dai migranti diventano dei testimoni delle culture della recente immigrazione'.<sup>37</sup> The recurring use of terms in the semantic area of *testimone/testimonianza* is an element to be taken into account when discussing the physical presence of these writers at the various initiatives that may be considered. Moreover, the existence of common goals in the field of the policies of *integrazione* (see Chapter 5) that were promoted in Italy in the nineties made these writers the protagonists of initiatives and publications, in cooperation with the work of other figures. In particular, Sinopoli points out that the interest and attention from these operators are also due to the themes that are at the centre of this production, which she identifies as 'il conflitto sociale tra indigeni (noi) e nuovi arrivati (loro), la pericolosità del viaggio migratorio e le diverse forme di elaborazione e di negoziazione della nostalgia del paese d'origine'.<sup>38</sup> These topics reflect some issues that started to appear more prominently in the Italian media in the nineties and to acquire a growing prominence in the social and political debate as part of a wider discourse around migration. The subsequent need to discuss these themes in a range of contexts – such as in the media or in schools – and to give them visibility made professionals from various fields interested in working with writers. In this respect, the involvement of writers in such cultural projects depends on the extent to which they may be identified as being able to contribute to each specific context.

Despite the range of contexts that Mengozzi and Sinopoli illustrate, these initiatives should not be seen as being disconnected from each other, but rather as part of a lively cultural industry whose protagonists are involved in a range of 'forms of activity in which various products and practices co-exist'.<sup>39</sup> Burns stresses the co-existence of such initiatives that do not necessarily share aims, target the same audience, or follow the same social and political agenda. To put it in Burns' words:

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<sup>37</sup> Franca Sinopoli, 'La critica sulla letteratura della migrazione in Italia', pp. 87-110 (p. 89).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, p. 200.

such forms of cultural production and dissemination perhaps achieve significant cultural capital and potential impact in the national public arena by virtue of the ways in which different kinds of cultural associations, cultural and political activists, community groups, and organs of production collaborate or simply co-exist in such a way as to generate a mass of cultural activity.<sup>40</sup>

The richness deriving from such a diverse set of initiatives produced by the cultural industry around migration literature results in a body of materials of various natures. The notion of ‘cultural intermediary’ can be instrumental to reflect on some specific issues that arise from the analysis of these ‘forms of activity’.

### 1.1.2 ‘Cultural intermediaries’ from Bourdieu to recent studies

When considering a varied set of agents such as publishers, journalists, and event organizers, the secondary literature on ‘cultural intermediaries’ helps to identify concerns and key concepts.<sup>41</sup> First, the idea that intellectuals and artists need to be legitimized, highlighting that this role may be played by several figures, ‘whose selective operations are invested with a truly cultural legitimacy’.<sup>42</sup> The existence of such a filter is a crucial point to investigate the ‘connection or articulation between production and consumption’ between writers and their readers.<sup>43</sup> These intermediaries encourage a consecration process that, in the case of migration literature in Italian, often has the aim of introducing writers and their work to circuits of experts, as Mengozzi states, and they are therefore seen as the agents who have the legitimacy to select writers. Using the notion of cultural intermediary allows an analysis of specific ‘modes of consecration’, as Sapiro defines them, depending on the particular context in which each cultural intermediary is active.<sup>44</sup> A second aspect of Bourdieu’s work is its reference to schools, in particular when he points out that the

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<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>41</sup> Among other works, see Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979); Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’, *Poetics*, 14 (1985), 13–44.

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’, 13–44 (p. 15).

<sup>43</sup> See Keith Negus, ‘The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance between Production and Consumption’, *Cultural Studies*, 16, 4 (2002), 501-515 (p. 503).

<sup>44</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, ‘The Metamorphosis of Modes of Consecration in the Literary Field: Academies, Literary Prizes, Festivals’, *Poetics*, 59 (2016), 5-19 (p. 6).

expansion of primary education in the second half of the twentieth century has widened the number and profile of consumers of culture.<sup>45</sup> This is relevant when reflecting on the role played by intermediaries, such as teachers, who present migration literature to publics of non-specialists, such as school students (see Chapter 5).

The choice of the term ‘cultural intermediaries’ stems from Bourdieu’s work, but has subsequently been developed and explored in a range of disciplines other than Bourdieu’s own primary field of the sociology of culture, such as economics and marketing. A special issue recently published on this theme encompasses a series of contributions from various disciplines, interestingly focusing on cultural intermediaries who are active in a range of contexts.<sup>46</sup> These works have reinterpreted Bourdieu’s theories in recent years, taking into account some significant changes that have called for a reflection on new factors, such as the presence of media that did not exist when Bourdieu was writing, which also play an important role in the case studies that are discussed in this thesis. For example, the use of the internet, and in particular social media, has both offered new tools to cultural intermediaries and contributed to expanding the very meaning of this notion. In their introduction, Smith Maguire and Matthews point out that over the years the term cultural intermediary ‘has been used as a descriptive catch-all for seemingly any creative or cultural occupation or institution’ and, a few lines later, they define it as ‘an overly inclusive, analytically-neutered term’.<sup>47</sup>

On the one hand, such statements stress the distance of the case studies included in the special issue from contexts in which the role of cultural intermediaries is confined to more traditional cultural environments, as defined in Bourdieu’s work and range of analysis. On the other hand, they pose the question of whether using this term in such a wide sense may make it a less effective category, because of the wide spectrum of figures that may fall into it. For example, among the case studies that explore the field of cultural intermediation, Ocejo discusses the figure of the bartender as a cultural intermediary. He stresses that because of the degree of independence that

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<sup>45</sup> Bourdieu, ‘The Market of Symbolic Goods’, 13–44 (p. 15).

<sup>46</sup> See Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, ‘Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now? An Introduction to Cultural Intermediaries in Context’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15 (2012), 551–62. For an overview of how the term ‘cultural intermediary’ has evolved, see also Nathalie Heinrich, ‘Mapping Intermediaries in Contemporary Art according to Pragmatic Sociology’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15, 6 (2012), 695–702.

<sup>47</sup> Smith Maguire and Matthews, ‘Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now?’, 551–62 (p. 552).

bartenders boast, they also have the ability to lead products through a consecration process, and therefore it is worth including such a profile in a study that investigates cultural intermediaries, although they would not be traditionally considered as agents of the cultural industry.<sup>48</sup> Such studies show how expanding the range of cultural intermediaries allows the use of such a frame of analysis when referring to various kinds of agents. This approach may be instrumental in the cases that this thesis discusses to examine not a single type of cultural intermediary, but multiple contexts in the literary industry operating with migration literature, as well as their various interactions with its consumers, in order to explore the way in which using the paradigm of cultural intermediation may contribute to the body of criticism around migration literature. Moreover, Smith Maguire and Matthews highlight that the aim of their special issue is ‘not to put cultural intermediaries in context, but to put context (back) into considerations of cultural intermediaries’.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the events that are analysed in this chapter are discussed from the point of view of the choices, strategies, and aims of the agent (or agents) that are involved.

Lastly, if considering the spectrum of terms that have been used in the scholarly debate to describe these agents, it is worth mentioning at least two additional sets of figures whose role might be confused with that of the ‘cultural intermediaries’ or, more in general, with the professional or non-professional actors who play a role in the dissemination of migration literature. These figures are referred to as ‘cultural mediators’ and have been at the centre of studies in the broad areas of translation studies and intercultural communication, respectively. Scholars of cultural translation studies have considered the role of actors who introduce new texts into a foreign literary environment, and who are also defined as gatekeepers. These can be publishers who promote specialized series of books, or translators themselves whose approach highlights a sensitivity towards other cultures. Cedergren and Schwartz, for example, describe them as ‘literary mediators’, with a focus on the movement of texts between different national literatures, in a comparative perspective.<sup>50</sup> If taking into account the field of intercultural communication and cognate disciplines, ‘cultural mediators’ are defined as people working in various sectors to facilitate access to public services and

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<sup>48</sup> Richard E. Ocejo, ‘At Your Service: The Meanings and Practices of Contemporary Bartenders’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15, 5 (2012), 642-58.

<sup>49</sup> Smith Maguire and Matthews, ‘Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now?’, 551-562 (p. 552).

<sup>50</sup> See for example Mickaëlle Cedergren and Cecilia Schwartz, ‘From Comparative Literature to the Study of Mediators’, *Moderna Språk*, 110, 10 (2016), i-x.

mutual understanding between foreigners and local operators, for example in schools or hospitals, or in workplaces. Although this chapter – and this thesis – does not refer to these figures under these specific disciplinary perspectives, it is relevant to consider these contributions and the way in which some elements of their work may overlap with the focus here on cultural intermediaries. First, these sets of activities intersect with that of the agents who are analysed in these pages. Second, some of the writers whose work is mentioned in this thesis work as operators in social services, for example Pap Khouma, Mohamed Ba, and Fabio Geda. Similarly, the role of gatekeepers as described above can be recognized in the work of writers and professionals working across different national realities. An example is the anthology edited by Mia Lecomte, *A New Map: The Poetry of Migrant Writers in Italy*, whose first aim is to provide the Anglophone public with a translation of some contemporary transnational poets writing in Italian.<sup>51</sup>

To sum up, the notion of cultural intermediaries – as defined in Bourdieu and works that followed – is used in this thesis to refer to a wide range of agents operating in the cultural industry who are taken into account when analysing each case study (such as organizers of events, agents active in distribution and dissemination circuits, journalists and educators), with a specific focus on the way in which their work is instrumental to disseminate migration literature to various audiences of non-specialists. Although the specific roles that various disciplines refer to as that of ‘cultural mediators’ are not at the centre of this analysis as such, these figures may serve as cultural intermediaries when playing a role in the dissemination of migration literature.

## 1.2 Three narrations by cultural intermediaries

A focus on the cultural industry around migration literature from the perspective of cultural intermediaries allows a particular stress on the organizational part of it, from the conception of an event, its target audience, and the location in which an event is organized, to the budget-related aspects, or whether it receives public funding, and the

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<sup>51</sup> *A New Map: The Poetry of Migrant Writers in Italy*, ed. by Mia Lecomte, Luigi Bonaffini, and Franca Sinopoli (Mineola, NY: Legas Logo, 2011).

background offered by an analysis of the social or political organizations for which the cultural intermediaries may operate.

The analysis of the way in which these agents operate in their respective fields attempts to identify and discuss the narrative that each cultural intermediary envisions. The link between intermediaries and the narratives they produce is made explicit by Wynn, who describes the strategies of tourist guides who need to develop their own narrative of the place that they are presenting to tourists.<sup>52</sup> This example highlights the difference between the object of intermediation (in Wynn's case, a touristic space; in the cases explored in this thesis, a writer or a book of migration literature) and the narrative that the intermediary constructs in the moment in which they present it to an audience, be it a group of tourists or the audience of one of the contexts at the centre of this thesis. As the first section of this chapter has highlighted, critics, educators, and journalists are but a few of the figures who have played a role in the dissemination of migration literature and engaged with the texts and their content in order to facilitate their reception in their respective fields, in light of their specific audiences and using them according to their frames. Following these premises, the various contributions of these agents are not to be seen simply as the dissemination phase of literary production, but more broadly as a separate moment of cultural production with a specific status within the cultural industry. As Smith Maguire and Matthews point out, 'cultural intermediaries perform creative work; thinking about their actual practices, experiences and impacts can assist in a critical assessment of the claims made about creative work in contemporary economies'.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the cultural projects and the set of choices that cultural intermediaries perform in terms of practices contribute to identifying elements of creativity that had an impact on the rise and development of migration literature.

The analysis of the cultural projects that follows considers three cases that correspond to various aspects of the life of a literary work, from the selection of the winners of a literary prize to the distribution strategy of a publisher. A focus on the practices of the cultural intermediaries involved in such different stages is instrumental

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<sup>52</sup> Jonathan R. Wynn, 'Guides through Cultural Work: A Methodological Framework for the Study of Cultural Intermediaries', *Cultural Sociology*, 6, 3 (2012), 336–50.

<sup>53</sup> Smith Maguire and Matthews, 'Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries', in *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, ed. by Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews (London: Sage, 2014), pp. 1-11 (p. 4).

to discuss the narratives that these initiatives create, highlighting the impact that they made in the dissemination of the literary text.

### *1.2.1 Literary prizes: Lingua Madre and Eks&Tra*

Organizers of literary prizes have served as cultural intermediaries for migration literature in many ways: encouraging emerging writers and giving them the chance to send their works; selecting and providing recognition to some of them, in a way that allows emerging writers to enter a literary circuit; promoting these texts through publications and public events. The analysis of *Lingua Madre*, in particular, investigates the role played by the institutional space of the Salone del Libro di Torino, focusing in particular on the call for contributions and the award ceremony. Ponzo and Scoppa have explored the role that literary prizes play in affecting consumers' choices in Italy.<sup>54</sup> These are described as a fundamental indicator of quality on account of the impact of the experts' judgement on consumers, following the proposition that 'the quality of many goods cannot be observed before purchase' and considering that books are defined as 'experience goods'.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, a book that wins a literary prize attracts the consumer's attention as well as that of cultural intermediaries working in other fields, thanks to their capacity to trigger a consecration process. Nevertheless, the *Concorso Letterario Nazionale Lingua Madre* and the *Premio Eks&Tra* are not to be seen along the same lines as major literary prizes in Italy. As Ponzanesi highlights, there is a circuit of alternative prizes that give space to migration authors that may not have access to major prizes.<sup>56</sup> The reasons behind this are various. For example, the most prestigious literary prizes usually consider published books, while one of the main issues for migration writers has been to access publishers.

*Lingua Madre* and *Eks&Tra* are open to emerging writers and consider unpublished texts and, for these reasons, they have been a means to access a certain literary circuit for many writers. In this sense, the experts' judgment can still be seen as significant recognition, as it contributes to the circulation of the text, as well as the circulation of the name of the author that is signalled among other cultural

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<sup>54</sup> Michela Ponzo and Vincenzo Scoppa, 'Experts' Awards and Economic Success: Evidence from an Italian Literary Prize', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 39, 4 (2015), 341–67.

<sup>55</sup> Ponzo and Scoppa, 341–67 (p. 342).

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 15.

intermediaries active in the field of migration literature. Moreover, in her analysis of the role played by festivals and literary prizes in the contemporary literary industry, Sapiro speaks of ‘modes of consecration’ and refers to the French context to explore in what ways these have changed in the past few years. Festivals, in particular, are described as the ‘new literary authority’, a definition that reflects the ways in which Bourdieu and other scholars speak of legitimacy and consecration.<sup>57</sup> As Smith Maguire points out, ‘the cultural intermediaries work to canonize the “not-yet-legitimate”’, to put it in Bourdieu’s words, and in this sense the process of consecration operated by organizers and members of the jury of festivals and literary prizes is seen as a means for authors to acquire recognition.<sup>58</sup>

In this respect, the experience of the literary prize *Lingua Madre* seems particularly relevant, as it provides emerging writers with access to specialized circuits while also offering them the visibility of the Salone del Libro di Torino.<sup>59</sup> The prize started in 2005 as an independent project within the Salone, and it has been sponsored, among others, by the Salone itself and the Settore Biblioteche of the Assessorato alla Cultura of the Regione Piemonte.<sup>60</sup> This specific event also gives us the chance to investigate in what ways the cultural intermediaries involved in the organization of the prize choose to promote such an initiative considering their intended audience. For *Lingua Madre*, the aim is to disseminate the winners’ texts thanks to the visibility given by a large-scale event like the Salone, taking into account that the people attending the prize ceremony may or may not be informed about *Lingua Madre* and need to be acquainted with it. The founder and organizer of the prize is Daniela Finocchi, a journalist who built a network of partnerships and collaborations with

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<sup>57</sup> Sapiro, 5-19 (p. 6).

<sup>58</sup> Smith Maguire, ‘Bourdieu on Cultural Intermediaries’, in *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, pp. 15-24 (p. 21).

<sup>59</sup> The Salone del Libro di Torino is one of the main literary festivals in Italy. Giorgi and her co-writers discuss the significance of literary festivals in the literary industry: ‘That the modern art world but also the creative industries would seek to instrumentalise festivals in order to promote their specific agendas is as unsurprising as the instrumentalisation of festivals by local authorities or national funding bodies (public or private). In other words, like other cultural activities, festivals are symptomatic for a specific way of looking at the arts, namely as means to achieve one or several ends of socio-economic or political significance – branding, urban regeneration, and democratisation representing the most important functions of contemporary festivals’. Liana Giorgi and others, *European Art Festivals: Strengthening Cultural Diversity* (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2011), p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> Paola Marchi, ‘Storia del Concorso letterario nazionale “Lingua Madre”’, in *L’alterità che ci abita: donne migranti e percorsi di cambiamento: dieci anni del Concorso letterario nazionale ‘Lingua madre’*, ed. by Daniela Finocchi and Giuseppina Corrias (Turin: Edizioni Seb 27, 2015), 11- 23 (p. 13).

associations and research institutes, a number of which sponsor some of the prizes.<sup>61</sup> The themes of the prize are women and migration, as the call for participants highlights. The two main prizes are reserved for women both of foreign origin and Italian.<sup>62</sup> As Quaquarelli points out, this choice ‘sembra apparentemente andare nel senso di una “deghettizzazione” delle scritture migranti’: the prize is not open to foreign participants only, as is the case for example for the Eks&Tra prize, and in this sense *Lingua Madre* does not ‘ghettoize’ foreign participants.<sup>63</sup> However, the Bando establishes a neat divide between the expectations towards the texts written by foreign women and the ones written by Italian-born authors: Quaquarelli notes that while the Concorso accepts submissions from foreign women ‘che desiderino esprimere e approfondire il rapporto tra la propria identità, le proprie radici e il paese che le ospita’, Italian women willing to participate are invited to ‘raccontare storie di donne straniere che hanno conosciuto, amato incontrato e che hanno saputo trasmettere loro “altre” identità’.<sup>64</sup> Quaquarelli points out that not only is there a divide between the two sections of the Concorso, with a stress on their own respective ‘bacino tematico’, but the term ‘raccontare’ also seems to suggest that only Italian participants are allowed the ‘dimensione del racconto, dimensione letteraria’.<sup>65</sup> This opposition between a group being invited to tell a story and the other to reflect on their own life experience seems to reinforce the narrative that the two sections of the prize are, in practice, expecting two different kinds of submissions, confirming a neat separation between the two strands of the Prize.

Among the articles of the Bando, number five is also relevant to discuss the aims of the Concorso, as it moves away from a mere list of regulations and discloses the Concorso’s ethos, stating the principles on which the project is based. The keyword ‘identity’ is highlighted and co-writing is encouraged, as it claims that the existence itself of the Premio is meant to promote inclusivity, not identity loss. As stated in article 5: ‘Tutto questo nello spirito della valorizzazione dell’ intreccio culturale che è prima di tutto intreccio relazionale: assistenza non è affatto perdita sul piano identitario, al contrario è proprio nella relazione che l’identità si afferma in modo

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<sup>61</sup> Concorso *Lingua Madre*, ‘Chi Siamo’ <<http://concorsolinguamadre.it/il-concorso/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>62</sup> The full set of articles of the Bando can be found on Concorso *Lingua Madre*, ‘Bando 2016’ <<http://concorsolinguamadre.it/bando/>> [accessed 1 May 2017].

<sup>63</sup> Lucia Quaquarelli, *Narrazione e Migrazione* (Milan: Morellini, 2015), pp. 24-25.

<sup>64</sup> Concorso *Lingua Madre*, ‘Bando 2016 – art. 1’.

<sup>65</sup> Quaquarelli, p. 25.

positivo e non preclusivo'. Article 5 also specifies that the texts need to be submitted in Italian, 'perché l'Italia è il paese di residenza e il luogo dove il Concorso è bandito'. The explanation provided stresses the connection between the language and the national space in which it is spoken, which is significant considering the prominence of the Festival di Torino among the Italian literary festivals. This requirement also narrows the target of the Bando, as it shows an explicit reference to the linguistic skills of the writers. In this sense, the use of the Italian language may be seen both as a way to respond to a need for a vehicular language – which allows participants from diverse cultural backgrounds to be able to read each other's texts – and as a means to encourage writing in Italian among foreign participants. Interestingly, the Bando also explores the possibility that co-writing may be seen not as a mere linguistic support, but rather as a strategy to promote an encounter among the co-writers, giving them the opportunity to start a conversation. Finally, article 5 states that 'è consentita, anzi incoraggiata, la collaborazione tra donne straniere e donne italiane nel caso l'uso della lingua italiana scritta presenti delle difficoltà', envisaging the possibility that foreign women may want to participate despite difficulties that they might encounter.<sup>66</sup> This point is indicative of the fact that the aims of the Concorso go beyond literary production, as it aspires to promote practices of dialogue and inclusivity, which may be seen as part of a wider context of initiatives of this kind that will be discussed in Chapter 5. However, this article in the Bando seems to set a rather abstract standard for 'lingua italiana scritta', which might prevent participants from sending their texts. The way in which the sentence is phrased also suggests that only 'donne italiane' have the ability to help in this sense, not considering the possibility that foreign women might help each other.

The central moment of every edition of the prize is the award ceremony, which takes place at the Salone del Libro. An analysis of some elements of the ceremony, such as the presence of writers on stage, may offer some insights into the ways in which Lingua Madre promotes itself and disseminates the work of its winners to the audience of the Salone. The award ceremony is presented as an institutional moment, due to the visibility given by the Festival. In the 2016 edition of the Premio – which is taken here as an example to perform a close reading of the event – the physical

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<sup>66</sup> Concorso Lingua Madre, 'Bando 2016 – art. 5'.

presence of the winners was emphasized.<sup>67</sup> For each writer there was a reading of an excerpt of the text and of the motivations of the prize. After that, the writer was invited on stage and asked to remain on the stage for the whole duration of the ceremony. The presence of the Italian city in which each winner is based is particularly valued, which reiterates the connection between the various parts of Italy and the Festival, to be seen as a central point of the national literary culture: a representative of the local administration is invited to join the winners onstage and to say a few words, together with a representative from the country of origin of the winner. This choice seems to be aimed at building a bridge between the writers' past and present, as well as at highlighting a sense of dedication to the multicultural cause of the *Lingua Madre* project, which is made visible and audible, as many languages and Italian accents can be heard depending on the country of origin of the winners. The geographical positioning of the participants is particularly highlighted, whether it is past or present, and in the 2016 edition it translated into the presence of people from all continents being awarded a prize, which suggests an attempt to give visibility to a policy of allocating the prizes that also recognizes the value of such a variety of participants. Sponsors are also invited to say a few words when each of their respective prizes is awarded, to mark the presence of external sponsors willing to contribute to and support the prize and its winners.

From this perspective, the physical presence of all these parties is highlighted by the fact that they each have the chance to say a few words, either to congratulate the winners or, in the case of the winners themselves, to thank the organizers for the prize. In her analysis of the 'significati simbolici [...] che l'evento-concorso può accogliere', Belozorovich discusses the physical presence of the women on stage, in particular reflecting on the role played by race: 'eventi pubblici a favore di donne diverse, nel contesto femminista, fanno delle donne diverse una massa indistinta, contrapposta, pur sempre, alle donne bianche che hanno già voce e quindi parlano per sé senza che nessuno debba offrirgliela'.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, Belozorovich discusses the power relations between those who offer a space (the organizers of the Concorso and the Salone itself) and those who are offered a space, and concludes her essay

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<sup>67</sup> This analysis is informed by the notes that I took while attending the event on 16 May 2016. The recording of the event is also available on Youtube. Concorso *Lingua Madre*, 'Premiazione XI edizione del Concorso *Lingua Madre*', online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnZV-1HgYpA>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>68</sup> Anna Belozorovich, 'Dare voce, prendere la parola', in *L'alterità che ci abita*, pp. 152-165 (p. 165).

suggesting that events of this kind should go in the direction of providing neutral spaces that ‘possano non risentire di squilibri determinati dalle rappresentazioni sociali’.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the presence of the winners on stage seems to stress the already existing imbalance between organizers and winners, both from the point of view of the opposition between white and non-white and in terms of agency. The narratives that these choices create communicate the message of a limited space given to the winners of the Prize themselves, to the advantage of other figures that symbolize one of the two, almost binary aspects of their constructed identity, shaped in opposition to Italy (the representative of their country of origin) and as part of Italy (the local centre where the winner lives).

The analysis of central elements of the Concorso Lingua Madre, such as the Bando and the award ceremony, highlights some elements that recur in other similar initiatives, such as the necessity to fulfil the requirement of being non-Italian to access a writing contest or, more in general, to be part of a certain category of writers. Despite its focus on female writers, the activities around Lingua Madre recall and invite a rediscussion of the fortune of the prize Eks&Tra, which has received much attention from scholars and has given some writers the opportunity to have their first short story published.<sup>70</sup> On the one hand, writers such as Kossi Komla-Ebri and Christiana De Caldas Brito started their literary career as prize-winners and later as members of the awarding jury.<sup>71</sup> Similarly to Eks&Tra, Lingua Madre has been a springboard for several writers over the past years, such as Igiaba Scego. On the other hand, as Parati points out, a considerable number of writers who have been awarded a prize in both these competitions have since stopped writing.<sup>72</sup> Another element in common is that both prizes have offered as part of the award the publication of the finalists’ texts in an anthology. The anthology is briefly prefaced by the organizer and, in the case of Lingua Madre, publicized widely and very actively through social media.<sup>73</sup> The choice to publish these volumes needs to be put into context if considering the fact that for

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 96-98; Jennifer Burns, ‘Outside Voices Within: Immigration literature in Italian’, in *Trends in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2007*, ed. by Gillian Ania and Ann Caesar (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 136-154 (pp. 138-139).

<sup>71</sup> The first group of jurors lists also writers Saidou Moussa Ba and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, together with the scholars Armando Gnisci and Graziella Parati. See Parati, *Migration Italy*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> The most recent one is *Lingua madre duemilasedici: racconti di donne straniere in Italia*, ed. by Daniela Finocchi (Torino: Edizioni SEB 27, 2016).

many authors it will be the only publication that they achieve. Pezzarossa discusses the 'limiti delle raccolte antologiche', for example if compared to single-authored volumes in terms of the visibility of the authors and editorial and critical attention towards the work of the single author, whereas Roberta Sangiorgi, founder of the Eks&Tra, states that the prize and the subsequent publications made it possible to establish 'il primo archivio in Italia della memoria della letteratura della migrazione'.<sup>74</sup> Whilst Pezzarossa's point raises issues about the purpose of these publications, envisaging options that would be more effective to promote the work of a single author, Sangiorgi's statement stresses the important function that such volumes perform in collecting these texts, as they are described as repositories. These two perspectives summarize a tension that recurs in other case studies in this thesis: on the one hand, the awareness that the logic of the market and publishing needs to be followed to promote authors, although it means excluding some authors to give space to others. An example could be the selection process behind the texts published in online journals such as *Sagarana* (Chapter 2) and *El-Ghibli* (Chapter 3). On the other hand, there are initiatives that were promoted to collect as many works as possible in order to provide access to a repository of this production, such as the BASILI&LIMM database (Chapter 3).

While the visibility given by the Salone is crucial to describe and position *Lingua Madre* as a cultural project, Eks&Tra has experienced a different kind of visibility, mainly because of the presence of well-known scholars and writers on the committee who would play a role in the consecration process for other experts and cultural intermediaries in the field. Eks&Tra has worked in contact with other initiatives, such as the book launches organized in the early 1990s by La Tenda, which would invite the winners of Eks&Tra to present their texts in Milan (see Chapter 3). In particular, in order to draw scholarly attention to the *Lingua Madre* Prize, Finocchi has established a 'Premio tesi di laurea', and some of the winning dissertations have been published in the previously mentioned volume *L'alterità che ci abita* that celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Prize. Such a volume reiterates the attention that the Premio pays to valuing the *tesi di laurea* that centre on the authors of *Lingua*

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<sup>74</sup> Roberta Sangiorgi, 'Relazione', in *Scritture e scrittrici migranti. ricerche, percorsi, progetto. Atti della giornata di studio del 12 dicembre 2012 con le relazioni di Roberta Sangiorgi, Raffaele Taddeo, Paolo Trabucco, Clotilde Barbarulli e Silvana Serafin* <[http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/assm/documenti/atti\\_2012-12-12.pdf](http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/assm/documenti/atti_2012-12-12.pdf)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

Madre, in order to establish and highlight a connection with the academic world and in particular with young graduates, who will be encouraged by this recognition to reiterate the narrative of *Lingua Madre* in their future career.

Another point in common is that both prizes have promoted collateral initiatives, such as school events and creative writing workshops.<sup>75</sup> In particular, *Lingua Madre* is very active in promoting further publications, projects, or other forms of recognition of former winners, highlighting the link to the Premio. This contributes to creating a wider narrative, which sees the Premio as a pole for activities that intend to promote women immigrants' literary production. Among other things, EKS&TRA has organized creative writing workshops in collaboration with Fulvio Pezzarossa, who teaches Sociology of Literature at the University of Bologna, and the author Wu Ming II. Although it is primarily intended as a university course for students, it is also open to the wider public and is organized and promoted by EKS&TRA. These initiatives should not be seen as moments of lesser prominence if compared to those revolving around the prizes itself, such as the publication of the Bando and the award ceremony. Rather, they establish these prizes as more permanent centres of a wider network of initiatives (see Introduction), as they constitute a presence that is not limited to the moment of the year when the prize is awarded.

All in all, the most significant contribution of these prizes has been that they have encouraged production by non-experienced writers, serving as a constant recruitment system that would grant new writers access to publication and visibility. Year after year, new voices have been awarded prizes and involved in the many activities that these organizations promote. These routes seem to promote both a narrative of inclusion, as they aim to value the production of new writers in the Italian language, and of exclusion, for example for their not being open to Italian-born writers. This also supports the proposition that migration literature functions as a literary industry with specific routes of production and dissemination, which may be separate from those of contemporary Italian writing.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> As article 7 of the Bando states, the winners of *Lingua Madre* might be involved in activities and presentations. See Concorso *Lingua Madre*, 'Bando 2016 – art. 7'.

<sup>76</sup> Such routes are specific to the field of migration literature to the extent that the agents involved in their organization identify migration as a key element when selecting writers and texts, as well as when reflecting on the circuits where their initiatives are promoted (see Introduction), as opposed to those production and dissemination routes that exist in contemporary Italian writing that do not consider migration as a defining issue.

### 1.2.2 Publishers and distributors: Edizioni Dell'Arco and the Gruppo Solidarietà Come

This case study presents publishing and distribution as two central moments of cultural intermediation. It focuses on the figure of the street bookseller to discuss in what ways their practice is instrumental to disseminate migration literature. In particular, the conversation between the street seller and the buyers is an example of performing creative work that the cultural intermediary enacts in his or her practice.

Several studies on migration literature in Italian have highlighted that over the years migration literature has been published by publishers of various size.<sup>77</sup> In an analysis that highlights the role of cultural intermediaries, it is relevant to stress that publishers can be seen as 'the first professionalizing authority for writers'.<sup>78</sup> According to Gnisci, there are two phases in the history of migration literature in Italian, which are interestingly linked to the reception and commercialization of these texts.<sup>79</sup> Whilst the first phase, defined as 'esotica', includes the so called 'scrittura a quattro mani', in a second phase, which Gnisci defines as *carsica*, the network of cultural intermediaries that this thesis explores is extremely active, and is characterized by the interest of smaller publishers that have published migration authors in dedicated book series.

In this respect, it is key to consider in what ways small publishers grant a book visibility. On the one hand, the exposure of the book cannot be compared to the publicity and visibility that big publishers may offer, such as reviews in national newspapers, invitations to appear on television, and participation in mainstream festivals. Take, for example, the recent success of a few fictionalized biographies of asylum seekers that have been published by major publishers, such as *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli* by Fabio Geda, *Non dirmi che hai paura* by Giuseppe Catozzella, and the latest book by Erminia Dell'Oro, *Il mare davanti*.<sup>80</sup> In particular, the visibility

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<sup>77</sup> Among others, see Parati, *Migration Italy*, pp. 99-102, and the recent article by Giulia Molinarolo, 'Per una nuova critica della letteratura italiana della migrazione: questioni aperte', *COSMO Comparative Studies in Modernism*, 8 (2016), 157-72.

<sup>78</sup> Sapiro, 5-19 (p. 11).

<sup>79</sup> Armando Gnisci, *Creolizzare l'Europa: Letteratura e Migrazione* (Rome: Meltemi, 2003), p. 113. An overview can be found in Mengozzi, pp. 18-26. Although this periodization is useful to keep track of the milestones of migration literature, it is important to stress the difficulties that can be encountered while trying to categorize this production. See Jennifer Burns, 'Outside Voices Within', pp. 136-154.

<sup>80</sup> Giuseppe Catozzella, *Non dirmi che hai paura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015); Erminia Dell'Oro, *Il mare davanti: storia di Tsegehans Weldeslassie* (Milan: Piemme, 2016); Fabio Geda, *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli. Storia vera di Enaiatollah Akbari* (Milan: Dalai Editore, 2010). Geda's book will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

that the media have given to these stories and to their authors makes them authorities that are given a voice when commenting on issues that are related to wider themes such as the condition of refugees and immigrants in Italy.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, a small publisher is more specialized and can grant a book and its author a smaller circuit that translates into a network of contacts of people interested in that specific area. In terms of the consecration process of a writer or a book, the selection process of a small but specialized publisher gives the books published a valuable prestige, presence, and publicity towards other cultural intermediaries, critics, and academics who access the catalogue of such publishers. In the field of migration literature this is particularly evident, given that some authors are better known, quoted, and studied by critics, as their works have circulated among circles of experts or interested people, while they are not necessarily accessed by a wider public. The role played by small publishers in the dissemination of migration literature has been recognized by Parati, who states: 'Minor publishing companies have been fundamental in creating a corpus of literary texts that have documented the development of migrant literature in Italy and the history of migrations to Italy narrated in the first person'.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, their interest around migration may or may not be linked to wider projects, for example the partnership between Fara Editore and Eks&Tra, as outlined in the previous section.

Publishers are not the only figures that play a role in phases such as the selection, editing and proofreading, distribution and marketing of a book, and it is crucial to investigate in what ways other figures may have contributed to the existence and dissemination of migration literature.<sup>83</sup> Distribution is particularly interesting, as minor publishers do not have access to mainstream bookshops, especially in a context, like the Italian one, in which the access of publishers to the main distribution networks is linked to the existence of a few powerful chains of bookshops, such as Mondadori and Feltrinelli, which dominate the national market.<sup>84</sup> For this reason, minor

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, an article by writer Giuseppe Catozzella that appeared in the online edition of the daily newspaper *Repubblica*. Giuseppe Catozzella, 'Quel bambino nella foto sono io', *Repubblica.it*, 4 September 2015 <[http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/09/04/news/catozzella\\_commento\\_foto\\_bimbo\\_siriano-122196912/](http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/09/04/news/catozzella_commento_foto_bimbo_siriano-122196912/)> [accessed 1 May 2017].

<sup>82</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup> The editing and proofreading of migration literature has been at the centre of the scholarly debate and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>84</sup> On this note see the section 'Crisi e concentrazione editoriale' of the essay by Gabriele Turi, 'Cultura e poteri nell'Italia repubblicana', in *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. by Gabriele Turi and Maria Iolanda Palazzolo (Florence: Giunti, 1997), pp. 436-48.

publishers rely on their own dedicated bookshops or send books directly to interested ones.

Edizioni Dell'Arco has often been taken as an example of a small publisher that successfully developed an alternative distribution system, with a strong ethical mission that allowed a group of Senegalese sellers to make a legal living out of it. Their work is particularly interesting from the perspective of narratives that picture migrants as illegal, while in this case they can count on a legal job. Edizioni Dell'Arco had a book series directed by Kossi Komla-Ebri, *Letteratura migrante*, in which several titles have been published, most notably Komla-Ebri's own *Imbarazzismi*.<sup>85</sup> Camilotti, who has studied the experience of the Edizioni Dell'Arco, notes that this publisher is particularly interesting because of its partnership with the Gruppo Solidarietà Come, which supports a network of street vendors as an alternative to traditional distribution systems. As its website states, Edizioni Dell'Arco has become a 'promotore della diffusione su strada della letteratura migrante a scopi sociali'.<sup>86</sup> If compared to other actors in the cultural industry, the peculiarity of this distribution scheme is that the Gruppo Solidarietà Come provides a direct channel between the publisher and the sellers: 'il modello di retribuzione della forza vendita [...] è basato sul percepimento del 50% del prezzo di copertina, che va a costituire l'entrata netta, mentre i restanti oneri contributivi restano a carico della cooperativa'.<sup>87</sup>

From a perspective that emphasizes and discusses the role of the various agents involved in this specific literary industry, these street sellers play an important role as cultural intermediaries of migration literature. Similarly to other intermediaries, sellers act as 'taste makers', as described by Smith Maguire. Referring in particular to retailers, Smith Maguire points out that Bourdieu recognizes their role as cultural intermediaries focusing on their work in 'assisting or channelling the perceptions and choices of consumers', highlighting that one of the contexts in which cultural intermediaries operate is 'as "a match-maker" between people and things'.<sup>88</sup> The peculiarity of street selling does not diminish the presence of these elements, which is rather emphasized if looking at the modes and strategies that sellers use and the fact

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<sup>85</sup> Kossi Komla-Ebri, *Imbarazzismi: quotidiani imbarazzi in bianco e nero* (Milan: Edizioni dell'Arco; Marna, 2002). Although Dell'Arco as such does not exist anymore, it has had huge success in selling, as the publisher Baffico has pointed out. Mauro Baffico, 'Intervista', *El-Ghibli*, 55 (2017).

