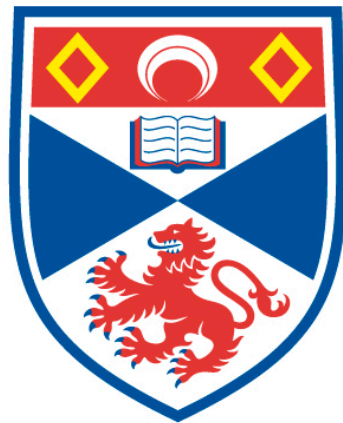Negotiating home spaces: spatial practices in Italian postcolonial
literature

Chiara Giuliani

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

2015

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I, Chiara Giuliani hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80.000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2012 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 2012; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2012 and 2015.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses a selection of Italian postcolonial novels from a spatial perspective, exploring the ways in which specific spaces come to play crucial roles in the narration. By investigating the work of Cristina Ali Farah, Gabriella Kuruvilla, Amara Lakhous and Igiaba Scego, this work aims to examine the strategies through which characters – who are either migrants themselves or have migrant parents – appropriate certain spaces, in the attempt to recreate feelings of home.

Through a geocritical approach, I explore the ways in which the absence of *home* leads to the creation of a multiplicity of *home spaces*; pivotal in this sense are the processes of remembering through which the spaces selected are compared, displaced and experienced not only on a different geographical level but also on a different temporal dimension.

The first part concentrates on public places; despite being imbued with familiar values, they become contested spaces exactly because of the presence of migrants. The sharing of these spaces with Italians without migrant origins leads the discussion to a wider issue: the inclusion/exclusion of migrants from Italian society. The analysis of journalistic sources and of the way they portray these same sites (in a situation of both social and physical decay), is indispensable in order to provide a thorough account of these spaces' role.

The second part focuses on private spaces; in particular exploring the way characters transform their dwellings into proper home spaces through a range of strategies. I focus on very specific and circumscribed spaces and to the reasons why they play a fundamental part in the narration.

However, if on the one hand the spatial analysis gradually narrows its focus by looking at more circumscribed spaces, on the other it broadens the sociological analysis of the characters' behaviours not as migrants but as human beings.

Acknowledgments

It goes without saying that the first person that I truly want to thank is my supervisor, Professor Derek Duncan. He has been the perfect mentor, enlightening and inspiring, with an astonishing knack of always finding the right word at the right moment. Knowing that I could blindly rely on his guidance and support made all the difference for me.

I would also like to thank the School of Modern Languages for their generous support in funding my PhD. I am also extremely grateful to the ELT language tutors for helping me improving my English.

Many thanks to the staff of the Italian department in St Andrews for their help and encouragement as well as the staff of the Italian department in Bristol, it was a short experience but the people I had the pleasure to meet made that year invaluable.

My parents and my brother obviously constitute a huge part of this amazing experience which would have been unimaginable without their unconditional love and unbelievably patient support. In addition, I would also like to thank my friends and relatives in Italy – especially in Corinaldo – to whom I have always felt close despite being thousands of miles away.

I have been blessed with the possibility of carrying out this PhD in two different places and even more blessed with finding great people to share this journey with. Thanks to Jimena (and her wonderful family), Claire and Tamzin and to all my friends here in St Andrews, in particular Raquel, Lucia, Nat and obviously Letizia, you made Bristol and St Andrews my personal home spaces.

Finally, I would like to thank my grandma, Malvina, to whom this thesis is dedicated; she knows why.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks
> and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat or a tent. It need not be a large space,
> but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control.[1]

Mary Douglas's quotation suggests that 'home' can be located anywhere, as long as it is in space; she also adds that the idea of having a home is strictly related to the possibility of having control of a specific space. These two premises are the starting points for this thesis. By drawing on different sources, I intend to investigate the role played by selected places in Italian postcolonial society as well as the strategies applied by migrants in order to transform those places into home spaces and eventually feel at home.

Edward Said, in a wider discourse on exile and on the contemporary situation of uprootedness, quotes Simone Weil and particularly her famous affirmation 'To be rooted […] is perhaps the most important and the least recognized need of the human soul'.[2] However, the French philosopher's assertion is part of a larger argument pivotal to the understanding of this study:

> To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human
> soul. […] A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation
> in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures
> of the past and certain particular expectations for the future. […] Every human being
> needs to have multiple roots. […] Reciprocal exchanges by which different sorts of
> environment exert influence on one another are no less vital than to be rooted in natural
> surroundings.[3]

Edward Relph also drew on Weil's farsighted ideas; he affirms 'to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things'.[4] He also specifies that the 'secure point' he refers to is the

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[1] Mary Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space', *Social Research*, 58 (1991), 287–307 (p. 289).

[2] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 183.

[3] Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind* (London: Ark, 1987), p. 41.

[4] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p. 38.

home, which is not the house where you live, but it could be any place with which you establish strong connections so that it is transformed into 'home place'.[5] As a character of *Madre Piccola* affirms:

> La nostra casa la portiamo con noi, la nostra casa può viaggiare. Non sono le pareti rigide che fanno del luogo in cui viviamo una casa. Dentro la nostra casa io, Domenica Axad e il piccolo Taarikh troviamo conforto e riparo, piantiamo le nostre fondamenta per aver la forza di combattere quotidianamente. Rimanere isolati non è più possibile, cerchiamo di adattarci e di ricostruire il nostro percorso.[6]

With these words Barni describes her idea of the home; a home whose meaning, due to her numerous moves, needs to be constantly negotiated and redefined.[7] Barni left Somalia after the outbreak of the civil war and she now lives in Italy. The idea of carrying her home with her suggests the possibility of feeling at home even after the departure from the homeland. It also suggests, echoing Weil, the fundamental need of being rooted, as clarified by the expression 'piantiamo le nostre fondamenta per avere la forza di combattere quotidianamente'. This possibility of experiencing home feelings in places other than the initial home is clearly described by Sara Ahmed, who states:

> The narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves through the carving out of inhabitable space, and hence no place in which memory can allow the past to reach the present (in which the 'I' could declare itself as having come home).[8]

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[5] Relph, pp. 38–39–41.

[6] Cristina Ubax Ali Farah, *Madre piccola* (Cles (Tn): Frassinelli, 2007), p. 263.