<sup>86</sup> Edizioni Dell'Arco, Website <<http://www.edizionidellarco.eu/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Silvia Camilotti, 'L'editoria italiana della letteratura della migrazione', in *Nuovo Planetario Italiano*, pp. 383-391 (p. 386).

<sup>88</sup> Smith Maguire, 15-24 (p. 20).

that these entail some degree of creative work. For example, presenting a book as the product to be sold to a random passer-by raises issues as to whether the seller assumes that that person may be interested in buying a book, or rather in contributing to the aims of Gruppo Solidarietà Come.

In this respect, the spatial dimension of this selling is also crucial, as the locations in which the Gruppo Solidarietà Come vendors and other street sellers work are in the vicinity of libraries, bookshops, and universities.<sup>89</sup> The process of channelling the choices of consumers is particularly evident when sellers investigate their potential buyers' tastes or interests, in order to direct their purchase towards specific books. In this sense, even if the aim of the conversation was to persuade a potential buyer, and not necessarily a mindful attempt to promote these books, the dialogue that sellers start around its content and author, its editorial history, is comparable with the work of other intermediaries of migration literature. There is a specific awareness of the work that they pursue, not only in terms of migration literature as a specific niche production, but more in general in their work as agents working in the literary industry. This can be seen both in the mission of Gruppo Solidarietà Come and Dell'Arco, and in the words of sellers themselves. Mademba points out in an interview: 'Può succedere che per qualcuno sia l'unico libro di lettura che ha in casa. Dunque è un seme che io getto'.<sup>90</sup> This point of view overturns the power relationship between the seller and the buyer: although the seller may be perceived as someone to be helped, who begs for money, their own perception and awareness of being able to allow people to access literature overcomes any linguistic and racial power hierarchy. Its specificity resides in the fact that the cultural intermediaries involved open a dialogue that is personalized and unique, considering that in this specific context the audience that the cultural intermediary needs to consider consists of a single person, which for example makes the conversation flexible in terms of length.

The work of the sellers therefore constitutes an interestingly widespread means of dissemination because of the potential buyers that they are able to reach. First, the fact that these vendors have become recognizable makes them a familiar presence in

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<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that not all book street vendors work for the Gruppo Solidarietà Come.

<sup>90</sup> Anna D'Agostino, 'Noi venditori di libri vi raccontiamo com'è fatta l'Africa', *Repubblica.it*, 22 May 2013 <<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2013/05/22/noi-venditori-di-libri-vi-raccontiamo-com.html>> [accessed 30 May 2017].

Italian city centres.<sup>91</sup> Second, the encounter itself between the seller and the potential buyer is casual and unexpected: the other initiatives that are analysed in these pages take place in precise spaces, where people choose to go because they have an interest in a specific topic, or at least are willing to know more about it and are prepared for an encounter with migration literature. The practice of street selling gives a niche production like that of Edizioni Dell'Arco a much wider visibility and reaches people who would not normally access it. In a wider sense, it facilitates access to books for people who might not even be interested in books or literature. Lastly, it is interesting to consider in what ways the interaction between the two parts is influenced by the physicality of these intermediaries, especially because of their being mainly of Senegalese origin, as it triggers a dynamic that involves race and language issues. An example could be the sense of incredulity that these sellers can speak Italian, as it is based on the assumption that people who are visibly of non-Italian heritage are not necessarily linguistically equipped to speak Italian. This and other details on the experience of street sellers have intersected the corpus of migration literature, as street selling has become a recurring theme in migration literature – from the classic *Io, venditore di elefanti* and *I bambini delle rose* to a few recent autobiographical accounts that speak specifically of the experience of book sellers.<sup>92</sup>

Whilst for most of the case studies in this thesis there are not available data that may measure the impact of the work of the intermediaries on their audiences, in this context there has been an attempt to survey the reaction of people to book street sellers. It has been conducted through a questionnaire prepared by the Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda, coordinated by Francesco Cosenza and published in a special issue devoted to street booksellers in *El-Ghibli*.<sup>93</sup> In a first phase, the questionnaire was submitted via email, reportedly using the mailing list that La Tenda uses to advertise their events, and only 76 people replied; in a second phase, both to passers-by and via email, for a total of 202 interviews. Among the data collected, it is striking that only 2% of the interviewees that replied to the first round of interviews replied

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<sup>91</sup> 'They changed the make-up of Britain's High Street', as Seeto commented when referring to *The Big Issue* street sellers in the UK. See Amelia Seeto, 'Intervista', *El-Ghibli*, 55 (2017).

<sup>92</sup> See for example Papa Ngady Faye and Antonella Coletta, *Se Dio vuole. Il destino di un venditore di libri* (Florence: Giovane Africa, 2011); Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta, *Io, venditore di elefanti: una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 2016); Mohsen Melliti, *I bambini delle rose* (Rome: EL edizioni lavoro, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda, 'Vendita dei libri per strada. Analisi comparata di due indagini statistiche svolte a Milano. Ottobre 2016 e maggio-giugno 2017', *El-Ghibli*, 55 (2017).

‘no, never’ to the question on whether they have ever read the books that they bought. This percentage rises to 16% in the second round of interviews performed.<sup>94</sup> This is relevant if reflecting on books as products to be sold, and the difficulty in interpreting the data on selling as indicative of a wider understanding of the dissemination of the content of the book itself.

The special issue of *El-Ghibli* referred to above, edited by Remo Cacciatori, originated in a conference in November 2016 that aimed to discuss the figure of the street seller with a specific focus on their relation with migration literature.<sup>95</sup> A key contribution to the issue is the interview with Baffico, the publisher of the Edizioni Dell’Arco, who provides an overview of the activities of the publishing house, for example specifying that they have employed around 1,200 sellers over twenty years of activity.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, some contributions heavily criticize the experience of street sellers, as the interview with writers Candelaria Romero and Melita Richter show. They both condemn it as a mode of selling, stating that it ‘non ha futuro’ (Romero) and should ‘acquistare dignità’ (Richter).<sup>97</sup> In particular, Richter suggests that more traditional routes should be used to promote this production:

Trovo che se ci fosse un investimento di energia e volontà a promuovere i libri che i venditori offrono per strada, se ci fosse un Corrado Augias, o un Fabio Fazio [...] a parlare in TV del libro degli autori africani, senza orpelli orientaleggianti, se sulle pagine di cultura dei settimanali si potesse leggere qualcosa sull’autore o sulle tematiche che i libri venduti per strada trattano, l’interesse potrebbe ravvivarsi.<sup>98</sup>

This comment refers to other modes of consecration of literary works, which are perceived as effective to acquire credibility and recognition. The writer mentions two important television journalists who host cultural programmes, as well as

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<sup>94</sup> The data is telling if considering that those who subscribe to the mailing list of La Tenda are interested in being updated on events on migration literature. The case of La Tenda is explored in Chapter 3.

<sup>95</sup> The conference is *La creatività dei migranti e la vendita di libri in strada*, organized by the Centro delle culture del mondo (Comune di Milano) and the Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda in Milan on 11 November 2016; See Remo Cacciatori, ‘Dialoghi di venditori di almanacchi e passeggeri’, *El-Ghibli*, 55 (2017).

<sup>96</sup> Baffico, ‘Intervista’.

<sup>97</sup> Romero and Richter are on the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli* and, as the introductory lines to the interview state, they have been asked to contribute to the debate that the special issue raises. See Melita Richter and Candelaria Romero, ‘Intervista’, *El-Ghibli*, 55 (2017).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

newspapers – *settimanali*, in particular – reiterating the proposition that these means might be effective because of their power in the consecration process of a literary work. Richter refers to a lack of *energia e volontà* to promote these books, but this comment seems to skip the figure of the seller and point at the publisher, or those in charge of making a decision about the distribution and promotion of a book. Similarly, when hoping for some extra information to be provided to prospective buyers to revive interest in this production, she interestingly recalls the promotion strategies performed by sellers, but applies them to larger-scale and traditional promotion strategies. All in all, it seems that while this contribution stresses the link between distribution choices and the promotion and visibility of Edizioni Dell’Arco’s books, and how the former affects the latter, it does not highlight and value the peculiarity of the choice to use street sellers to promote migration literature, which is made effective by the proximity between sellers and potential reader. It also fails to recognize the public that street sellers target, which is different to the audience of a television show or the readers of weekly newspapers, especially when considering that these media outputs are accessed by a very specific and well-educated audience.<sup>99</sup> Rather, street sellers promote a narrative that – almost literally – speaks to everyone, facilitating access to migration literature for a target of buyers who may or may not have an interest in it, or in literary texts in general.

### *1.2.3 Collective writing for theatre: the Compagnia delle poete*

The Compagnia delle poete is an example of a creative project in which writers have not only decided to organize as a group, but also served to some extent as cultural intermediaries to disseminate their own work. This section suggests a parallel between the work of cultural intermediaries and that of artists, such as the members of the Compagnia, in terms of reworking, selecting, and filtering migration literature while keeping the encounter with an audience as a central concern. If compared to other writing projects, the peculiarity of the Compagnia delle poete resides in the choice to respond to the needs of potential audiences and other intermediaries producing performances, namely incorporating their poems into wider, more complex artistic products. As the introduction to this chapter has anticipated, these specific choices are

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<sup>99</sup> Chapter 4 explores television broadcasts as a dissemination context for migration literature.

made in a direction that points at establishing a connection between the theatrical event and the contexts in which it is performed. Moreover, this group of writers decided to embrace the contingency of meeting an audience and capitalized on that, for example accompanying their performances with sessions in which they can answer questions from the audience and interact with them not only as members of the Compagnia, but also as single artists promoting their own work.

The Compagnia presents itself as a creative project with an intrinsic transcultural and translingual nature. Its members come from and have lived in different countries, and in their own personal writing they have developed a poetics that interprets and highlights this experience in different ways. They also have different professional backgrounds – some of them are academics, others translators – and expertise in other artistic practices, such as theatre. This expertise emerges in their performances, which have been defined as ‘polyartistic’, because they incorporate singing, music, and dance.<sup>100</sup> The Compagnia was founded in 2009 by Mia Lecomte with a group of female poets with whom she had worked on previous projects.<sup>101</sup> Gender was not initially a criterion for inclusion in the group, but it later became a significant aspect of the production, with particular attention given to themes and imaginaries that refer to femininity, such as their performance *Madrigne*.<sup>102</sup>

Transnationality, on the other hand, is a concept widely used in the poete’s own descriptions of their work, for example the ones produced for promotion purposes, in order to highlight the movement in and out of Italy and across each member’s country of origin and the fact that production from different national backgrounds and literary traditions interact with each other through a composition in the Italian language. As Mauceri and Niccolai point out, migration ‘non ha un ruolo centrale nelle poesie delle poete da palcoscenico, perché come ha affermato Lecomte non vogliono focalizzare l’attenzione sull’aspetto sociale del fenomeno’.<sup>103</sup> This statement can be reinforced if comparing the Compagnia to other theatrical projects that the two authors have explored in their *Nuovo scenario italiano*. The themes of the productions by the Compagnia, such as fairy tales, femininity, and home, have not

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<sup>100</sup> See *Premiata Compagnia delle poete*, ed. by Francesco Armato (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone editore, 2013), p. 23.

<sup>101</sup> See for example Lecomte’s work as an editor of anthologies, such as *Ai confini del verso: poesia della migrazione in italiano*, ed. by Mia Lecomte (Florence: Le Lettere, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> See Armato, p. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Maria Cristina Mauceri and Marta Niccolai, *Nuovo scenario italiano: stranieri e italiani nel teatro contemporaneo* (Rome: Ensemble, 2015), p. 116.

specifically stressed a reference to migration. Nevertheless, migration serves as a hidden *fil rouge* that characterizes each *poeta*'s production, alongside other recurring themes, such as travel and writing in another language. Although the reference to migration does not appear in the titles of the performances, it has been identified as a sector in which the proposals of the *poete* are more likely to be accepted, for example when thinking of festivals or other initiatives.<sup>104</sup>

The rise of theatre initiatives with a strong presence of migration – be it a character, a member of the cast, or the playwright – has been described by Mauceri and Niccolai, who refer in particular to their presence over the last forty years in Italy. This context might have created a fertile environment that is able to acknowledge these works and encourage a stress on themes such as migration, transculturality, and cultural and linguistic diversity on stage. Nevertheless, the necessity to direct applications and proposals towards specific contexts raises issues around the dynamics of being part of literary and artistic circuits, especially when the theme of migration may or may not be central or pertinent when promoting a certain performance. Despite the complexity and richness of the performances of the *poete* – in terms of themes, artistic practices, and the multiplicity of voices on stage – the risk is that the work of artists with a link to migration is seen as being part of a wide umbrella term of migration literature, to the detriment of other aspects of their work. Whilst scholars and critics have discussed editorial choices and critical approaches that might ghettoize migration literature (see Chapter 2), this case shows that this danger exists in dissemination contexts too.

Although each member of the Compagnia has been published widely and each is well known individually in the field of migration literature – in particular, and among the others, because of their focus on plurilingualism (Serdakowski), colonial and postcolonial tensions (Ali Farah), and children's writing (Pumhösel) – their choice to produce texts as a collective has an impact on their artistic production as a group. Their work as a Compagnia centres on the performances, and not on publications as is usually the case for writers. This element distances the work of the Compagnia from that of its individual members, as the interlocutors of the Compagnia are more varied than they would be in their writing career, and from the organizational point of view they need to be able to interact with agents working in a context that is more similar

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<sup>104</sup> My interview, 05 May 2015.

to a theatrical company rather than a group of writers. The existence of a collective literary project that goes beyond writing and explores other arts directs the writing of a group of writers, and stimulates their artistic experience. As Lecomte points out, the books that have been published based on the scripts of their productions do not result from a specific plan to publish the performances as books; rather, these are projects that have been proposed to the Compagnia and respond to a general request of the public to have access to the texts of the Compagnia.<sup>105</sup>

Reflecting on the creative process behind these performances clarifies why these should not be seen as poetry readings or, considering the scripts that have been published, as anthologies of poems.<sup>106</sup> As the analysis of the work of Gabriella Ghermandi and the focus on her performance *Regina di Fiori e di Perle* will show in Chapter 5, dissemination contexts such as book launches or school visits have urged writers to take into account elements such as the proximity to an audience when preparing for those events.<sup>107</sup> In the case of the Compagnia, this specific moment of promotion of a writer's work has been combined with the decision to work together and develop an independent voice as a group and has triggered a creative process that has evolved over the years of activity. In a first phase, Lecomte would assemble existing poems that she had in her archive, which she had collected thanks to her work as a scholar of contemporary Italian poetry. In a second phase, the members of the Compagnia were asked for contributions that were created for a specific production.<sup>108</sup> The creative process of producing new artistic outputs – which are rooted in the artistic practice of each member, but characterized by a strong element of originality because of its being created by the Compagnia and for the Compagnia – has been prominently influenced by the purposes for which they exist, which is the moment of the performance. These artistic outputs are therefore informed by elements that contribute to the realization of the performance, above all the presence of an audience and the need to open a channel of communication. In this sense, the Compagnia serves as cultural intermediary of migration literature in a way that is intrinsic to their creative process. In particular, Lecomte's role of coordinator for the group confers on her a

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<sup>105</sup> Mia Lecomte, 'Dialogue avec La Compagnia delle poete', presented at *Écrire entre les langues Scrivere tra le lingue* (Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III, 2015).

<sup>106</sup> Compagnia delle poete, *Novunque*, ed. by Laura Toppan (Rome: Aracne, 2012).

<sup>107</sup> Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Rome: Donzelli editori, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> This is particularly the case for the last production on *La casa fuori*, first staged on 25th October 2017 at the *Casa delle donne* in Milan, and for this reason is not included in Armato, as it followed the publication of the book.

further responsibility in terms of cultural intermediation, if considering the process of assembling the scripts, the promotion of the Compagnia, and as a spokesperson for the group.

The performances are tailored around each of the shows that they organize and in which a poem by each *poeta* is performed by its author. As Lecomte pointed out, it can be compared to the Orchestra of Piazza Vittorio in Rome, another fluid collective project, and it can be described as having a modular structure.<sup>109</sup> Such a distinctive element of their work is interestingly shaped by contingent reasons, as not all members can take part in each event because of other commitments or budget reasons, as the project is entirely self-funded. It means that the performances change from time to time: the content itself and the narration are always different, as elements such as the selection of the various poems is different. Each performance is different as the script changes to be adapted to people on stage, spaces and times dictated by the location and the event schedule. The performances that they have produced consist of a collection of voices that compose it, but it remains abstract, as in practice they are never together on stage, so not all the poems that are originally included in an ideal script of a performance are actually performed, as only the poems of the poets who are present are part of the theatrical event. Moreover, the modular nature of the performances is also due to the presence of musicians or other artists, and the existence of stage direction. Pozo summarizes well these characteristics referring to a ‘scrittura decentrata’ that is characterized by three points: ‘mobile – gli adattamenti della sceneggiatura e del copione dipenderanno da ogni spettacolo –, flessibile – perché varierà secondo i testi da creare e dagli spazi in cui saranno rappresentati – e policentrica – perché diretta in forma collettiva e in funzione dei temi o dei testi che daranno luogo alla sceneggiatura finale’.<sup>110</sup> The polycentric nature of the group and

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<sup>109</sup> Mia Lecomte, “‘Body in Languages: la Compagnia delle poete’” in conversation with Loredana Polezzi’, presented at the *Identities in Motion. Legacies and Representation of Mobility in Contemporary Italy* (University of Warwick, 2016). As the website of the Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio reads, ‘Musicisti che provengono da dieci paesi e parlano nove lingue diverse. Insieme, trasformano le loro variegata radici e culture in una lingua singola, la musica. (...) Partendo dalla musica tradizionale di ogni paese, mischiandola e intingendola con rock, pop, reggae, e classica, si arriva alla sonorità unica dell’OPV’. See Orchestra Piazza Vittorio, Website <<http://www.orchestrapiazzavittorio.it/chi-siamo/>> [accessed 15 December 2017]; see also Teresa Fiore, *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy’s Transnational Migrations and Colonial Legacies* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 76-82.

<sup>110</sup> Begoña Pozo Sánchez, ‘La transculturalità della Compagnia delle poete: un fenomeno innovativo nell’ambito della letteratura italiana della migrazione mondiale’, *Revista de Italianística*, 27 (2014), 70-80 (p. 79).

the existing network with other initiatives make this project a central voice in migration literature today. Unlike the *Lingua Madre*, the *Compagnia delle poete* is not based in a specific place but moves according to the event.<sup>111</sup>

In this sense, not only the productions, but also the very poetics of the *Compagnia delle poete* are characterized by a strong connection with the specific context in which each performance takes place. For each performance, the founder and member Mia Lecomte creates an ad-hoc adaptation of the piece depending on the members performing, the musical and artistic support, the time available, and the space provided. In particular, the presence of different poete makes each element of the performances different, such as the sound itself of the voices, because of the accents of each *poeta*. Texts are ordered following a *fil rouge* but also performance-connected details such as the sound of the voices and their acting skills. The *mise-en-scène* is the moment in which the production gets physical and decisions need to be made as to how to arrange the scripts depending on the contingencies. As Armato puts it, the *Compagnia* ‘riesce a reinventarsi in ogni occasione performante’.<sup>112</sup> For these reasons, the *Compagnia* has given critics the occasion to discuss their ‘potere rigenerativo’, to use an expression familiar to Gnisci’s area.<sup>113</sup>

Some of the events in which the poete have performed were organized to present their project in a specific environment, for example at an event in Montpellier.<sup>114</sup> In that specific case there was a performance open to the city and on the following day a round table for specialists in which people could ask questions. Performances are usually accompanied by a moment for questions and answers with the public. As the group and the performances themselves exist only insofar as there is a public, these moments are valued by the poete, as Armato has discussed, when he defines ‘eventi collegiali interartistici e interculturali’.<sup>115</sup> Mia Lecomte has also

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<sup>111</sup> Lecomte, Richter, Romero are on the editorial committee of the journal *El-Ghibli*; Belozorovich was among the winners of *Lingua Madre*; Porster was one of the speakers at the Sagarana’s Seminari. The members of the *Compagnia delle poete* are based in various cities, in Italy and abroad.

<sup>112</sup> Armato, p. 19.

<sup>113</sup> Armato, p. 16. Similarly, Moll speaks about *rinnovamento*, see Nora Moll, ‘Il rinnovamento viene da “fuori”? L’apporto degli scrittori migranti alla letteratura italiana contemporanea’, in *Lingue e letterature in movimento*, ed. by Silvia Camilotti (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2008), pp. 29-46.

<sup>114</sup> *Écrire entre les langues Scrivere tra le lingue*, Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III, 2015.

<sup>115</sup> Armato, p. 86.

pointed out that ‘la crescita si fa anche col pubblico, con le reazioni e con le critiche’, stressing the importance of keeping a dialogue with their public open.<sup>116</sup>

In this respect, the attention paid to the website is also central to their work.<sup>117</sup> The website functions as an archive of events and publications, as well as some of the poems that compose each performance. This is also conceived for researchers, as a repository of reviews and references of their performances. The website is updated with short biographies of the Compagnia and press reviews, together with some poems by the Compagnia and some pictures. A list of the performances, together with relevant details such as the names of the poets performing and musicians or artists present, can also be found on their website.

All in all, the development of a performance has allowed each member of the Compagnia to explore other artistic areas that do not emerge in written works. These performances share many elements with the narratives of cultural intermediaries, because of their being cultural activities that aim to disseminate migration literature to audiences that do not necessarily coincide with the readership of migration literature. In this sense, looking at the production of the Compagnia from this perspective provides an instance in which migration literature goes beyond the pages of a book, creating a narrative that combines poetry and performances in view of a moment of dialogue with an audience. Not only does the participation of this group of writers in this project show a commitment to what this chapter has described as a role of cultural intermediation for migration literature, but it also highlights in what ways an artistic output can be seen as both informed and nurtured by its dissemination.

### 1.3 Conclusion

This chapter considers a range of agents from different areas of the cultural industry that have contributed to the dissemination of migration literature. The body of criticism on cultural intermediaries has been put into dialogue with the scholarly debate on migration literature in order to engage with the narratives of the agents at the centre of these case studies. In this sense, the notion of ‘cultural intermediary’ has allowed an analysis that centres on the role played by these agents and highlights in

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<sup>116</sup> Mia Lecomte, ‘Intervista’, online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h8WWdKvr-Q>> [accessed 30 August 2017].

<sup>117</sup> Compagnia delle poete, Website <[www.compagniadellepoete.com](http://www.compagniadellepoete.com)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

what ways the work of such a diverse set of professional and non-professional figures may be discussed.

In particular, the analysis of these three case studies brings to light the importance of physicality, which is especially prominent given that the figures involved embody a linguistic or ethnic Other for an Italian audience. For *Lingua Madre*, the stage presence of the winners is a key element of the award ceremony. *Gruppo Solidarietà Come*'s street vendors create an unexpected setting of dissemination for migration literature. The *Compagnia delle poete* is a theatre project based on performing each member's poems. These choices and strategies, though caused by very diverse and contingent reasons that are specific to each case, may be read as an attempt to make literature and writers real in front of the audience, promoting an encounter that allows texts and words to be marketed and disseminated stressing aspects and using strategies that go beyond the content of the book.

These narratives accompany the ones created by the authors and their books independently from them, establishing a separate creative project as well as speaking to a separate audience. An example could be the intended readership of the books published by *Edizioni Dell'Arco*: the narratives created by the street vendor to sell the book serves to promote and disseminate the book itself, but is different from the content of the book, although they are often inspired by it. The fact that the narratives created by the authors and the ones pursued by the intermediaries do not necessarily coincide is one of the crucial concerns of this thesis, and in particular the fact that this divergence may not be problematized by the intermediaries themselves and scholarly debate. As the case of the *Compagnia delle poete* has shown, the agency of the writers involved in these projects is a crucial question that arises across the case studies and will be discussed in the next chapters.

Another point that is and will be addressed is in what ways these initiatives and the reasons behind them function in relation to a literary industry that needs to reinvent itself to match the consumer's needs. These questions arise when developing strategies to promote new authors (*Lingua Madre*), the importance of selecting strategies to distribute and sell books (*Gruppo Solidarietà Come*), and poetry as a niche production to be reworked to reach a public (*Compagnia delle poete*). These and other aspects of this specific cultural industry need to be considered in their intersection with the transnational nature of this production, for example the fact that the *Concorso Lingua Madre* is open to women of foreign origin, the distribution system of *Dell'Arco*

is grounded on the work and management by Senegalese vendors, and the productions of the Compagnia delle poete are realized by translingual members.

Finally, this chapter has explored the nature of the connections among the three case studies, which may be described as part of a polycentric network of individuals and groups that pursue their own objectives, but at the same time create and promote networks of collaborations to facilitate a movement of writers, books, and projects (see Introduction). The next chapters build on these premises. The selection of the case studies is linked to the intention to explore the role of specific cultural intermediaries and see how their field of action and activity can be a productive point of enquiry. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on two cases, Sagarana and La Tenda respectively, whose main aim was to promote and disseminate migration authors in Italian, with a specific focus on translingual authors, the first one for specialists, the second one specifically located in an area and open to a wider public. Chapters 4 and 5 look at contexts in which migration authors are not the centre of the regular activities and in which the cultural intermediaries (television professionals in Chapter 4 and educators in Chapter 5) made a specific decision to choose this topic over others.

## **Chapter 2. Sagarana's Seminari: Sharing and debating contemporary Italian literature**

This chapter centres on the nine editions of the Seminari 'Scrittori migranti' organized by the cultural association Sagarana, with a stress on the role that they played in formulating and keeping a record of questions posed by some key protagonists of migration literature.<sup>118</sup> This case study was selected because of the centrality of the Associazione Culturale Sagarana, and specifically its founder Julio Monteiro Martins, in encouraging and facilitating a discussion within and about migration literature in Italian. In particular, the Seminari – around forty sessions organized in nine events between 2001 and 2009 – offered a vibrant arena of discussion for the participants. For the purposes of this thesis, they served as a significant platform because they encouraged sharing and networking practices that could lay the foundation for the development of new projects and partnerships. The Seminari also provide materials that help investigate the relationship between the production of translingual writers and contemporary Italian literature.

From the point of view of the audiences that the Seminari targeted, two separate but complimentary dimensions need to be considered. On the one hand, the context in which the Seminari took place, taking into account the channels through which the event was publicized and the participation of a range of writers and scholars, as well as the fact that one of the aims of the event was to include in the conversation a larger community of people. As Monteiro stated: 'si tratta di un seminario aperto al pubblico: studiosi, studenti, ricercatori e cittadini comuni'.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, the fact that the transcripts of the Seminari were made available and can be freely accessed on Sagarana's website gives a wider audience the possibility to access these materials. This choice is to be seen not only as a means to disseminate the events themselves and, more in general, migration literature. The presence of the Seminari on the website also shows an awareness of the importance of those debates, not only in their content, but also as a moment of discussion in which ideas could be developed together. They also constitute an archive of materials whose nature between oral and written shows

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<sup>118</sup> Section 2.4 discusses how the name of the Seminari evolved over the years. The title is here (and elsewhere in the chapter) shortened to 'Seminari' to highlight the continuity between these events despite the change of name.

<sup>119</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the second seminario – first session', 15 July 2002 <[http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì\\_mattina.htm](http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì_mattina.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

these tensions. In general, the chapter highlights in what ways the internet is one of the elements that characterize the many activities of the Sagarana project.

For this reason, the Seminari constitute a valuable source for this thesis to engage with how their participants – writers, scholars and activists – discussed migration literature in Italian in those years. An overview of the key topics addressed allows us to identify the main points of debate in the 2000s. The Seminari also offer the chance to discuss and find common patterns among initiatives that started in the late nineties. In this sense, this chapter shows that a focus on such initiatives constitutes an important source to discuss migration literature in Italian, and is useful to contextualize other secondary sources (see Introduction).

Finally, the centrality of Monteiro's work emerges in many ways in this chapter, with an emphasis on the intimate relationship between his political and artistic work and the Sagarana project, which exemplifies well to what extent the creative nature of his work as organizer echoes his artistic profile. This is highlighted in particular in relation to the creation of a community of writers and his purpose to work towards 'un'Italia più cosmopolita e più aperta al diverso'.<sup>120</sup>

## 2.1 The 'mondo Sagarana': the interaction between the journal, creative writing classes, and the website

It is crucial to contextualize the Seminari as part of a wider cultural project that includes initiatives of various kinds, such as creative writing classes and an online journal. These initiatives are not presented as independent from each other, but serve as a way to build each strand of the Sagarana project within a wider structure. In terms of the dissemination of migration literature, these strands played an important role because they allowed users who were not necessarily interested in or aware of this specific topic to be acquainted with it, for example thanks to the use of the newsletter.

A strand of the project revolves around Monteiro's interest in creative writing. The Scuola Sagarana offered courses in creative writing, which were organized both in shorter workshops and in longer educational courses, called Master, which lasted two years. The link between the school and the journal was stated explicitly by

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<sup>120</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, 'Il primo compleanno', *Sagarana*, 5 (2001) <[http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero5/editoriale\\_ita.html](http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero5/editoriale_ita.html)> [accessed 2 November 2017].

Monteiro, when he launched ‘la sua prima edizione on-line, parte integrante ed essenziale del progetto più ampio della Scuola Sagarana’.<sup>121</sup> Monteiro defines the journal as ‘un progetto estetico e didattico’, as it combines the need to have a platform for the students of the school to see their work published. In addition, it granted them the possibility to make their work accessible not only to the other students, but also to a wider readership. When discussing his selection criteria, Monteiro specifies that ‘la rivista *Sagarana* prende in considerazione la qualità specificamente letteraria, e la “leggibilità” dei racconti o dei brani che offre’.<sup>122</sup> Monteiro highlights its interest in the literary text despite other factors, in a way that justifies the choice to include both published and unpublished texts, as well as texts that were newly translated into Italian. To put it in Monteiro’s words, he refers to texts ‘rimaste ancora inedite, poco conosciute o difficilmente accessibili’.<sup>123</sup> Accordingly, the journal was open to both well-known and emerging writers, some of whom were the students of the Scuola Sagarana. Monteiro’s selection process is the *trait d’union* between these works and allowed such different literary products to be published on the same platform. As Monteiro states: ‘Le scelte sono fatte da me, e anche certe traduzioni e certe ricerche di materiale inedito’.<sup>124</sup>

This element of concentrating decision-making processes in the figure of Monteiro characterizes the Sagarana project, in a way that makes it inseparable from its creator. In this sense, Sagarana can be described as a laboratory that Monteiro used as a base for his activities, as well as to nurture the network of contacts that he developed over the years. Accordingly, the structure itself of the project defines it as a cultural product that, despite the many collaborations, centres on Monteiro’s artistic and political figure. For example, some of the issues of the journal are introduced by an editorial article by Monteiro, in which he reflects on his own selection of the articles for the issue also referring to current affairs. In terms of cultural intermediation, the role of Monteiro is connected to the existence itself of the editorial and cultural projects that he produces. For this reason, the creative side of his intermediation is particularly visible because of the strands of Sagarana, the many connections that he

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<sup>121</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, ‘Benvenuti alla rivista Sagarana’, *Sagarana*, 1 (2000) <<http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero1/rivista.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>122</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, ‘Una rivista in continua evoluzione’, *Sagarana*, 3 (2001) <[http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero3/editoriale\\_ita.html](http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero3/editoriale_ita.html)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, ‘Lo spirito della Sagarana’, an interview with Silvia Treves, *Sagarana*, 10 (2003) <<http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero10/intervista.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

builds between them, and the fact itself that these are established as being part of a comprehensive, cohesive, and long-term project.

The website of Sagarana reunites the strands of the project and serves not only as an archive, but also to publicize the activities of Sagarana and, in general, as a means to interact with the potential audience of Sagarana's initiatives. For example, the announcements of the following sessions of the creative writing workshops can still be accessed through the old issues of the journal.<sup>125</sup> The website also served as a means to collect donations: as one page states, despite the partnerships that the project has established over the years, it did not have access to public funding and it could only survive thanks to the voluntary work of Monteiro and his collaborators.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, as the journal was issued quarterly, Monteiro used the newsletter and the 'Lavagna del sabato' to update the readers on the latest activities of Sagarana. The latter was a weekly publication, defined as an 'aggiornamento settimanale dal mondo Sagarana'. It followed the same selection criteria as the journal, but thanks to a shorter-term publication granted Sagarana's readers some extra material between one issue and another. Since its first post in 2009, it reached the huge amount of 627 texts published.<sup>127</sup> These strategies established a loyal relationship with the readers, who could therefore receive weekly updates on the 'mondo Sagarana' and were encouraged to check the website regularly.

Finally, a central section of the website, 'Il direttore', gives access to an overview of Monteiro's own publications, with details of his books and access to reviews.<sup>128</sup> If compared to the websites of other writers (see for example Gabriella Ghermandi and Kossi Komla-Ebri in Chapter 5), Sagarana expands the idea of a personal website, as it links it to a wider project: it incorporates Monteiro's artistic profile into his activity as organizer of events, journal editor, and educator. In this sense, and despite the presence of collaborators working on the journal, the Seminari and the delivery and organization of the creative writing courses, Sagarana elaborates

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<sup>125</sup> See for example the announcement on the Sommario page of the second issue of the journal on <<http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero2/index.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>126</sup> Sagarana, 'Sostieni il progetto Sagarana' <<http://www.sagarana.net/donazione.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>127</sup> Sagarana, 'Lavagne dal 2010 in poi' <<http://www.sagarana.net/archiviolavagne.php?paginanews=4>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>128</sup> Sagarana, 'Il direttore' <<http://www.sagarana.net/speciale/index.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017]. In particular, great visibility is given to one of the few monographs on a translingual writer in Italian, by Morace. See Rosanna Morace, *Un mare così ampio: i racconti-in-romanzo di Julio Monteiro Martins* (Lucca: Libertà Edizioni, 2011).

and transmits the figure of Monteiro considering the many aspects of his activities. In particular, what emerges is his presence in the first twenty-five years of migration literature, not only for the centrality of his role in the Sagarana project, but also for his contributions to other initiatives, such as the many short stories that he sent to *El-Ghibli*.<sup>129</sup>

The Sagarana project concluded at the end of 2014 when Monteiro passed away, but the presence of Sagarana was maintained, as the website is still online, although not updated. This choice reflects the central role that Monteiro played in the existence of the project, which could not continue without his guidance. Monteiro – as a writer, teacher, cultural project organizer, and intellectual – was celebrated in many forms. First, a special issue of *El-Ghibli* in 2015 collected his previously published short stories, as well as reviews and critical works on his writing and interviews. Second, following the event ‘Tenere accesa *La macchina sognante*’ held at the Biblioteca Casa di Khaoula in Bologna in 2015, a new website and online journal was launched by some of Monteiro’s collaborators, *La macchina sognante. Contenitore di scritture dal mondo*, and with an explicit reference to his work and the stated aim to continue what Sagarana had started.<sup>130</sup> As the description of the new project states, *La macchina sognante* needs to be seen not only as a homage, but also as a statement of recognition of the efforts made by Monteiro to promote literature:

Per far continuare a vivere un’eco dell’opera di Julio Monteiro Martins lo scrittore brasiliano recentemente scomparso abbiamo battezzato questo spazio aperto “La macchina sognante”, prendendo a prestito il titolo del suo ultimo libro di riflessioni, pubblicato postumo a marzo 2015. Ci siamo ritrovati con entusiasmo ad essere l’equipaggio di questa “macchina sognante” che è la letteratura; una letteratura attorno alla quale ha ruotato la stessa vita dell’autore, che mai ha fatto della scrittura un atto isolato e solitario, ma si è sempre

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<sup>129</sup> Sixteen texts over the first 42 issues. See El-Ghibli, ‘Archivio’ <<http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=5&sezione=1.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>130</sup> La Macchina sognante, Website <<http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

esposto pubblicamente per renderla pratica attiva, bene pubblico.<sup>131</sup>

This short presentation summarizes well some of the main concerns of the Sagarana project: the idea of literature as a practice, which needed to be encouraged and shared; the emphasis on a vision of literature as an act which could not be *isolato* and *solitario*, but on the contrary could benefit from occasions, like the Seminari, when people who practise it discuss it, and make it available to a wider public; finally, the necessity of a community of people working on projects that support these ideas, in a way that stresses the importance of the role of the selection and intermediation of literary products.

## 2.2 The Seminari

The core of this chapter focuses on the Seminari and discusses their being events that revolve around a specific interest in translingual authors, contextualizing them in the editorial and literary panorama in contemporary Italy. Each section outlines and discusses some key elements of the Seminari, stressing the connection between the content of the debates that took place and the choices that characterize the organization of the Seminari themselves. In particular, this chapter examines: the time frame in which the Seminari were developed, with reference to other initiatives that took place or started in those years; the structure of the Seminari; their speakers, considering both writers and scholars; the audience of the Seminari; the importance of the transcriptions that were made available online; the reasons why the Seminari ended after nine editions.

### *2.2.1 Migration literature as a movement? The end of the nineties/early 2000s*

The Seminari embraced a wide and eventful time frame. Significantly, they took place after about a decade from the first literary works written by translingual writers in Italian dating back to the early nineties, which conventionally inaugurate this

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<sup>131</sup> La Macchina sognante, 'Riflessione' <<http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/riflessione-1/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

production.<sup>132</sup> In this sense, the Seminari were grounded on works that caught the attention of critics and the willingness to elaborate on them, in order to start a more established debate. Although they were not the first events specifically focussing on migrant writers in Italian – for example, the series of book launches organized by the association La Tenda in Milan started in 1993 (see Chapter 3), while the Eks&Tra prize was established in 1995 (see Chapter 1) – they were created one year after the first issue of the *Sagarana* journal, which granted them a basis to build on. Moreover, during the Seminari other key initiatives that took place in those years were announced and presented. For example, during the second edition of the Seminari, the creation of *El-Ghibli* was mentioned, together with some details about its conception. This information emerges from a conversation between the writer Amor Dekhis and Mia Lecomte:

Amor Dekhis – Circa due anni fa mi arrivò un e-mail, da Kossi [Komla-Embri] il quale intendeva riunire tutti questi scrittori in un movimento, forse per pubblicare qualcosa indipendentemente. Era una buona idea, c'erano coinvolti anche Armando Gnisci e Julio [Monteiro Martins]. Purtroppo [...] sono sorti molti problemi e incomprensioni e così l'idea è morta sul nascere. Spero comunque che un giorno ci sarà un gruppo che seguirà questo cammino, perché anche solo l'incontro tra di noi, può essere positivo, creare nuove possibilità.

Mia Lecomte – Se n'è riparlato il febbraio scorso, e in autunno dovrebbe uscire il primo numero della loro rivista, che si chiamerà Ghibli [*sic*]. Rispetto al progetto iniziale vorrebbero allargare un po' il discorso, e mi hanno invitata a collaborare nella redazione.<sup>133</sup>

This excerpt stresses the willingness to explore forms of collaboration among authors, as well as the difficulties that were encountered in starting a project that could result in an agreement among the parties. It also provides some indications on the

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<sup>132</sup> Graziella Parati, *Mediterranean Crossroads. Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>133</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the second seminario – first session', <[http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì\\_mattina.htm](http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì_mattina.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

timing of such movements, which dates the conception of *El-Ghibli* – or, at least, an early version of what would then become *El-Ghibli* – back to the late nineties. Significantly, the journal *Kúmá*, founded and directed by Armando Gnisci, was first published in 2001, which suggests that the idea of starting such a project was conceived in the same years.<sup>134</sup> Dekhis's statement also reinforces Komla-Ebri's intention to start a *movimento* of writers, stressing that 'anche solo l'incontro' would be beneficial to writers. In this sense, the Seminari position themselves in a fertile moment that was characterized by the birth of several initiatives. Moreover, being one of the most long-lived events bringing together influential authors and scholars of the field to discuss topics related to migration writings in Italian, the Seminari constituted a yearly appointment for specialists who shared their aims and modes.<sup>135</sup> In this sense, the participants – to be seen not only as speakers of the Seminari, but most importantly as scholars and writers pursuing their own projects – shared the aim to be part of the debate at a moment when several platforms for debates were growing. Despite the lack of a proper manifesto, or a formal membership process, the creation and development of various initiatives in the late nineties and the early 2000s can be identified as a unifying factor among a set of diverse cultural projects (see Conclusion).

Another element that characterizes the projects that started in those years is the connection with institutional partners. In the case of the Seminari, they were supported by a series of institutional collaborations that are reflected in some of the choices that were made, as well as in the changes in the organization that occurred over the years. All nine editions of the Seminari took place in Lucca and were organised by Sagarana with the Provincia of Lucca and Porto Franco, a project carried out by the Regione Toscana.<sup>136</sup> Only the first edition was organised in collaboration with La Sapienza University in Rome, and specifically with the scholar Armando Gnisci. Following the

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<sup>134</sup> The journal *Kúmá* is no longer available online.

<sup>135</sup> Among the speakers, the following writers: Ron Kubati, Sandra Clementina Ammendola, Gezim Hajdari, Amara Lakhous (2001); Mia Lecomte, Anilda Ibrahim, Amor Dekhis, Brenda Porster (2002); Helene Paraskeva, Barbara Serdakowski, Tahar Lamri (2003); Candelaria Romero, Artur Spanjulli, Gabriella Ghermandi (2004); Cristina Ali Farah, Melita Richter, Jadelin Gangbo, Pap Kouma (2005); Kossi Komla-Ebri (2006); Barbara Puhösel, Hamid Barole Abdu, Livia Bazu, Eva Taylor (2007); Mihai Mircea Butcovan, Jarmila Očkayová (2008); Karim Metref (2009). Among the scholars and critics: Armando Gnisci, Andrea Sirotti, Sonia Sabelli, Davide Bregola, Sandra Ponzanesi Carmine Chiellino, Raffaele Taddeo, Fulvio Pezzarossa.

<sup>136</sup> The project was presented during the fourth seminar, first session. More information – with a focus on the first phase of the project (1999-2002) – can be found on Regione Toscana, 'Progetto Porto Franco. Toscana, terra dei popoli e delle culture' <[http://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/12662099/6a8cc99792eaf5b7c7063bb5d9f9e724\\_pr ogetto.pdf/320ccd9f-e690-42bf-ad7b-da00f73cdf41](http://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/12662099/6a8cc99792eaf5b7c7063bb5d9f9e724_pr ogetto.pdf/320ccd9f-e690-42bf-ad7b-da00f73cdf41)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

aims of Porto Franco – and in particular its idea to start a dialogue with the *società civile* – it is significant that one of the characteristics of the Seminari was its aim to start a dialogue between authors, scholars, and the general public ('si tratta di un seminario aperto al pubblico: studiosi, studenti, ricercatori e cittadini comuni').<sup>137</sup> However, the first Seminario (2001) was publicized in the fourth issue of the *Sagarana* online journal with a stress on the fact that there would be one 'incontro aperto al pubblico'.<sup>138</sup> This announcement implies that the other sessions of the event were only devoted to a group of specialists. Whilst the transcripts of the first Seminari are not available on the website, those of all other editions are freely accessible online. This change in the policy of sharing the debates online can be interpreted as a change in the conception of the event, which started as a moment of discussion for specialists and later switched to a more open forum that everyone could attend, as well as giving access on Sagarana's website thanks to the transcripts. As Monteiro pointed out at the inaugural speech of the second seminar, 'quando si pensa di trasmettere un contenuto di libertà e democrazia, bisogna cominciare dalla forma stessa con cui si organizza un evento che propone questi valori'.<sup>139</sup> In this sense, the initiative takes into account the organizers' willingness to disseminate migration literature to a wider public, justifying this decision with a reference to the 'values' that the event intends to pursue. Interestingly, this reflection on an organizational aspect of the event intersects with the content of the event itself, stressing in what ways the role of the organizers has creative, but also political leverage (see Chapter 1). Moreover, similarly to other events (see the book launches organized by La Tenda, Chapter 3), the participation of people may or may not have included the author's readers, or an audience that had any background in the field. In this sense, one of the concerns of the series of events was the need to balance the purpose of addressing specialists with wider dissemination purposes.

A recurring pattern is also the attention paid to the availability of the content of the initiatives and the materials produced. The Seminari gave the chance to meet and share ideas with the general public, but at the same time it was mainly a community of scholars and authors who attended them. Moreover, considering the

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<sup>137</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the second seminario – first session'.

<sup>138</sup> Sagarana, 'Sommaro - Issue 4' <<http://www.sagarana.it/rivista/numero4/index.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>139</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the second seminario – first session'.

speakers that were invited and the topics that were discussed, the Seminari maintained their identity as a specialist-led and specialist-focused event. In the last section of this chapter, we will see that the reason why the transcripts of almost all the sessions of the Seminari were published online is because they were seen as a tool that makes the Seminari accessible to scholars and students from all over the world who are interested to know more about the sessions. However, it has to be pointed out that the transcripts are available only in Italian, and although specialists in contemporary Italian literature abroad are usually used to reading texts in the source language and not necessarily in translation, it is clear that the circulation of the transcripts would be different if they were translated, as a wider audience could be targeted. Considering the topic of the Seminari, scholars working on migration literature in other languages might be interested in reading them, for example in a comparative perspective. All in all, the interest of the organizers to prioritize for nine years meeting, discussing, and working together, as well as sharing their thoughts and spreading them through the Internet, needs to be contextualized within these two sides of the Seminari – their being small events with an audience of specialists in migration literature, but open to the general public; the ability to reach people everywhere through the internet, but limiting the access to Italian-speaking readers.

The initiatives that started in the late nineties focused mainly on the recent presence of translingual writers in the Italian literary panorama. When considering the aims of the Seminari, a sense of awareness that the Seminari promoted a change in the perspective through which translingual authors are considered recurs across the nine editions. In particular, in the opening speech of the second seminar, Monteiro pointed out that not only could the participants witness a key passage of contemporary literature, which would be accessed in schoolbooks by future generations, but they also were taking part in the making of it.<sup>140</sup> The idea that migration literature in Italian constitutes a crucial passage in the history of Italian literature was discussed in several sessions, as well as the chance to lay the foundation to build a new, fertile field of study within contemporary Italian literature. This view finds an interesting echo in critical works: for example, Gnisci focuses on the fact that even if in other contexts – he mentions the UK, France and Germany – migration literature has existed for longer, Italy has the chance to get a sense of this new-born creole literature while it is still

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

taking its first steps and participate in this process.<sup>141</sup> Accordingly, Moll discusses whether and to what extent it is possible to speak about a *contribution* coming from migrant writers to contemporary Italian literature, and argues that the meaningfulness and innovation generated by migrant authors – especially if looking at what happened in other European countries that have been deeply affected by migration – contributes not only to national literatures but also at European and world level.<sup>142</sup> In particular, the focus on translingual authors was presented by claiming that contemporary Italian literature could be separated from a wider, large-scale phenomenon that interested – and still interests – Italy in those years, namely the birth and spread of a new trend of translingual authors. To put it in Monteiro’s words, ‘[I]a presenza in tutta Italia di scrittori di tanti paesi diversi venuti ognuno con la loro lingua e la loro storia personale, che hanno cercato e imparato la lingua italiana e creato poesia, teatro, narrativa, sta portando e porterà un arricchimento straordinario alla civiltà e alla cultura italiana’.<sup>143</sup>

Overall, the analysis of some organizational choices of the Seminari offers the chance to identify recurring patterns of some key initiatives that started at the end of the nineties. In particular, the focus on translingual writers as an element of newness in Italian literature is the pushing factor that brings urgency to the initiatives that discuss migration literature in dedicated spaces. Mengozzi summarizes well the range of action that characterized the years between the end of the nineties and the beginning of the 2000s, and identifies the following contexts: ‘(delle) collane specializzate, (dei) premi letterari istituiti ad hoc, (dei) siti e (dei) convegni dedicati esclusivamente a questa produzione’.<sup>144</sup> She points out that these *canali* have continued to play a pivotal role in the publication and dissemination of migration literature beyond those years, despite relatively increased attention from major publishers to the work of some authors, such as Elvira Dones. As this section has shown, these channels were key to establish a debate on migration literature, which is the element that characterizes these initiatives, despite the differences and specificities of each organizer.

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<sup>141</sup> Gnisci, *Creolizzare l’Europa*, p. 7.

<sup>142</sup> Moll, ‘Il rinnovamento viene da “fuori”?’’, pp. 29-46 (pp. 32-33).

<sup>143</sup> Sagarana, ‘Transcripts of the second seminario – first session’.

<sup>144</sup> Mengozzi, p. 28.

### 2.2.2 Structure, topics, and speakers: translingual authors within contemporary Italian literature

The structure of the Seminari is revealing of the strategies that were adopted to facilitate both a debate on migration literature and the promotion of the work of the authors who participated. Each edition lasted from two to six days and different sessions were set, with more than forty sessions in total. Among them, some were structured as round tables on some specific topics, in others the writers that were invited could give a brief speech to introduce their work.

The sessions where the writers were protagonists were structured with an initial introduction by Monteiro, followed by a presentation by the author and the reading of some poetry, short stories, or excerpts from longer texts, and concluded with questions from the audience. Similarly, scholars who took part were asked by Monteiro to present their work and conclude their session answering questions from the audience. Interestingly, the questions were not limited only to discussing the works of authors and scholars, but expanded towards their experience as translingual writers, with a focus on elements of their experience that could help discuss the specificity of their work. For example, a link that they established between the artistic production of the writers and their experience as mobile subjects who had moved to Italy, with debates on life in Italy, Italian politics and society. In the Seminari these two aspects – the focus on literature but keeping migration to Italy and Italy as a destination country as a wide research area – found an interesting balance, although the primary interest was to establish migration literature as a literary presence in contemporary Italian literature. In this respect, the audience of scholars directed the questions towards technical aspects, linking the experience of single authors to wider issues. The issues of translation and self-translation, which have been discussed more recently by scholars such as Polezzi, were often the object of debates in the sessions dedicated to an author's presentation, as one of the recurring questions was on what it means to write in another language.<sup>145</sup>

Focusing on the sessions of the Seminari that were structured as round tables, the topics of discussion that were at the centre of the nine editions could ideally be

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<sup>145</sup> See Polezzi, 'Translation and migration' and the responses to this that appeared in the following issues of the journal. As for the reasons that have led translingual writers to choose Italian, I have collected and discussed the replies that some of the participants presented in the Seminari in a separate work. See Gioia Panzarella, 'L'italiano degli scrittori migranti', in *Perché scrivere? Motivazioni, scelte, risultati*, ed. by Francesco Bianco and Jiří Špička (Florence: Franco Cesati editore, 2017), pp. 311-317.

divided into two groups. First, topics that refer to the experience of being a writer in the contemporary Italian literary market, including the publication process, the choice (if any) between smaller or bigger publishers, the book market in Italy, the possibilities offered by online publications, the proofreading process, the participation in literary prizes, publication in anthologies, the relationship with translators or literary agents, or copyright in the era of the internet, to name but a few. From this list it emerges that the translingual authors participating in the Seminari debated issues that are somehow common to any author working in the context of the contemporary literary market. In other words, the overall aim of suggesting these topics for debate proved the fact that speaking about some aspects of the work of translingual authors cannot be neatly cut off from speaking about contemporary Italian literature.

Topics that concerned the specificities of translingual authors emerged in many ways over the nine editions of Sagarana's Seminari. In particular, the issue of how to define this production was not only one of the most recurring, but also became one of the main concerns of the Seminari. As Monteiro pointed out, 'si parla di letteratura migrante, letteratura di ibridazione, letteratura transculturale. Per il momento li chiamiamo scrittori migranti, ma non è detto che sia una scelta definitiva, anche questo sarà oggetto di discussione del seminario'.<sup>146</sup> The existence of several definitions to identify this production is due to the fact that a wide range of different cases and experiences characterizes it. The first critical works that systematize it into patterns and tendencies appeared only recently, even if it is clear that the heterogeneity of these writers' experiences and backgrounds makes this process problematic.<sup>147</sup> The heterogeneity makes the use of any label problematic and many definitions have been created over the years to highlight some aspects that were considered relevant in a certain context or from the point of view of a certain scholar, as the next pages will discuss. For this reason, critical works have defined their field of enquiry in detail when discussing this topic, in order to justify not only a label to identify their corpus, but the selection of the corpus itself. In *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro*, Comberlati states explicitly the criteria followed in identifying the authors that he considers in his research. He narrows his enquiry to those authors writing in Italian that have published

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<sup>146</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the second seminario – first session'.

<sup>147</sup> See Franca Sinopoli, 'Prime linee di tendenza della critica sulla letteratura della migrazione in Italia (1991-2003)', *Neohelicon*, 31, 1 (2004), 95-109. Burns identifies genre, gender, and cultural identity as the three main features that make the systematization a complex process. See Jennifer Burns, 'Outside Voices Within', pp. 136-154.

at least three works.<sup>148</sup> In *Migrant Imaginaries*, Burns chooses to focus on prose narratives – rather than poetry or theatre – by writers from Africa, the Middle East and some Albanian authors.<sup>149</sup> As both scholars argue, the aim of finding some criteria is not to include or exclude certain authors from the wide and nuanced corpus of migration writings in Italian; rather, to make their research orientation explicit and use tools of analysis that are coherent within the corpus that they have selected. Similarly, Polezzi uses a footnote to clarify her use of ‘migrant writing’ in a specific context, to avoid overlapping with other common definitions or anticipating assumptions that would be caused by the lack of clarity of the term ‘migration’ (see Introduction). She argues: ‘I am using “migrant writing” to refer to writing produced in a host language and directly related to the experience of migration; not all migrant writing is autobiographical in nature, nor is all of it inscribed within postcolonial writing, though these categories can and often do overlap’.<sup>150</sup>

From the sessions of the Seminari, it emerges that the interest in these labels is not limited to theoretical, academic discussions, but reflects the range of definitions and keywords used in the literary industry, from names of book series to titles of literary events. Accordingly, trends that arose during the Seminari were in dialogue with theories, debates and points of view external to the Seminari themselves, for example, when scholars discuss their preferred definition – or, more specifically, the one that they have used in the specific context of their work – in the sessions.

Interestingly, some of the speakers of the Seminari were not translingual writers, but also Italian authors who have addressed the topic of migration in various ways. The fact that these writers took part in the events prevented Sagarana’s Seminari becoming a self-referential moment in which only translingual writers and scholars would meet to discuss issues that involve only a portion of contemporary literature in Italian. This choice can be linked back to the *Sagarana* journal, which did not use translingualism or criteria other than the *leggibilità* of the texts to publish them. Although the specific aim of the Seminari is to discuss translingual authors – or as Monteiro also defined it, ‘il fenomeno della migrazione letteraria e artistica’ – the choice was to include voices of authors who were not necessarily part of the circuit of

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<sup>148</sup> Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro: La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>149</sup> Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>150</sup> Polezzi, 345-356 (p. 355, footnote 6).

migration literature.<sup>151</sup> As the next section of this chapter discusses, this tendency leads us to consider this production from new perspectives, for example opening their doors to other experiences, such as that of Italian-born authors writing about migration. As Monteiro states, this vision contributes to a process of *sghettizzazione* within migration literature in Italian.<sup>152</sup> Mauceri and Negro offer a precious contribution to this debate in their *Nuovo Immaginario Italiano*, which is a comparative presentation of how some themes are presented singularly in literary writings in Italian by either migrant or Italian-born writers.<sup>153</sup> This analysis highlights some specificity in translingual writings while keeping in mind the close relationship and comparison with the Italian literary context. Moreover, the book shows that in the last few decades migration as a theme has been widely discussed by Italian-born authors in their works.

This tendency would suggest that a shift from a writer-centred to a theme-centred point of view can help establish a wider framework, which is not set in accordance with the fact that they are translingual subjects using a new language to write literary works. In other words, broadening the field of enquiry would mean taking into consideration a larger spectrum of writers and, consequently, their contributions to the current debates on the issue of migration within Italian cultural contexts. Other issues discussed during the Seminari seem to encourage and justify the need to debate – and, more concretely, carry out – a *sghettizzazione*. Among the directions that this kind of process might take, Ponzanesi proposed building ‘un confronto tra scrittori migranti italiani, francesi o tedeschi’ in order to investigate how local and global intersect.<sup>154</sup> It is interesting to see how Ponzanesi has given these thoughts other perspectives in her research, for example when she claims that the establishment of a postcolonial discourse in Italy has to be contextualised within the European situation.<sup>155</sup>

However, it seems that the idea of an existing *sghettizzazione* – and that dynamics of inclusion or exclusion are operating at many levels – is discussed by

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<sup>151</sup> Sagarana, ‘Transcripts of the second seminario – first session’.

<sup>152</sup> Sagarana, ‘Transcripts of the third seminario – fifth session’, 03 July 2003 <[http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario3/seminario3\\_5.htm](http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario3/seminario3_5.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>153</sup> Mauceri and Negro, pp. 11-13.

<sup>154</sup> Sagarana, ‘Transcripts of the fourth seminario – third session’, 14 July 2004 <[http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì\\_mattina.htm](http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario2/lunedì_mattina.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>155</sup> See for example Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies: European Perspectives’, in *Postcolonial Italy*, pp. 51-69.

Monteiro when commenting on the choice to invite non-translingual authors. In his welcome speech at the beginning of the third seminar, Monteiro addresses Italian-born authors with *scrittori stanziali*, and migrant writers with *scrittori migranti* or *scrittori dell'ibridazione*. These proposals emerge as provisional in Monteiro's words, but at the same time the need to concretely address one or the other category made it necessary to choose a definition. He claimed that in a context that discusses literature and writing such definitions are needed to allow an effective, mutual understanding and communication. He also stressed that that the *scrittori stanziali* that took part were often chosen because of an interest in migration, in a wide sense. As Monteiro points out when commenting on his decision to invite Francesca Caminoli:

tutti gli anni, oltre agli scrittori migranti, della migrazione, se volete, invito uno scrittore di madrelingua italiana, è venuto Dario Voltolini, è venuta Pia Pera l'anno scorso e quest'anno volevo Francesca perché tra gli scrittori italiani con cui ho contatti è quella con più empatia col mondo fuori dall'Italia, è una delle scrittrici meno provinciali che abbia mai conosciuto.<sup>156</sup>

Monteiro stresses an 'aesthetic', a 'poetics' of migration that permeates contemporary writing, going beyond the origins of the single author. Monteiro's emphasis on the writer's being one of the less 'provinciali' – which is presented as a criterion for him to choose to invite her among other possible options – is a significant point because of the local and global dimension within literary works dealing with migration.

In this sense, a position that emerged at many points in the Seminari is the idea to refuse any definition, challenging the idea of a national canon made up of Italian-born writers and, thus, including migrant writing in Italian in the contemporary production of Italian literature.<sup>157</sup> As discussed in the previous pages, some authors and scholars have insisted on this point, claiming that such an inaccurate definition as *letteratura della migrazione* puts together a group of writers of diverse backgrounds, aspirations and quality. In one of his last contributions to this debate, Taddeo's new proposal is to change the perspective, from a focus on literary works by non-Italian

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<sup>156</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the seventh seminario – first session', 09 July 2007 <<http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario7/seminario1.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>157</sup> See also Silvia Camilotti, 'Introduzione', in *Lingue e letterature in movimento*, pp. 29-46.

born authors to a *poetics* of migration, referring to the widespread tendency for writers to deal with themes and tropes evoking migration that mirrors contemporary global forces.<sup>158</sup> This approach also seems to echo Frank's idea of *migration writing*, to be read in opposition to *migrant writing* written by migrant authors. This shift in terminology corresponds to a thought-provoking shift in point of view, namely to consider all the literary production of the 'age of migration' as part of a single frame, without any specification regarding the origin or the destination country/language/literary canon.<sup>159</sup> For example, in his monograph on migration writing, Frank focuses on four authors, specifying that even if one of them, Jan Kjærstad, has not had a migratory experience, it is still possible to look at his works according to an aesthetic of migration.<sup>160</sup> Lastly, the need for migration writers to be freed from any label has been contested by Gnisci, implicitly in his first production, where he enhanced the uniqueness of the Italian case, and explicitly in his more recent work. He claims that egocentrism is what leads migrant writers to be unwilling to be identified with such a label, as they are not aware of the richness and value of what it means to be a migrant writer.<sup>161</sup>

During the Seminari a number of labels were presented by their own creators, in a way that invited the audience to engage with the topic. *Letteratura della migrazione* is one of the most used and widely accepted ways to define the corpus of literary works written in Italian by translingual writers, although Monteiro often stresses that this has to be seen as a provisional, conventional term. Other proposals have been presented over the years. Among others, Chiellino introduced the notion of *letteratura interculturale* – referring to authors of Italian origin writing in German and, later, applying it to the Italophone context.<sup>162</sup> Taddeo and the group of La Tenda in Milan suggested *letteratura nascente* (see Chapter 3).<sup>163</sup> Both labels were discussed and debated during the Seminari and outside, and, if mentioned, still carry a strong

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<sup>158</sup> Raffaele Taddeo, 'Dalla "letteratura italiana della migrazione" al movimento poetico della migrazione', *InVerbis*, 5 (2013), 175-186.

<sup>159</sup> Søren Frank, 'Four Theses on Migration and Literature', 39-57 (p. 52).

<sup>160</sup> See Søren Frank, *Migration and Literature: Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Jan Kjærstad* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 15.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Armato, pp. 16-17.

<sup>162</sup> *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland: ein Handbuch*, ed. by Carmine Chiellino (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000). See also Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the fifth seminario – second session', 19 July 2005 <<http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario5/seminario2.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>163</sup> Raffaele Taddeo, *Letteratura nascente* (Milan: Raccolto Edizioni, 2006). See also Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the fifth seminario – fourth session', 20 July 2005 <<http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario5/seminario4.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

socio-political connotation, as they are considered to be strictly linked to the context and people who introduced them. Deleuze and Guattari's construct of *littérature mineure* that they explore in their analysis of Kafka's work has often been referenced in pieces of criticism on migration literature in Italian and has been used to describe it.<sup>164</sup> For example, the notion of deterritorialization/reterritorialization is key to illustrate some aspects of translingual authors in Italian, as well as what Deleuze and Guattari identify as the third characteristic of a minor literature, its 'collective value', which can apply significantly to a discussion on the existence itself of a 'movement' of migration literature in Italian (see Introduction).<sup>165</sup>

All in all, this issue of definitions has to be contextualized within the long list of topics discussed in the Seminari, although it was identified as a specific issue to address. As discussed in this section, it is not only a matter of choosing among a list of labels that carry different nuances, but also of considering the reasons behind them. The ultimate issue that emerged in the Seminari is whether migrant authors in Italian need to be identified by any label, considering that many writers pointed out that it is a matter of inclusion or exclusion from what can be defined as contemporary Italian literature. One of the measures that Monteiro took in this direction was the choice to invite a number of non-translingual authors to contribute to and participate in the sessions of Sagarana's Seminari, although the focus of the events was explicitly to explore the work of translingual writers. The next section discusses in what ways this debate is reflected in the names of the Seminari themselves, and to what extent it might have contributed to the end of the Seminari.

### 2.2.3 *The end of the Seminari*

The Seminari promoted the widely-shared idea that migrant writers in Italian constitute a challenging and ground-breaking change within contemporary literature in Italian. This point was supported in various ways and more or less explicitly not only by the theorists and scholars who took part, but it can also be inferred considering the questions and answers between the participants, which highlighted specificities

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<sup>164</sup> Among others, see Rosanna Morace, *Letteratura-mondo italiana* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2012), p. 57; Simone Brioni, *The Somali within: Language, Race and Belonging in Minor Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2015).

<sup>165</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, transl. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16-27.

and elements of newness in migration writing. Over the years, the Seminari offered an open, transcultural perspective on contemporary narratives in Italian. Their transcriptions constitute today a unique corpus of documents that mirrors not only the critical trends of those years, but also how some positions evolved in the first decade of the millennium. The title of the Seminari is somehow emblematic of this evolution: from the *Scrittori migranti* of the first editions, it changed to *Scrittori e scrittrici migranti* in the sixth, accompanying but also anticipating the rise of critical works that year after year started to focus on the specificities of female migrant writers and poets.<sup>166</sup> In the eighth edition, the name changed again to *Seminario della Sagarana: realtà e prospettive della letteratura contemporanea in lingua italiana*, where the keyword *migranti* disappears, probably to highlight a new sense of belonging or anyway a wider framework to be considered, for example because of a lack of consecration of migration writers as such within the Italian contemporary literary industry.

As Monteiro recognized, the fact itself that the Seminari ended in 2009 can be linked to the progressive loss of meaning of the category of migrant writer for the migrant writers themselves, who perceived it to be generic and abstract to mirror such a complex group of people with different backgrounds, motivations and aspirations. In his answer to the question ‘why have the Seminari ended’, Monteiro gave two reasons, one of a practical and economic nature – the Regione Toscana stopped providing funding and the venue for the event – and the other reason was more ‘literary’, as he defined it.<sup>167</sup> He claimed that in the last few years many writers had lost interest in participating in an event that highlighted their being migrant, as if, through this filter, their individuality could not be properly perceived. Identifying themselves as migration writers, as Monteiro points out, helped them – for some time at least – to feel part of a group, and for nine years they prioritized the need to meet to discuss and work together and share their thoughts. However, as Monteiro stated,

negli ultimi anni avvertivamo un lento ma chiaro esaurimento dello “spirito di gruppo”, dell’identificazione degli scrittori migranti – ora più numerosi, più diversi tra di loro e con un’opera di maggior spessore e ampiezza – in una categoria

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<sup>166</sup> Among others, see the previously mentioned volume edited by Camilotti, *Lingue e letterature in movimento*.

<sup>167</sup> My interview, 27 May 2014.

generica, quella degli scrittori migranti, per diventare, come insisteva sempre Bozidar Stanisic' e molti altri, scrittori e basta. Avevo capito che l'abbandono di questa categoria generica e astratta da parte di questi autori era un passo fondamentale del loro processo di affermazione, e non aveva più senso insistere a conservare un tipo di seminario che non corrispondeva più ai loro interessi e alle loro aspirazioni. Il problema è che questa crescente aspirazione al riconoscimento individuale non ha avuto fino ad oggi una risposta né dal mercato editoriale né dalla stampa culturale o dell'ambiente accademico. Così, senza più il collettivo e ancora senza una percezione delle individualità, questi autori rimangono in un limbo senza alcuna espressione o visibilità nel contesto culturale, nonostante il grande valore dell'opera di alcuni di loro.<sup>168</sup>

Following Monteiro's analysis, it has to be highlighted that after the end of the Seminari there is still a vibrant community of writers, scholars and activists organizing events on migration literature. From this perspective, the example of the Compagnia delle poete is particularly significant (see Chapter 1). This artistic project – founded in 2009, interestingly, the same year as the last edition of the Seminari – shows that there is still the will and need to collaborate, to work together and be united because of their being translingual and transcultural writers, and the group has been vital and active since then.

To put it differently, the experience of the Seminari is not a definitive and absolute answer to the trends of migration literature in Italy today. It seems that the nature of the Seminari themselves – open to both migrant and non-migrant authors, with a focus on what it means to be a writer today in Italy and in a globalized world – brought them to a shared, aware, and meaningful end. As the next section will discuss, despite the end of the Seminari, the experience of Sagarana has continued in different forms, for example the journal, and is still accessible through the transcripts of the Seminari.

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<sup>168</sup> My interview, 27 May 2014.

#### 2.2.4 Transcripts online and the use of the internet

In this chapter, the transcriptions of the Seminari have been treated as a corpus to be analysed and put into dialogue with other critical contributions, thanks to the fact that they offer an open, transcultural perspective on contemporary narratives in Italian. However, it is worth discussing the complex nature of these texts, focussing in particular on transcripts as a peculiar mode of communication and on the use of the internet as a medium to spread them.

Firstly, it has to be pointed out that transcripts can be described as an interesting case within the *continuum* between written and oral texts. The contrast between written and oral forms of language has been widely discussed within several fields of research, from philosophy to media and communication studies. In particular, what is of interest here is the idea that oral and written forms are not necessarily two neatly separated types of texts. Among others, this issue has been explored by Italian linguists and sociolinguists such as Berruto, whose models can be useful to the aims of this paragraph.<sup>169</sup> The so-called diamesic dimension of language – which refers to the *medium*, the concrete means through which language is expressed – helps to describe potentially countless communicative acts that stay somewhere in-between the written and oral extremes of the axis. It means that some features of written production – for example, their being well structured and linguistically/grammatically refined – and some features of orality – which are by definition less organized and characterized by a consistent use of deixis and paralinguistic features, among other things – can both occur in the same text at the same time. These aspects need to be taken into account when hybrid texts, like transcripts, are analysed and used as a source, despite their being rarely public or widely disseminated documents.<sup>170</sup>

Transcripts present a range of characteristics that can be seen as applying to both oral and written texts. Even if they appear in a written form, as an oral text that has been recorded and subsequently written down, they maintain the spontaneity and lack of structure typical of oral texts.<sup>171</sup> This emerges not only when referring to the

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<sup>169</sup> See Gaetano Berruto, 'Varietà diamesiche, diafasiche, diastratiche', in *Introduzione all'italiano contemporaneo. La variazione e gli usi*, ed. by Alberto A. Sobrero (Rome: Laterza, 2003), pp. 34-92.

<sup>170</sup> Among the contributions that discuss the use of transcripts in academic contexts, considering in particular the 'intended audience' of transcripts, see Mary Bucholtz, 'The Politics of Transcriptions', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32 (2000), 1439-1465.

<sup>171</sup> Features of written and oral forms are described in Mari D'Agostino, *Sociolinguistica dell'Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), pp. 112-13.

general trends of the discussions (as the debates move from one topic to another in a few minutes – and, consequently, in a few lines of the transcription), but also within the sentences themselves, for example in the case of self-corrections. It is worth mentioning the ‘mixed’ nature of these texts, as there are some exceptions to this, for instance when a participant’s written speech and/or excerpts from their books are reported in the transcripts. In that case the position of the text within the diamesic axis changes, and some of the features here described may vary. Conversely, the written form allows the reader to slow down or accelerate the reading speed, or to re-read some passages and to skip others.

The second point to address while discussing the transcripts of the Seminari is linked to what Jakobson defines as the ‘channel’ of communication, which is in this case the internet. When discussing the role that the internet has played in the dissemination of migration literature in Italian, a parallel could be made between the publication of the first texts written by migrant writers in the early nineties and the massive spread of access to the internet in those years in Italy. Moreover, as anticipated in various sections of this chapter, the transcripts of almost all the sessions of the Seminari can be found online and can be freely accessed, and they constitute a precious archive of information that is accessible from all over the world. This choice mirrors one of the most interesting ideas behind Sagarana, which is creating a place physical but also virtual to discuss migration writing in Italian and, more generally, contemporary literature.

In this respect, it is interesting to point out that Monteiro argued that his aim for the transcripts was that ‘(gli) interessati o studiosi di altri paesi e dell’Italia, che non potevano venire a Lucca, potessero informarsi direttamente delle discussioni’.<sup>172</sup> Following the analysis of the nature of the transcripts, it may be objected that readers cannot, by definition, access the content of the Seminari *direttamente*: the intermedial translation – from a recorded spoken language into a written text – makes the transcripts a partial version of what the Seminari were. Suffice to mention the pragmatic elements of language, which are lost in the written text, or the fact that punctuation has been added later, arguably modifying the nuances of the oral text through the intervention of a third person, namely the one who translated the records

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<sup>172</sup> My interview, 27 May 2014.

into a written form. However, it is clear that even taking into account these objections, losses, imperfections, the transcripts constitute an invaluable source of information.