[7] For more information on the meaning of the home in relation to experiences of migration see: Sara Ahmed, 'Home and Away Narratives of Migration and Estrangement', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2 (1999), 329–47; Lucie Benchouiha, 'Dove È La Mia Casa: Questions of Home in Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's Lontano Da Mogadiscio', *Quaderni del '900*, 4 (2004); Simone Brioni, 'Memory, Belonging and the Right for Representation: Question of Home in Kaha Mohamed Aden's Fra-Intendimenti', in *Shifting and Shaping a National Identity: Transnational Writers and Pluriculturalism in Italy Today*, ed. by Grace Russo Bullaro and Elena Benelli (Leics, UK: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2014), pp. 23–41; Jennifer Burns, 'Exile Within Italy: Interactions Between Past and Present "Homes" in Texts in Italian by Migrant Writers', in *Annali d'Italianistica*, 2002, XX, 369–84; Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature*, (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2013); Fulvio Pezzarossa, 'Una casa tutta per sé. Generazioni migranti e spazi abitativi', in *Certi confini. Sulla letteratura italiana dell'immigrazione*, ed. by Lucia Quaquarelli (Milan: Morellini, 2010) pp. 59–117.

[8] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', pp. 330–31.

Ahmed is here commenting on how people, when forced to migrate, try to inhabit the spaces that surround them in order to retrieve feelings of warmth and familiarity, so as to find spaces 'to call home'.[9] Looking at the quotation from *Madre Piccola* this is especially evident in Barni's allusion to the fact that a home does not necessarily need walls, and in the use of the verb *adattarsi*, which conveys the belief that despite having abandoned the original home there are different places in which she (and her family) can feel at home.

Defining 'home', however, is a very challenging task. Home can refer to a space, circumscribed to a greater or lesser extent, the house for instance, as well as the homeland. In the same way, home can be associated also with the feelings that are experienced in those places or in certain situations. Depending on the nature of these feelings the idea of home can be related to happiness and safety, as well as to pain, hatred and fear; it can also be a site of resistance, as pointed out by bell hooks.[10] In this thesis home is interpreted as a positive concept, as a series of feelings that would make the subject feel safe and at ease; a place of belonging and stability, a refuge where to feel secure. It does not have to be in a house or in a conventional dwelling; these feelings can actually be experienced in different places and situations and when this happens, even an unexpected place can be transformed into a home space.

For ordinary places to become home spaces, their inhabitants have to experience them in different and personal ways in order to charge them with values associated with the idea of home. Migrants' attempts to put down roots in Italy can be seen as what De Certeau refers to as 'tactics':

> a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. […] The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. […] It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. […] In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.[11]

Through these tactics a plurality of places can be charged with home values. According to Ahmed, however, this plurality of homes will never make up for the abandonment of the

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[9] Doreen Massey, 'A Place Called Home?', *New Formations*, 17 (1992), 3–15.
[10] hooks, p. 42.
[11] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011), pp. 36–37.

original one because in none of these places could memory function as a bond between past and present. This, however, is not always the case, as suggested by Igiaba Scego in *La mia casa è dove sono*.[12] As hinted in the title of the book, your home is not only the one where you were born, or where your family is, but could actually be found in other places: not just one specific place but a plurality of locations; not just one home, but different potential *homes*. Scego's novel can indeed be read as a spatial autobiography in which the description of the city of Rome overlaps with events of the author's life and with memories of her closest relatives, in a successful attempt to map her own personal geography through her emotions and through the places capable of generating and retrieving such emotions.

This thesis investigates the practices carried out by the characters of selected literary texts in order to transform specific ordinary places into *home spaces* as suggested by Ahmed; my aim is also to explore the role of these places within the wider context of Italian contemporary society. In line with Scego's example, I also argue that a crucial role in this process of transformation is played by memory through which migrants can recall past events and familiar situations that help them feel at home outside the home.

In order to achieve this I will use two main sources: Italian postcolonial literature and a wide selection of newspaper articles. The sources selected, however, include a varied group of characters: first and second generation both male and female; these are features that influence their attitude toward a place. Belonging to different generations implies, for instance, differences in the way migrants inhabit a specific space as well as the way they live in Italy. Emblematic of this is, for instance, Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* where this generational difference is highlighted by the crucial presence of Scego's mother. Italy is for the latter a point of transit before going back to Somalia; Igiaba Scego, on the other hand, was born in Italy and she does not share this intention of going back to a place where she has never lived if not for brief periods of time. The intention of return, which recurs in the following chapters, is indeed an important element which belongs mainly to first generation migrants who, like Scego's mother, have been forced to leave their homelands. Nevertheless there are instances in which also first generation migrants do not share this dream; emblematic of this is Safia in *Divorzio* who arrives in Italy with the intention to settle down.

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[12] Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010).

Another thought-provoking aspect which arises from the inclusion of a broad variety of characters is the issue of gender. Indeed female and male characters often inhabit the places here considered in distinct ways. An example of this will be noticed in the way Safia approaches the phone centre; i.e. with a very different attitude from Christian/Issa and from the male subjects included in the analysis. This example suggests interesting points of discussion related to gender and space that fall beyond the scope of this research.

Creating home spaces in Italian contemporary society

The way migrants modify specific places is, in this thesis, interpreted through De Certeau's terminology:

> A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibilities of two things being the same location (place). [...] In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.[13]

It could indeed be argued that, according to the analysis carried out here, migrants transform *lieu* into *espace*, into a specific kind of spaces: home spaces. Emma Bond expands De Certeau's distinction between *place* and *space* locating it in a trans-national context:

> The trans-national thus offers the possibility to connect *place* […], with a more fluid idea of *space* which is akin to Bauman's flexible notion of a habitat of meaning, as a socially-constructed setting that can expand and contract, either partially or entirely, thus allowing for meaning to be produced through the mediation of the body through the text. […] it is the text itself that becomes trans-national in the very practice of its construction, for as de Certeau reminds us, stories 'carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places'.[14]

In line with Bond's analysis I will examine migrants' ability to charge ordinary places with different and personal home values. In this sense, some places which are not conventionally

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[13] De Certeau, p. 117.
[14] Emma Bond, 'Towards a Trans-National Turn in Italian Studies?', *Italian Studies*, 69 (2014), 415–24 (p. 423).

linked to the image of the home are *practiced* so as to transform them into *home spaces*. These processes of transformation take place both in public and in private spaces; however, despite this main distinction, the analysis will point out that, after migrants' 'tactics' are set in motion, the publicness of specific spaces does not represent an obstruction to the process of transformation from ordinary places into home spaces.

The three public places that will be the focus of the first part of the thesis are: multi-ethnic neighbourhoods (namely the area of via Padova in Milan, San Salvario in Turin and Esquilino in Rome), the train station (particularly Termini Station in Rome) and the phone centre. The choice of these specific places is due both to their significant presence in Italian postcolonial literature and also to the fact that, in the last decades, they have started to be considered migrants' meeting points and as such regarded as critical locations. Amara Lakhous, answering the question why space is so important in his novels, affirms:

> Io credo che la gestione dello spazio sia fondamentale perché è proprio su questo piano
> che vengono fuori le contraddizioni della società italiana, che da una parte teme gli
> emigrati, dall'altra affida loro gli anziani, i bambini, le chiavi di casa, insomma la
> propria intimità domestica. […] Da Mahfuz ho imparato tantissimo: ad esempio, la
> nozione dello spazio come protagonista del romanzo, e l'idea che i personaggi sono
> impensabili al di fuori di uno spazio, perché è lì che avviene tutto: l'incontro, lo
> scontro, la comunicazione, l'amore.[15]

Looking at space is therefore crucial because it is in space, and particularly in the places I selected, that Italy deals concretely with the presence of different cultures. It is in these places that migrants have become visible in those areas. This visibility is significant for two reasons: on the one hand by inhabiting public places and therefore by taking an active part in the society, migrants start putting down their roots in Italy. On the other hand, however, their visibility becomes the reason behind locals' complaints against migrants' presence in Italy, as frequently portrayed by the press. Gilroy, commenting on the way migrants are perceived in Britain, notes that: 'the country's persistent failure to be hospitable is about far more than just managing the internal effects of mass immigration. […] It is the workings of racism that produce the order of racial truths and not the other

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[15] Daniela Brogi, 'Le catene dell'identità. Conversazione con Amara Lakhous', *Between*, 1 (2011), pdf version pp. 2–3.

way around'.[16] This same consideration can be effectively used to discuss the Italian situation. This anxiety, caused by immigrants' presence in Italy, is exacerbated by the fact that this is perceived as a problem to be contained; Nermin Saybasili affirms:

> We are living in a period in which the illusion of unity imposed by the nation-state is increasingly undone by civil war, ethnic cleansing or wars of domination fought under the guise of liberation struggles. The more this occurs, the more those who as a result have been dislocated and forced into movement come to be seen as a 'mass of people' circulating on or through borders and, consequently, as a 'problem' to be contained.[17]

It is in these contexts of encounter-clash that the processes of charging places with home values become not only necessary but also indispensable.

The arrival of 'mass(es) of people' in locations that were up to that moment inhabited only by Italians without migrant origin has brought to the establishment of new hierarchies and boundaries that the newcomers are not expected nor allowed to cross. David Sibley, looking at the British situation, analyses the dynamics of power taking place in a certain area when it is inhabited by more than one group.[18] Sibley's work becomes relevant for this thesis particularly in his analysis of the role and of the process of boundary-construction due to an increasing sentiment of threat and danger:

> The sense of border between self and other is echoed in both social and spatial boundaries. […] Crossing boundaries, from a familiar space to an alien one which is under the control of somebody else, can provide anxious moments […]. For the individual or group socialized into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable, the liminal zone is a source of anxiety. It is a zone of abjection, one which should be eliminated in order to reduce anxiety but this is not always possible.[19]

Noticeable in this passage is Douglas' influence; her work on boundaries, external and internal, as well as public and private, also grounds this thesis and particularly the analysis

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[16] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, 1 edition (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 115–116.

[17] Nermin Saybasili, '"Digital Ghosts": Voice and Migratory Hauntings', in *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, ed. by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo Van Leeuwen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 319–43 (p. 331).

[18] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London; Routledge, 1995).

[19] Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, pp. 32–33.

of the perception of immigrants in Italy. Douglas points out that 'danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable'.[20] In an Italian context, these transitional states or liminal zones are those areas in which migrants and non-migrants cohabit. Therefore multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, train stations and phone centres are perceived as contested places, where the presence of migrants is threatening not only to national security but also to national identity. However, these are also the spaces where, due to different elements, migrants can feel at home and this is precisely the reason why I have chosen to analyse them.

In addition, I have decided to look at those strategies through which specific characters from the novels put very delimited places 'under control'[21] be these indoor or outdoor locations, private or public. These spaces, despite the fact that they are inhabited in a very personal way by the characters considered, become important for this thesis because it is precisely in there, and through those strategies, that characters find their way of living in Italy.

Terminological choices

As soon as I started analysing these sources, I became aware of running the risk of perpetrating the customary separation carried out by politicians and by the mass media between 'foreigners' and 'Italians'. Jennifer Burns wrote a caveat to explain the use of the dichotomy *us-them*, specifying that this use had nothing to do with any Orientalist discourse, but was conscious of the necessity of keeping this separation in order to avoid the denial of 'the difference in which their [migrants'] writing finds its voice, and to cancel out its positive effects'.[22] In line with this, I feel the need to specify that, to avoid confusion, I use adjectives or expressions such as migrants and non-migrants, so as to make clear if I am referring to Italians with or without a migrant background.

A further issue that I found problematic was how to work with the authors of the selected literary texts and more specifically how to define them; on the one hand, the definition

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[20] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 97.

[21] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

[22] Jennifer Burns, 'Recent Immigrant Writing in Italian: A Fragile Enterprise', *The Italianist*, 18 (1998), 213–44 (p. 213).

migrant writers was for me incorrect, whereas on the other hand the more comprehensive definition of *Italian contemporary writers* seemed to me incomplete. The definition *migrant writers*, as they have conventionally been labelled, creates more problems than it manages to solve. In order to be able to include all the writers previously mentioned, such a definition is often accompanied by further clarifications like for example, *second generation* (as Scego is often defined); clarifications that provide more information about the biography of the writers but that do not specify anything about their style or the content of their works.[23] Perhaps the only author that could be considered a *migrant writer* is Amara Lakhous, who migrated from Algeria to Italy in 1995; as Daniela Merolla and Sandra Ponzanesi asked: 'when does a migrant stop being a migrant?',[24] and consequently when does someone stop being a migrant writer? Or once you are a migrant writer will you be a migrant writer for life? After twenty years living in Italy and writing in Italian and after he became an Italian citizen in accordance to the law, defining Lakhous *migrant* seems to me anachronistic. The definition *migrant writers* is further problematic, as this term is not usually used in opposition to *non-migrant writers* but to *Italian writers*. Grace Russo Bullaro and Elena Benelli highlight that:

> It behoves us to remember that the definition of migration literature *per se* is unclear, and often found to be inaccurate and simplistic, incapable of reflecting the current state of affairs. Indeed, even defining a migrant proves to be much more involved if we look closely. Is a writer who was born elsewhere, lives and writes in Italy a migrant? Is a writer who was born from immigrant parents but is an Italian citizen still a migrant?[25]

They carry on asking and confuting possible solutions opting for the plausible one of *translingual writers*. For the purpose of this thesis, where the literary texts have been

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[23] As also pointed out by Bond and Comberiati 'Il contesto critico talvolta non ha aiutato a decifrare la reale portata del fenomeno: il dibattito su come definire tale produzione letteraria non ha sempre saputo fornire gli strumenti adeguati per comprendere l'innovazione e l'originalità dei testi, mostrando un'attenzione eccessiva alle terminologie piuttosto che ai contenuti'. (Bond, Emma and Daniele Comberiati, 'Introduzione. Narrare il colonialismo e il postcolonialismo italiani. La "questione" albanese' in *Il confine liquido: rapporti letterari e interculturali fra Italia e Albania*, ed. by Emma Bond and Daniele Comberiati, (Nardò (LE): Besa, 2013), pp. 7-27 (p. 18)). In this research the focus will be, as much as possible, on the literary texts themselves, rather than on the writers and their personal stories.

[24] Daniela Merolla and Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Introduction' in *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe* ed. by S. Ponzanesi and D. Merolla (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 1-52 (p. 4).

[25] Grace Russo Bullaro and Elena Benelli, 'Introduction: Redefining migration literature: towards a transnational and translingual alternative' in *Shifting and Shaping*, ed. by Bullaro and Benelli, pp. xiv-xxvi (p. xviii).

selected first and foremost on the basis of the spaces they include, the definition *migrant writers* is not appropriate. By deciding not to use the definition *migrant writers* to refer to the authors included in this analysis, I do not intend to flatten authors' transcultural background. In fact I think that Bullaro and Benelli are overlooking the difference between *migrant writers* and *migration literature*. While agreeing with them in the criticism to the inaccuracy of the label *migrant writers*, I think that *migration literature* could be used as a more comprehensive definition in the attempt to include these writings under an umbrella term. In this sense Burns' definition of *migration literature* is helpful to disentangle this situation: 'to identify a body of writing as "migration literature" posits movement across geographical space as somehow inherent to the stories that those writings tell and the ways in which they tell them'.[26] It is therefore different to talk about *migration literature* in which the definition is referring to the works rather than to the writers. After considering possible definitions as the already mentioned *translingual* or also *transnational* and *transcultural writers*, which I find all acceptable and much more precise than *migrant writers*, I think that these labels are not functional to the scope and ideas I want to convey in this thesis. Despite the accuracy of the definition *migration literature* and the efficacy of terms such as *translingual*, *transnational* and *transcultural*, the authors I study here will be defined as *Italian postcolonial writers* and their work will be looked at as *Italian postcolonial literature*.

Among the questions asked by Bullaro and Benelli is a specific one about the possibility of using the label *postcolonial writers*; they ask: 'How about writers who arrived in Italy from previous colonies? Are they postcolonial writers or migrant writers?'.[27] Benelli and Bullaro's quotation suggests that the definition postcolonial is related to the authors' origin, whereas Daniele Comberiati suggests expanding the concept of postcolonial on both a geographical and a chronological level.[28] My reason for using the definition postcolonial

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[26] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 131.

[27] Bullaro and Benelli, p. xviii.

[28] 'Sono propenso ad un allargamento del corpus, allargamento che investe sia il contesto geografico/spaziale che quello, per così dire, generazionale. Una definizione troppo rigida del "post-coloniale italiano" rischia, infatti, di perdere di vista la complessità del fenomeno. […] L'allargamento generazionale è necessario per comprendere autori provenienti da famiglie italiane stanziate nelle colonie […], originari di famiglie miste […], nati e cresciuti in Africa […], nati in Africa ma emigrati in seguito in Italia […] o infine nati in Italia da genitori africani (come Igiaba Scego)'. Daniele Comberiati, 'La letteratura postcoloniale italiana: definizioni, problemi, mappatura', in *Certi confini*, ed. by Quaquarelli, pp. 161–78 (pp. 168-169).

is not grounded on geographical elements, but rather on my belief that: 'It can be said that in the postcolonial era, all locations, all writers, all subjects are postcolonial, in that history of colonialism is shared by the globe albeit with different impact on different locations and peoples'.[29] My use of the term postcolonial is particularly linked to this awareness of an experience that is *shared* by migrants and non-migrants, by people belonging to former colonies and to former coloniser countries. The perception of this common ground, initially suggested by the terminology and then detected in the investigation of the *shared* spaces, fuels the rationale behind my choice of adopting the definition *postcolonial writers*.

My understanding of Italy as a postcolonial country and the possibility of reading contemporary Italian literary production from a postcolonial perspective is very much indebted to the definition provided by Romeo and Lombardi-Diop:

> The case of Italy – as a national paradigm rarely understood within a postcolonial framework – also compels us to evaluate postcolonialism under a new light. This volume addresses the Italian postcolonial condition as one of the main factors that affects lives and shapes cultures in contemporary Italy. […] Our notion of the 'postcolonial' is grounded in the assumption that the economic and cultural effects of colonialism are still present in many countries, including Italy, predominantly in the way by which the imbalance of colonial power is reinstated in today's global world through the unjust treatment and exclusion of migrants from developing countries who are often denied access to human rights and the privilege of global citizenship.[30]

Their volume acts as a perfect manifesto of Italian postcolonial studies, a manifesto that became even more precise and clearly sketched in a recent article.[31] Divided into two complementary parts written respectively by Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, the article highlights the necessity of using postcoloniality as a lens through which contemporary Italy and Italian culture may be understood, in the crucial attempt to create: 'larger models of inclusivity that are truly representative of Italy's contemporary postcolonial condition'.[32] Picking up on Romeo and Lombardi-Diop's quotation, my thesis attempts to provide an

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[29] Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 172.
[30] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 'Introduction: Paradigm of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy' in *Postcolonial Italy,* ed. by Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, pp. 1-29 (pp. 1–2).
[31] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 'The Italian Postcolonial: A Manifesto', *Italian Studies*, 69 (2014), 425–33.
[32] Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 'The Italian Postcolonial', p. 433.

accurate representation of Italy through an analysis that omits, when possible, the historical dimension, but focusing instead on the spatial investigation of Italian contemporaneity; a contemporaneity that, going back to George, is shared among Italians with or without a migrant background, a postcolonial contemporaneity nevertheless.