Online resources have proven to be an important pool of material by migrant writers in Italian, as Sagarana, *El-Ghibli*, but also online archives like Basili offer access and data on both primary texts and critical contributions. In particular, Carrer reports that the Sagarana website counts ‘850 visite giornaliere, 80.000 visite per numero, +30% di visite ogni numero’.<sup>173</sup> On the use of the internet, Monteiro points out that

Senz’altro Internet ha un ruolo decisivo [...] È evidente a questo punto che la rete è diventata – magari a scapito dei suoi creatori – il grande, e forse unico vero sistema di informazione alternativa a quella “ufficiale” [...] Questo accade soprattutto perché la produzione e l’emissione d’informazione attraverso Internet, almeno per ora, ha dei costi relativamente bassi, e quindi sopportati da quei gruppi sociali e culturali che non possono contare sulle abbondanti sponsorizzazioni dei loro detrattori.<sup>174</sup>

The specific reference to the contrast between different kinds of ‘gruppi sociali e culturali’ that use the internet as a means to promote migration literature reflects the wide use of this medium that has been pursued in initiatives on migration literature. In a sense, these resources seem to balance the difficulty in finding some books that have been published by small publishers and that after the first edition are not often reprinted and become very difficult to find. In this respect, Carrer also stresses that

[Internet] riserva un’attenzione specifica e promuove la diffusione delle voci dei cittadini immigrati in modo paritario, economico, capillare, ciò che i mezzi tradizionali ancora non sanno fare. Le riviste culturali telematiche considerate rivestono in tal senso un ruolo del tutto esclusivo in quanto vetrine periodicamente rinnovate e liberamente accessibili in cui tematiche radicali eticamente motivate e sperimentazioni

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<sup>173</sup> Luisa Carrer, ‘Multiculturalità e rete: voci migranti in Italia’, *Didaweb.net* <[https://www.didaweb.net/mediatori/articolo.php?id\\_vol=1005](https://www.didaweb.net/mediatori/articolo.php?id_vol=1005)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

di stile sono avanzati da scrittori esordienti o affermati a pari diritto.

All in all, migration literature could be published, communicated, and disseminated through initiatives that had to develop a series of open-source strategies so that these texts could be accessed widely. Sagarana is an example of a cultural association that used its website as a basis not only to publicize its activities, but most importantly as a 'vetrina' to make materials and content available.

### 2.3 Conclusion

Selecting the Seminari as a case study for this research offered the chance to discuss one of the longest lasting and best-documented cultural initiatives on migration literature in Italian. Over the nine editions, several authors had the chance to present their works and to discuss them with other participants, who were mainly specialists in the field. Moreover, the transcripts of the Seminari available online allow these debates to be accessed by an additional audience, following the idea that the internet can help to spread and share information, as it is seen as a 'veicolo aperto e democratico, attraverso il quale [Sagarana] riusciva ad arrivare ovunque, istantaneamente e a costo zero per il lettore'.<sup>175</sup> The role played by the internet proved to be crucial when discussing the networks among initiatives, as it proves that these contexts have expanded over the years not only in a specific territory but also virtually. As the previous pages have discussed, the limitations caused by the transcripts being entirely in Italian need to be taken into account, as well as the fact that transcripts themselves constitute a peculiar in-between mode of communication, bringing together features of both written and oral texts. However, the amount of information that is made available and the consistent range of topics that were discussed make the Seminari and their transcripts a source for readers and researchers working on migration literature in Italian.

Among the Sagarana initiatives, the journal has had more visibility over the years than the Seminari, also because it has been issued for 14 years, versus the nine

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<sup>175</sup> Julio Monteiro Martins, 'Il 10° anniversario della rivista', *Sagarana*, 41 (2010) <<http://www.sagarana.net/anteprima.php?quale=184>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

editions of the *Seminari*.<sup>176</sup> As one of the more established journals publishing migration writers in the 2000s – together with *Kuma* and *El-Ghibli* – it allowed a number of then emerging writers to see their name circulate among a circuit of specialists. For example, the name Sagarana is still visible today in the writers’ biographies and list of publications, reflecting the fact that publishing there is perceived to be a milestone of their writing career, still worth mentioning, although they could be currently seen as old publications. Accordingly, the presence of Sagarana’s name also recognizes the value that authors – but also scholars and critics – attribute to the role of editor played by Monteiro, especially because of the emphasis that he put on his own selection process. In this sense, Sagarana serves as a key passage in the consecration process of migration writers (see Chapter 1).

Moving from these premises, this chapter argues that the *Seminari*, although less present and visible in the scholarly debate than the journal, play a similar role in selecting and presenting a group of speakers as important voices in migration literature. Whilst the nine editions of the event established the *Seminari* as a yearly appointment for writers and scholars, its transcripts are still a valuable source today, as they provide an account of the debates of some key protagonists and writers in the 2000s. This mode of analysis considers migration literature not only as a corpus of texts, but also as a debate raised by and for translingual writers. In this sense, the use of such materials stresses the importance of valuing the moment of debate, and recognizes the importance of the intention of communicating with a wider public. The intrinsic dissemination-oriented purpose of these initiatives is in apparent contrast with the awareness of being listened to (and read) by specialists.

This chapter has also discussed the *Seminari* in relation to other initiatives of those years and, more in general, the scholarly debate on the themes that were discussed during the sessions. In particular, the existence of a network of initiatives was stressed during the *Seminari* and made visible, as one of the successes was to make authors and scholars discuss and debate. In this sense, the *Seminari* were not only a prominent centre of this network, but also a pushing factor that facilitated the encounter between operators (see Introduction). The analysis of the content of the *Seminari* offered the opportunity to show that some of the topics that were addressed

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<sup>176</sup> There are some examples of publications that quote the *Seminari*, such as Patrizia Ceola, *Migrazioni narranti: l’Africa degli scrittori italiani e l’Italia degli scrittori africani: un chiasmo culturale e linguistico* (Padova: Libreriauniversitaria.it, 2011).

during the sessions of the Seminari can dialogue with recent critical debates. In this sense, it is significant to stress the participation of non-translingual writers in building a debate on migration literature in Italian.

A question that arises is whether it is acceptable to consider the group of people that participated in the Seminari over the years as a community of authors, as a literary movement. The participation in the Seminari – but also in other initiatives organized by Monteiro and Sagarana, such as the online journal – involved such a wide range of authors and scholars over the years that reflects the tendency to create spaces where migration writing can be shared, disseminated and promoted in various forms, such as a series of book launches or literary prizes. Despite the lack of homogeneity in intentions and definitions, these contrasts reflect the polycentric nature of the background of the scholars and event organizers and, consequently, this is reflected in the initiatives that they promote. Moreover, the openness towards contemporary literature seems to contrast with the creation of a movement of writers. Although Sagarana did not formally constitute a literary movement, it offered specialists in migration literature the chance to share and disseminate their work and concerns. Moreover, the group of collaborators that worked with Monteiro over the years decided to continue to work together after he passed away.

Lastly, this case study has shown the levels at which an analysis of initiatives in which migration literature is disseminated can be pursued. First, the need to contextualize a single event within the wider project of Sagarana, to identify the concerns of the organizer Monteiro and the narrative that he and his collaborators created. In the case of Sagarana, this narrative can be summarized as the intention to create an initiative that promoted a discussion on migration literature, to be seen as a topic to engage with because of the changes that were happening in those years in contemporary Italian literature.

### Chapter 3. Migration literature between local and global: *La Tenda's* book launches

The series of book launches promoted by the Associazione Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda (Milan) constitutes an established occasion within the Italian panorama of events that are specifically devoted to migration literature.<sup>177</sup> Scholars such as Gnisci, Parati, and Mengozzi mention them in their works as an example of initiatives that promote migration authors outside academia, as well as recognizing their representativeness among other initiatives.<sup>178</sup> Similarly to Sagarana's Seminari, the focus of these events expands beyond the focus on a book and its author, exploring topics such as the experience of writing in a new language and the reasons behind the choice itself of publishing a book in Italy. The main difference between these book launches and the Sagarana seminars can be identified in the audience of these series of events. While Sagarana aimed at creating a discussion among specialists that could eventually be accessed by a wider public thanks to the transcriptions on their website, La Tenda and their Incontri di Narrativa Nascente are primarily targeting the inhabitants of three Northern districts of Milan: Maciachini, Dergano and Bovisa. As the association's statutory document states, La Tenda was in fact founded with the specific aim to promote mutual cultural understanding between the various communities that reside in the area.<sup>179</sup>

The initiatives that the Statuto illustrates have taken place since 1991 thanks to an ongoing partnership with various local associations and institutions, the funding that La Tenda receives from time to time from local administrations, and above all the local public library, the Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa. This synergy has been significant not only for the local community, but it has also provided a service for students and scholars interested in migration literature, and especially the work of translingual authors in Italian. Referring in particular to their production, Pezzarossa highlights: 'manca nell'intera penisola [...] una collezione sistematica ed esaustiva di tutti i materiali pubblicati'. He adds: 'Ricca la raccolta della Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa di

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<sup>177</sup> For a list of the events see Associazione Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda, 'Narrativa nascente' <[http://www.latenda.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=106](http://www.latenda.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=106)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>178</sup> Armando Gnisci, 'Per studiare la letteratura della migrazione in Italia', *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies*, 35, 1 (2001), 199-204 (pp. 199-200); Mengozzi, p. 35.

<sup>179</sup> Associazione Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda, 'Statuto' <[http://www.latenda.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=34&Itemid=105](http://www.latenda.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34&Itemid=105)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

Milano, in collaborazione con il Centro Cultural Multietnico La Tenda, il cui catalogo è in rete'.<sup>180</sup> The activities of La Tenda have therefore instituted a dynamic in which migration literature could interact with a specific location, in a way that exemplifies how 'physical spaces' can be 're-introduced into a contemporary cultural consciousness', to put it in Bond's words.<sup>181</sup> A parallel could be made between La Tenda's aims and the work of trans-national artists operating in Italy as described by Bond: these texts are 'always grounded in specific Italian locations', in a way that puts into dialogue the 'sense of belonging' to a specific area and the various voices that express the 'globalization and diaspora stories' of that area.<sup>182</sup> The example that Bond takes is *La mia casa è dove sono* by Igiaba Scego, a novel that explores the intersections between Rome and Mogadishu. Similarly, La Tenda's initiatives aimed at nurturing the global tensions that are present in the territory because of the presence of a number of foreign communities. The Statuto itself of the association was conceived on the basis of the needs of the territory, offering strategies that could support it towards its changes. One of the means that was identified is the book launches of texts by translingual authors, in particular in events that see the authors themselves taking part to present their work to the community. These contexts, although coordinated by La Tenda in an established format, stress the importance of direct contact between the community and authors, who are therefore enabled to present their 'stories' while contributing to the development of a local community's 'consciousness'. In terms of cultural intermediation, the central section of the chapter will discuss how these book launches have been organized considering the perspective suggested by La Tenda to present these authors and their texts as agents that could contribute to a mutual understanding among communities.

In this respect, the volume *Il quartiere dei destini incrociati* incorporates some features that summarize the mission and the aims of La Tenda, and in particular the reasons behind the strong connection between its activities and the territory.<sup>183</sup> It collects the short stories written by the participants of two series of creative writing workshops moderated by the writer Mihai Mircea Butcovan and the scholar Remo

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<sup>180</sup> Pezzarossa, 'Altri modi di leggere il mondo', pp. VII-XXXIII (p. VIII, footnote 5).

<sup>181</sup> Bond, 423.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> *Il quartiere dei destini incrociati. Due anni di scrittura creativa presso la Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa*, ed. by Mihai Mircea Butcovan and Remo Cacciatori (Milan: Linea BN Edizioni, 2013).

Cacciatori in 2012 and 2013.<sup>184</sup> The reference to Calvino's work stresses the intersections among the contributions, but it also seems to invite readers to appreciate a link to an established, canonical Italian writer, challenging the expectation that such an experimental publication of texts by emerging writers might trigger. A focus on the *quartiere* – the element of the title that differs from Calvino's *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, which emphasises the existence of a community in place of aristocratic isolation – was developed over the first edition of the workshops, mirroring the choice to consider a specific spatial dimension that could make the participants reflect on community and identity. The participation of both immigrants and Italian-born participants was instrumental to 'servirsi della scrittura per permettere a diverse culture di esprimersi ed ascoltarsi', as Cacciatori points out.<sup>185</sup>

The *Narrativa Nascente* book launches and the *Il quartiere dei destini incrociati* workshops are only two of the initiatives that have been promoted by La Tenda over the past twenty-five years. The aim of this chapter is to analyse in what ways these activities benefited not only the territory that they were targeting, but also played a role in nurturing a debate at (inter)national level on migration literature in the Italian language. The first section of this chapter focuses on the territory in which La Tenda operates, its being an 'associazione di volontariato', and specifically on La Tenda's own Scuola di italiano per stranieri and the networks that the school is part of; the second section centres on the Incontri and some of the initiatives related to migration literature and its promotion; the third section explores the journal *El-Ghibli*, discussing in what ways it positions itself in respect to La Tenda and as an initiative that disseminates migration literature. The online catalogue made available via the local Biblioteca, stressed by Pezzarossa as a main resource for scholars of migration literature, is not the only connection La Tenda has with online activities. The existence itself of *El-Ghibli* is due to the fact that writers expressed the desire to work together

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<sup>184</sup> These workshops recall other similar initiatives, such as the one directed by Fulvio Pezzarossa and the Eks&Tra association – see the announcement of the last edition: Eks&Tra, 'Laboratorio di scrittura creativa Eks&Tra con Wu Ming 2. Aperte le iscrizioni' <<http://www.eksetra.net/il-laboratorio-di-scrittura-creativa-ekstra-parte-da-marzo-2017/>> [accessed 15 December 2017], as well as the writing workshops run by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel and researchers from the Transnationalizing Modern Languages team. See Transnationalising Modern Languages, 'Familiar strangers: a poem by Femi Abidogun', <<https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/2015/09/07/familiar-strangers-a-poem-by-femi-abidogun/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>185</sup> Gioia Panzarella, 'Il quartiere dei destini incrociati. Interviste sulla scrittura creativa agli autori intervenuti', *El-Ghibli*, 37 (2012) <[http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=09\\_37&section=6&index\\_pos=3.html](http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=09_37&section=6&index_pos=3.html)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

and organize to go in that direction, and the foundation of *El-Ghibli* could be seen as one of the moments in migration literature when there was an attempt from a group of writers to create a movement. The element of collaboration and willingness to produce a new initiative is also to be contextualized within the work of La Tenda and the long list of writers who have presented their books.

These three sections do not mean to suggest that these are separate focuses with little interaction between them. Rather, the relationship between language teaching – and, more in general, the provision of educational services in an area with a high percentage of immigrants – and the promotion of migration literature in a specific territory offer a perspective to discuss the means, purposes and outcomes of La Tenda.

### 3.1 Migrant communities in Milan: the Scuola di italiano per stranieri and its networks

This section provides some context to La Tenda as a cultural project, discussing the reasons that led a group of activists to identify immigration as a main concern, as well as the strategies that they used to facilitate a dialogue among new and old communities. In particular, the focus is on the link between the local and the global dimension of La Tenda: while the attention paid to the territory is an essential point of the mission of the association, the connections that it established with wider networks provide a fruitful perspective to discuss its aims. First, they highlight that the contribution that La Tenda aims to give to the field of multilingual community-building – and, as the next sections will show, to migration literature – is to be seen as part of a wider change that involves associations and public institutions. Second, these connections stress the importance of voluntary work in these contexts, and the way in which civil society takes action to supply services when public institutions do not.

The temporal and spatial coordinates that characterize the birth of this association are key to investigate its activities. La Tenda was founded in the early nineties by a group of activists who intended to create a space in which citizens could start a dialogue with the new immigrant communities that were progressively moving to the districts of Maciachini, Dergano, and Bovisa in Milan. The demography of this area has changed significantly in the last two decades, as well as that of other areas in

Milan that have been consistently affected by migration. According to the data provided by the Fondazione ISMU and the Comune di Milano, the nationality of these people is extremely diverse.<sup>186</sup>

Among these, the Muslim communities deserve specific attention for many reasons. On the one hand, as far as La Tenda is concerned, it has to be noted that in the first few years in the Italian classes that they organized over 75% of students were Egyptian, which made Arab-speaking learners a central concern of the Italian-teaching activity. On the other hand, the presence of the Islamic Centre in Viale Jenner has certainly played a role in shaping the perception of Muslims by the established community, especially because of the national-level coverage that some facts received in the nineties.<sup>187</sup> In this sense, the case of La Tenda and the area in which it is active is representative of how national-level debates have an impact on everyday dynamics. A key event that characterized the early nineties in Italy was the rise of the Lega Nord party. As Foot puts it, their ‘prioritization of anti-immigrant propaganda reinforced Italian national identity against foreign Others’.<sup>188</sup> In the case of La Tenda, the social and political background is particularly interesting as it is possible to establish a connection caused by the way in which large-distribution media engage with issues related to migration (see Chapter 4). The growth of a very diverse Muslim presence in Italy has emphasized issues about the visibility and perception of Muslim communities not only at national level but also in ‘localized communities’, as Burdett has recently investigated.<sup>189</sup> La Tenda’s mission intends to respond to a set of changes that affected the area’s everyday life, as Taddeo has pointed out: he mentions the arrests at the Mosque in 1995, the rise of the Northern League, and the attack on the World Trade Center as some of the crucial moments that challenged La Tenda’s activities, especially because of the discourses and representation of the Islamic world that had started to circulate in the national media.<sup>190</sup> As Burdett points out, ‘every writer, critic

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<sup>186</sup> The *Fondazione Ismu, Iniziative e studi sulla multiethnicità* is a research centre in Milan. Amongst its activities and contributions and relevant to us here is the annual report on migration in Lombardy. See Comune di Milano, *La popolazione straniera a Milano 2009*, ed. by Paolo Bonomi <[http://allegati.comune.milano.it/Statistica/Popolazione/StranieriMilano\\_2009.pdf](http://allegati.comune.milano.it/Statistica/Popolazione/StranieriMilano_2009.pdf)> [accessed 15 December 2017]; Centro studi e ricerche IDOS, *Immigrazione: Dossier statistico 2016* (Rome: Iodos, 2016).

<sup>187</sup> See Stefano Allievi, *Islam italiano: viaggio nella seconda religione del paese* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 188-189.

<sup>188</sup> John Foot, *Modern Italy*, second edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 36.

<sup>189</sup> Charles Burdett, *Italy, Islam and the Islamic World: Representations and Reflections from 9/11 to the Arab Uprisings* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> My interview, 3 July 2014.

or journalist [...] refers inevitably to the way in which such events have been represented and the effect that they have exercised'.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, and the statutory document of La Tenda shows in what ways the association phrased their answer to the questions that were posed in the early nineties.

In particular, the focus on the territory predominates in the statutory document of La Tenda. This document states that the contribution that the association pursues consists of promoting mutual understanding among the communities living there: 'l'obiettivo è dare motivi di contributo di pensiero, confronto, cultura, azione; e di rivitalizzare positivamente la vita della zona e favorire l'instaurazione di nuovi rapporti di comprensione e di solidarietà fra tutti gli abitanti'.<sup>192</sup> In particular, the second article of the document lists its aims in detail, including the following crucial points: defending and representing foreign communities in the territory, the cohabitation of people from different ethnicities, overcoming the dominant and individualistic culture, the importance of ideals of freedom, tolerance, peace, and social and economic equality. It also explains that the partnership with other community groups in the area is essential to establish La Tenda and its activities in relation with the territory. Most important is the work with the local public library, the Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa, which has hosted several initiatives by La Tenda, such as the series of book presentations *Narrativa Nascente* (see next section).

If put into relation with the initiatives that La Tenda organizes, these points highlight the role of cultural intermediation that the association wishes to play, which is stressed by the sentence 'instaurazione di nuovi rapporti di comprensione and solidarietà'. Among the initiatives that La Tenda has promoted since the beginning of its activities, the *Scuola di italiano per stranieri* constitutes the most tangible outcome of the intentions outlined in the Statuto and the most direct means through which the aims of La Tenda are put into practice. Interestingly, the organization of 'corsi per cittadini stranieri di alfabetizzazione e di lingua italiana' is placed first in the section of the Statuto that lists the initiatives that they intend to promote, which is revealing of the importance that La Tenda members think these could have in the territory. It also suggests that they recognized the lack of provision of such services in the area, which is confirmed by the numbers of students that have attended the courses over the

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<sup>191</sup> Burdett, p. 6.

<sup>192</sup> La Tenda, 'Statuto'.

years. As one of the oldest initiatives of this kind in Milan, it has seen a total of around 15,000 students in the last twenty-five years, with an average of 230-250 students per year since the classes moved to the spaces provided by the secondary school in Via Livigno.<sup>193</sup> Bianchi has identified ‘plurality’ as a key term that summarizes the way in which the school functions, referring specifically to ‘spazi, etnie e culture, didattiche, accoglienza’.<sup>194</sup> In particular, ‘spazi’ refers to the use of public spaces for the classes. Taddeo has pointed out the importance of not having a fixed, dedicated space for the activities, and the decision to use public spaces such as the local library for the Incontri di Narrativa Nascente and public schools for the classes.<sup>195</sup> This choice stresses not only the intention to establish a closer link to the territory, but also to give migrant communities access to public spaces that may be traditionally seen as linked to being used by older, stable communities. Moreover, public schools and libraries are perceived as spaces of education and culture, which echoes the aim of La Tenda to highlight the cultural value that migrants can add to a specific territory. At the same time, the provision of ‘spazi di accoglienza’, as Bianchi puts it, indicates that the aim of the school is to build policies of reception, not only to provide them with language support, but also creating a context where students could feel welcome. Bianchi also pointed out the ‘connotazione ideologica’ of the activities of the volunteers. She suggests that teaching the Italian language was not the only reason why volunteers would teach at La Tenda, but it needs to be seen as a political act to experience multiculturalism and encourage dialogue.

From this perspective, the importance of such an initiative is more meaningful if put into the context of the set of voluntary-led schools that have flourished in Milan in the last twenty years to offer an opportunity for language education to immigrants, such as the ones working within the Rete scuole senza permesso. The name of the network itself, with an explicit reference to the *permesso di soggiorno* (long-term residency visa), is to emphasize that these schools open their Italian courses to everyone, regardless of their legal status. Although these schools work independently from each other, there are regular meetings to establish priorities and committees with

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<sup>193</sup> Raffaella Bianchi, ‘Parole & emozioni: la scuola de La Tenda’, presented at *Dalla lingua per la sopravvivenza alla lingua della creatività letteraria* (Milan, 24 September 2016), online video recording, YouTube <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfO\\_Im\\_8rCE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfO_Im_8rCE)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> My interview, 3 July 2014.

representatives from the various associations that develop common projects.<sup>196</sup> The experience of the network was discussed by the sociologist Ambrosini in the speech that he gave when the network was awarded the Nesi Prize, in which he described the pivotal role of these schools in the lives of immigrants in Milan.<sup>197</sup> Ambrosini points out that, considering the lack of public resources, voluntary work has been essential in the last few years to give immigrants in Italy the opportunity to access the Italian language and improve their quality of life. Whether it is a religious or non-religious institution, the schools that are part of the Rete activate productive dynamics with their learners, facilitating the process of becoming part of the community. At the same time, they contribute to making the presence of migrant communities visible in the territory, considering that these schools are well-known in their respective areas. Voluntary workers fill the existing gap between the immigrants' needs and what the state provides, in a friendly and welcoming way. They represent civil society's impulse to build a bridge between communities, to socialize and promote fruitful relationships.<sup>198</sup> Language teaching provision, in particular, is essential for immigrants who are then enabled to access other rights, as Ambrosini puts it, and it is therefore a precious service that volunteers in the Rete offer.

Ambrosini also highlights the fact that the interest in learning Italian has now become a necessity because of the existence of language tests that have an effect on the legal status of immigrants in Italy. In this respect, the recent accreditation of La Tenda as a Plida centre (Progetto Lingua Italiana Dante Alighieri) has reinforced the school's commitment to foreign citizens seeking a more permanent status on Italian soil.<sup>199</sup> In fact, a language test is among the conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to get long-term resident status. According to the Decreto 4 giugno 2010, immigrants are asked to sit a language test in the local *prefettura*, unless they already have a language certificate, such as the ones offered by Plida centres, attesting their language

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<sup>196</sup> On the network and its projects see the paper given by the Rete coordinator: Fabio Mantegazza, 'La rete, geni, obiettivi', presented at *Dalla lingua per la sopravvivenza alla lingua della creatività letteraria* (Milan, 24 September 2016).

<sup>197</sup> Maurizio Ambrosini, 'Premio Nesi concesso alla Rete delle Scuole Senza Permesso' <<http://www.scuolesenzapermesso.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/INTERVENTO-Ambrosini.pdf>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>198</sup> On this point see also the introduction to a special issue co-edited by Ambrosini on civil society and migration policies, in which the editors discuss in what ways civil society actors and local networks play a role in defending immigrants' social rights. Maurizio Ambrosini and Joanne Van der Leun, 'Introduction to the Special Issue: Implementing Human Rights: Civil Society and Migration Policies', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 13, 2 (2015), 103-115.

<sup>199</sup> See the Plida, Website <[www.plida.it](http://www.plida.it)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

knowledge.<sup>200</sup> The importance of being a Plida centre is at least twofold: La Tenda is now able to give their students, but also external applicants, the opportunity to get an official certificate that attests language knowledge. These certificates are considered more prestigious than the test offered by the Prefettura, as they require more preparation and can be included in a résumé. Moreover, being part of a network of Plida centres all over the world has introduced La Tenda and its volunteers to higher standards of teaching competence, becoming more standardized and formalized, as well as being able to request training sessions by the Plida trainers.

All in all, the Scuola is a major initiative of La Tenda and highlights two key elements of its work. First, the employment of voluntary workers, which strengthens the ties with the community and establishes its presence in the territory. It is relevant that in view of the twenty-fifth anniversary of La Tenda, a documentary was made by the video makers Valeria Palermo and Matteo Massocco, entitled *Il mondo in una tenda*.<sup>201</sup> Significantly, they devoted a large part of the movie to the school, rather than to the book launches, as it was probably perceived as contributing more visibly to the perception of the presence of La Tenda. In this sense, the Incontri themselves are legitimized by the commitment of the volunteers as educators (see Chapter 5).

The second element that the school stresses is the positioning of La Tenda within the educational networks of which it is part. Despite the differences in aims and range of action, these two networks – the Rete and the Plida – put La Tenda in dialogue with contexts that enrich its experience not only as a voluntary association and strengthen La Tenda’s mission as facilitator of welcoming policies for immigrants. At the same time, La Tenda becomes an actor in a world-wide community of schools and institutions that promote the Italian language and culture.

### 3.2 The Incontri di Narrativa nascente as a site of dissemination for migration literature

One of the most notable contributions that La Tenda made to the debate around migration literature in Italian is Taddeo’s definition of ‘narrativa nascente’, which has been used not only for the series of book launches, but also gave the title to Taddeo’s

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<sup>200</sup> Ministero dell’Interno, ‘Decreto 4 giugno 2010’ <[http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/2014\\_06\\_24\\_dm\\_24062014\\_test\\_italiano.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/2014_06_24_dm_24062014_test_italiano.pdf)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>201</sup> *Il mondo in una Tenda*, dir. by Valeria Palermo and Matteo Massocco (2015).

book. It is a label that puts the emphasis not only on the novelty that these authors bring, but also to the in-progress status of this production. Thanks to the use of the present participle *nascente*, it highlights the fact that the corpus of texts is not necessarily homogeneous or definite, but rather an open set of texts that progressively grows. Although it refers specifically to non-native speaking writers who use Italian for their writing, the absence of any explicit reference to migration or translingualism has to be noted, as if it were assumed that such a new production could only be authored by foreign writers bringing new energies to Italian literature. Not mentioning migration, however, probably played a role in the scarce success of this definition in the academic critical debate, in which it has mainly been used in reference to Taddeo's work, as its meaning is not immediately identifiable and requires further explanations, especially for non-specialists.<sup>202</sup> For example, in her *Narrazioni Contese*, Mengozzi devotes a section to the analysis of several labels that have been used by critics and scholars, ignoring Taddeo's definition. At the same time, *nascente* also suggests a permanent status of a production that has just appeared and has not reached a subsequent phase of maturity. The fact that the label still remains in 2017 is significant, despite the awareness of the wide range, quantity, and diversity of texts that have been published since the beginning of this series of events. As this section shows, one of the most visible characteristics of the Incontri di narrativa nascente is the choice to keep some of the elements – the format, the name, the location – the same over the years. Whilst this decision serves the aims of the Incontri to establish a presence in the area of Maciachini, Dergano, and Bovisa in Milan, it also raises questions on the impact that these organizational choices may have had on the dissemination of migration authors and their works. On the one hand, the attention that La Tenda has paid to migration authors has contributed to giving visibility to these works, fulfilling the aim stated in the Statuto to present the literary and cultural side of migration to the inhabitants of the area. On the other hand, in terms of the cultural intermediation of migration literature, the way in which the Incontri were structured has impacted the way in which they were communicated. In other words, the narrative arising from the Incontri is strongly influenced by the aims of La Tenda: not only for its targeting the local community, but also because of the strategies that the organizers used to fulfil this aim.

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<sup>202</sup> Taddeo, *Letteratura nascente*.

The choice not to state explicitly in the title of the events a term that links to (im)migration needs to be discussed in relation to the aims of the series of book launches. Interestingly, on the flyers that were produced to publicize the first series of book launches, the description of the event was phrased as: ‘sette incontri sulla Narrativa di lingua italiana prodotta da cittadini di nuova immigrazione’, which suggests that the name *Narrativa nascente* was not perceived as self-explanatory. These events respond to the intention of La Tenda to pursue ‘la valorizzazione della produzione letteraria in lingua italiana realizzata da cittadini stranieri’.<sup>203</sup> As Taddeo pointed out during our interview, the focus of the events has been on presenting a book in a way that encourages a literary and cultural investigation of the text, as La Tenda positions itself as a proponent of the ‘valorizzazione’ of the text and the book.<sup>204</sup> One of the strategies used in this sense concerns the format of the events. In particular, a scholar is invited to present an analysis of the text to introduce the book, as well as act as respondent during the debate that would follow the presentation, usually in the person of Remo Cacciatori or Taddeo himself. In their analysis, they aimed not only to give the audience an idea of the content of the book, the plot and characters, the structure of the text, and the themes. The purpose of the presence of this figure was also to provide a point of view on the book in their capacity as literary experts. In this sense, if analysing the *Incontri* as a site of intermediation of migration literature, it is essential to stress that both La Tenda and the scholars play a key role: La Tenda, because of the set of decisions taken on the format of the session, for example inviting one scholar to chair the session, introducing the book, chairing the question and answer session, and asking the authors questions; and the scholars themselves, as they provide the audience with their own reading of the text, which influences at many levels the way in which a book and its author is received by an audience. This double level of intermediation – the former to meet the aims of the association, and the latter to fulfil the request to offer a literary analysis of the text – has an impact on the narrative of migration literature that La Tenda offers to its audiences.

Taddeo added that the figure of the scholar had been essential in the setting of the book launches.<sup>205</sup> The presence of a professional engaging with the book would guarantee that the literary level of the presentation could be perceived as adequate,

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<sup>203</sup> La Tenda, ‘Statuto – art. 3’.

<sup>204</sup> My interview, 3 July 2014.

<sup>205</sup> My interview, 3 July 2014.

despite the presence of emerging or not very well-known authors. In this sense, the presence of the scholar responds to the role of culture intermediary to the extent that he or she acts to legitimize the literary work. Moreover, as a professional asked to present a book to a wide public audience, their role is also to facilitate people's understanding of it, selecting the information in a way that is accessible to such an audience. Taddeo also argued that starting from the book would assure the audience that the focus would remain on literary aspects, trying to avoid the book launches being seen as 'folkloric' meetings with authors coming from abroad.<sup>206</sup> This perspective shows the attempt of La Tenda to establish the Incontri as initiatives that aimed to present migration by keeping the literary work by translingual authors at the centre of the event and not, for example, the life experience of the author. Such an approach reveals an intention to keep the Incontri recognizable and separate from other initiatives on migration that would not necessarily stress the intention of La Tenda to value the literary production by immigrants, as the Statuto states. From La Tenda's perspective, at the moment of setting up these events in the early nineties, it was important to reflect on the fact that these texts were still considered a phenomenon that would not last, often defined as *récit de vie*, testimony, experiments that would never be part of the Italian literary canon, as Taddeo argues.<sup>207</sup>

This position needs to be put into relation with the audience of the Incontri di narrativa nascente. People going to these events were and are not only expecting to take part in an event with a writer, but are also confronted with the possibility to attend a literary event which includes time for discussion on the text, among other things.<sup>208</sup> The fact that the complexity of the event – such as the participation of a scholar – was publicized on the flyers for the Incontri confirmed that this was the narrative that the organizers wanted to communicate. This point has to be seen from the perspective of a book launch setting, in which the audience of the event does not necessarily coincide with the readership of the text. Rather, it is a potential readership, which needs to be encouraged to access the text. To put it differently, the mission to play an active role in the territory was translated for La Tenda into a use of literature as a means to invite people to come into contact with migration from a new perspective, showing the

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Such as the readings performed by Bovisa Teatro, one of the local associations with which La Tenda is often in partnership.

cultural and artistic side of migration in a way that could mirror the experience of people who had just moved to Italy, as much as the newly arrived communities in the area where La Tenda was active.

Unlike the availability of materials that can be found on the Seminari della Sagarana, there are not recordings or transcripts of the Incontri. What emerges from the list of the book launches that can be found on La Tenda's website is that these events have been grouped in cycles or, as in more recent years, as single events, also because of the lack of funding available to invite authors.<sup>209</sup> According to Taddeo, each event brought together an average of sixty people in the audience.<sup>210</sup> One of the few traces available is a publication promoted by CRES (the Centro ricerca educazione allo sviluppo, active within the NGO 'Mani tese' in Milan) that had the explicit purpose to make the experience of the first three Incontri accessible to those who could not take part in the event. The volume includes the transcripts of the presentations by the authors, but also the debate that followed it, and excerpts from the book.<sup>211</sup> The first book that was presented in 1993 was *Io, venditore di elefanti* by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta, with both authors present, followed by *La promessa di Hamadi* and *Chiamatemi Ali*.<sup>212</sup> This choice appears meaningful because of the role that these texts and these authors have played in the critical works related to migration literature.

As a matter of fact, over the years La Tenda has become a key centre of dissemination for migration authors. While commenting on the lack of attention that migration literature in Italian has received in Italian academia, Gnisci acknowledges La Tenda as an active voice outside academia. He recognizes the efforts made by the association to promote the authors and support them while promoting their books, as well as the support given by La Tenda to the students and scholars who want to access it. Gnisci's point summarizes well the priorities of La Tenda, partially echoing what the introduction to the Cres volume says: 'Non [...] un'operazione per specialisti perché la finalità del Centro [Culturale Multietnico La Tenda] non è quella di offrire

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<sup>209</sup> An archive of the flyers is about to be put together with the pdfs of the flyers that could be collected thanks to the materials that were unearthed because of the research for this thesis. Users of the library have been invited to contribute to it with the flyers that they might have kept.

<sup>210</sup> My interview, 3 July 2014.

<sup>211</sup> *Narrativa nascente: tre romanzi della più recente immigrazione*, ed. by Raffaele Taddeo and Donatella Celati (Milan: CRES Mani Tese, 1994).

<sup>212</sup> P. A Micheletti and Saidou Moussa Ba, *La promessa di Hamadi* (Novara, Italy: Istituto geografico de Agostini, 1994); Mohamed Bouchane, *Chiamatemi Ali*, ed. by Carla De Girolamo and Daniele Miccione (Milan: Leonardo, 1991).

riflessioni a studiosi ma di fare incontrare le culture'.<sup>213</sup> Although the declared audience is the people of the area and the stated intention is to facilitate an encounter among cultures, it is interesting to look at how La Tenda has become a resource for students wanting to investigate migration literature, especially in the Milan area. For example, when discussing the sources of her thesis and the way in which she has selected them, Ravelli states: 'La mia analisi si è prevalentemente basata sulla bibliografia elaborata dalla Biblioteca Rionale Dergano-Bovisa del Comune di Milano'.<sup>214</sup>

Two publications are to be seen as the major outcome of the Incontri, the book *Narrativa Nascente* by Taddeo and the *Bibliografia* by Francesco Cosenza.<sup>215</sup> *Narrativa Nascente* collects the reflections on some of the books that Taddeo has presented in the Incontri, together with pieces that he wrote for the Supplemento section of *El-Ghibli*, a focus on a single author that explores both their works and the critical response to them. The space and depth of analysis that Taddeo devotes to each author is strictly connected to their participation at the Incontri and/or the existence of a Supplemento on them, which makes the publication a source to explore Taddeo's experience as cultural intermediary. His analyses are aimed to reach a wide audience and are focused on the texts. The book is only partially organized according to critical criteria, unlike other books that pursue similar aims such as Comberinati's *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro*, in which the introductory sections and a solid critical framework provide the reader with a broader context. Taddeo puts the authors in alphabetical order and has recently published an e-book version of *Narrativa Nascente* with new authors and books, with the intention to update it regularly.<sup>216</sup> In this sense, *Narrativa Nascente* works as a reference volume to search for information on specific authors more than a critical support for the study of this production, although the introductory sections provide some background.