Methodology and critical approach

The spatial analysis carried out in this research overlooks the chronological dimension of the spaces considered. This decision to limit my research to the *here* and *now* is related to my intention to look at the facts as they are now, to look at the present situation, fully aware that present-day Italy is the result of years of history, of conflicts and agreements, and more importantly that the presence of migrants in Italy is also consequential to Italian colonialism, reprising Paul Gilroy's famous slogan 'the immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe was once out there'.[33] I agree with intellectuals who have been calling attention to Italy's need to become aware of its colonial past in order to undergo a process of decolonization that will pave the way for the acceptance of immigration into Italy. Nonetheless, I am convinced that it is also important to focus on the present situation and in particular on the physical shared space of Italian contemporary society in order to understand and to appreciate the possibility of multiple views of the same context and to embrace such a plurality. The best way to achieve this is by looking at the present as the paradigmatic time dimension for migrants; according to Ranajit Guha:

> What is within is *here* - a place the migrant will not be entitled to call his own. The displacement is made all the more poignant by the paradox that it corresponds to no distantiation in time. For it is stapled firmly to an accentuated and immediate present cut off from a shared past by the adverbial force of 'no longer'.[34]

The spaces will be analysed by looking at their role *now*, *here*, in Italian contemporary society.

If the scope of this thesis is to examine the all-encompassing role of these spaces, in the attempt to provide an analysis as comprehensive as possible, the best approach is, in my

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[33] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture? Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 110.
[34] Ranajit Guha, 'The Migrant's Time', *Postcolonial Studies*, 1 (1998), 155–60 (p. 156).

opinion, the methodology suggested by geocriticism. Bertrand Westphal argues: 'Rather than considering a spatial or a spatiotemporal representation as not "real", we view every representation (whether literary, iconographic, etc.) as referring to a broadly imagined reality that, in and through its extreme extension, is subject to a weak ontology'.[35] I completely agree with the criticism against the assumption that a literary representation by being 'literary' is not truthful;[36] furthermore, I think that the literary representation, despite being essential, is not sufficient in order to understand the extent to which these same locations have become so relevant in the Italian society. Drawing again on geocriticism, I find that multifocalization is the only solution in order to attempt a thorough spatial reading. Westphal argues:

> Without hesitation, I would say that multifocalization is the chief characteristic of geocriticism. […] In a geocritical sense, multifocalization is expressed in three basic variations. The point of view is relative to the situation of the observer with respect to the space of reference. […] the point of view alternates between endogenous, exogenous, or allogeneous characters.[37]

All three perspectives become relevant for this analysis, but one in particular is noteworthy: the allogeneous point of view which 'lies somewhere between the other two. It is characteristic of those who have settled into a place, becoming familiar with it, but still remaining foreigners in the eyes of the indigenous population'.[38] Westphal also adds that 'from a postcolonial perspective, the allogeneous point of view embraces a stereophonic focalization, which promotes the emergence of third space'.[39] The emergence of the third space becomes a pattern in the analysis carried out in this thesis, but in order to acknowledge such emergence, the application of a multifocal reading turned out to be indispensable. This is particularly the case of the first half of the thesis, where I look at neighbourhoods, train stations and phone centres, as in these places the endogenous and the allogeneous viewpoints overlap. I have chosen to consider in particular two kinds of

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[35] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 37.
[36] Westphal, p. 122.
[37] Westphal, pp. 122–128.
[38] Westphal, p. 128.
[39] Westphal, p. 129.

sources: Italian postcolonial novels and a collection of articles from Italian newspapers.[40] These two sources will be the lens through which I illustrate the role played by the public spaces examined in this thesis. Both sources, by including the description of the spaces considered, cover a variety of different perspectives providing a persuasive reading of these contact zones.

The settlement of migrants in Italy, the sharing of living spaces such as flats, buildings and, in a wider perspective, cities with Italian non-migrants, along with the launching of commercial enterprises, has been frequently depicted by the press as a dangerous consequence of the absence of control laws and the lack of means to welcome them.[41] As Andall and Duncan point out:

> The very act of settlement involves an encounter and interaction with an established environment. The political objectives of governments can mean that these interactions are facilitated or impeded, just as informal and more formal interactions can occur at the social or cultural level. Conceptualized as contact zones in the colonial literature and diasporic space in postcolonial discourse, these interactions tend not to be neutrally received and accepted but rather have been and are frequently contested and contentious spaces of mediation and interaction.[42]

As this quotation suggests, the dynamics taking place in the processes of settlement are complex, differently perceived and equally differently represented. For this reason multifocalization can be the key to an investigation that intends to embrace a plurality of point of view, to illustrate a plurality of representations, as well as the complexity of these spaces' role.

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[40] Throughout the thesis, however, I will also draw on websites, blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts as well as on official legal documents in order to provide an even wider array of representations.

[41] For more information about migrants and their representation in the press see: Giovanna Campani, 'Migrants and Media, The Italian Case', in *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference* ed. by Russel King and Nancy Wood (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 38–52; Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004); Jessika terWal, 'The Social Representation of Immigrants: The Pantanella Issue in the Pages of La Repubblica', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 22 (1996), 39–66.

[42] Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture' in *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures*, ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1-19 (p. 3).

In line with this, I take into consideration a wide range of articles collected from Italian newspapers with different political backgrounds and uneven circulation.[43] These sources provide me with a wide variety of representations of the same space; in the same way, the presence of different voices in the novels contributes with an equally wide multiplicity of viewpoints. The spaces therefore are not analysed by comparing journalistic sources to the literary ones, but rather by juxtaposing a variety of perspectives that by adding information, details and comments one on the other eventually shape a comprehensive illustration of these spaces. Consequently, the newspapers are not included to illustrate the negative aspects of immigration as often attempted by some politicians and vast part of the citizenry; nor are the novels used to support the positive sides of multiculturalism. Both sources are rather employed as complementary representations of the same shared postcolonial context; this is the only way through which the intention to provide a broad analysis of these spaces can be fulfilled.

Therefore, the spatial analysis is enriched by the wide spectrum of voices that describe the ways these spaces are inhabited: the situation of familiarity established by a character and a specific space is expanded by an interview given by a woman about that same space; the news of the curfew in a certain neighbourhood, unenthusiastically reported in several articles, gains insightful angles when read in a short story; the Italian man denouncing the situation of decay is reflected by the hostile character complaining about it. I have decided to examine the press, rather than other possible sources (pictures, films and so on) because, methodologically speaking, I can efficiently analyse this source in juxtaposition to the literary works. Indeed, the newspaper articles are examined both on a content level, in order to highlight the events occurring in these places, but also on a linguistic level so as to gain an understanding of how the press represents these same places and their inhabitants.