The other text is the *Bibliografia*, which collects basic information on the authors, such as the country of origin, and the book titles. Authored by Cosenza in 2011, the *Bibliografia* collects the information that Cosenza handled in his capacity as

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<sup>213</sup> *Narrativa nascente: tre romanzi*, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Alessandra Ravelli, 'Scrivere tra i mondi: prospettive critiche sulla letteratura dei nuovi italiani' (unpublished *tesi di laurea*, University of Milan, 2011/2012, *relatore* Martino Marazzi *correlatore* Daniele Comberinati), p. 77.

<sup>215</sup> Francesco Cosenza, *Letteratura nascente e dintorni: bibliografia aperta* (Milan: Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa, 2011).

<sup>216</sup> Raffaele Taddeo, *Letteratura nascente* (Narcisus.me: 2015).

Director of the Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa. Until his retirement in 2016, Cosenza played an important role in co-organizing the events, as well as being the contact for La Tenda in the Biblioteca. When applicable, the Bibliografia lists where the books are located in the Dergano-Bovisa library, so it has in a sense been created for the library users. This decision is to be linked to wanting to allow library users not only to attend the Incontri, but also to use the collection of books, in a way that suggests the will to facilitate access to a corpus of texts that has been acquired by the library in reference to its collaboration with La Tenda. Thanks to the long partnership with La Tenda, the biblioteca rionale Dergano Bovisa has developed a specific collection called *Letteratura nascente*, as stated on the website, with over 600 published and unpublished books.<sup>217</sup> As the Incontri have also seen unpublished authors presenting their books, the library would print copies of the book for the audience to access them. Smari's *Fiamme in paradiso* is an example of a book that was launched when it was still unpublished.<sup>218</sup> Interestingly, Smari's writing experience is closely linked to La Tenda, as he was a student at the Scuola and started to write under the guidance of Taddeo and La Tenda's volunteers. The experience of the Biblioteca Dergano Bovisa, which has become a pole for specialists interested in migration literature, recalls the Fondo Armando Gnisci, instituted in 2012 thanks to a donation from Armando Gnisci of 660 books. Like the Biblioteca Dergano Bovisa, the Fondo is kept in a public library in Lanuvio (Rome) and collects in the same section fiction and essays on the theme of migration literature, as well as unpublished works that have been donated from the authors to Gnisci. The fruitful collaboration with the Biblioteca constitutes an important connection between La Tenda and public spaces in the territory. Similarly to the use of public schools for the Italian classes, these partnerships show La Tenda's attempt to give migrants and migration literature access to public spaces.

All in all, the experience of the Incontri does not exhaust the interest of La Tenda in migration literature. The collection of books available in the local library, enriched by the Bibliografia, together with some key publications such as *Narrativa nascente*, have contributed to disseminating the work of La Tenda and to making it available beyond the area of Milan where La Tenda is active. However, these critical

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<sup>217</sup> Comune di Milano, 'Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa' <[http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/vivicitta/luoghicultura/biblioteche/sistema\\_bibliotecario\\_milano/sedi/biblioteca\\_dergano-bovisa](http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/vivicitta/luoghicultura/biblioteche/sistema_bibliotecario_milano/sedi/biblioteca_dergano-bovisa)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>218</sup> Abdel-Malek Smari, *Fiamme in paradiso* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2000).

works – and, more in general, the narrative produced by La Tenda on migration literature – is impacted by the intermediation of La Tenda and its mission to use migration literature as a means to pursue its aims of mutual understanding in the territories. In particular, the strategies adopted at the Incontri show that the attention paid to the local audience functions as a filter through which the books and their authors are presented.

### 3.3 The journal *El-Ghibli* as a movimento letterario?

The last section of this chapter explores the online journal *El-Ghibli*, with a stress on the reasons why it was founded, its structure, and the work of its editorial committee. These elements are discussed highlighting in what ways they express a collaboration among a group of authors who act as cultural intermediaries of migration literature. Despite the fact that La Tenda legally owns *El-Ghibli*, the two institutions are independent from each other. For example, the journal's decisions are made by its editorial committee, which does not intersect with the management of La Tenda except in the person of Taddeo, who is president and founder of La Tenda as well as member of the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli*.<sup>219</sup> However, the connections between the journal and La Tenda have been instrumental and beneficial to promoting migration literature: whilst La Tenda has an established presence in the territory, *El-Ghibli* can count on the internet as a tool of dissemination. In other words, the crucial element that strengthens this connection is the common focus on migration literature, and in particular the role played by both *El-Ghibli* and La Tenda as centres of the network in different ways, but complimentary to each other. In particular, the Incontri di Letteratura Nascente, which were active over the ten years prior to the foundation of *El-Ghibli*, had already served as a context that gathered together writers and offered a forum to discuss migration literature. In this sense, La Tenda's interest and established presence in the field offered the new journal a support that was not limited to mere legal requirements.

At the time of its launch, *El-Ghibli* presented itself as the only journal with an editorial committee composed of migrant writers, in a way that seems to highlight the

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<sup>219</sup> Unlike Monteiro's centrality in the Sagarana project (see Chapter 2), Taddeo's editing role has worked within collegial decision-making organisms, both in the management of the activities promoted by the volunteers of La Tenda and in the context of the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli*.

difference from other examples that were managed by scholars, such as the journal *Kúma*. This claim stresses that in *El-Ghibli* a group of writers is in charge of the decisions, such as the selection of materials and the involvement in the promotion of the journal. This is therefore an example of an initiative that sees writers not only as producers of literary works, the object of analysis of scholars, and the focus of the work of cultural intermediaries. Rather, writers in the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli* established their agency in the publication system also serving as cultural intermediaries. Although new members have joined the committee over the years – in particular, from the academic world – the experience of *El-Ghibli* is significant because it constitutes a concrete output of a collaboration between authors and their intention to build something together in the late nineties. As Ghermandi points out, the group of writers that were part of the initial group intended to establish an initiative that could mirror their efforts to create a literary movement.<sup>220</sup> In this sense, the choices that led to the creation of *El-Ghibli* – as well as the ones made by the members of the editorial committee later on – may also be interpreted as acts creating a movement of writers.

A key figure in the birth of *El-Ghibli* is the writer Gabriella Ghermandi, who was not only part of the initial group of writers, but also coordinated the committee until 2009.<sup>221</sup> When asked to give an account of the origins of *El-Ghibli* and of her experience as a member of the editorial committee, she interestingly decided to emphasize the connection with her artistic practice.<sup>222</sup> This is stressed both in the title of her contribution and in the incipit, ‘vorrei narrarvi del mio percorso artistico/letterario e della nascita della rivista *El-Ghibli*’, which presents the two focuses of her article in a proximity that suggests that they are in some way linked to each other.<sup>223</sup> In particular, Ghermandi contextualizes the first steps that she took in the literary industry within some initiatives that were specifically devoted to migration literature. She signposts the beginning of her writing career following the decision to ‘uscire verso l’esterno. Accettare il pensiero del confronto con un possibile pubblico’, which translated into her participation in the 1999 edition of the Eks&Tra literary prize

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<sup>220</sup> Gabriella Ghermandi, “‘El-Ghibli’: nascita e realizzazione di una rivista di letteratura migrante e di una sua redattrice”, *Il Lettore Di Provincia*, 123–124 (2005), 133–45.

<sup>221</sup> My interview, 21 September 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Clarissa Cló, ‘Spaesamenti padani deterritorializzati’, *Il Lettore Di Provincia*, 123–124 (2005), 5–25 (p. 21).

<sup>223</sup> Ghermandi, ‘El-Ghibli’, 133–45 (p. 133).

(see Chapter 1). Ghermandi states: ‘ho scoperto [...] che esisteva la “letteratura italiana della migrazione” e io ne facevo parte’, investing great importance in that moment, as well as of a feeling of belonging.<sup>224</sup> This comment also shows the link between Ghermandi’s being a writer and feeling part of a community of writers. In this sense, the existence of a category such as migration literature that was used among agents in the field – in this case, the Eks&Tra organizers – contributed to creating an environment for Ghermandi to perceive that there would be other writers that she could collaborate with.

Another element in the article that provides some context to the creation of *El-Ghibli* is the reference to the changes that were happening in Italy in those years in terms of the public perception of migration. Ghermandi defines the nineties in Italy as ‘gli anni della scoperta del mondo dell’Altro’, for example because of the intercultural projects that were organized in public spaces such as schools (see Chapter 5). She describes those years highlighting the role that writers are asked to play to contribute to such projects. Ghermandi states: ‘c’è grande fermento e noi, scrittori della nascente letteratura, veniamo invitati a iniziative legate alla cultura e all’intercultura, al dialogo, all’integrazione e alla pace’.<sup>225</sup>

The *fermento* that Ghermandi refers to has also played a role in facilitating contacts among writers. Similarly to the dialogue between Amor Dekhis and Mia Lecomte in the Sagarana’s second Seminario (see Chapter 2), Ghermandi identifies the writer Kossi Komla-Ebri as the instigator of the initiatives that led to the creation of *El-Ghibli*. In particular, she refers to a phase in which writers would keep in contact via email, as well as a meeting in Milan, where they laid the foundation for a new project: ‘si parla della creazione di un movimento, la stesura del suo manifesto, la possibile realizzazione di una casa editrice e di una rivista’.<sup>226</sup> Ghermandi also stresses the group’s intention to keep it open to non-migrant collaborators. The example that her article provides is the participation of Taddeo in the group, reporting that writers invited him to join the group despite the fact that he was an Italian-born scholar because of the willingness to follow a policy of inclusion. This passage is also interesting from the point of view of cultural intermediation, and in particular of the power dynamics between writers and scholars. Not only were migration writers

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid. This quotation will be discussed further in the Conclusion.

<sup>225</sup> Ghermandi, ‘El-Ghibli’, 133–45, (p. 137).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

building a project that would see writers themselves become the agents in selecting materials for readers, and this way affecting the circulation of texts; they were also in the position of including new members in the project or excluding them from it, and thus shaping the direction that the project would take. Moreover, Ghermandi points out that the presence of a ‘comitato editoriale di migranti’ was one of the elements of the project that convinced the Provincia di Bologna to fund it. In particular, the proposal that they sent to the Provincia di Bologna highlights the link to La Tenda, ‘che ha fra i propri scopi sociali la diffusione della letteratura della migrazione’.<sup>227</sup> Although Ghermandi explains in the article that the contact with the Provincia di Bologna was facilitated by an early conversation that she had with the then *assessora* Donata Lenzi (who is a member of Partito Democratico, a centre-left political party), it is interesting to note this and other searches for funding that targeted local administrations – in particular, left-winged parties – in order to support initiatives.

The decision to start an online journal entailed the need for a reflection on the use of the internet, its advantages but also its limitations. While the journal *Sagarana* is part of a website that counts on the use of the internet to establish the presence of the project online (see Chapter 2), *El-Ghibli* is the result of a discussion around the creation of a movement that was realized through an online journal. In terms of the use of the internet as a medium to publish the journal, the online dimension is not as much at the centre of the debate as it is in Monteiro’s narrative, apart from the recurring comment in Khouma’s ‘Editoriali’ that the journal receives views from all over the world.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, thanks to some funding received from the Provincia di Milano, in January 2009 the editorial committee published *Le parole nel vento*, a collection of some of the texts that had already been published in *El-Ghibli*.<sup>229</sup> This initiative could be seen as a way to accompany the online publications with a more traditional one, to encourage authors to write something that goes on paper. This seems to contradict the online vocation of the project, although the sporadic nature of the initiative suggests that the editorial committee wanted to make the most of the funding received. Most importantly, *Le parole nel vento* provided an occasion to reflect on the organization and the history of *El-Ghibli*, and it is introduced by some pages that

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<sup>227</sup> Comitato editoriale di *El-Ghibli*, ‘Proposta alla Provincia di Bologna’, in Ghermandi, ‘El-Ghibli’, 133–45 (p. 142).

<sup>228</sup> See for example Pap Khouma, ‘Editoriale’, *El-Ghibli*, 35 (2011).

<sup>229</sup> *Le parole nel vento. Testi migranti pubblicati dalla rivista El-Ghibli*, ed. by Comitato editoriale di *El-Ghibli* (Rome: Carta, 2009).

describe the project and the structure of the journal at that time, which allows a comparison with the situation nowadays.

In this respect, it is relevant to stress that some of the online materials have not remained accessible and it is necessary to use other sources to trace the changes that have occurred over the years. For example, the editorial committee changed with the entrance of Ugo Fracassa and other academics. Their entrance can be tracked thanks to the *Editoriali*, which among their functions report on the new members of the editorial committee and the farewells. Another significant change is the way in which the journal is structured. As both Ghermandi and the *Carta* publication state, the original organization is into the main sections: *Racconti e poesie*, *La stanza degli ospiti*, *Parole dal mondo*, *Generazione che sale*, and *Interventi*. The stress is on making visible the work of translingual authors, non-translingual authors, translated authors, writing by young authors, and critical pieces respectively. After years of maintaining the same structure – although in 2013 the site migrated to a new graphic platform – the first issue of 2017 presents some changes if compared to the original structure of the journal. The sections are now *Narrativa transnazionale*, *Poesia transnazionale*, *Stanza degli ospiti*, and *Interventi*. Whilst some sections have disappeared, the previous *Racconti e poesie* has been divided into two, which are defined as ‘le due sezioni letterarie della rivista’ in the *Manifesto*.<sup>230</sup> The *Manifesto* itself was edited, as its last paragraphs describe the new structure of the journal, and the old one is only accessible through the old issues, although the lack of a date does not explain explicitly that the *Manifesto* is not the original one. After 2017, the keyword seems to be *transnazionale*, which makes it evident that the sections are devoted to translingual writers, while in the past it was not considered necessary to use a label to define it. In particular, from the archive of the journal it is evident that not only do the more recent issues contain fewer articles, but also that the core group of writers who used to send articles more regularly does not anymore. These changes in the structure, the names of the sections, and the content of the journal in terms of authors that publish in it show that over the years the project has evolved, losing some of its initial characteristics, which is probably linked to the changes in the composition of the editorial committee. They show a willingness to continue work that goes in the

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<sup>230</sup> Comitato editoriale di El-Ghibli, ‘Il manifesto’ <<http://www.el-ghibli.org/il-manifesto/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

direction of maintaining the presence of a journal that has contributed and still contributes to the publication and dissemination of migration literature.

*Il vento delle parole* also gives us the chance to reflect on how the editorial committee functions, as it explains that each text is anonymized and sent to the editorial committee for assessment.<sup>231</sup> Each member needs to submit a vote from zero to five and if the text gets an average of more than three the text is publishable. According to the committee, this procedure guarantees a high quality and the blind selection makes it transparent. If looking at the reasons why *El-Ghibli* was created, and in particular the will to create a movement of writers, this procedure aims to reflect the idea that the voices of the members are considered and participate in the issuing of the journal. In this sense, the comparison with the *Sagarana* journal shows significant differences, as in that case the selection was made by Monteiro personally (see Chapter 2).

A key question that the members of the editorial committee have asked themselves over the years – through the Editoriale of the journal – is whether *El-Ghibli* should widen its focus, which since the beginning of its publication has been devoted to migration literature. For example, in issue 16 Khouma reflects on whether *El-Ghibli* should expand and move towards the analysis of non-literary aspects of migration:

ci siamo chiesti più volte se [...] *El-Ghibli* debba continuare a mirare solo verso un progetto intrinsecamente letterario [...]. Il dubbio è se *El-Ghibli*, per non trasformarsi un'isola letteraria in mezzo ad un oceano in continuo movimento, nel futuro debba dare più a questi altri mondi [...]. Per esempio, aprendo qualche finestra sugli attuali molteplici cambiamenti che riguardano almeno l'Italia.<sup>232</sup>

Although vague and with no direct or visible changes or even follow-ups, this proposition points at some questions that *El-Ghibli* shares with the Incontri di narrativa nascente and, more in general, with La Tenda. Both initiatives have kept at the centre of their analysis translingual writers, and the existence itself of *El-Ghibli* is due to a group of translingual writers who wanted to collaborate in a common project.

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<sup>231</sup> *Le parole nel vento*, p. 15.

<sup>232</sup> Pap Khouma, 'Editoriale', *El-Ghibli*, 16 (2007) <[http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=04\\_16&section=0&index\\_pos=1.html](http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=04_16&section=0&index_pos=1.html)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

However, Khouma's claim stresses that the focus on literature has never prevailed over the focus on migration, nor over the importance that both these sets of intermediaries recognize when transmitting works that could perform a message of mutual understanding and dialogue. In the case of *La Tenda* this aspect is more explicit because of the necessity to start a discussion in a territory with multiple migrant communities. Similarly, the selection of works by the editorial committee of *El-Ghibli* would be unlikely to become 'un'isola letteraria': the texts that *El-Ghibli* publishes reveal an attention to the 'attuali molteplici cambiamenti', because of the mission of the journal and possibly as a direct result of the selection process used by the editorial committee.

However, the Editoriali can be identified as the space in which Khouma and the editorial board could connect the texts to what was happening around them in a more explicit way. They offered Khouma or other members of the editorial committee the chance to directly address the readers of the journal and reflect on current affairs, going beyond and sometimes also leaving aside the content of the texts published in the journal. The content of the editorial is varied. It ranges from announcing initiatives promoted by *El-Ghibli*, such as the conference that celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the journal organized at the Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa in 2011 (issue 30), to signposting events that might be of interest to the readers, such as the release of Mohsen Melliti's movie *Io, l'altro* (issue 15). Interestingly, the focus of a significant number of Editoriali, or parts of them, is to report and comment on current affairs, from Italy and from the world. To name but a few of the topics that Khouma covered in over 50 Editoriali: a reflection on the presence of wars all over the world, in particular mentioning the kidnapping of the Italian volunteer workers Simona Pari and Simona Torretta (issue 5); the attacks in Bagdad, London, and Jerusalem (issue 10); the inclusion of East European countries in the European Union (issue 18); the announcement of the Obama candidacy (issue 21); the protests of immigrants in Rosarno (issue 27).

The aim of the Editoriali is therefore to stress the social and political significance of information that, although visible, is not necessarily examined in depth in the Italian media, as well as to provide a comment by a recognizable voice. For the readership of the journal, their presence stresses a political choice of the editorial committee and the community of intention. The Editoriali are signed by Khouma, apart from very few exceptions. Sometimes they are signed 'Khouma e la redazione'.

Significantly, Raffaele Taddeo signs the editorial of June 2006 to express solidarity to Pap Khouma himself, who was the victim of an attack in Milan, and reflecting on the fact that whilst his involvement could lead to interest from the media, many of these facts remain invisible.<sup>233</sup> All in all, it seems that although the issue of the exclusive focus on literature has been raised, there has always been a space for a more political discussion.

One of the last acquisitions of *El-Ghibli* was the database Basili, which was offline for a few years before a new version was launched again in April 2017. The new version of the database was renamed Basili&LIMM, using the acronym promoted by Gnisci to identify Letteratura Italiana della Migrazione Mondiale, and is accessible through the *El-Ghibli* homepage. In his introductory page, Gnisci explains the process that brought Basili back to life:

Kossi [Komla-Ebri] mi propose che potevamo far risorgere la banca dati facendola rivivere nel sito della bella rivista bolognese e poi milanese *El-Ghibli*, fondata e diretta dagli scrittori migranti in Italia insieme ad alcuni autori italiani. Pensai subito: la ricerca scientifica umanistica in Italia viene salvata dagli umanisti migranti!<sup>234</sup>

The new Basili marks an important collaboration between two major centres of dissemination of migration literature, and shows the intention of *El-Ghibli* to support the initiative. As Gnisci notes, it is key to stress that Basili was created in an academic context that could no longer maintain it online, and that the collaboration with *El-Ghibli* allows scholars to have this tool back online.

All in all, the experience of *El-Ghibli* is a tangible outcome of a collaboration among authors that has been online for the last fifteen years. Despite the fact that the most visible aim of the journal is to focus on literature, stressed by the subheading ‘Rivista di letteratura della migrazione’, the political and activist side of *El-Ghibli* is made visible not only in the Editoriali, but also in its collaboration with La Tenda and other institutions, as the Basili case shows. Moreover, the organization of the editorial committee stresses the way in which its members decided to function as cultural

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<sup>233</sup> Raffaele Taddeo, ‘Editoriale’, *El-Ghibli*, 12 (2006) <[http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=03\\_12&section=0&index\\_pos=1.htm](http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=03_12&section=0&index_pos=1.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>234</sup> Armando Gnisci, ‘Ritorna la banca dati BASILI nella nuova versione BASILI&LIMM’ <<http://www.el-ghibli.org/basililimm/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

intermediaries for migration literature in a collective way, mirroring the initial project to create a literary movement.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In terms of the cultural intermediation of migration literature, the series of book launches is the core initiative organized by La Tenda. Whilst *El-Ghibli* is an example of writers organizing and taking agency of their work, at least at the beginning of its activities, the Incontri di narrativa nascente are strongly characterized by the intermediation of La Tenda, not necessarily in view of the association's aims, but more in general by employing a figure that could function towards a legitimation of the work of the writer.

Despite their different nature, La Tenda and *El-Ghibli* share the reasons that led to their creation, as in both cases a group of people decided to work together in order to find new strategies to challenge the perception of migration in Italy. The political vocation that characterizes both projects is more visible in La Tenda and its two main initiatives, the Scuola and the Incontri. Despite its being an online journal focusing on migration literature in Italian, *El-Ghibli* has often dedicated space, especially in the editorial articles, to current news and reflections on migration-related theories and debates.

In seeking to explore the experience of La Tenda in relation to migration literature and the set of book launches devoted to its promotion, this chapter has endeavored to broaden the field of enquiry to La Tenda's history and other initiatives, not only to contextualize the reasons behind the conception of the Incontri di narrativa nascente, but also to provide some arguments to support the proposition that La Tenda is a case study in which voluntary and local forces are behind the promotion of migration literature. The case of La Tenda is peculiar also for several reasons. First, the twenty-five years of activity included the various collaborations and networks that have been explored and have evolved over the years together with the changes that were happening in the territory and, in a broader sense, in relation to the public perception of migration in Italy. Moreover, a considerable number of authors, both published and unpublished, have been offered the possibility to launch their book in a

supportive environment and contribute to a project that presented them as agents that could contribute to facilitating mutual understanding among communities.

Second, the intention to work in the territory is the reason behind their choices. When analysing their initiatives, it is crucial to consider that the audience targeted belongs to the library or the area. La Tenda used to post their flyers to their mailing list and to the library's one, while today they use their respective mailing lists. Similarly, they put up posters to publicize their events in the area surrounding the school and the library.

Third, what appears crucial in exploring La Tenda's many initiatives is the passage between creating a context in which migrants would be welcomed and literature-related activities. As an association that has granted literature the role to promote mutual understanding, it is interesting to see in what ways discussing a cultural product that is often characterized by a strong presence of elements from a foreign culture could be given the role of a means to open up new perspectives for local communities. In this respect, the initiative that was organized to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of La Tenda seem to reconcile the two natures of the association, as the title aims to stress: *Dalla lingua per la sopravvivenza alla lingua della creatività letteraria*.<sup>235</sup> The conference emphasizes the continuum between language teaching and the use of a new language in literary texts, as the event brought together experts in Italian as a second language, such as Graziella Favaro and trainers from Plida, scholars such as Remo Cacciatori, volunteers from the Scuola, and writers, such as Malik Smari, Kossi Komla-Ebri and Cristiana De Caldas Brito. Interestingly, the whole event was recorded and is available on YouTube, which confirms the intention of La Tenda to initiate a conversation that goes beyond Milan. In this sense, the set of initiatives managed by La Tenda – plus the ones that La Tenda collaborates with, and the networks that it is part of – ranges from local initiatives to national and international ones, placing La Tenda as a bridge between the local and the global.

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<sup>235</sup> The conference was held at the Biblioteca Dergano-Bovisa on 24 September 2016.



## Chapter 4. Migration Literature on Television

As outlined in the Introduction, the examples that were selected to discuss the presence of migration literature on Italian television are characterized by their being programmes that do not specialize in migration. The case studies show in what ways a mainstream narrative on migration resonates when migration literature is presented on cultural television programmes. As Jacomella points out, referring to the mass media, ‘in the recent decades migration has been – and still is – the “talk of the day” in most Western countries’ and this ‘seems to be particularly true in the Italian context’.<sup>236</sup> The aim of this chapter is to discuss in what ways the presence of a discourse on migration on the Italian public television channel Rai 3 is affected when migration literature is presented in cultural programmes, as well as to analyse how some key concerns, such as translingualism, emerge and are disseminated on national television.

The narrative behind the broadcasts that are considered in this chapter needs to be put into dialogue with recent studies on the representation of migration in the Italian media. Significantly, *Destination Italy* devotes one of its three sections to media. The editors highlight that whilst migration was not identified as a priority for the media in the 1980s, studies that discussed the presence and representation of migration in the Italian media started to appear in 1990.<sup>237</sup> This attention is to be put into dialogue with a series of initiatives that are enacted to monitor the representation of migration or that specialize in migration-related policies. For example, dedicated projects were founded, such as the Carta di Roma and Redattore sociale, as well as the so-called *media multiculturali*.<sup>238</sup> Although this chapter does not focus on the media coverage of migration, these premises are key to contextualize some of the choices made by the hosts of the broadcasts selected. For example, the reference made on ‘Pane Quotidiano’ to a shipwreck in Lampedusa echoes the relevance that this type of news has in the media, and suggests that it cannot be ignored either when the focus is on the literary text. *Destination Italy* also explores the media’s responsibility towards

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<sup>236</sup> Gabriela Jacomella, ‘The Silence of Migrants: The Underrepresentation of Migrant Voices in the Italian Mainstream Media’, in *Destination Italy*, pp. 149-164 (p. 149).

<sup>237</sup> Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, ‘Introduction’, in *Destination Italy*, pp. 1-27 (p. 5).

<sup>238</sup> Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, pp. 1-27 (pp. 9-10).

the creation of a discourse around migration and the construction of concepts – such as the idea of an ‘emergenza’ – in the Italian media.

The choice to focus on television is due to the central role that it plays in affecting the public perception of migration in contemporary Italy. Drawing from Eco’s definition of ‘neo-television’, Gundle discusses ‘the growing role of television in people’s lives [...] and the fact that today there is no “reality” which has not either gazed at the mass media or been the subject of the latter’s gaze’.<sup>239</sup> By means of the analysis of the case studies, this chapter focuses on issues and questions that arise when large-impact media such as television addresses migration literature in Italian. The selection of videos, authors, and programmes – which are all available in the Rai video archive – does not intend to exhaust the cases of migration authors speaking on television. It will rather give some homogeneity to this analysis, as the three cases that are presented have all been broadcast on the Rai channel Rai 3, which is traditionally communicated and perceived as a channel with a focus on culture and a left-oriented audience.<sup>240</sup> Interestingly, as this chapter will show, these cases have become part of a narrative created within a public television channel that is expected to make the audience aware of a discourse around migration. Moreover, Gundle specifies that ‘in Italy [neo-television] does take on special connotations because of the unusual importance of the medium in creating a shared sense of belonging and developing a collective identity’.<sup>241</sup> In this sense, there are some elements that recur in the analysis of the case study, such as the distancing opposition I/they, the stress on stereotypes and stereotypical representations of Italianness, and the reference to elements that are familiar to the Italian public while stressing a distance from the guest’s experience.

Interestingly, none of the cases that are discussed in this chapter refers to authors who are central to the academic debate on migration literature in Italian. These examples seem to confirm the proposition that there is a significant divide between how migration literature in Italian is discussed and established within the academic debate and its presence and perception in the cultural and literary debate outside academia, where it is often perceived as exceptional and unusual. From this

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<sup>239</sup> Stephen Gundle, ‘Television in Italy’, in *Television in Europe*, ed. by James A. Coleman and Brigitte Rollet (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1997), pp. 61-76 (p. 74).

<sup>240</sup> Gundle, pp. 61-76 (pp. 70-72).

<sup>241</sup> Gundle, p. 74. See also Mihaela Gavrilă and Mario Morcellini, ‘RAI Narrates Italy: Current Affairs, Television Information and Changing Times’, *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 3, 1–2 (2015), 81–97.

perspective, the case of Jhumpa Lahiri is particularly emblematic: as a Pulitzer prize-winning author who is already well-known in Italy, her presence on ‘Pane Quotidiano’ was mainly centred on her life in Italy and her comments on migration-related issues, such as a shipwreck in Lampedusa that occurred that day. The fact that she wrote her last book directly in Italian was not mentioned during the interview, while it is at the centre of a study by academic scholars.<sup>242</sup>

Finally, this chapter uses the example of migration literature to raise some issues on the presence of literature on Italian television. Television as a medium offers literature and its authors a visibility that other sites of cultural production cannot guarantee (see Chapter 1), giving them the chance to have a voice at national level. An element that emerges in this chapter is that, whether it is a talent show or a talk show, the focus of these cases seems to oscillate from the author to their works, not necessarily in a balanced way. In the cases that will be analysed, television as a medium seems to have urged the necessity to construct a new character within a narrative, which goes beyond that of a writer of a literary work and touches on details that are intrinsically linked to the life experience of the person.<sup>243</sup> Whilst other cultural projects – such as the ones that were discussed in the previous chapters – are characterized by their local nature, for example in terms of the specific aims and narratives to be tailored to the needs of each initiatives, television seems to provide a narrative that responds to a ‘an abstract notion of migration and an equally impersonal image of “the migrant”’, as Polezzi would put it, despite any impact on the way in which literary works are presented.<sup>244</sup> Inviting Enaiatollah Akbari to promote Fabio Geda’s *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli* is an emblematic example of how the presence of the protagonist of the biography has prevailed over inviting the writer of the book himself, because Akbari was more appealing on a television show, entitled to speak about migration with his own voice, without the mediation of an Italian-born author.

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<sup>242</sup> See Dagmar Reichard, ‘Migrazione, discorsi minoritari, transculturalità: il caso di Jhumpa Lahiri’, in *Scrivere tra le lingue. migrazione, bilinguismo, plurilinguismo e poetiche della frontiera nell’Italia contemporanea (1980-2015)*, ed. by Daniele Comberiati and Flaviano Pisanelli (Rome: Aracne, 2016), pp. 77-92.

<sup>243</sup> On the construction of narratives in Italian reality television see Sergio Splendore, ‘Media Logic Production: How Media Practitioners in Italian Reality Television Localize TV Formats and Select “Entertainment Values”’, *The Journal of Popular Television*, 2, 2 (2014), 189–204. On authenticity and ethnicity in reality television participants see Catherine R. Squires, ‘The Conundrum of Race and Reality Television’, in *A Companion to Reality Television*, ed. by Laurie Ouellette (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 264-282 (pp. 273-278).

<sup>244</sup> Polezzi, ‘Translation and Migration’, 345-356 (p. 347).

Moreover, television emphasizes the physical presence of the author, adding a face to a name and referring to attributes that do not necessarily emerge when disseminating a literary product through other media. As De Carlo points out, according to the biography that Savic submitted in the selection phase of the show, he could look like ‘un personaggio accattivante dal punto di vista televisivo e con zero qualità letterarie’.<sup>245</sup> In this sense, the emphasis on the author’s biography and the necessity to have access to it in order to reach a full and thorough interpretation (and, for the aims of this thesis, dissemination) of the text is read as productive in the literary debate in Italy.

#### 4.1 Enaiatollah Akbari on ‘Che tempo che fa’ (25 April 2010)

One week after its release, television presenter Fabio Fazio launched Fabio Geda’s *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli* on his popular primetime show ‘Che tempo che fa’.<sup>246</sup> What is compelling about this case study is that the television launch of the book was structured as an interview between Fazio and Akbari, the protagonist of a story of migration and not Geda, the author of his biography, who was significantly sitting in the audience and not taking part in the conversation. This dynamic allows us to discuss not only the conversation between Fazio and Akbari, but also to make a parallel between Geda and Akbari in the writing process of the book and the presentation of Akbari’s story on ‘Che tempo che fa’.

The date when the interview was aired is also significant to the extent that Fazio links this choice to a set of values that characterize 25 April in Italy, which he defines as a ‘giorno di orgoglio nazionale’. The explicit reference to Italian Liberation Day can be seen as an attempt to highlight a crucial event in building the contemporary Italian identity and takes on a particular meaning in the months preceding the 150th anniversary of the Italian Republic, the Centocinquantesimo, whose celebrations started in 2010 and were given much visibility on the Rai channels. The parallel that Fazio suggests between Akbari’s story and Liberation day is twofold: first, he asserts that people who seek to start a new life elsewhere are experiencing a ‘storia di liberazione’, too. The second point that Fazio suggests to his audience is to embrace

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<sup>245</sup> Andrea De Carlo, ‘Prefazione’, in Nikola P. Savic, *Vita migliore* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014).

<sup>246</sup> The full video of the broadcast see ‘Enaiatollah Akbari’, *Che tempo che fa*, Rai 3, 25 April 2010, <<http://www.rai.televisio.../ContentItem-d4792aa6-e5dd-4791-af6f-b0e06aae6f6f.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

Liberation day as a chance to fight ‘our’ prejudices against migrants. In this sense, the interview is explicitly taking a side in the debate on immigration to Italy: from the very beginning of the interview, Fazio establishes a connection between a crucial episode of Italian history and universal feelings of freedom and liberation, proposing a proximity between the audience and Akbari’s experience.

Although Akbari’s story is at the centre of a literary work, the choice not to interview Geda highlights that the focus of the television programme is primarily on Akbari himself, mentioning the book and its author but not necessarily engaging with the person who transferred the story into writing. This is especially interesting if considering the format of the broadcast, as among the guests that Fazio invites there are often writers launching their books – or other artists such as actors and musicians presenting their work. Moreover, whilst the book is already an account of Akbari’s story, the programme proposes a further narrative of it. First, ‘Che tempo che fa’ selects some episodes of the story from the book to be discussed in the interview, adding a layer of selection to the one that already exists in biographical works. Second, the types of questions that Fazio asks are an attempt to reflect those that may arise when reading the book. For example, Fazio refers to passages of the book asking Akbari to comment or expand on them. This element suggests that despite the decision to interact with the protagonist of the story, in ‘Che tempo che fa’ the book is kept at the centre of the conversation. Third, the narrative that emerges from this broadcast stresses the fact that the story was the object of a book and therefore it went through a consecration process: not only had the writer Geda selected Akbari and his story as the protagonist of his book, therefore recognising its representativeness and significance, but also a prestigious publisher selected it. In other words, the way in which the programme was structured suggests that whilst the book served as a means to present and make Akbari’s experience known in Italy, the narrative power of his story is not exhausted in the book and needs to be expanded and nurtured by a conversation with Akbari.

Reflecting on the content of the story and its themes – fleeing a war zone, the refugee status in Italy, the condition and dangers that underage refugees face, among others – is instrumental to justify the attention that the book attracted, and in particular its presence on ‘Che tempo che fa’. The novel is a biography of Enaiatollah Akbari, an Afghani young man who left his country when he was a child to flee war and poverty, and spent the following eight years travelling through East Asia and Europe,

until he could apply for and obtain refugee status in Italy. In the interview with Akbari, Fazio retraces the main stops of his journeys and the adjustments of his life in Italy, referring to the most crucial and painful phases of his travels. The interview echoes the trend that sees the migrant as a witness who is given a space in which they can have a voice and recount their life experiences, tackling themes such as the dangers of crossing borders and the difficulties of obtaining the status of political refugee in Italy and adjusting to the new country.<sup>247</sup> In this sense, the interview can be inscribed in a wider narrative of migration that permeates the Italian media, in particular because it reiterates the presence of recurring patterns that are recognizable to the audience.