In this thesis each chapter will be devoted to a particular space; consequently, I investigate the novels transversely in order to establish different connections between the texts on the basis of the space in question. The public spaces selected play an important role in Italian contemporary society and they have often been at the centre of debates about the presence of migrants in Italy. This is because spaces like train stations and phone centres are, as Giuliana Benvenuti defines them, 'zone di contatto' where the encounter

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[43] All the sources have been assembled through the online providers of each newspaper.

between Italians with and without migrant origin takes place.[44] These 'zone di contatto' are the tangible evidence of migrants settling down in Italy, the territory shared by migrants and non-migrants. This cohabitation has sometimes been perceived as a negative element by vast part of Italian population: a coexistence that is frequently regarded as a threatening phenomenon that endangers both Italian identity and national security.

From a theoretical perspective this thesis draws on different theories and secondary sources. The first part will focus more specifically on the spatial analysis of public space; the investigation, will be primarily sustained by Lefebvre, Cresswell, Sibley and Douglas and in particular their contribution to the discourse around issues of inclusion/exclusion and of processes of boundary-construction.[45] Douglas, specifically her article *The Idea of a Home*, will also be important for Chapter 4 in which the space of the house and of provisional dwellings will be investigated;[46] this part is also very indebted to the work of Morley as well as of Sara Ahmed, both of whom provided me with an ideal theoretical support to look at the notion of home in narratives of movement and migration. [47]In the final part of the thesis the focus will be on more personal spaces and the way these are inhabited by characters in the novels. Sara Ahmed's work on emotions and the relationship with language and space represents the perfect framework to carry out an exhaustive analysis on the meaning of these very personal locations.[48]

The primary sources analysed in this thesis can be divided in two groups: literary and journalistic. The selection process of the literary texts develops from the decision to analyse

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[44] Benvenuti affirms the importance of analysing the spatial dimension in literature; she underlines that 'la letteratura non si ritrova più di fronte all'alternativa tra descrivere spazi "reali" o creare spazi immaginari: è invece una delle varianti che codeterminano la spazialità, una componente attiva della produzione dello spazio, di quello urbano come del paesaggio. [….] La riunificazione di spazio percepito, conosciuto e vissuto che Lefebvre indicava come compito per un soggetto rivoluzionario viene oggi rideclinata in riflessioni sui confini e sul "terzo spazio", dove la sfida è quella di individuare zone di contatto che consentano di riarticolare la segregazione e di costruire nuove identità ibride e nuovi spazi trasgressivi. Spazi che emergano dalla tensione tra i luoghi della segregazione e la mobilità della frontiera, una tensione della quale oggi si occupano teorici e artisti'. Giuliana Benvenuti, 'Il protagonismo dello spazio', *ISintellettualistoria2* <http://isintellettualistoria2.myblog.it/2009/07/15/giuliana-benvenuti-il-protagonismo-dello-spazio/> [accessed 5 February 2015].

[45] Tim Cresswell, *In Place / Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011); Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*.

[46] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home'

[47] Ahmed, 'Home and Away'; David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

[48] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

novels and short stories that were written by authors who share a background of migration to Italy either experienced by themselves (as it is the case of Amara Lakhous), or by parents (as it is the case of Igiaba Scego), or just one parent (as for Ubax Cristina Ali Farah or Gabriella Kuruvilla). The origin of the authors is varied and not determining for their inclusion in this analysis; what made the difference was the crucial role played by space in their work. As a matter of fact, in addition to their multicultural background, these authors show a particular attention to the issue of space, not just as a setting, but rather as a key element for the development of the narration. For Lakhous this is evident already from the titles of his novels, and this is also the case of Kuruvilla's *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*. For Ali Farah the relevance of space is not immediate but it becomes evident throughout the analysis of the text as certain spaces appear quite regularly in the novel. For Scego the spatial dimension is an important element already in her earlier novels and it becomes the protagonist of *La mia casa è dove sono*. Once I have selected the authors, the process to choose the texts that I was going to analyse followed three main steps. The first one is related to the characters: all of them – as do the authors in question – share a common background of migration to Italy. This element was crucial in order to find characters that want to inhabit places in a specific attempt to turn them into home spaces. Subsequently I looked for spaces that recurred in more than one text and possibly more than once. It was fundamental for this analysis that these spaces were not a casual appearance in one text but the representation of a habitual presence in the lives of these characters. Finally, I included novels and short stories where specific places represent an essential element in specific stories, either because they are frequently mentioned as a recurrent place visited or inhabited by one of the characters, or because they are indispensable for certain events to happen. These are the spaces investigated in the final chapter, namely the bathroom, the bedroom, a bench and a public garden. Subsequently, the main literary sources will be: *Madre Piccola* by Cristina Ali Farah, *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* by Gabriella Kuruvilla, *La mia casa è dove sono* by Igiaba Scego and finally *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio* and *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* both by Amara Lakhous.[49]

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[49] Ali Farah, *Madre piccola*; Gabriella Kuruvilla, *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2012) especially the first chapter entitled 'Via Padova' (pp. 3-49); Amara Lakhous, *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* (Rome: E/O, 2010); Amara Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Rome: E/O, 2006); Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa*.

In relation to the journalistic sources I will draw, in particular, on *La Repubblica* and the *Corriere della Sera* as they are the most important and best-selling newspapers in Italy, but also because, in theory, they are considered less politically involved if compared to other dailies. I also provide the point of view of two politically aligned journals: *Il Giornale* (right-oriented) and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (left-oriented). However, when it is relevant to the discussion, I include other newspapers such as *La Stampa*, for instance, because it offers a closer look to the situation in Turin.

The timeframe, of both literary and journalistic sources that will be analysed in this thesis, spans from the moment in which immigration in Italy started to be represented as a problematic issue up to December 2014. According to Alessandro Dal Lago in his book *Non-Persone* the origin of the perception of immigration in Italy as a problem coincides with the beginning of the 1990s. He argues:

> All'inizio degli anni novanta, la sostanziale indifferenza delle istituzioni e della società italiana lascia il posto a un'ostilità, simbolica e materiale, sempre più decisa – una reazione rafforzata da provvedimenti di ordine pubblico spettacolari che hanno legittimato una cultura dell'emergenza e della chiusura verso gli stranieri […]. Dall'inizio degli anni novanta, i migranti sono divenuti per l'opinione pubblica italiana e le cause della crisi sociale e delle paure collettive che hanno segnato la fine della cosiddetta Prima repubblica.[50]

Therefore, with the exception of the articles collected from *La Stampa* in Chapter 1 referring to internal migration in the 1950s, the articles included in the analysis dates from January 1990 to the end of the research process of this thesis.[51]

Outline of the thesis

The structure is intended to slowly narrow the perspective from chapter to chapter, from wide public areas in the first part, to small and intimate spaces in the second. In the first

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[50] Dal Lago, p. 25.