During the broadcast Fazio went through some significant passages of the book and expanded on them, to give Akbari the chance to retell his story on television. The opposition between ‘you’ and ‘I’ is not the only circumstance in which the distance between the interviewee and the imagined audience of the show is stressed. Fazio reflects on and highlights the differences between what would be considered conventional in a Western society, such as the Italian one, and Akbari’s experience of childhood. For example, he reports his surprise when he discovered that Akbari does not know his date of birth and, consequently, asks Akbari several questions to identify his age and his birthday. Another point that he makes is about human traffickers, who are seen as criminals from a Western perspective, while they represent safety for people like Akbari who want to find a way to pursue a better future. In this sense, Akbari’s story is filtered by Fazio’s questions, which are aimed at highlighting elements that stress the distance between the audience’s experience and Akbari’s. This approach, possibly enacted to point the attention of the audience to interesting passages of the book, is to be seen in relation to the premise that Fazio established at the beginning of the interview: whilst Akbari’s experiences can be perceived as uncommon and tragic, they still need to be seen as part of a universal struggle with which the audience is invited to sympathise.

The repetition of Akbari’s sentences by Fazio is another element that emphasises the distance between the interviewee and the audience of the show, and it can be identified as a recurring pattern in the conversation. These repetitions serve the aim of stressing some crucial points of the interview, but at the same time they suggest

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<sup>247</sup> Marco Bruno, ‘The Journalistic Construction of “Emergenza Lampedusa”: The “Arab Spring” and the “Landings” Issue in Media Representations of Migration’, in *Destination Italy*, pp. 59-83 (pp. 62-67).

the more or less conscious attempt by the host to make the audience fully understand the details of the story when the pronunciation is less clear:

Fazio: [...] Da quanto tempo sei a Torino?

Akbari: Circa cinque anni.

Fazio: Cinque anni. E da dove arrivi invece? La tua città natale è...?

Akbari: Ghazni, Afganistan.

Fazio: Ghazni, Afganistan. Quanti anni hai impiegato per arrivare in Italia?

Akbari: Beh diciamo in tutto circa dieci-undici anni... forse...

Fazio: Circa dieci undici-anni.

On a few occasions, Akbari's sentences are also slightly rephrased, when Fazio perceives them to be less understandable. Interestingly, the host tends to simplify the linguistic structures and the idioms that Akbari is using, for example:

Akbari: Mi aveva... La notte prima mi aveva detto... mi aveva fatto tre raccomandazioni che non dovevo fare mai.

Fazio: Tre raccomandazioni...?

Akbari: Sì. Che non dovevo mai fare... nella mia vita.

Fazio: Ah, cose che non dovevi mai fare nella tua vita.

What emerges from these examples is that Akbari's linguistic competence is to some extent questioned by the host, who provides a linguistic support to make sure that his audience can understand his guest. Not only were most of these interventions not needed, but the quantity itself of times that Fazio intervened made it clear that there was a specific interest in this direction. This intervention can also be contextualized in a wider series of linguistic reflections that Faloppa outlines when referring to the way in which the media cover migration in Italy and in particular the language that they use. He points out that 'continuity prevails over discontinuity, and the grey zones of language seem to function as an ambiguous representation of migrants, fluctuating between inaccuracy, professional idleness, stereotypical images, sensationalism, and xenophobia'.<sup>248</sup> Although Faloppa focuses mainly on lexical features, the pattern of repeating or rephrasing chunks of sentences performed by Fazio

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<sup>248</sup> Federico Faloppa, 'Media and Migration: Some Linguistic Reflections', in *Destination Italy*, pp. 105-123 (p. 112).

is significant, as it draws attention to the linguistic competence of his guest. In particular, this contributes to a stereotypical representation of the migrant as someone who needs linguistic support, as he or she may not be understood by the audience.

This type of interaction is also particularly relevant when reflecting on Fazio's choice to interview Akbari and not the author of the book, who sits in the audience. The extent of Fazio's interventions, as shown in the quotations above, seems to contrast with the intention of interviewing Akbari and not Geda, in order to allow Akbari to speak about his life using his own voice, without the mediation of an Italian-born author, in a way that gives the audience the possibility to access a story first-hand. In this sense, a parallel between the dynamics enacted in 'Che tempo che fa' and those that occurred in the writing of the book may offer some insights in the analysis of the interview. This process is contextualized in light of the debate around the varied forms of collaboration between translingual writers and writing professionals such as journalists, teachers, and writers, with a focus on the power relations between the two (or more) co-writers.<sup>249</sup> Romeo analyses the power relations between co-authors focusing on two elements: the risk of a process of appropriation by the editor and the way in which the narrator receives political and cultural agency thanks to these texts. Romeo also points out the importance of considering the theoretical and methodological implications of these elements when analysing co-written texts.<sup>250</sup> For example, she reflects on the presence of Fortunato's name on the cover of *Immigrato*, while Methnani's name is relegated to second place, and defines it as an appropriation process.<sup>251</sup> In the case of *I coccodrilli*, Akbari's name does not appear as one of the authors, but his name is present in the subtitle of the book, *La vera storia di Enaiatollah Akbari*, which guarantees him a presence on the cover.

In her analysis, Romeo also refers to epitextual materials that can provide information about the co-writing process, such as interviews with the co-writers. In the case of Geda/Akbari, the writing process is described both in some statements made by Geda and, interestingly, also in the novel itself. In a promotional video available on the publisher's YouTube channel, Geda reports that, after Akbari read his

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<sup>249</sup> See Jennifer Burns, 'Borders Within the Text: Authorship, Collaboration and Mediation in Writing in Italian by Immigrants', in *Borderlines: Migrant Writing and Italian Identities*, ed. by Jennifer Burns and Loredana Polezzi (Isernia: Iannone, 2003), pp. 387-94.

<sup>250</sup> Caterina Romeo, 'Meccanismi di censura e rapporti di potere nelle autobiografie collaborative', *Between*, 5, 9 (2015), 1-28 (p. 10).

<sup>251</sup> Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani, *Immigrato* (Rome: Theoria, 1990).

own story written in the novel, he started to recount his own story and memories using Geda's words.<sup>252</sup> Geda points out that Akbari has absorbed 'il modo in cui io ho scelto di raccontarla', and points out that thanks to his intervention Akbari is able to have access to it in a way that makes it look 'organico' and therefore 'utile'. The stress on the possibility to choose to tell something in a specific way reveals the intervention made by Geda, and the extent to which the content of the book is filtered by an agent whose role is to produce an organic account of a life experience. This process is also presented as useful, stressing that the aim of the writing process is to make the story accessible and readable in a way that Akbari would not have achieved if he had told the story himself. Geda was in charge of the word choice, phrasing, and narrative structure of the text, and their negotiation appears in the text thanks to the presence of some paragraphs where the dialogue between Geda and Akbari is reported:

Posso parlarti di quando i talebani hanno chiuso la scuola, Fabio?

Certo.

Ti interessa?

Mi interessa tutto, Enaiatollah<sup>253</sup>

Or, in another passage:

A questo tengo molto, Fabio. [...]

Lo diremo forte e chiaro, Enaiat. Dove siamo rimasti?<sup>254</sup>

These comments, which interrupt the flow of the narration integrating it with key information on the writing process of the novel, are not introduced by any punctuation that can make the direct speech identifiable, but simply starting a new paragraph. This graphic choice makes the dialogue intertwined with the narration, and shows how essential the dialogue between the writer and Akbari has been in the writing of the text. Although Akbari is not one of the authors and his name does not appear on the cover of the book together with Geda's, the writing process that concerns *I coccodrilli* can still be compared with some of novels published in the early 1990s that were co-written by an Italian journalist and a non-Italian-born writer, as the reference to Romeo's work suggests.

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<sup>252</sup> Dalai Editore, 'Fabio Geda racconta Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli', online video recording, YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QkUyaS0HNU>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>253</sup> Geda, p. 12.

<sup>254</sup> Geda, p. 14.

A second perspective that could offer some insight into *I coccodrilli* is that Geda is not new to the motif of migration, considering that in *Per il resto del viaggio ho sparato agli indiani*, his debut novel that was shortlisted for the Premio Strega in 2007, the protagonist Emil Costantin Sabau is a thirteen-year old undocumented immigrant from Romania who starts a journey around Europe to look for his grandfather.<sup>255</sup> From this perspective, as Mauceri and Negro suggest, Geda's production could be inscribed in a recent production of literary texts in Italian that engage with migration (see Chapter 1). Mauceri and Negro propose a critical approach that sees both Italian-born and translingual authors analysed under the same frame, which is based on a focus on the representation of the immigrant in contemporary Italian literature (see Introduction).

All in all, an analysis of *I coccodrilli* can benefit from a focus on the writing process performed by Akbari and Geda. Despite that, the narrative proposed in the interview between Fazio and Akbari centres on introducing Akbari to the audience, whilst the presence of the writer Geda is not emphasized. Moreover, Geda's role in selecting Akbari's story and turning it into a text was crucial to give Akbari access to this platform of dissemination.

#### 4.2 Jhumpa Lahiri on 'Pane Quotidiano' (11 February 2015)

In 2013, the journalist and writer Concita De Gregorio started a new talk show on Rai 3, 'Pane Quotidiano', a twenty-minute slot in the early afternoon in which she interviews personalities of culture and literature to present their works and interact with an audience of school students.<sup>256</sup> In 2015, Jhumpa Lahiri was invited to launch her book *In altre parole*, a long essay that collects some articles and short stories by Lahiri that have previously appeared in the magazine *Internazionale*. In her interview, De Gregorio uses the book to start a conversation with Lahiri, focusing primarily on her decision to move to Italy and her interest in the Italian language. The interview also expands on more general topics that are related to mobility and specifically immigration to Italy, such as the shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea, the presence of

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<sup>255</sup> Fabio Geda, *Per il resto del viaggio ho sparato agli indiani* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2014).

<sup>256</sup> 'Jhumpa Lahiri', *Pane Quotidiano*, Rai 3, 11 February 2015, <<http://www.raiplay.it/video/2015/02/Jhumpa-Lahiri---Pane-quotidiano-del-11022015-4e298d38-ccab-40f3-bbbf-1363c8a5c5d5.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

foreign communities, and examples of multilingualism in the audience. This case study is explored keeping at the centre of the analysis a representation of migration as a wide, ambiguous concept that incorporates a diverse set of topics (see Introduction) and how the presence of a non-Italian born author has given them the chance to tackle these topics to the detriment of a deeper analysis of Lahiri's work. For example, this section discusses the ambiguity of the term translation as it is presented in the show. Although it is not mentioned by either De Gregorio or Lahiri, it is used as part of the title for the episode. This is particularly interesting when considering that the peculiarity of Lahiri's writing in *In altre parole* is that she wrote her book directly in Italian, and that this information is never stated clearly in the interview.

Italy and the Italian language are the key elements of the interview and their centrality in *In altre parole* emerges clearly in the first part of the conversation with De Gregorio. Lahiri's choice to write in a language that is neither her first nor her second language is a key element of her work. In the interview, she claims that her exploration of the Italian language challenges the certainties of her being a successful writer and puts her in the position of questioning herself and her writing in a way that is seen as productive for her creative process. In *Internazionale* first and in the book later, Lahiri explores her process of moving to Italy and starting to write in Italian. De Gregorio presents the book as a love story of a person with a language that she loves and that she wanted to learn by living in the country and establishing a 'true relationship' with Italy despite the struggles of learning a new language. The emotional side of writing in Italian is a recurring topos in migration literature. For example, the writer and poet Helene Paraskeva refers to her relationship with the Italian language as 'un amore consapevole', and establishes a connection between her decision to write in Italian and the place where she lives: 'Scrivo in italiano perché voglio comunicare in questo paese in italiano. [P]er me l'italiano è un amore consapevole, l'ho scelto io'.<sup>257</sup>

In general, a reflection on the reasons why Lahiri highlights the intimate reasons that led her to learn and use Italian are particularly relevant if compared to similar contributions by other translingual writers in Italian, also considering that

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<sup>257</sup> Sagarana, 'Transcripts of the third seminario – third session', 02 July 2003 <[http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario3/seminario3\\_3.htm](http://www.sagarana.net/scuola/seminario3/seminario3_3.htm)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

Lahiri's perspective shows the awareness of an experienced and well-known writer.<sup>258</sup> *In altre parole* contains Lahiri's reflections on her own writing in a new language after reaching a good level of success in the States and on the inextricable bond to a language with which she has no link apart from something that she has chosen to explore. The conscious choice to learn and use Italian is one of the elements that distinguish Lahiri's experience from that of other mobile subjects that are mentioned in the interview. In particular, this divide is explored when Lahiri states that she had the possibility to study Italian and visit Italy as a tourist, before making the decision to use it as her literary language.

The interview also stresses Lahiri's successes in terms of literary recognition. De Gregorio introduces Lahiri as a 'grande, grandissimo scrittore', mentioning immediately the Pulitzer Prize that Lahiri received in 2000. De Gregorio also points out that Lahiri can be seen as one 'dei pochi cervelli che abbiamo importato', stressing the fact that Italian people leaving the country and going abroad are usually 'cervelli in fuga'. The narrative of the *cervelli in fuga* particularly recurs in the media to refer to the movement of well-educated Italian people who enter the job market abroad.<sup>259</sup> In this sense, the Italian emigrant is represented as deeply different from the immigrant to Italy, as the Italians moving abroad are labelled with an expression that refers to their brain – namely their education, but also by extension their wit – whilst the narrative surrounding the immigrant to Italy is generally constructed around negative attributes.<sup>260</sup> De Gregorio is therefore highlighting the exceptionality of Lahiri's presence in Italy making a parallel with well-educated Italian people going abroad, rather than with other immigrants who move to Italy. The narrative of the opposition between Italian emigrants as well-educated and immigrants to Italy is also strengthened by the keyword *pochi*, with no clear reference to data confirming that there is a number of *cervelli* also arriving in Italy, who are probably *in fuga* from another country.

From this perspective, the narrative of the episode and in particular the portrayal of Lahiri is developed following two separate – and possibly opposite –

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<sup>258</sup> See for example Bregola's interviews to writers such as Julio Monteiro Martins and Barbara Serdakowski in Davide Bregola, *Da qui verso casa* (Milan: Edizioni Interculturali, 2002).

<sup>259</sup> Romeo discussed *cervelli in fuga* in a recent paper. See Caterina Romeo 'New Mobilities, New Subalternities', presented at *Transnational Italies: Mobility, Subjectivities and Modern Italian Cultures* (The British School at Rome, Rome, 26-28 October 2016).

<sup>260</sup> See the section of *Destination Italy* on 'Media', and in particular Jacomella, pp. 149-163.

directions. On the one hand, because of her being a mobile subject, Lahiri is identified as a figure who may be interested in discussing these topics, as well as be able to express an authoritative opinion. On the other hand, De Gregorio refers to categories such as ‘cervelli in fuga’, ‘ennesima tragedia in mare’, and ‘seconde generazioni’ that echo lexical choices that recur in the mainstream media. In this sense, the presence of Lahiri gives De Gregorio the chance to tackle a set of topics that are part of the public debate in Italy, suggesting that such different contexts and issues can fit together. The direction taken by the interview emphasizes Lahiri’s being a foreign person living in Italy, rather than the book and her being a writer, suggesting that the presence in the programme of a foreign person who lives in Italy is what justifies a debate around themes that offer links to current affairs. Although the American writer is not directly involved in such contexts, she is asked to comment on them, or at least sees the presence of these topics in the episode of ‘Pane Quotidiano’ that centres on her book. The juxtaposition of these topics is relevant from the perspective of the audience of Rai 3, which is both reassured by a familiar narrative on migration and interested by the presence of a successful writer.

At least two other moments of the interview see migration – to be intended as a generic, mainstream topic – at the centre of the conversation: first, when the news arrives of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea, and second when De Gregorio asks Lahiri to comment on the Bengali community in Rome. During the broadcast, it is reported that that day three hundred people died in the vicinity of Lampedusa while trying to cross the Mediterranean by boat. When De Gregorio asks her and makes her participate in that debate in her capacity as a foreign person living in Italy, Lahiri highlights the difference between her experience and that of the *immigrati*. Lahiri refers to the Bengali immigrants that she meets at the market: although they share a culture and an origin, she exemplifies some of the difficulties that they have to face, using statements like: ‘si trovano sempre ai margini’, ‘devono lavorare in nero’, ‘l’Italia non è un paese accogliente per loro’. All in all, it seems that the presence of Lahiri in the show allows De Gregorio to refer to at least four different groups of people – Lahiri (a successful writer who can afford to move to Italy to learn Italian), labour migrants who have been living for years in Italy, newly arrived refugees, and second generation students. These are all seen and portrayed as foreign people living in Italy, although differences are highlighted by Lahiri herself who distances her own experience using *loro*.

Moreover, the format of the show includes the presence of some secondary school students who have read the book and can ask the guest questions and contribute to the discussion. Significantly, drawing on Lahiri's multilingualism, De Gregorio asks the audience of school students to comment on the use of Italian. In order to make clear that she wants to hear from students of foreign origin, De Gregorio requests that students 'con genitori di un altro paese' intervene in the discussion with Lahiri, following a question to the writer about her native language. Some comparisons are made between the reflections of Lahiri – whose *lingua madre* is Bengali, while English is identified as the language of her education, highlighting a conflict, as she defines it, between the two languages in her life – and the students' experience, especially when De Gregorio asks a few questions about their use of the Italian language and in general their relationship with Italian. The journalist asks what language they speak at home with their parents and their feeling when they use Italian. She also invites students to comment on the learning process of a language. These questions, which are aimed at involving the students in the discussion touching upon a topic that is familiar to some of them, highlight the willingness to enrich the discussion with other experiences than Lahiri's, despite going towards a separate direction than the interview with Lahiri.

Another crucial element of this case study is the choice to use the word 'translation' on the screens that serve as background to the studio, behind the two women, as it confuses the message of the language that Lahiri uses to write her book. The title that was given to this interview with Lahiri, *Lost in translation*, seems to suggest that the book was not written in Italian, but translated, especially because the fact that Lahiri wrote *In altre parole* in the Italian language is never emphasized openly. The only reference is on the Rai website, although it is not clear that the book that she wrote in Italian is the one that was presented: 'un amore così passionale da spingere [Lahiri][...] a studiare l'italiano tanto meticolosamente da arrivare a scrivere un libro nella nostra lingua'.<sup>261</sup> This element is particularly relevant when contextualized within Lahiri's reflective pieces on her experience of writing in Italian. For example, a few months after the interview with De Gregorio she published a piece in *The New Yorker* explaining the importance of writing directly in a new language. She claims: 'Italian offers me a very different literary path. As a writer I can demolish

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<sup>261</sup> 'Jhumpa Lahiri', *Pane Quotidiano*.

myself, I can reconstruct myself. I can join words together and work on sentences without ever being considered an expert'.<sup>262</sup>

Considering the life between several cultures and the coexistence of three languages in Lahiri's everyday life, the term 'translation' encapsulates some of the tensions existing in Lahiri's writing, especially when considering a 'broad and interdisciplinary notion of translation', which has been discussed in a forum of the *Translation Studies* journal.<sup>263</sup> Following Polezzi's idea to investigate in what ways 'language practices connected to migration can be linked to translation', Lahiri's reflections in 'Pane Quotidiano' seem to echo these ideas, in particular on the idea that 'the migrant as artist and as self-translator can offer at least a partial response to negative models of translation seen as a form of control over linguistic heterogeneity'.<sup>264</sup> Although the self-translation of Lahiri was not made evident in the interview, it has emerged in Lahiri's choice to move to Italy and use the Italian language. As Polezzi points out, 'translation takes place not just when words move on their own, but also, and mostly, when people move into new social and linguistic settings'.<sup>265</sup> However, the way in which 'translation' was used in 'Pane Quotidiano' still seems problematic, as it was offered to the audience with no explanation, and in particular because its common use suggests that the reference is to an interlingual translation of a book.

Interestingly, Lahiri's work has been analysed because of its translingual nature and used as an example of a production that transcends traditional national boundaries. Wilson compares Lahiri's work to that of Francesca Marciano, who chooses to write in English despite her being Italian, stressing the two writers' 'self-conscious linguistic transformation'.<sup>266</sup> In particular, Wilson has stressed the importance of language as an explicit theme in Lahiri's writing and reflects on the fact that the critics should face these cases and the way in which they distance themselves from the national canon. In this sense, the work of Lahiri is that of a translingual author but at the same time isolated if compared to other translingual writers in Italian that

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<sup>262</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, 'Teach yourself Italian', *The New Yorker*, 7 December 2015 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/12/07/teach-yourself-italian>> [accessed 15 September 2017].

<sup>263</sup> Translation Studies Forum: Translation and migration, 'Editorial note', *Translation Studies*, 5 (2012), 345.

<sup>264</sup> Polezzi, 345-356 (p. 345).

<sup>265</sup> Polezzi, 345-356 (p. 348).

<sup>266</sup> Rita Wilson, 'Creative encounters: literary practices, (self-)translation and identity', presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> *Biennial ACIS Conference* (Monash University Prato Centre, 4-7 July 2017).

have been explored in other chapters of this thesis. It is true that their experience can be compared if considering movement across languages, but at the same time the analysis of cases such as *El-Ghibli* (Chapter 3) or *Sagarana* (Chapter 2) stress in what ways these were created as part of wider cultural projects. Including Lahiri as an example therefore is useful to identify the network of relationships that have been established among other writers and the initiatives that they have promoted, establishing a different kind of circuit than that of other translingual writers in the Italian language.

All in all, the conversation between Lahiri and De Gregorio explored various facets of living in Italy from the point of view of people with a background of mobility. These are certainly some of the themes of her *In altre parole*. Much attention is paid to her being a non-Italian living in Italy – which bridged the link to other migration-related topics – rather than to other elements that she discusses in her work. For example, Lahiri’s writing in the Italian language never emerges and the use of the word translation somehow makes it even less clear. Lahiri is presented as a successful writer, and this was her first interview on Italian television, but migration seems to be the key element of Lahiri’s profile that is worth investigating on the programme, to the detriment of other elements of her writing, in Italian or not.

#### 4.3 Nikola Savic on ‘Masterpiece’ (October 2013 – March 2014)

This case study analyses the presence of writer Nikola Savic on the talent show ‘Masterpiece’, and in particular in what ways a narrative of migration emerges from both Savic’s self-representation and the way the show emphasizes the writer’s engagement with the topic of migration.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, thanks to ‘Masterpiece’’s focus on creative writing techniques and the writing process of the contestants’ novels, the programme allows the audience an interesting insight into the translingual nature of Savic’s writing, especially in the editing and proofreading phase of his novel.

For these reasons, this case study was included in this chapter despite the differences between it and the other two sections. First, it centres on a different television format and covers a larger time frame than a single interview. ‘Che tempo

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<sup>267</sup> *Masterpiece*, Rai 3, October 2013 – March 2014, <<http://www.masterpiece.rai.it/dl/portali/site/page/Page-461957fc-5f28-4ee2-a0aa-1da517c79b78.html>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

che fa' and 'Pane Quotidiano' also share their being aired at established times – primetime for the first, midday for the second – which Rai 3 has traditionally devoted to cultural formats, whilst 'Masterpiece' was aired in the late evening. Second, the element of contest positions this case study at a different moment in the consecration process of a writer: *I coccodrilli* and *In altre parole* are already available in the bookshops while they are presented on television, and their authors are published – if not acclaimed – writers who are being launched on prestigious television programmes. 'Masterpiece' shows the selection process of the books, starting from the arrival of the text. In particular, the audience is asked to take part in the selection process of the book, as they could vote for one or the other contestant. However, the fact that 'Masterpiece' was aired on Rai 3 – as well as the other two shows – suggests that the three broadcasts target a similar audience, which can be described as left-wing-oriented and interested in cultural topics.<sup>268</sup>

Moreover, the elements that make 'Masterpiece' a unique show in the Italian panorama – especially if compared to more traditional formats – allow an analysis of specific issues arising from disseminating literature on television. Aired from October 2013 to March 2014, 'Masterpiece' echoes the format and the expectations of other, more popular talent shows on music or cooking, which have become increasingly popular in Italy in the last few years. It was presented and advertised as the first ever talent show on literature, in which amateur writers are asked to perform creative writing pieces and 'prove attitudinali che consentiranno di misurare la capacità di scrittura e di comunicazione e il talento letterario'.<sup>269</sup> From a cultural intermediation perspective, the participation of emerging authors makes the aims of 'Masterpiece' similar to the ones of literary prizes (see Chapter 1), as there is a jury that has the ability and authority to establish value and select the winners. In particular, the selection of the participants of 'Masterpiece' was based on the novel that they had to submit, although the challenges to be won in subsequent phases of the show were based on creative writing exercises that are typical of creative writing courses, as indicated by the partnership with the Scuola Holden (Turin). This shows that the programme granted poor access to the novel itself, instead centring the episodes on challenges that could highlight the characteristics of the contestants, in view of

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<sup>268</sup> Gundle, pp. 61-76 (pp. 70-72).

<sup>269</sup> Masterpiece, 'Regolamento' <[http://www.rai.it/dl/docs/1374499492866regolamento\\_MASTERPIECE.pdf](http://www.rai.it/dl/docs/1374499492866regolamento_MASTERPIECE.pdf)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

marketing the winning author. Considering that the focus of the episodes was mainly on building the contestants as characters of a narrative, the challenges were also a test for their ability to face difficulties not only in writing-related activities but more in general to withstand the pressure of such a contest. In this sense, unlike literary prizes, the format of the talent show takes into account a set of criteria that include the ability to attract the votes of the audience and of the jury. What prevails in 'Masterpiece' is the access to the writer-contestants, rather than their texts.

The participation of non-Italian-born contestants and the presence of the writer Taiye Selasi as a judge were some of the elements that gave the narrative of the show a connotation that suggested an interest towards issues of migration and mobility. In particular, great attention was paid to the characterization of Savic, who won the competition and whose book *Vita migliore* based on his life was published by the publisher Bompiani.<sup>270</sup> When presented to the jury, the plot of the novel stresses that the point of view is that of a young person who left Serbia to live in Italy and goes back to Serbia. This element is presented in a way that makes his point of view closer to that of the Italian reader, as the protagonist sees his own country from a new perspective and can translate it for the Italian reader. In particular, as a writer of Serbian origin, who lives in Italy and writes a novel that tackles issues of migration and return, Savic is portrayed as a writer with a strong interest in such themes from the very beginning of the show.

Migration is also a recurring theme of the texts that he produces during the challenges of the show. A strong narrative around the theme of migration emerges from both a few production choices, such as the comments by the narrating voice of the show and the selection of Savic's remarks during the programme, and the texts written by Savic for the challenges. Savic is depicted as a man who comes from a place that has been destroyed by wars, where people from multiple nationalities needed to find a way to coexist. The narrating voice represents him as a strong personality, a fighter, a fearless person. For example, the anecdote of him not being afraid when once he found himself with a pistol to his head was repeated more than once during the show and is also included in his *Vita Migliore*. Moreover, his perspective as a foreign person living in Italy is described as aware of the cultural divide between Italy and

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<sup>270</sup> Nikola Savic, *Vita migliore* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014).

Serbia, and the stress of the narrating voice is on his being particularly aware of what is described as being specific to Italy.

Accordingly, it is interesting to note the selection of comments by Savic that have been broadcast. When another contestant chooses a theme for his or her own challenge, he often comments with statements like: ‘Perché non pensate magari agli immigrati? Adesso non per fare polemica...’.<sup>271</sup> Immigration is almost always the theme that Savic chooses for his challenges: for example, in episode four Savic writes a short text about queuing to request a *permesso di soggiorno*. All these elements contribute to creating a coherent narrative, from the first episode to the final one, that sees Savic not only connotated thanks to recurring and stereotypical attributes that are typically used to refer to the young male, immigrant who needs to face harsh life conditions, but also engaging with topics related to migration in the challenges of the show.

A similar process of characterization is enacted for all the participants, but in the case of Savic it is centred around his being non-Italian and interested in exploring a diverse set of facets of migration, as if he was claiming his belonging to a larger group of people sharing the same experiences and tensions. In this sense, a reference to Duncan’s work can be instrumental to explore in what ways the representation of Savic was characterized by a stress on his being intrinsically non-Italian. Whilst ‘examin[ing] the cinematic strategies through which Albanian migrants have been represented in recent Italian film’, Duncan claims that ‘although Albanians, by and large, are not “black” in conventional epidermal terms, their representation in Italian cinema depends on racialized notions of identity and of ways of looking that position them as “non-white”’.<sup>272</sup>

Drawing on this study, the parallel between Albanian characters and the contestant Savic can be suggested at many levels. In particular, the hierarchical relationship between Savic and other Italian-born contestants is highlighted when he comments on his use of the Italian language. The only moment when the novel written by Savic in order to participate in the show is taken into consideration is when he discusses the editing to be performed with a professional editor and proofreader from

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<sup>271</sup> Masterpiece, ‘Episode five’, 23 March 2014, <<http://www.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-a1247356-3c47-4c6c-ba54-fe3ae0c7213c.html#p=>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>272</sup> Derek Duncan, ‘Italy’s Postcolonial Cinema and Its Histories of Representation’, *Italian Studies*, 63, 2 (2008), 195-211 (p. 201).

Bompiani. Savic claims that he does not want to improve the quality of his Italian and correct his grammar mistakes, because he believes it might affect his view on Italy. He states ‘se comincio a scrivere con un italiano troppo standard perdo la visione di extracomunitario’.<sup>273</sup> In terms of the representation of a non-Italian contestant, this statement about his use of Italian is interestingly put into dialogue with what Savic defines as his *visione*, his own perspective not only on language, but also by extension on the world that he explores in his writing. This element can be seen as a claim from the writer to establish his peculiarity if compared to the other contestants, who in the last phases of the contest were all Italian-born. At the same time it shows an awareness of suggesting a choice that could be perceived as a problem, especially when discussing standard Italian with a professional editor who is in charge of polishing his book for publication. Moreover, Savic’s use of the term *extracomunitario* seems to challenge, if not contradict, his caring about and being interested in migration-related themes, but at the same time it reinforces the practice of using terms that characterize the mainstream representation of migration. All in all, the characterization of Savic as a non-Italian writer is not only carried out by the narrating voice of the show, but also from his own representation and perception of elements that make him recognizable for the audience.

The parts of the programme devoted to the publication process of the novels were also interesting in terms of the presence of literature on television, and in what ways it can be communicated to a television audience. Whilst the other two case studies were recognized programmes with an established audience – also because of the familiar formats – ‘Masterpiece’ proposed a new format that involved not the finished work, but the process that leads to a polished, publishable book. They contributed to creating more awareness about the publishing process of a book, for example highlighting the presence and contributions of professionals behind the writers that appear on the front cover. In this sense, these sessions made them acquainted with the specificity of translingual authors, making a debate that exists in the scholarly environment visible to the general public: if contextualising the discussion around the editing phase of Savic’s book within some critical works on

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<sup>273</sup> Masterpiece, ‘Episode five’.

migrant writings that have discussed the issue of their editing phase, it is interesting to see that these issues were discussed on a public television channel.<sup>274</sup>

Among the commentators of Savic's work, the reflections proposed in the afterword to *Vita Migliore*, the novel that was published by Bompiani as a grand prize for the winner, the writer Andrea De Carlo offers the reader an account of the experience of 'Masterpiece' and, more in general, of the chances provided by television. De Carlo states that his own participation in the show as a judge is due to his willingness to look for an 'autentico talento'. This word choice follows the use of an idiomatic expression ('authentic' in the acceptance of 'proper', 'true' talent), but it also plays with an argument that De Carlo brings up later in his afterword: Savic, who 'usa la nostra lingua in modo molto più interessante e creativo di tanti che la parlano da sempre', depicts Belgrade with 'authenticity' thanks to a prose described as meagre, energetic, sincere.<sup>275</sup> The use of the adjective 'authentic' does certainly ring a bell in the area of migration literature in the Italian language, as some critics have argued that the early production could be described as an account of the writer's life experiences, which could be trusted because of the existence of an autobiographical pact between the first-person narrator and writer of the text.<sup>276</sup> Moreover, as discussed by Moslund, authenticity also has to be seen as part of the set of traits that are proper to the 'migrant hero', who is framed as a recurring figure in contemporary writings.<sup>277</sup> In addition, De Carlo comments on his own and Savic's presence on 'Masterpiece'. He states that he was aware of the 'rischi', as he defines them, to be taken when participating on a television show, pointing out that the editing of the video materials behind a recorded show can cause images and words to be manipulated. This is presented as an issue for him as a writer, someone who is 'abituato a essere responsabile di ogni sua virgola'.<sup>278</sup>

All in all, 'Masterpiece' served the role of showing the general public some less well-known elements of creative writing and the publishing industry.<sup>279</sup> Thanks

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<sup>274</sup> See for example Comberinati, pp. 72-73.

<sup>275</sup> De Carlo, 'Postfazione'.

<sup>276</sup> Among others, see Nora Moll, 'Narrative Strategies, Literary Imaging and Reflections on Identity: Constructing a Narrative Community in Italy', in *Destination Italy*, pp. 221-239 (pp. 225-226).

<sup>277</sup> Sten Pultz Moslund, 'Danish Identity and the Migrant Hero's Hybridising Gaze in Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier*', in *Migration and Literature in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Mirjam Gebauer and Pia Lausten (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2010), pp. 287-303.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Among other things, Kate Willman and I have discussed 'Masterpiece' in light of the contemporary literary market in our joint paper: Kate Willman and Gioia Panzarella, 'The Literary Talent Show "Masterpiece" and the Representation of the Arts on Italian Television', presented at the *Millburn House Symposium* (University of Warwick, 27 May 2015).

to the presence of Savic as one of the finalists – and, later, winner of the show – migration become a key topic of the programme, and an analysis of this broadcast from this perspective has revealed that both Savic and the selection of video materials played a role in stressing this aspect. From a cultural intermediation perspective, it is also relevant that the presence of a narrating voice gave a voice to the narrative created by the programme, making the construction of Savic’s representation more visible.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The case studies presented in this chapter helped discuss in what ways the presence of literary products affects the narrative that public television performs on migration. More in general, these pages have investigated whether specific broadcasts have worked towards reinforcing or questioning stereotypes about the presence of migration in Italian society. The decision to focus on television is due to the relevance that recent studies have devoted to how the mass media discuss migration. Although the internet and social media have radically changed the way in which information has worked over the past two decades, television still has a pervasive influence in the Italian and Western flow of news, and has maintained a significant role in determining fashions and issues that are at the centre of public debates. When focusing specifically on migration literature, the internet has been identified in other chapters as a privileged and rich medium for the dissemination of migration literature. In this sense, the most striking element that emerges from the analysis of these case studies is that other media, such as television, and the access of writers to these channels are regulated in substantially different ways. The relationship between the internet and migration is based on the use of the internet as a freely-accessible means through which everyone – at any point in their writing career – could contribute to an ongoing debate. On the contrary, these three cases articulate how a discourse around migration has been developed in national television broadcasting, where the cases are selected following criteria such as the prestige of the guest. In particular, hosts and other figures involved in the production of the shows have served as cultural intermediaries of migration literature because of the dissemination that they have granted the literary works, and not necessarily stressing some key points attuned to the specific interests of their audiences (see Chapter 5).

In this sense, the analysis of these cases allows a discussion of some issues that are relevant in the current debate around migration literature in Italian, such as the presence of migration and migrants in Italian literature and the co-writing dynamic (Geda/Akbari), the process of writing in a new language (Lahiri), and the writing process and editing phase of a text written by a migrant author (Savic). These and other aspects have not necessarily been addressed in the broadcasts: a question that arises therefore is whether the presence of these authors and novels on television is aimed at nurturing the growing attention and presence of the discourse around migration in national debates. The element that somehow reunites these cases is the reference to a biographical genre, in which life experiences do not only emerge from the literary product but most interestingly from the real person who lived them, whether they are the writers of the book (Lahiri, Savic) or not (Akbari).

This perspective is particularly interesting if put into relation with the format of the talent show, discussed for the 'Masterpiece' case. On the one hand, there is an expectation from migration writing to be telling a true story, because of the (auto)biographical nature of many of these texts. On the other, reality television claims to be showing the experiences and reactions of 'real' people. This parallel can also be applied to the creation of a narrative that producers carry out in the other two cases, as the presence of an interviewee with a migration experience shifts the focus of the programme from the literary product to the author. Akbari and Lahiri were invited to discuss their own lives and experiences in the first place, creating a distance between them and the literary product that somehow justifies their presence on television. Literature is presented as the topic of the programmes but almost disappears in the conversations with the interviewees, as what matters is that migration is discussed. These cases suggest that what makes the news is the person, not the book, and that to some extent engaging with the topic of migration through migrant writings can be perceived by the audience as a way to offer assurance of access to the first-hand experience of migration.

Lastly, these cases seem to confirm that migration has become a mainstream issue that populates not only the news but also talk shows and entertainment. None of the case studies examined in this chapter started from a specific interest in migration, as the programmes analysed had a focus on cultural issues and in particular on literature. Migration was a topic that happened to be discussed because of the specific guest/participant invited, which invited a reflection on that matter. This element is also

relevant when discussing in what ways these examples position themselves within the network of initiatives that have been explored in the first three chapters.

## **Chapter 5. Migration literature in the classroom: Materials and writers' visits for school students**

This chapter considers the presence of migration literature in school materials and school-related activities. It investigates the ways in which migration literature intersects with educational settings, with a focus on the reasons why this topic is presented to school students and the modes through which it is realized. Whilst the urgency and contingency of discussing migration in Italian schools emerges as a pushing factor, literary texts – often integrated with additional materials, such as glossaries and informative texts – are either seen as a means to introduce the topic of migration or perceived as particularly attractive objects that might enhance students' interest and motivation. Accordingly, the exceptional nature of school visits raises questions on whether such extra-curricular activities give students the chance to access the text and/or the first-hand life experience of the author. In this sense, the way in which writers position themselves will be discussed, looking in particular at the tensions between the agency of the writer and the educational apparatus provided by the educators involved.

The range of action of the cultural intermediaries involved and the nature of the audience that they target are two key points that allow a discussion around some similarities and differences between the content of this chapter and the analysis of the presence of migration literature on television shows broadcast by RAI in Chapter 4. Unlike the case studies examined in Chapters 2 and 3, both television and school professionals do not necessarily specialize or have a specific training in migration and/or literature. In this sense, shifting the focus of the analysis to their work as cultural intermediaries of migration literature raises some issues such as their selection criteria for texts and writers, as well as which topics are included or excluded when designing a specific output. When considering educational outputs, the existence of a corpus of materials available for educators shows that scholars, publishers, and educators themselves have shared a specific concern to provide teachers with tools and to facilitate the use of migration literature in class. Moreover, the involvement of educational administrators – like head teachers, as one of the case studies will show – and policy-makers in the field of education highlights the necessity to consider the work of a diverse range of professional figures, who operate at different levels. For

this reason, and in order to provide some context, this chapter explores in what ways local, national, and supranational policies have provided a fertile environment.

The work of cultural intermediaries active in both television and school is also characterized by the need to target a general audience, to be considered as such especially if compared to initiatives designed for other audiences, such as the public at a book launch: unlike other contexts, there is not a specific interest in migration literature that leads a single individual to take part in an event, nor an expectation that migration literature as such should be the focus of a school activity or a television show. The reason why these audiences are exposed to migration literature is in these cases a consequence of a decision by an agent who chooses to select this theme and insert it into their programme, be it a script for a television show or a school syllabus. For this reason, the modes through which a specific initiative is enacted depend on the interests and aims of the cultural intermediaries themselves. From this perspective, considering the intermediaries as market makers has a peculiar significance in these contexts because of their capacity to establish a market outside the circuits of experts, who have traditionally been identified as a privileged environment in which migration literature has been disseminated. In particular, despite the fact that school professionals are not involved in the production of migration literature, they have facilitated access for a large and diverse audience – especially when thinking of public education contexts that would not have been reached through other channels. Moreover, the interest of publishers in producing resources specifically for schools has to be seen not only as caused by increased attention from the general public towards migration, but more specifically to respond to the decision of educators to insert migration literature into their curricula and the consequent need to provide them with pedagogical support and suitable materials.

The first section of this chapter focuses on some examples of materials created for schools professionals, ranging from studies written for teacher training to textbooks. This section discusses the relationship between migration literature and the field of *intercultural*, as well as offering an analysis of how migration writings are presented in some textbooks and collections of essays for educators. The second section centres on writers' visits, and the expectations towards these initiatives from the point of view of both the organizers of the event and the authors themselves. While in the first section the work of the cultural intermediaries involved is crucial to determine and discuss the content of such materials, the analysis of the writers' visits

highlights a shift in agency from the cultural intermediary to the author: although the setting and purpose of these initiatives is still established by an agent, for example a teacher, the ownership of the content can still be reclaimed, as seen in Gabriella Ghermandi's choice to create a theatre version of her novel *Regina di fiori e di perle* to be performed on such occasions. In other words, the willingness to be in charge of one's own message tends to limit possible interference by any intermediaries other than the writers themselves. These choices also play a role in determining forms of artistic expression, creating a synergy between creative production and dissemination.

The presence of some teaching on migration literature at university level has been discussed by Mauceri. Although the data have changed since 2002, this study shows that around ten years after the birth of this production there was a need to see where it was taught and the details of the courses, such as which texts are taught.<sup>280</sup> In keeping with the way this thesis has been developed, this chapter focuses on educational spaces leaving aside initiatives involving university students (see Introduction) to examine schools. The analysis of such different educational outputs is by no means an attempt to summarize the very diverse set of initiatives that have been carried out, but rather to provide an overview of telling examples to explore the reasons why and the modes through which migration literature has been presented in this specific context. In this sense, the presence of various layers of cultural intermediation reflects and justifies the range of materials that this chapter considers, from textbooks to lesson plans and educational essays.

## 5.1 Books, anthologies, and pedagogy essays: migration literature entering the curriculum

### 5.1.1 *Why intercultural education*

This section offers some background context to the educational outputs that have been produced in the field of migration literature. In particular, it discusses in what ways migration literature has interacted with the notion of *intercultural*. *Intercultura* is a recurring keyword in the critical works on migration literature in the Italian context.

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<sup>280</sup> Maria Cristina Mauceri, 'La letteratura italiana della migrazione nei curricula universitari europei e nordamericani', in *Diaspore europee e lettere migranti*, ed. by Armando Gnisci and Nora Moll (Rome: Edizioni interculturali, 2002), pp. 145-150.

For example, *letteratura interculturale* is one of the labels that have been used to describe migration literature, stemming from Carmine Chiellino's work on contemporary literature in the German language (see Chapter 2). In these pages the focus is on intercultural education, to be intended as in contrast with other related fields such as intercultural communication.

The educational outputs on migration literature are often categorized under the label *interculturale*, which refers to a series of educational practices that have been pushed by the presence of students of foreign origin in Italian schools and developed in a broader discussion on how disciplines may be taught in inclusive ways. Portera explores the use of 'intercultural' as opposed to 'multicultural' and 'transcultural'. While 'multicultural' is indicated as an effective term to describe society, 'in the sense of the presence of people with different norms, values, religions and ways of thinking', he stresses that the inter- prefix in 'intercultural' highlights the exchanges and interactions that these educational practices promote.<sup>281</sup> The limitations of multicultural education, Portera claims, lie in the 'descriptive nature' of the prefix multi-, which recognizes the coexistence of more than one cultural context. Multicultural is therefore to be seen in opposition to the educational strategies that intercultural education actively encourages. The second principle that Portera discusses is transcultural education. Such 'educational strategies would aim to develop common universal elements: respect, peace, justice, environmental protection, human dignity, autonomy, etc.'.<sup>282</sup> Portera acknowledges the merits of such an approach, but at the same time considers its limitations: 'a view of the world is depicted here which is unrealistically supposed to be unitary, while in reality the world is very heterogeneous and fragmentary', claiming that transcultural education does not stress cultural differences. One consequence, he adds, could be a promotion of 'an "a-cultural" pedagogy or even pedagogy focused on the assimilation of minorities'.<sup>283</sup> This analysis clarifies the connotations of key terms that are used in educational materials, as well as in what ways the presence of groups of students with different cultural backgrounds may be approached by following (at least) one of these principles.

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<sup>281</sup> Agostino Portera, 'Intercultural Education in Europe: Epistemological and Semantic Aspects', *Intercultural Education*, 19, 6 (2008), 481-491 (p. 486).

<sup>282</sup> Portera, 481-491 (p. 484).

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

Favaro offers a definition of intercultural education that states explicitly the aims pursued and the domains that are of interest. She argues that

imparare a stabilire e a gestire le relazioni e gli incontri con le differenze introdotte negli spazi di vita da chi è (ancora) lontano e da chi ci vive accanto. È questo il primo compito dell'educazione interculturale. Per fare questo è necessario agire su due livelli: quello cognitivo e dell'informazione e quello affettivo, delle rappresentazioni reciproche e delle emozioni.<sup>284</sup>

The two levels that Favaro identifies reflect the main points that emerge when exploring the reasons why migration literature is introduced in educational outputs. As the next section of this chapter will discuss, the focus on representations, and the stress that these are *reciproche*, is one element that migration literature may offer to educators and emerges in the selection of texts and authors for anthologies and other publications. This definition adds to Portera's analysis that the pushing factor of the establishment of the discipline is the need to build a relationship with someone who is different: the proximity to people from other countries is presented by Favaro as a key element and the distance is also emphasized by the use of the pronoun *ci*, which refers not only to educators, namely the readers of the essay, but more in general to the Italian people. Accordingly, Favaro contextualizes the introduction and spreading of intercultural education by tracing the presence of the word *interculturale* in Italian laws and regulations. She mentions the Circolare Ministeriale 'La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale', which for the first time speaks about intercultural education and introduces it into Italian legislation.<sup>285</sup> Favaro stresses that a crucial document is the Pronuncia by the Consiglio Nazionale della Pubblica Istruzione, 'Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola'.<sup>286</sup> This document states that

l'educazione interculturale non si esaurisce nei problemi posti dalla presenza degli alunni stranieri a scuola, ma si estende alla

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<sup>284</sup> Graziella Favaro, 'L'educazione interculturale in Italia. Una scelta possibile e necessaria' in *L'interculturale dalla A alla Z*, ed. by Graziella Favaro and Lorenzo Luatti (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), pp. 21-37 (p. 21). Her italics.

<sup>285</sup> Ministero dell'Istruzione, 'Circolare Ministeriale n. 205/16 luglio 1990: La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale'.

<sup>286</sup> Favaro, pp. 21-37 (pp. 24-25). Consiglio Nazionale della Pubblica Istruzione, 'Pronuncia n. 73/2 marzo 1994: Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola'.

complessità del confronto fra le culture, nella dimensione europea e mondiale dell'insegnamento e costituisce la risposta più alta e globale al razzismo e all'antisemitismo.<sup>287</sup>

This document embraces a wider perspective – not only Italian, but also European and global – highlighting the role played by intercultural education in fighting discrimination. This element represents a step further in comparison to Portera's stress on 'interaction'. Interestingly, it also defines the challenges caused by the presence of students of foreign origin in Italian schools as *problemi*, a word that recurs in other publications that will be discussed in the following pages.

Lastly, Favaro notes that the term *interculturale* has progressively disappeared from the norms and regulations of the Italian Ministry of Education, and has been substituted by more general terms such as 'convivenza civile, educazione alla cittadinanza, diritti umani'.<sup>288</sup> However, she highlights that, despite this change in the terminology, the needs and policies that these documents have promoted have not decreased. Similarly, Portera points out that 'the concepts of intercultural education and pedagogy have been used frequently and can be found in many European documents, numerous books and school laws. Yet, it has emerged [...] that there is an on-going failure to provide a clear semantic definition or distinct epistemological foundation for the concept'.<sup>289</sup> Although it is problematic to provide a full definition of intercultural education, the elements that emerge from a comparison with multicultural and transcultural education suggest that it centres on the 'interaction' between individuals and the promotion of activities and strategies. This aspect is also highlighted by UNESCO, which defines interculturality as 'the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect'.<sup>290</sup> Accordingly, this point seems to echo what Moll identified as the 'portata interculturale' of migration literature as one of the innovative elements of this production. Quoting the work of Maalouf and his seminal book *On Identity*, Moll reflects on the tensions between identity and alterity in migration writing, especially when it is based on identitarian accounts. She highlights that the way in which migration literature addresses these

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<sup>287</sup> Favaro, pp. 21-37 (p. 25).

<sup>288</sup> Favaro, pp. 21-37 (p. 21).

<sup>289</sup> Portera, 481-491 (p. 484).

<sup>290</sup> UNESCO, Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005, Article 8.

themes may facilitate a discussion in educational contexts because it tends towards an ‘elaborazione critica e raramente nostalgica [...] di stereotipi etnici e culturali’, and she specifies that this characteristic is ‘apprezzata da un pubblico di insegnanti, studenti ed operatori interculturali’.<sup>291</sup>

Migration to Italy constituted a major cause that pushed educators to reflect on how to introduce practices that could promote dialogue and mutual understanding between cultures. Sinopoli, for example, argues that the aspects of migration literature that are stressed in book introductions, interviews, newspaper articles and online journals centre around migration and immigration as sociological issues, in order to nurture a discourse on integration and multiculturalism. She adds that, in these contexts, migrant writings are often presented as positive messages of peace and cohabitation within Italian society.<sup>292</sup> However, the field of intercultural education, and more generally studies and initiatives around *interculturalità*, have developed in Italy because of at least two other factors. On the one hand, there is the work carried out in previous years by supranational institutions, such as UNESCO and the European Union, as Fiorucci suggests.<sup>293</sup> Among the various policies, it has to be noted the formulation of an ‘intercultural competence’ in the Common European Framework for Languages, which stresses the link between language learning and a wider set of skills that may include the ‘knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the “world of origin” and the “world of the target community”’.<sup>294</sup> On the other hand, disciplines such as sociolinguistics worked towards the valuing and awareness of language diversity, as well as a reflection on the multilingual nature of Italy, not to be seen as a monolingual and monocultural country but in its linguistic richness and variety.<sup>295</sup> De Mauro has reflected on the series of factors that ‘trasforma in causa di svantaggio la diversità dialettale, culturale e sociale che caratterizza la grande massa dei lavoratori e della

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<sup>291</sup> Moll, ‘Il rinnovamento viene da “fuori”?’’, pp. 29-46 (p. 40).

<sup>292</sup> Franca Sinopoli, ‘Prime linee di tendenza’, 95-109 (p. 96-97).

<sup>293</sup> Massimiliano Fiorucci, *La mediazione culturale: strategie per l'incontro* (Rome: Armando Editore, 2007), pp. 47-53. See for example the UNESCO Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation (1966) and the European Council Directive 77/486/EEC of 25 July 1977 on the education of the children of migrant workers.

<sup>294</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, ed. by Council of Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>295</sup> See for example Mari D’Agostino, *Sociolinguistica dell’Italia contemporanea*.

popolazione italiana'.<sup>296</sup> From this perspective, in subsequent studies by linguists and specifically sociolinguists, a parallel emerges between dialects and the languages of immigrant communities, both to be seen in their respective relationship with the Italian language.

In this sense, the corpus of publications around migration literature in educational outputs needs to be contextualized within these tensions, taking into account the need to produce materials and resources for a generation of teachers who had to face these changes and include them in their teaching although they had not received specific training. These societal changes have subsequently had an impact on the training of teachers, as today intercultural education is part of the curriculum of university courses to train school teachers.

### 5.1.2 *Migration literature for teachers: centri interculturali and didattica interculturale*

A reflection around the link between *intercultural* and migration literature therefore needs to take into account the fact that cultural intermediaries involved in this area are professionals who are active at different levels: policy-makers, teachers and educators, head teachers, but also scholars writing materials for students and for teacher training. Cultural intermediaries not only work in the direction of the public, but also offer expertise and authority to other cultural intermediaries, for example in the case of materials for teachers or teacher training. Scholars and experts producing materials for teachers, for example, serve as cultural intermediaries to the extent that they provide teachers with materials and data that they could use in class. Teachers themselves, when planning their classes or organizing specific initiatives, serve as cultural intermediaries of migration literature. From this perspective, the selection of materials is filtered by many actors and adapted to an audience which is at each stage less generic and characterized by more specific needs. In a broader sense, these cultural intermediaries have the authority not only to insert migration literature into textbooks, but also to select activities from a textbook and use them in the classroom.

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<sup>296</sup> Tullio De Mauro, '10 tesi per l'educazione linguistica democratica' (1977) <<http://www.giscel.it/?q=content/dieci-tesi-leducazione-linguistica-democratica>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

There are various levels at which the link between migration literature and *intercultural* is more evident. First, it is interesting to explore the work of scholars and experts active in the field of intercultural education with a specific interest in migration literature. Luatti, Favaro, and Demetrio, among others, have worked extensively on various aspects of migration literature, such as children's literature (Luatti and Favaro), autobiography and narration of the self (Demetrio), and work with other authors to produce materials for school students (Favaro).<sup>297</sup> Their role as cultural intermediaries of migration literature is particularly interesting because of their work in the field of *intercultural*, for example in their capacity as coordinators at different levels for *centri interculturali* in Italy. These institutions foster a dialogue with local communities and networks, for example in projects and collaborations with schools and libraries.<sup>298</sup> Among her most recent roles, Favaro is part of the *Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'interculturalità*, in her capacity as coordinator of the Rete nazionale dei Centri interculturali. The Centro Come, one of the founding members of the Rete nazionale dei Centri interculturali that is directed by Favaro, was created in order to 'accompagnare i processi di trasformazione delle città in senso multiculturale e per costruire una società inclusiva'.<sup>299</sup>

The role of *centri interculturali* is particularly prominent considering that they support initiatives devoted to educators, some of which are devoted specifically to migration literature. For example, the *X Convegno Nazionale dei Centri Interculturali*, held in Bologna in 2007, was entitled 'Letterature migranti e identità urbane'. The editors of the proceedings explain the reasons behind this specific focus, stressing that 'la letteratura della migrazione possa rivelarsi particolarmente efficace in quanto contiene opportunità e spunti per creare interesse e curiosità per le altre culture, scambio di esperienze e, talvolta, traumi comuni, offrendo la possibilità di riconoscere una comune umanità'.<sup>300</sup> Migration literature is presented not only as a corpus of texts

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<sup>297</sup> Among the texts published by these three scholars: Duccio Demetrio and Graziella Favaro, *Didattica interculturale: nuovi sguardi, competenze, percorsi* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002); *L'interculturalità dalla A alla Z*, ed. by Graziella Favaro and Lorenzo Luatti (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004); Graziella Favaro and Lorenzo Luatti, *Il tempo dell'integrazione: i centri interculturali in Italia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008); Lorenzo Luatti, *E noi? Il 'posto' degli scrittori migranti nella narrativa per ragazzi* (Rome: Sinnos, 2010).

<sup>298</sup> A list of Italian *centri interculturali* can be found on <http://www.interculturatorino.it/centri-interculturali-in-italia/mappa-dei-centri/> [accessed 7 September 2017].

<sup>299</sup> See Centro Come, Website <[http://www.centrocome.it/?page\\_id=141](http://www.centrocome.it/?page_id=141)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>300</sup> Miriam Traversi and Mirca Ognisanti, 'Scrivere di sé, leggere di noi: il ruolo delle nuove espressioni migranti e il dibattito sulla città che cambia', in *Letterature migranti e identità urbane: i centri*

whose plots give the chance to encounter the other, but also a means to share experiences and identify common traits among different communities. Although migration literature is intended here as the production by translingual writers, this excerpt establishes that the implicit target of their production is therefore Italian people, who are understood to be in need of opportunities that may stimulate curiosity towards diversity. The introduction to the volume continues by specifying that ‘per noi italiani [...] da questa esperienza può nascere una riflessione importante e necessaria sul tema dell’identità multipla e non rigida, sulla consapevolezza di chi siamo diventati, ripercorrendo e riappropriandoci delle tappe più significative della nostra storia’.<sup>301</sup> The stress on the Italian belonging of both the authors and the readers suggests that there is the expectation of a shared concern on the themes that the authors list. Although not explicitly, the reference to Italian history and its reappropriation seems to connect immigration to Italy to other experiences of mobility that have characterized Italian history, thus encouraging empathy and mutual understanding towards immigrants. However, the reflection on the need to see identity as multiple – and, by extension, the purpose of the whole book to promote the other as a means to ‘riconoscersi in una comune umanità’ – contrasts with the stress on Italian-ness, which is in itself an abstract, ‘rigid’ definition. Moreover, the emphasis added by the repetition ‘noi italiani... nostra storia’ reinforces an opposition between Italian and non-Italian people, which is also counterintuitive if considering the purposes of the volume.

Interestingly, the volume also asks questions about the role that *centri interculturali* may play in disseminating migration literature, in order to ‘far conoscere questi scrittori e scrittrici a un pubblico più ampio e per superare l’idea diffusa che la letteratura migrante sia un genere di nicchia, poco influente sia rispetto ai problemi primari e di diritti negati a una parte della popolazione’.<sup>302</sup> Migration literature is therefore recognized as a means to discuss rights and problems related to migration, which are described as relevant to a general public and not only to a niche readership. This is particularly significant when considering that the volume was created to make

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*interculturali e la promozione di spazi pubblici di espressione, narrazione e ricomposizione identitaria*, ed. by Miriam Traversi and Mirca Ognissanti (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008), pp. 11-19 (p. 13).

<sup>301</sup> Traversi and Ognissanti, pp. 11-19 (pp. 13-14).

<sup>302</sup> Traversi and Ognissanti, pp. 11-19 (p. 15).

the experience of the Convegno available to educators, perpetuating the mission of the Convegno to create contact between experts and school operators, teachers and NGOs.

One of the purposes of the volume is also to stress the importance of bringing migration literature to public places in the city, such as public schools. This point is raised when discussing the impact that cultural initiatives play in the territory, for example in the essay on the Casa di Khaoula.<sup>303</sup> From this perspective, initiatives with a focus on migration literature are seen as contributing to the creation of spaces that ‘consentano ai nuovi cittadini di parlare, raccontarsi, rappresentarsi’ in order to ‘inaugurare una nuova fase della società multietnica, in cui i migranti non sono più ospiti cui dare il benvenuto, ma nuovi cittadini che arricchiscono la città di accenti, lingue, rappresentazioni e storie diversi, ma non troppo’.<sup>304</sup> Finally, the Appendix of the volume by Milena Zuppiroli, in particular, presents a list and brief descriptions of initiatives that have been created to facilitate an encounter between migration literature and the territory.<sup>305</sup>

Whilst some publications, such as *Letterature migranti e identità urbane*, focus uniquely on migration literature to implement a discourse around intercultural education, others discuss and signal the inclusion of migration literature by describing it as one of the fields that may be taken into account when considering different disciplinary fields that contribute to the debate on intercultural education. An example is the chapter on migration literature included in the volume *Educare diversamente*, whose sections and chapters include disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and religion.<sup>306</sup> Despite the presence of different disciplinary areas – which may allow and justify the inclusion of a chapter specifically on literature – the backcover of the volume reads: ‘Non mancano poi alcuni saggi che aprono piste di ricerca su versanti disciplinari differenti, come quello di Massimiliano Fiorucci sulla letteratura scritta

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<sup>303</sup> Michele Righini, ‘L’educazione interculturale fra scuola e biblioteca pubblica: la biblioteca “Casa di Khaoula” di Bologna’ in *Letterature migranti e identità urbane*, pp. 253-261. On activities in *centri interculturali* in Bologna see also Naomi Wells, ‘Transnational Flows and Translanguaging Practices: Exploring Multilingual Subjectivities in Contemporary Italy’, in *Transnational Italian Studies*, ed. by Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi and Marco Santello (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>304</sup> Traversi and Ognissanti, pp. 11-19 (p. 12).

<sup>305</sup> Milena Zuppiroli, ‘Linguaggi urbani e letteratura migrante “in rete”’, in *Letterature migranti e identità urbane*, pp. 293-310.

<sup>306</sup> Massimiliano Fiorucci, ‘Scritture in movimento. Letteratura e testimonianze delle migrazioni’, in *Educare diversamente*, pp. 215-229.

dagli immigrati in lingua italiana'.<sup>307</sup> Unlike other examples that this chapter explores, *Educare diversamente* does not necessarily speak to teachers of literature or linguistic subjects, but invites educators to consider migration literature – among other materials from other disciplinary areas – as a tool to introduce topics that may be relevant in starting a discussion, from an intercultural education perspective. This example raises questions on the use of these literary texts in class, and in particular on whether they are selected because of their literary nature or for the content that they convey, which Fiorucci defines in the title of the essay as *testimonianze*.

Among the publications that explore practices that have been developed in Italy, some studies discuss the application of intercultural approaches in the contexts of each specific disciplinary field, to review the way in which disciplines are taught in order to establish inclusive ways of conceiving teaching. The range of action that intercultural education has had over the years has progressively been considered not only as a set of practices that could be used in specific contexts, such as classes with a high presence of students of foreign origin, but also and more interestingly as an approach that crosses disciplines and learning environments. As Fiorucci puts it, 'tra l'immigrazione e l'educazione interculturale, esiste, in un certo senso, un legame "originario" anche se, successivamente, l'educazione interculturale ha assunto una valenza educativa propria, indipendentemente dal fenomeno migratorio'.<sup>308</sup>

In this respect, one of the most quoted works is the series published by Editrice Missionaria Italiana and edited by the CEM – Centro Educazione alla mondialità based in Brescia, the *Quaderni dell'interculturalità*. The introduction to the series confirms the interest in applying intercultural education to specific disciplinary fields. It reads: 'l'approccio interculturale si applica alla prassi didattica ordinaria e si configura come un nuovo orientamento pedagogico e didattico'.<sup>309</sup> These volumes apply *interculturalità* to a number of disciplines, from geography to geometry, in order to identify new strategies to 'affrontare il problema della presenza dell'alunno straniero in classe'.<sup>310</sup> The reference to the presence of the foreign student is made explicit, and the introductory section of the book explores the importance of valuing the student's first

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<sup>307</sup> *Educare diversamente: migrazioni, differenze, interculturalità*, ed. by Donatello Santarone (Rome: Franco Angeli, 2006).

<sup>308</sup> Massimiliano Fiorucci, *La mediazione culturale*, p. 48.

<sup>309</sup> Antonella Fucecchi, *Didattica interculturale della lingua e della letteratura*, Quaderni dell'interculturalità, 5 (Bologna: EMI, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* Her italics.

language, describing Italy as ‘una realtà non più monoculturale e monolingvistica’.<sup>311</sup> Although the presence of non-Italian students has affected the composition of Italian classes and made some specific interventions necessary, it would be hard to define the Italian situation that precedes immigration as monocultural – because of the presence of minorities, for example – or monolingual, if considering factors such as the presence and prominence of dialects. On the one hand, teaching strategies from intercultural education may constitute a tool to address an already existing diversity in Italian classes, following De Mauro’s indications on the importance of valuing dialects and cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, inclusive teaching that aims to develop various types of intercultural competences is made necessary not by the presence of students in a specific class, but more widely to promote practices of dialogue and ‘interaction’ among cultures, to put it in Portera’s words.

An analysis of the volume of the series devoted to languages and literature, *Didattica interculturale della lingua e della letteratura*, shows where migration literature has been positioned among the topics and examples that are identified as being useful to promote intercultural education in the teaching of linguistic subjects. The aim of the volume is to reiterate that the study of languages – to be intended both as Italian and foreign languages – and literatures is in itself intercultural, but that it is necessary to work in a way that stresses the intercultural nature of this content. The author also identifies two objectives that teachers should ‘abituare gli alunni a cogliere: a) la complessità del fenomeno linguistico, nel tempo e nello spazio, b) il contributo che i contatti tra i popoli offrono all’evoluzione delle lingue e di conseguenza alla produzione letteraria’.<sup>312</sup> The key concept of the sentence seems to be ‘abituare a cogliere’, as the intrinsic intercultural nature of the subjects suggests that teachers need to develop more awareness of the complexity of the issues discussed in class, rather than necessarily introducing new topics.

However, the three texts of migration literature that are mentioned – the classic trio of early texts, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, *La promessa di Hamadi* and *Chiamatemi Ali* – are not presented in a separate section of the book, but as part of the ‘Percorsi didattici’, a section with a brief list of activities concluding each chapter that teachers may use in class to work on that specific content, including some suggestions on the

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<sup>311</sup> Fucecchi, p. 10.

<sup>312</sup> Fucecchi, p. 12.

objectives of the teaching activities and the materials that can be used. This particular chapter is entitled ‘Due esempi di produzione letteraria interculturale’ and explores the ‘koine linguistica veneto-portoghese’ in Brazil and literary production in Arabic Sicily. When focusing on the presence of migration literature in this book, the accessibility of this content is a key concern: only readers interested in searching for possible ‘Percorsi didattici’ for these topics will find out about migration literature in Italian, as it is not signalled in the introductory section of the volume or in the index, or elsewhere in the chapter itself. Despite the poor visibility given to the pages devoted to the activities on migration literature, it is significant that the volume suggests a link between very diverse literary production, and in particular promoting a parallel between a literature of immigration and a literature of emigration. Whilst in the case of the koine veneto-brasiliana the stress is on texts written in Italian and the experience of an Italian community abroad that produced literary activities in Brazil, the three texts are briefly presented as production in the Italian language whose aim is to discuss immigration in Italy today: ‘in Italia sta emergendo una narrativa, costituita dai romanzi dell’immigrazione, apprezzabili non solo come testimonianze che illustrano o denunciano le condizioni di vita dell’immigrato, ma perché hanno una loro dignità letteraria’.<sup>313</sup> An element to consider is the reference to the *dignità letteraria* of these texts, as for other sections of the volume the author did not find it necessary to highlight such a detail, nor to clarify what *dignità letteraria* is and whether it is necessary to assess it to introduce a text in class. A chapter of the book is devoted to the work of the writers Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka, stressing that ‘sarebbe tuttavia grave e imperdonabile trascurare il tema del colonialismo culturale e dei suoi effetti sulle lingue degli altri’ and highlighting the fact that both of them are Nobel Prize winners.<sup>314</sup> The different recognition that these two sets of writers have received may have played a role in the planning of the book, and in the decisions on the kind of space and visibility to be given to each of them.

Moreover, the two pages that refer to the three texts are structured as brief summaries of the plots that highlight elements that may be discussed in class, or considered by the teacher when selecting or presenting the books to their students. Each text is introduced only briefly, but it is significant that the little information

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<sup>313</sup> Fucecchi, p. 82.

<sup>314</sup> Fucecchi, p. 12.

provided both refers to aspects that are of interest in *intercultural* and at the same time appears controversial if compared to other sections of the book, or in general when assessing texts to be used in class. In the few lines on *Io, venditore di elefanti*, the role of the co-author Pivetta is described as crucial, as the author states that the book ‘nasce con l’indispensabile mediazione di un italiano [...] poiché l’insufficiente conoscenza della lingua avrebbe impedito a Pap di raccontarsi’.<sup>315</sup> Another point that is stressed is that it is a ‘storia di un’integrazione, e i suoi interlocutori sono gli italiani e non i parenti rimasti in patria’. Highlighting this point could be seen as an incentive for teachers to use this text in class to start a discussion about integration, although in this case the message that is conveyed is that integration is only expected to take place in the direction of immigrants adjusting to the context of the destination culture. Second, *La promessa di Hamadi* is presented as a book that may be used in class as a text to work on the narrative structure of the novel. Following this line of analysis, the author specifies that ‘la posizione del narratore è inclassificabile in base ai nostri criteri narrativi’ and this is due to the fact that the book ‘risente della cultura d’origine animistica dell’autore’.<sup>316</sup> The use of the possessive *nostri* shows the opposition and the distance between the text and its potential readers. Moreover, the observation on narrative criteria that might be more familiar to the reader sharpens a dichotomy between a narration that is considered regular and normative versus a text that presents some characteristics that belong to somewhere else, whether related to animism or not. The description also states that ‘il romanzo si prefigge fini didattici perché presenta in appendice un apparato esplicativo che delinea alcuni tratti della cultura senegalese’.<sup>317</sup> As the next section will show, the paratext of the De Agostini edition of *La promessa di Hamadi* also includes exercises for students and a glossary.

All in all, despite scarce visibility in the volume, the inclusion of these three texts shows an interest towards the production of non-Italian born authors, which is significant when considering the aim of the book to select a few representative texts that may be chosen by literature or foreign language teachers. However, the selection in itself proves to be insufficient – if not misleading – to make teachers aware of the range of possibilities that these books may offer in class. This example highlights the complexity of the transmission and manipulation of content in publications for

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<sup>315</sup> Fucecchi, p. 82.

<sup>316</sup> Fucecchi, p. 83.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

educators, especially given that both the authors of the studies and the teachers who will use the book serve as cultural intermediaries for migration literature.

### 5.1.3 *Students working on texts: La promessa di Hamadi and Parole di Babele*

Migration literature has not only been included in more comprehensive and interdisciplinary educational materials or collections of essays, as outlined in the previous section, but it has also been published in works specifically devoted to being accessed and used by school students. Recent studies have attempted to establish the idea that migration literature may be introduced in schools from an intercultural perspective. For example, Gisbussi reflects on the use of literary texts to promote intercultural dialogue. She argues that ‘nell’ambito delle letture antologiche la scelta di testi della “letteratura della migrazione” possa essere significativa’.<sup>318</sup> She also points out that not every text is suitable to be included, and lists some criteria to be used. Among the criteria, when she refers to writers, she states that ‘il loro punto di vista esperienziale non è irrilevante; [...] secondo una prospettiva socio letteraria, esso può contribuire a costruire una visione diversa sul “mondo” in cui vivono tanto gli autoctoni quanto chi ha origini straniere’.<sup>319</sup> This position reiterates the depiction of writers as witnesses to the extent that it values the use of texts of migration literature because of their first-hand access to an experience of migration. It also stresses the existence of a selection process operated by educators, which is necessary when composing an anthology of texts. In this sense, and considering the optional nature of these materials, the intermediation of the educators is key to determine and discuss the way in which texts of migration literature are presented to students.

In particular, *La promessa di Hamadi* and *Parole di Babele. Percorsi didattici sulla letteratura dell’immigrazione*, a novel and an anthology respectively, were published by publishers working in the education sector.<sup>320</sup> From an analysis of the structure of these textbooks and the activities that they present, it seems that migration literature has been proposed to students for at least two reasons: first, as texts that

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<sup>318</sup> Francesca Gisbussi, ‘L’educazione letteraria nella classe plurilingue-pluriculturale attraverso la letteratura della migrazione in italiano: una ricerca-opzione per l’educazione interculturale.’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli studi di Macerata, 2013).

<sup>319</sup> Gisbussi, p. 116.

<sup>320</sup> P. A. Micheletti and Saidou Moussa Ba, *La promessa di Hamadi* (Novara: Istituto geografico de Agostini, 1994); Davide Rigallo and Donatella Sasso, *Parole di Babele percorsi didattici sulla letteratura dell’immigrazione* (Turin: Loescher, 2002).

could introduce the topic of migration allowing a discussion on the themes arising from the narration, for example thanks to the informative pages that accompany the primary text; second, as textbooks that could be instrumental to practice and develop linguistic skills related to texts and writing in the learning of Italian – to be intended as the students' first, vehicular language – such as narratology and more generally textual analysis, as appropriate to the level of the student. However, it is implied that the choice to use these texts would be linked to the teacher's willingness to explore the topic of migration, which could motivate and stimulate the students' interest in the content of the text.

Considering *La promessa di Hamadi* from this perspective is instrumental to highlight that this book was conceived as a text with educational purposes, as well as accompanied by a set of activities that could offer the teachers some materials to work on the text. This characteristic of the De Agostini edition is not necessarily stressed in the scholarship on migration literature when the book is discussed. Interestingly, the glossary of the book has been quoted by Parati and Comberiati as a source to discuss the origin of the term *vu-cumpra*' and included in two sections of their books in which they provide and discuss issues and information of a general order about immigration to Italy.<sup>321</sup> Although neither of them stresses that the glossary is part of a wider apparatus of additional reading and exercises, it is interesting that this paratext in the book is used as a source for scholars to discuss linguistic issues, which may suggest that the additional materials provided by the two co-authors are read and used not only by its intended readers, but have also served as a source for scholarship.<sup>322</sup> The paratext is not mentioned when Parati, speaking about *La promessa di Hamadi* and *La memoria di A.*, explains that the publisher De Agostini 'marketed them as educational texts that catered to pedagogical programs devoted to multiculturalism in Italian schools'.<sup>323</sup> Although the idea of marketing a text as educational could explain the choice of inserting these additional pages, this does not highlight the fact that the writing process itself of the novel was influenced by the idea that it would be read by school students. While reflecting on the autobiographical instances in books such as *Io, venditore di elefanti*, *Immigrato*, and *Chiamatemi Ali*, Taddeo stresses that *La promessa di Hamadi* is instead 'una fiction particolare che ha scopo didattico' and adds that the intended

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<sup>321</sup> Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro*, p. 41; Graziella Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 46.

<sup>322</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 46.