[51] The only exception is the article 'Per l'aggressore in ottanta assistono allo stupro' published in 1989 which will be cited in Chapter 2 because it represents the starting point of a series of articles denouncing the situation of social decay at Termini railway station. Massimo Lugli, 'Per l'aggressore in ottanta assistono allo stupro', *La Repubblica*, 9 June 1989 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/06/09/per-aggressore-in-ottanta-assistono-allo.html> [accessed 22 March 2013].

chapter I take into consideration multi-ethnic urban areas of three Italian cities namely Rome, Milan and Turin. In the second and third chapters I address respectively the analysis of the spaces of train stations and phone centres.

The fourth chapter will function as a bridge between the first three chapters and the final one, as it takes into consideration the space of the house. I look at the space of the house in a practical way, i.e. by analysing the ways migrants inhabit their more or less temporary dwellings (be they appropriate houses or provisional shelters) in order to transform them into home spaces.

The final chapter analyses spaces that are relevant only for certain characters in specific novels, these are: the bathroom, the bedroom, the bench and a public garden in Rome. In these spaces the presence of memory triggers makes characters reminisce about important, but also ordinary, events and people belonging to the past. The examination of the characters' relationships with these spaces highlights how these special connections are not related to an experience of migration that implied the abandonment of an original home (as it is often the case in the other chapters), but rather to a traumatic experience common to anyone that envisages the loss and the mourning of a loved one.

In conclusion, in this thesis I argue that characters, despite having left what is considered to be the home (be it the house of their childhood or of their family), set in motion a series of processes that lead to the renegotiation of the identity of certain spaces, in order to rebuild a mode of familiarity that crosses the walls of the home, be this national or more local. When these processes are successful, the meaning of home will also need to be renegotiated in order to allow the existence of a plurality which is not the same as the original home, but which does not have to be perceived as less valuable. As Parviz, one of the characters of *Scontro di civiltà*, affirms:

> Sono molto affezionato alla sua cucina. È l'unico spazio che dia tranquillità al mio cuore ferito. […] Gli odori che riempiono la cucina mi fanno dimenticare la realtà e mi sembra di essere tornato nella mia cucina a Shiraz. Dopo un po' il profumo delle spezie si trasforma in incenso, ed è questo che mi fa ballare e cantare come un derviscio, ahi ahi ahi …. […] Ognuno di noi ha un luogo dove si trova a suo agio. C'è

chi si trova bene in una chiesa, in una moschea, in un santuario, in un cinema, in uno stadio oppure in un mercato. Io mi trovo bene in cucina.[52]

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[52] Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà*, p. 20.

Chapter One

'Mi sembrava di vivere ancora al Cairo. […] "Ma questa Roma dov'è?"'[1] Practices of Belonging in Multi-ethnic Italian Neighbourhoods

This chapter aims to look at selected Italian streets and urban zones which have been targeted by the Italian press, as suffering from social and physical decay, due to the presence of an increasing number of immigrants. These areas are also the settings of the Italian postcolonial novels I have selected. Both postcolonial writers and the press have acknowledged that in the last twenty years Italian cities have changed profoundly. This is not surprising, in theory, as in the 'global' era, with the arrival of immigrants, every city has undergone this same process.[2] However, Italians are still struggling to accept the idea of a multicultural society, and the depiction that the press offers of these areas is indicative of this sentiment. The neighbourhood as a key space in everyday life is the mirror of these changing situations. This is not only a limited, geographical entity inside the city; it is also a social environment and a crucial networking place:

> The neighbourhood may become more important as an arena for recreation and leisure. In a sense, the neighbourhood becomes an extension of the home for social purposes and hence extremely important in identity terms: 'location matters' and the neighbourhood becomes part of our statement about who we are. Moreover, it is important not to see the neighbourhood as just a territorially bounded entity but as a series of overlapping social networks.[3]

The neighbourhood shapes the identity of its inhabitants and, conversely, the inhabitants forge the identity of a specific neighbourhood through their *ways of using the city*.[4] If until twenty years ago, the identity of the selected neighbourhoods has been perceived by its inhabitants as homogenous and cohesive, the arrival of immigrants from every corner of the world, with their habits and traditions, has destabilised the citizens' certainty of

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[1] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 41.

[2] Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization, and Hybridity* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), p. 3.

[3] Ray Forrest and Ade Kearns, 'Social Cohesion, Social Capital and the Neighbourhood', *Urban Studies*, 38 (2001), 2125–43 (p. 2130).

[4] De Certeau, p. 30.

being in their own safe environment. Therefore, on the one hand, the *old residents* do not feel at home any longer, as the migrants' settlement in their local areas has displaced their reference points; on the other hand, the newcomers are trying to make themselves at home, *appropriating* the space they inhabit.[5] In the articles collected the presence of migrants is suggested as a valid reason to abandon specific areas which are very often described as invaded by foreign intruders.

Migrants, from their point of view, through their attempt to inhabit the neighbourhood, are trying to become part not only of the city but also, of Italy. Opening shops, frequenting parks, sending their children to the local schools, are all *practices of belonging*,[6] used by migrants in order to have greater involvement in Italian society and ultimately, to feel at home. These practices are obstructed by the lack of effective legislation which could help migrants' integration in the city dynamics. Therefore, migrants' attempts to establish a satisfactory way of living in Italy is not always successful; the consequences of this failure, such as homelessness or unemployment, are perceived as generating chaos, disorder and filth which may threaten the order and harmony of Italian society. The presence of migrants in Italian neighbourhoods is obstructed by Italian residents who, according to the press, feel overwhelmed and threatened by the strong presence of migrants:

> Privo di ogni sovrastruttura propriamente ideologica, il razzismo italiano si fa 'senso comune'. Appare impermeabile al contesto degli eventi e all'agenda politica […] Procede al contrario per contagio in comunità urbane che si sentono improvvisamente deprivate di ricchezza, sicurezza, futuro, attraverso 'marcatori etnici' che si alimentano di luoghi comuni o, come li definiscono gli addetti, 'luoghi di specie'. […] La xenofobia lavora tanto più in profondità quanto più si fa odio di prossimità […]. Disprezzo verso donne e uomini etnicamente diversi ma soprattutto socialmente 'troppo contigui' e numericamente non più esigui.[7]

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[5] Lefebvre, p. 165.