<sup>323</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 99.

readership for the texts is substantially different from other texts that were written in those years: 'I primi tre si rivolgono al grande pubblico italiano [...] quello di Ba e Micheletti si prefigge di parlare a ragazzi in età scolare che va dalla terza media al biennio di scuola media superiore'.<sup>324</sup>

The volume includes an apparatus of exercises designed by the co-writer of the book, who is a school teacher. This exercise section focuses on textual analysis, which is part of the literary education that students receive at that age. Some pages of the volume interrupt the novel to focus on migration in Italy today and integrate what is narrated in the story with data. These central pages are printed on laminated, colour pages in the 1991 edition, which make them particularly visible if compared to the paper used for the rest of the book. This publication seems to use migration literature as a means to access a more general knowledge of literary studies, to acquire skills that can be transferred to the analysis of other texts. At the same time, the sections in which elements for discussion are identified make the topic of the text a central concern and part of a wider discourse that stresses the importance of discussing migration in schools.

A similar approach can be seen in the anthology *Parole di Babele*, an anthology of texts that were published in the nineties, which were chosen as representative to present migration literature to school students. Each unit of the book includes some excerpts from the texts, introduced by a brief description and followed by exercises. The chapters alternate with sections called 'Scheda', which are informative texts providing data on migration to Italy. The volume concludes with a 'Vocabolario', a glossary collecting words that are introduced in the chapters as specific to discussing migration. The exercises are organized into various sections such as 'Comprendere' and 'Produrre'. Sasso, one of the co-authors, defined it as 'un'antologia di tipo classico', referring to the organization of the sections that follows what can be seen as a typical way of organizing an anthology for school students.<sup>325</sup> Despite that, the book presents some characteristics and activities that are strictly linked to the specific theme of the anthology. First, Sasso comments on the decision to divide the text into three sections, which recreate the three phases of a migration

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<sup>324</sup> Taddeo, *Letteratura nascente*, p. 88.

<sup>325</sup> Donatella Sasso, 'Parole Di Babele: confusione delle lingue o nuove potenzialità comunicative?', in *Eufemia. Educarci alla convivenza con le parole dell'altro*. Conference proceedings <[http://www.bibliolab.it/costituzione/atti\\_educarci%20alla%20convivenza.pdf](http://www.bibliolab.it/costituzione/atti_educarci%20alla%20convivenza.pdf)> [accessed 8 August 2017], p. 51.

experience.<sup>326</sup> Second, after a brief text entitled ‘Come si entra in Italia’, a ‘Scheda’ that illustrates various permits and regulations, an exercise requires students to fill in the ‘modulo di richiesta di visto’, using a facsimile of the form reproduced in the book.<sup>327</sup> This activity invites students to consider the experience of filling in a form, an activity that distances itself from more traditional exercises that are included in anthologies because of its practice-oriented, technical use of language. On the one hand, this approach to language education goes beyond the study of literary works and considers more factual contexts of real life, expanding specific skills that are essential to what Balboni would define as ‘educazione linguistica’.<sup>328</sup> On the other hand, this type of activity suggests that the aim of the exercise is not exhausted by linguistic education, but also aims to make students acquainted with procedures that regulate immigration to Italy, and to some extent experience the task of filling in such forms. Interestingly, the second part of the exercise asks the students to consider the information that is in the forms, referring if necessary to the ‘Scheda’, and to make a decision about the applications of the other students. The aims of this exercise are not stated explicitly in the textbook, leaving open the interpretation of the final aim of such an activity. In particular, if assuming that the aim of the exercise is to raise awareness on the criteria that regulate the ‘richiesta di visto’, it is crucial to note that a discussion around the application process itself is suggested implicitly by the exercise, which only requires students to assess other applications. A further step could have been a reflection on the existing criteria, which would invite students to collect ideas, make hypotheses, and in general brainstorm on how legalized migration works in Italy. The limits of such an exercise are established by the purpose of the publication, which is presented as an anthology of literary texts. However, the presence of informative texts – which integrate fictional texts with factual information and provide an insight on data – is in itself a statement that makes the book serve not only as ‘un’antologia di tipo classico’, as Sasso stated, but as a more complex tool to make students better acquainted with the topic of immigration to Italy.

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<sup>326</sup> Sasso, p. 51-52.

<sup>327</sup> Rigallo and Sasso, pp. 29-30, pp. 44-45.

<sup>328</sup> Paolo Ernesto Balboni, *Fare educazione linguistica: insegnare italiano, lingue straniere e lingue classiche* (Turin: UTET, 2013).

## 5.2 Writers in schools

The presence of writers in schools is generally linked to initiatives that aim to promote literacy and creative writing. The Piccoli Maestri association, for example, focuses on encouraging ‘il piacere della lettura’ in public schools in Italy and unites over one hundred writers that may be invited to discuss a book of their choice with school students.<sup>329</sup> However, the analysis of some initiatives that invite migration writers to schools shows that a prominent aim is to encourage students and teachers to explore the topic of migration. In particular, the existence of specific projects that centre on the involvement of migration writers suggests that authors are selected in the first instance because of their personal history, excluding de facto other writers that do not share the same life experience. These initiatives provide a controlled environment that allows writers to enter schools thanks to the mediation of educators – teachers, principals, organizers – because of the existence of a project that establishes a format to be followed and suggests the themes or sub-themes to discuss. Although the choice to invite a writer demonstrates an interest in using a literary text as a means to discuss the theme of migration, the modes and aims of a specific event may vary. Some of the crucial variables to explore are: whether students are given access to the text and read it before meeting the author; the types of activities that students do to prepare for the visit, if they prepare at all; whether the topic of the visit is the text itself, or tends to move away from it and focus on the topic of migration because of the first-hand experience of the writer. While the next section focuses on the case of Gabriella Ghermandi, and how taking part in these events has impacted her creative practice, in this section the analysis of the event *Culture e letteratura della migrazione* helps to discuss in what ways the presence of a number of teachers working independently from each other but under the same project has resulted in different outcomes.

*Voci dal silenzio* has promoted several editions of the event *Culture e letteratura della migrazione* – according to their website, the 15th edition of the event took place in 2016 – in which school students could focus on the work of a specific author and meet him or her.<sup>330</sup> The first edition of the event took place in Ferrara and was promoted by ‘Cies, dall’Associazione Cittadini del Mondo e dall’Università degli Studi di Ferrara – Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, con il patrocinio della Regione Emilia

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<sup>329</sup> Piccoli Maestri, Website <<http://www.piccolimaestri.org/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>330</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, Website <[www.digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/](http://www.digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/)> [accessed 15 December 2017].

Romagna, della Provincia e del Comune di Ferrara’.<sup>331</sup> *Voci dal silenzio* has also devoted a section of their website, which is hosted by the Comune di Ferrara, to a collection of the ‘Esperienze didattiche’ that were realized in preparation for the event. These materials allow reflection on the various ways in which migration authors have been involved in school activities, as they range from excerpts by an author, to the description of the activities that they did in class, to comments by the teachers who planned the activity. As the organizers state, ‘sono nati interessanti e a volte originali lavori individuali e di gruppo: letture critiche, laboratori di scrittura, prove di drammatizzazione’.<sup>332</sup> When outlining the experience of a class working on a text by Carmine Abbate, for example, the *Voci dal silenzio* website reports some suggestions on how to use the text for a close-reading exercise with first-year students of *scuole superiori*.<sup>333</sup>

As the introduction to the collection states, the event should therefore be seen as the final event of a long-term initiative that has involved ‘studentesse e studenti degli Istituti superiori di Ferrara’. The event has given the participants the chance to present their activities in front of other students, the writers, and the organizers of the event. The activities of the previous months are described as ‘qualcosa di diverso dalle consuete attività didattiche’, stressing the distance between the regular course of curricular activities and the participation in such projects.<sup>334</sup> The exceptionality of these educational initiatives, their not being *consuete*, highlights the fact that migration literature is a topic that has not entered the curriculum, but it is necessary to take part in a specific project, when available, to be able to access it. On the one hand, the possibility itself to be involved in an event outside school, and to be able to meet the author whose work was read in class, has contributed to the exceptionality of the event. The encounter with the writer interestingly revolves around the moment when students report the various types of output that they produced in class. On the other hand, as one of the teachers put it, the phase of the project that preceded the encounter allowed a ‘confronto con i testi letterari, attività tradizionalmente poco appassionante per ragazzi di un istituto professionale (“Profe, ma dobbiamo proprio leggere dei

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<sup>331</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, ‘Presentazione curatori’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/presentazionecuratori.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>332</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, ‘Introduzione’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/esperienzeintroduzione.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>333</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, ‘Esperienze – Abate’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/esperienzeabate.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

libri?’’).<sup>335</sup> Similarly to other cases discussed in the first section of this chapter, the use of migration literature is identified and described as an element that has motivated students to access and appreciate literary texts. In particular, the output that that specific group of students produced was a laboratorio di scrittura ‘durante il quale, attraverso le suggestioni fornite dalle nostre letture e discussioni, ci siamo cimentati nel tentativo di scrivere alcune poesie e alcuni racconti’.<sup>336</sup>

Thanks to the format of the initiative, in *Culture e letteratura della migrazione* students were not only acquainted with the text, but also invited to re-work it and/or use it as a starting point to develop their own creative work. Students who had worked on the poems by Sandra Clementina Ammendola produced poems and short compositions, which are accompanied by a short note of presentation by the head teacher of the school: ‘un ringraziamento particolare va rivolto all’azione dei docenti che si sono fatti promotori e artefici dell’iniziativa’ that recognizes and highlights the fact that each teacher has approached the texts and the ways to employ them in class in different ways.<sup>337</sup> The work of adapting general directives to the needs of specific students, choosing among a range of possible texts and authors, and planning ad hoc activities makes the figure of the teachers involved in this project agents of dissemination for migration literature.

In this sense, an interesting experience is the one offered by the teacher Silvia Sansonetti. First, she describes the way in which she started planning the activity following the directives of the project: ‘quale docente di Storia, avevo inizialmente escluso di occuparmi dell’aspetto letterario, quindi dell’analisi dei testi degli scrittori, per accogliere invece la proposta del CIES di una riflessione sul fenomeno migratorio attraverso un taglio di tipo storico’.<sup>338</sup> Second, she explains the way in which she managed to link the aims and texts proposed by the project to her discipline-specific curriculum. She observes that the writer Julio Monteiro Martins ‘utilizza spesso personaggi o momenti storici come materiale per i suoi racconti. Da qui è nata l’idea di provare a utilizzare il suo racconto ‘Le due città’ per introdurre gli allievi in una delle vicende storiche che si dovevano studiare: le rivolte sociali e religiose scoppiate

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<sup>335</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, ‘Esperienze – Khouma’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/esperienzepap.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Voci dal Silenzio, ‘Esperienze – Ammendola’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/esperienzeammendola.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>338</sup> Silvia Sansonetti, ‘Incontro con Julio Monteiro Martins’ <<http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/esperienzejulio.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

in Europa alla fine del '300, in particolare quella degli hussiti'. Lastly, she highlights in what ways the chance offered by the texts and, in general, by this initiative has nurtured the motivation of students. She comments: 'Sicuramente l'accostamento di queste vicende storiche, dopo la lettura di "Le due città" di J. Monteiro Martins, ha potuto avvalersi di un aumento della motivazione e dell'interesse degli allievi'.<sup>339</sup>

Whilst *Culture e letteratura della migrazione* offers an example of a publicly-funded, long-term project, the work of many writers has revolved around smaller-scale projects, sometimes existing simply because of an invitation by a single teacher. Another element to be considered is that inviting a writer to visit a school is not necessarily only linked to their work as writers, but to other activities that made them active in the educational sector. If looking at the work of Mohamed Ba, for example, it would be misleading to start from his only book to explore his activity in schools, where he has worked for years as an actor and cultural mediator. In particular, his *Il tempo dalla mia parte* presents interesting intersections between his autobiography and other people's migration experiences, and he also mentions the fact that his being a cultural mediator led to writing, and the mission to report other people's stories.<sup>340</sup> In other words, his activities in school started before the publication of his first novel, which was conceived and inspired by his work.

Similarly, Kossi Komla-Ebri conducts activities with students of various ages, from very young children to university students. Because of his double identity as a surgeon and a writer, his visits to schools are related to various campaigns or initiatives – such as the recent *Germogli Recisi* campaign – ranging from literature to health issues.<sup>341</sup> As he pointed out in an interview, 'impegno il mio tempo libero in associazione come mediatore interculturale nel mondo della scuola e della sanità'.<sup>342</sup> In terms of overlaps between his work as a writer and his commitment to visit schools, his *Imbarazzismi* and *Nuovi Imbarazzismi* could also be put in dialogue with his dissemination activities, for example if taking into account the fact that the books collect sketches and anecdotes along the same lines of those that he uses in his school

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Mohamed Ba, *Il tempo dalla mia parte*.

<sup>341</sup> Germogli Recisi, Website <<http://www.germoglirecisi.com/index.php?lang=it>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>342</sup> Kossi Komla-Ebri, 'Intervista' <<http://ww3.comune.fe.it/vocidalsilenzio/intervistakossi.htm>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

visits.<sup>343</sup> As the next section shows, Gabriella Ghermandi's work constitutes a further telling example of how artistic practices may intersect with the contingencies of a dissemination event.

### 5.2.1 Gabriella Ghermandi

Ghermandi has served as a cultural intermediary for migration literature at many levels. Whilst her role in coordinating the editorial board of *El-Ghibli* has been explored in Chapter 3, this section focuses on how her activities in schools – or, in general, in dissemination events – have had an impact on her creative and artistic practice. An element to consider is that Ghermandi, like Ba and Komla-Ebri, is also involved in dissemination initiatives that go beyond the interest in her novel. For example, she is the creator of the Atse Tewodros project, which fuses traditional Ethiopian music with jazz and other Western musical expressions to open up dialogue and exchange, also thanks to her collaboration with other artists.<sup>344</sup>

When taking part in a seminar at the University of Warwick, Gabriella Ghermandi linked the existence itself of her theatrical piece *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2009) to her participation in events in which she was asked to speak about her novel of the same name. Her reflection started by questioning the kind of narrative that the organizers of initiatives could develop around her novel. Ghermandi commented on the participation of migration writers in these events, stating that 'i migranti attirano', therefore suggesting that there is a link between the presence of non-Italian born authors and the expectation of getting a first-hand account of their life experiences.

When asked about her feelings when presenting her book to an audience, Ghermandi stressed the importance of considering the book as an object that has a separate identity from its author, living an autonomous life.<sup>345</sup> In producing a theatre version of the novel, she claimed her agency as a writer who wants to be in charge of the message that her words convey, and for this reason chooses an artistic representation over a more fluid format for a school visit. This choice also highlights

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<sup>343</sup> Komla-Ebri, *Imbarazzismi*. Kossi Komla-Ebri, *Nuovi imbarazzismi: quotidiani imbarazzi in bianco e nero... e a colori* (Milan: Edizioni dell'Arco; Marna, 2004). These collections of sketches reflect on the stereotypes that recur in everyday encounters with blackness and, more generally, cultural diversity in Italy. See Marie Orton, 'Writing the Nation: Migration Literature and National Identity', *Italian Culture*, 30, 1 (2012), 21-37.

<sup>344</sup> Ghermandi's website is interestingly divided into two main sections, 'music' and 'writing'.

<sup>345</sup> My interview, 21 September 2017.

the fact that she values the moment in which the creative elaboration happens, which is not in front of the audience. In this sense, the range of activity of the cultural intermediaries involved in such initiatives is more limited, as within the time of the performance Ghermandi could interact with her public directly, in a space that is established by herself and thanks to her own artistic production. She also stressed the importance of the emotional side of this choice, which is linked to having her public participate in an event in a different ways, entering the story and being 'parte della storia', rather than passively listening to, for example, a question and answer session.<sup>346</sup> She also described her performance as a moment of encounter with her audience and a chance to give her artistic production a voice, and not just herself as a person.

The need to communicate her work, and in particular to speak about her novel in public events such as school visits, triggered in Ghermandi the need to use different forms of artistic expression, which can be seen as a rewriting of the novel. Considering the performance *Regina di fiori e di perle* as a rewriting is interesting when looking at the genesis of the novel. On the one hand, the relationship between the novel and Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere* is stated clearly in the 'Ringraziamenti' at the end of Regina: 'da quel romanzo, infatti, è nata l'idea di questo'.<sup>347</sup> On the other hand, the collection of voices and experiences that Ghermandi performs and recognizes constitutes in itself a work of elaboration and rewriting: 'se dovessi dire che questo romanzo è solo opera mia, mentirei. Io sono solo stata colei che ha raccolto tutte le voci'.<sup>348</sup> In her *Postfazione* to the novel, Lombardi-Diop records that 'il romanzo è infatti frutto di un lavoro durato mesi, in cui l'autrice ha ascoltato, registrato e trascritto le storie di tante persone' and points out the importance of the orality: 'a differenza di quello dello storico, il cui lavoro di selezione e interpretazione delle fonti risponde a un principio di attendibilità, il processo di selezione e d'indagine della Ghermandi risponde a strategie letterarie e alle esigenze della forma narrativa orale. L'oralità è il principio strutturante del romanzo'.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> On Flaiano and Ghermandi, among others, see Silvia Camilotti, *Ripensare la letteratura e l'identità: la narrativa italiana di Gabriella Ghermandi e Jarmila Očková* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012).

<sup>348</sup> Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Postfazione', in Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Donzelli Roma, 2011), pp. 305-313.

<sup>349</sup> Lombardi-Diop, pp. 305-313 (p. 309).

From this perspective, the decision by Ghermandi to resist the chance to speak about her novel, and rather to give the audience the opportunity to take part in her performance, takes on a particular significance. Her practice of rewriting *Regina*, of intermedial translation including (at least) theatre, fiction, and oral accounts creates an interesting tension between written and oral forms, in particular if considering the passage from oral to written while writing the novel, and back to oral when producing the performance.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored migration literature in educational contexts with a focus on two elements: textbooks/educational materials and writers' visits. These two focuses mirror the dichotomy between texts and authors that has emerged in the thesis, and in particular the ways in which the presence of the authors changes the dynamics of the initiative and the range of action of the cultural intermediaries involved. Accordingly, the cases presented in this chapter show a divide between the work of mediation and manipulation by school professionals when presenting migration literature and the strategy carried out by Ghermandi, from a perspective that discusses whether the interest is prominently in the author – and, more specifically, in his or her migration experience – or in his or her works. As this chapter has shown, there are examples of authors, such as Ghermandi, who choose to produce a performance and propose them when invited to speak to an audience. Her decision to translate the novel into a new artistic work means that she can tell her story the way she wanted it to be told, reducing the space for intervention from the teachers/organizers. On the other hand, the work of selection of texts and excerpts, the planning of activities, and in general the adaptation of texts to be the object of a class is instrumental when considering teachers under the frame of cultural intermediaries and reflects the creative nature of their work (see Chapter 1). In this sense, it is relevant to discuss the policies and approaches that have allowed migration literature to be part of school-related activities, such as intercultural education and the work of institutions such as *centri interculturali*.

The focus on educational outputs of various kinds has also allowed an analysis of the presence of migration literature in schools that takes into account the complexity of such a context in terms of the diverse set of professional figures involved. For

example, if considering publications devoted to educators, there are at least two sets of professionals whose interventions filter students' access to migration literature: the writer of the contribution and each of the teachers who will use the activity with their students. Similarly, the case of *Culture e letteratura della migrazione* is an example of a local initiative that has encouraged teachers to develop activities on migration literature. Although the project entails the involvement of guidelines by the organizers that could direct the teachers, and the further filter of headmasters or local administrators, the selection and planning of the activities is a prerogative of the teacher.

All in all, this range of figures raises questions in terms of who channels which information, and what access the teachers have to primary and secondary sources on migration literature. Unless there is a specific interest, teachers – and consequently students – will not have other access to migration literature. In other words, the presence of more than one layer of intermediation results in less and less proximity to the texts and specialization in the specific topic of migration literature. These mechanisms are not specific to migration literature, but acquire importance in this case because of the absence of migration literature from school curricula, which allows a higher degree of independence and choice for teachers to interpret and select these texts for their students – and, above all, the possibility not to include it in their activities. An element that recurs in the chapter is the aura of exceptionality of these initiatives, their being extra-curricular almost by definition. The access to this body of literature was made possible thanks to initiatives and teaching practices that were external to the curricula, not compulsory, for example not incorporated into Italian literature classes. Moreover, the presence of migration literature in schools as described in this chapter shows that the activities that revolve around these texts or authors tend to go beyond the traditional way of intending the teaching of literature, especially when the stress of the activity is on the *testimonianza*, or the interest towards these texts and authors has been presented as linked to the driving force of *interculturalità*, as well as the urgency to speak about migration. A notable example is the use of two interviews with Christiana de Caldas Brito and Julio Monteiro Martins at the Esame di Stato in 2006, and not excerpts from their works, as they comment on their

migration experience in the interviews.<sup>350</sup> In this sense, the questions posed in this chapter might expand to consider the importance of introducing migration into the curricula, recognizing that migration permeates Italian public discourse.

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<sup>350</sup> Ministero dell'Istruzione, 'Esami di stato conclusivi dei corsi di studio di istruzione secondaria superiore - Prima prova scritta, sessione ordinaria 2006', <[http://www.istruzione.it/esame\\_di\\_stato/Secondo\\_Ciclo/tracce\\_prove\\_scritte/2006/P000.pdf](http://www.istruzione.it/esame_di_stato/Secondo_Ciclo/tracce_prove_scritte/2006/P000.pdf)> [accessed 8 August 2017].

## Conclusion

The case studies discussed in this thesis aim to investigate the dissemination of migration literature in the Italian language. The preliminary reason to undertake this piece of research was to explore this production from the perspective of initiatives that served to disseminate it, and in particular the work of agents that have contributed to promoting it. The contribution that this study hopes to provide is therefore an informed selection of revealing examples that could serve as a resource to expand the field of enquiry on migration literature towards some key initiatives and publications that played a role in promoting it, and which have not been at the centre of research before. Moreover, this thesis suggests that the study of dissemination events is instrumental to discuss some aspects of this production, in particular when considering the way in which migration literature dialogues with the discourse on migration that characterizes contemporary Italy and from a perspective that intends to mirror the continual nature of migration to Italy. Elements such as the number of people arriving to Italy, their country of origin, and the length of their stay have varied over the years. Similarly, the political changes happening in Italy have put the discourse on migration at the centre of political and social debates. As Parati puts it in the conclusion of *Migration Italy*, ‘As I am writing, other changes in the cultural landscape are adding to the complex set of theoretical approaches that I have employed’.<sup>351</sup> In this sense, the focus of this study on initiatives that took place in Italy has helped to identify key figures and contexts of dissemination, as well as the audiences that they targeted, in order to contribute to depict in what ways discourses on migration are evolving.

The rubric ‘migration literature’ is used to stress the focus on these two terms when considering a set of initiatives that took place over the past twenty-five years. For the purposes of this thesis, this working definition has been instrumental to establish a common ground to analyse case studies that are not homogeneous in terms of audiences, aims, and professionals involved. This choice has allowed us to consider cases that are distant from each other but that offer insights in exploring an equally varied literary production. The labels used by single organizers are not a criterion to include or exclude case studies. On the contrary, they have to be seen as one of the elements that play a role in the way in which migration literature is promoted and

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<sup>351</sup> Parati, *Migration Italy*, p. 198.

disseminated, and therefore as part of the objects of the analysis. For this reason, this thesis argues that the notion of migration literature can be productive to identify contexts in a variety of sectors of the cultural industry in which there is a tension between migration and literature.

This approach has combined an analysis of the narratives emerging from the case studies with the scholarly debate on migration literature in Italian. From the discussion of each case study, it emerges that the intermediation operated by the different agents involved enacts a manipulation of content that is closely related to the contexts of dissemination. The ‘creative’ nature of the work of these agents, as Smith Maguire and Matthews define it, translates the literary text and the authors themselves to specific audiences (see Chapter 1).<sup>352</sup> More specifically, a key question that has emerged across the chapters is to identify and problematize whether and to what extent the cultural intermediation has absorbed concerns that derive from the public perception of migration in Italy. A pattern that can be seen is that writers and their texts are expected to play a role in the current debate on migration. For example, the members of La Tenda show their need to engage with how migration is perceived and experienced by a local community, as the association was created to facilitate the cohabitation of new and old communities in a specific area of Milan. In particular, they decided to present migration authors in the local library to propose a counter-narrative on migration that could give visibility to its artistic aspect and fight the dominant narrative. Similarly, the presence of migration authors on Rai 3 broadcasts was filtered to talk to an audience immersed in a narrative of migration characterized by stereotypical elements that are perceived as familiar and recognizable.

Because of the centrality of the expectations of the audiences, they can be seen as co-producers of these initiatives. In the contexts considered, authors are communicated not only in terms of promotion, but most importantly in ways that construct a narrative that intends to meet the needs of a specific audience. This element is particularly crucial when considering the impact that dissemination events have had in the development of some new artistic projects by migration authors and creates a triangulation among writers, intermediaries, and audiences. In other words, it emerges

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<sup>352</sup> Smith Maguire and Matthews, ‘Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries’, pp. 1-11 (p. 4).

that the work of authors and cultural intermediaries is nurtured and affected by their proximity to an audience.

Thus, the analysis that this thesis proposes is revealing of elements that may be useful not only in exploring these initiatives, but also when engaging with the texts produced by migration authors. This concluding section discusses these elements along three lines that are encapsulated in three quotations. The first element is the attempt to articulate an opposition between ‘migration literature’ as defined in this thesis and the existence of a *movimento*, namely a group of writers that have worked together identifying common goals. The second one pertains to the agency of writers in respect to the work of intermediation. The last point considers the impact that dissemination events may have on the artistic work of writers. This conclusion also aims to highlight the connections among the case studies and suggests further steps for this research.

‘Ho scoperto [...] che esisteva la “letteratura italiana della migrazione” e io ne facevo parte’.<sup>353</sup>

One of the questions that this thesis asks is whether it can be claimed that there exists a literary movement that unites migration writers. Describing the set of initiatives as part of a network has helped in visualizing the connections among them, in terms of more permanent partnerships or just signalling collaborations. However, this network does not necessarily suggest the existence of a literary movement organized by authors themselves, especially because these initiatives are managed by agents who establish their own aims, which do not necessarily coincide.

In this sense, Ghermandi’s statement is representative of this divide. When commenting on the first time she participated in the Eks&Tra prize, Ghermandi describes the ‘letteratura italiana della migrazione’ as an entity that already existed, although she was not aware of it, and although she was considered part of it. The use of inverted commas in her quotation highlights the fact that migration literature is perceived as an established entity other than Ghermandi herself. At the same time, Ghermandi provides her own description of what migration literature is: ‘Un’ invisibile corrente “nascente” che conteneva nel suo flusso migranti di varie parti del mondo che

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<sup>353</sup> Ghermandi, ‘*El-Ghibli*’, 133-145 (p. 137).

avevano scelto come lingua d'espressione letteraria l'italiano'.<sup>354</sup> This definition stresses the features that Ghermandi recognizes as necessary to define this production, such as the choice of using Italian. Ghermandi's statement also highlights the sense of passivity in her being considered part of migration literature, as it is not described as a feeling that starts from the writer, but as a consequence of the existence of an initiative that has established the rules for her to be part of it.

As described in Chapter 3, later in the article Ghermandi offers an account of the process that led a group of writers to start a conversation on a common project, which would eventually become the online journal *El-Ghibli*. This passage stresses the difference between initiatives that are started by writers and other contexts in which what prevails is the agency of the organizer. In this sense, an interesting case is the Sagarana project. Despite the prominent role played by Monteiro in the organization of the event – and other factors such as the duration of the initiative over the years, and the support received by the presence of the online journal between one edition and the other – Sagarana has contributed to creating a pole where authors could meet and be part of a community. In other words, authors could use the centre of the network to enter a circuit made up of publishers, scholars, journalists, and educators who specialize in migration literature. The role of the internet, in particular, has proven to be essential in this sense.

The examples of *El-Ghibli* and Sagarana suggest the two levels that can be identified when discussing the network of dissemination initiatives that this thesis presents. The first is represented by a circuit of producers and consumers of migration literature – in marketing terms they might be referred to as 'culture enthusiasts', because of their high degree of involvement.<sup>355</sup> The other level is wider and includes cases in which migration and literature coexist, or happen to join up, such as the case discussed in the chapter on television broadcasts. They are both fundamental parts of this thesis, as they contribute in different ways to exploring how literature can play a role in the debate on migration.

In other words, this thesis has considered a tension between a relatively narrow circuit and the mainstream interest in migration. From this perspective, this research could be expanded exploring case studies in which this tension is particularly evident.

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Kolb, *Marketing for Cultural Organization*, pp. 47-54.

An example could be the Festival delle Letterature Migranti, which has taken place in Palermo since 2015 and is run by the journalist Davide Camarrone. Although there has been a presence of translingual writers, migration is intended in a wider sense, as ‘migrazioni delle persone e delle idee’ and ‘criterio interpretativo del Contemporaneo’.<sup>356</sup> This initiative needs to be seen as part of a series of initiatives around the theme of migration have been promoted in Palermo by the Comune, most notably thanks to the ‘Mobilità umana internazionale – Carta di Palermo 2015’. These further cases may stress that the analysis of migration literature does not only pertain cases in which translingual authors are predominantly involved, but it is enriched by cultural initiatives in which migration is intended in a wider sense, to be determined depending on the contexts in which they are promoted.

‘Un amico scrittore diceva: “Sono anni che scrivo, ho pubblicato vari libri, ho sentito dire di tutto sui miei libri. Ma finora nessuno mi ha detto se scrivo bene o male”’.<sup>357</sup>

Metref is one of the authors who took part in a debate on migration literature that was published in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* between 2011 and 2012. Although this thesis seems to confirm the concern of the anonymous writer that Metref quotes – this study does not enter into the content of the books written by migration writers, but focuses on the work of people who disseminate them – it also embraces the perspective that considers the agency of writers in respect to the work of intermediation. In particular, the analysis of the case studies has highlighted the fact that the focus of agents of dissemination is often on collateral aspects (‘ho sentito dire di tutto’) rather than the texts. For example, the case of Akbari’s interview shows that even if the writer of the story of migration is Italian-born, the attention is focused on the migrant subject who is the protagonist of the literary text, and the dynamic of the interview stresses features that are characteristic of Akbari’s being a migrant subject. In this sense, dissemination events have revealed themselves as a privileged point of view to explore the way in which translingual authors have been presented by critics, and the physical presence

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<sup>356</sup> Davide Camarrone, ‘Il nostro Festival’, *Programma Festival delle letterature migranti* (2017), p. 11.

<sup>357</sup> Karim Metref, ‘Breve storia della letteratura migrante’, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 23 January 2012 <<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/01/23/breve-storia-della-letteratura-migrante/185818/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

of writers because of their being migrant subjects has been an essential point of discussion.

This aspect is especially fertile if compared to the case of Elena Ferrante, a prominent figure widely analysed by critics and academics in Italian studies. Ferrante claims that her novels are independent from her persona and refuses to reveal her own identity. *La Frantumaglia* collects Ferrante's correspondence with her publishers, and a recurring topic is her participation in promotion events, to follow her idea that 'i libri non abbiano alcun bisogno degli autori [...]. Se hanno qualcosa da raccontare, troveranno presto o tardi lettori'.<sup>358</sup> The analysis of the case studies presented in this thesis shows that dissemination events are an essential part of migration literature, as they have been used not only to promote the books, but more in general to put the book into a context that could re-use and re-invent their existence for further aims. Chapter 5, for example, has discussed the use of migration literature as a privileged set of materials to introduce intercultural education in schools. In other words, the tendency to create spaces where migration literature can be shared, disseminated and promoted in various forms has created a disentanglement between the agency of the writers and that of the cultural intermediaries. On the one hand, Ferrante disvalues the necessity of her presence at dissemination events and stresses the importance of a community of readers that is in charge of giving a book the attention that it deserves. On the other hand, some of the audiences considered in this thesis were not necessarily the readership of the texts, and only had access to the narrative provided by the agents involved in their dissemination.

In this sense, Metref's statement invites a reflection on the work of critics and scholars, who play a pivotal role in the dissemination of migration literature, although this thesis has not explored them systematically in order to instead give space to initiatives that had not been included in the debate before. Nevertheless, as anticipated in the Introduction, the role of the intermediation of critics and academics would deserve a dedicated study, especially for projects that attempt to involve a larger audience than that of the university rooms. An example could be the online course 'Letteratura e migrazioni in Italia' that has been run by Silvia Camilotti through an e-

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<sup>358</sup> Elena Ferrante, *La frantumaglia: carte: 1991-2003, tessere: 2003-2007, lettere: 2011-2016*, (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2016), p. 12.

learning platform provided by the Università di Venezia for the past two years.<sup>359</sup> As an introductory series of classes on migration literature, it provides access to both critical texts and literary works, and is open to everyone and for free. Another example is the online project ‘Princesa 20’, realized by Ugo Fracassa (Università Roma Tre) and Anna Proto Pisani (Université Aix-Marseille).<sup>360</sup> The interest of this project lies in the multimedial expansion of the book *Princesa*, and in particular the decision to make available online a philological analysis of a text with a complex editorial story. An analysis of these and other examples can be useful not only to position university-based initiatives in the network that this thesis describes, but most importantly to track the public engagement and impact activities produced in the field of migration literature.

‘A seconda delle occasioni di esibizione e delle poete in scena, [la Compagnia delle poete] modifica e adatta di tappa in tappa la formula di base sulla quale è costruito lo spettacolo’.<sup>361</sup>

The cases of the Compagnia delle poete and Ghermandi show that dissemination has affected the creative processes of artists. In these cases, performance has been the direction that these artists have taken to adapt their work ‘a seconda delle occasioni di esibizione’. The choice of performing is not a complete novelty for the writers that are considered in this thesis, and can be traced back to the interest of these authors in artistic practices – Ghermandi’s being a singer and some members of the Compagnia being performers, such as Romero. At the same time, the process of translation of their work from one audience to the other entails a re-elaboration of their literary products. In the case of the Compagnia, this has also led to a practice of collective writing that made the work of each member of the Compagnia melt into a collective work. Moreover, as Chapter 1 outlines, the Compagnia has started to produce performances which the members contribute to with original works created specifically for the purpose of a performance.

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<sup>359</sup> In collaboration with the Archivio Scritture Scrittrici Migranti, University of Venice. See Silvia Camilotti, ‘Letteratura e migrazioni in Italia’, online video recording, YouTube <<https://youtu.be/Jg9V1jftLDs>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>360</sup> Princesa 20, Website <<http://www.princesa20.it/progetto20/>> [accessed 15 December 2017].

<sup>361</sup> Compagnia delle poete, ‘Homepage’.

In this sense, a focus on dissemination initiatives is not only useful to give context to this production and track the environment that nurtured its development, but also to investigate reasons and factors that played a role in some artistic choices, such as the centrality that the audience has taken in these writers' work. An interesting point that these two cases highlights is that the dissemination dimension plays an intrinsic role in the creation of these new projects. For Ghermandi, the performance is a reaction to a request to speak about her work in front of varied audiences, an occasion of empowerment that allows her to disseminate her work in her own terms. Similarly, the Compagnia claims that one of the aims of the group is to 'dare voce alla poesia transnazionale' in the Italian language, of which they are a considerable representation.<sup>362</sup> All in all, these examples show that dissemination contexts have inspired – for a variety of reasons – the writers' creative processes to investigate new routes of artistic expression. Moreover, the question as to how to communicate migration literature (in the cases of Ghermandi and the Compagnia, their own production) to an audience and the search for new strategies suggest a parallel between the narratives produced by artists and the ones produced by intermediaries, and highlights the creative nature of their work.

From this perspective, a further direction that this research could take is a close reading of these performative works that is aimed at tracking elements that are indicative of the reasons that have led the artists to make specific choices in order to make the most of the proximity to their audiences.

In conclusion, a focus on the dissemination of migration literature has proven effective to identify elements of its cultural industry that are instrumental to analyse this literary production. In particular, the debate on migration in Italy constitutes a crucial factor that affects the modes in which migration literature is disseminated to public audiences, as the corpus of case studies shows. This debate has pushed the creation of some of these projects, but it is also the wider discourse in which these projects develop and to which they aim to contribute. This study stresses the prominent role that some cultural projects have played in establishing and disseminating migration literature, as well as the networks that a number of agents have created from the nineties onwards. It establishes the polycentric nature of this network, highlighting

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

the independence that each centre had from the other, in particular in terms of aims and audiences. This thesis also signals some attempts that have been made to promote a literary movement, which manifest themselves in the form of long-term projects. Finally, it expands the debate on translingual writings towards a direction that reflects on how both writers and dissemination agents develop their work when in proximity to an audience.



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