[6] Ares Kalandides and Dina Vaiou, '"Ethnic" Neighbourhoods? Practices of Belonging and Claims to the City', *European Urban and Regional Studies - EUR URBAN REG STUD*, 19 (2012), 254–66 (p. 254).

[7] Carlo Bonini, 'Nel belpaese dell'intolleranza; il microrazzismo quotidiano', *La Repubblica*, 25 October 2008<http://www.repubblica.it/2008/10/sezioni/cronaca/intolleranza-razzismo/intolleranza-razzismo/intolleranza-razzismo.html> [accessed 10 March 2013]. Noteworthy is also the role played by social networks such as Twitter and Facebook used by some citizens to exchange pictures and videos to denounce the situation and to complain against migrants' presence in these neighbourhoods. Some

Migrants' efforts to settle in Italian cities and how this is often challenged by the press and by a vast part of Italian citizens to prevent their success, is a vicious circle which underpins this chapter. The ways in which the press represents multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, as undergoing a process of degradation, both on a physical level and on a social one, will be analysed. On the other hand, the problems presented will be interpreted through the lens of Italian postcolonial novels, which will demonstrate how migrants are trying to put down roots, and to feel at home in Italy, despite the hostile sentiment within Italian society. This chapter will provide a contextual frame which aims to facilitate also the understanding of the analysis carried out in the following chapters.

Together with the novels mentioned in the Introduction, the analysis will comprise articles collected from Italian newspapers. The selection process of the articles was very similar to the one undertaken for the novels, i.e. the main topic of these articles is represented by the role played by space for different reasons. In some cases they are the backdrop to criminal events, or for instance something significant happened in their proximities. This criterion implied the inclusion of different typologies of articles: *cronaca*, for instance, as well as financial reports and editorials; the styles, the authors and the audiences are therefore very different. Additionally, I will also look at Amara Lakhous's *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario*, which takes place in Turin, and Giorgio Fontana's *Per legge superiore*.[8] Additionally, this chapter draws on the collection of interviews carried out by Giorgio Fontana and published in the book *Babele 56, otto fermate nella città che cambia* and on the autobiographical experience of Italo Fontana published with the title *Non sulle mie scale. Diario di un cittadino alle prese con l'immigrazione clandestina e l'illegalità*.[9]

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examples are 'Degrado Esquilino' <https://twitter.com/degradesquilino> [accessed 21-03-2013]; 'Roma fa schifo' <https://twitter.com/romafaschifo> [accessed 21-03-2013]. On the other hand, some Facebook groups work in order to promote specific neighbourhoods, for instance, 'Via Padova – Milano' <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Via-Padova-Milano/140377599359698> [accessed 21-03-2013] and 'Agenzia Sviluppo San Salvario' (onlus) <https://www.facebook.com/agenziasviluppo.sansalvario> [accessed 21-03-2013].

[8] Giorgio Fontana, *Per legge superiore* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 2011).

[9] Amara Lakhous, *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario* (Rome: E/O, 2013); Giorgio Fontana, *Babele 56. Otto fermate nella città che cambia* (Milan: Terre di mezzo, 2008); Italo Fontana, *Non sulle mie scale. Diario di un cittadino alle prese con l'immigrazione clandestina e l'illegalità* (Rome: Donzelli, 2001).

The analysis of the press has highlighted specific threads that regularly appear when talking about these cities and the presence of immigrants. First of all, the issue of housing management created several problems for the locals who recognised in the so-called *case-dormitorio* potential criminal danger and a breeding ground for germs and diseases. The unsatisfactory administration of the housing question often leads journalists to draw a comparison between internal migration and foreign immigration; the areas included in this study were actually common destinations for Italian migrants, mostly from the south, during the last century and particularly in the 1950s.[10] To better investigate this parallel, my analysis will also draw on an additional selection of articles collected from the historical online archive of *La Stampa*, from 1 January 1950 to 1 January 1960. The problem of *degrado*, once a consequence of internal migration is now one of foreign immigration. Regarding this issue, it will be useful to highlight how the press, through the analysis of the physical decay of the areas considered, is often explicitly suggesting, that the decay of Italian cities is due to the migrants' overcrowding of certain areas. Crucial in this process of deterioration, is the role of migrants' commercial enterprises. It is particularly relevant to point out how the presence of shops and restaurants is decisive in producing, in Italian citizens, a growing *fear of invasion*. This sentiment of invasion, combined with the process of decay in the area, leads the original inhabitants to fear that the traditional identity of the neighbourhood will be lost;[11] a frequent pattern used by the press to highlight how dangerous migrants are, is the nostalgic reference to how the *quartiere* used to be before their arrival, and to how Italian cultural heritage is disappearing, due to the newcomers' presence. The first outcome of this situation is the accusation that the authorities are taking insufficient action to resolve the situation. A leitmotiv is constituted by the incessant complaint on the locals' part, about the indecision, the disorganisation and the lack of measures taken by both the national government, and the various local administrations. All these issues are portrayed by the press as crucial and problematic. On the other hand, however, the analysis of the literary sources will demonstrate how behind these situations often lie the migrants' attempts to become part of Italian society, and more importantly, to feel at home.

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[10] Petros Petsimeris, 'Urban Decline and the New Social and Ethnic Divisions in the Core Cities of the Italian Industrial Triangle', *Urban Studies*, 35 (1998), 449–66 (p. 450).

[11] Throughout this chapter I will use expression such as *original inhabitants* or *locals* or *residents* meaning Italian non-migrants living in these specific areas.

1.1 'I miei undici coinquilini: otto egiziani, un marocchino, un bengalese e un senegalese'.[12] Immigrants and Housing Policy in Italy

In all the areas taken into consideration in this study, the housing issue is a recurrent problem. Italy was neither prepared nor willing to prepare itself for the arrival of migrants. The different municipalities of the main Italian cities did not offer a grounded and organised housing policy which would have guaranteed the satisfaction of the migrants' primary needs. Along with a lack of legislation, the behaviour of Italian landlords was, and still is, particularly discriminating. As Flavia Cristaldi affirms:

> most landlords do not rent their houses to foreigners – especially if they belong to specific ethnic groups – without a security deposit. When they decide to rent, to a foreigner, there is often no written lease to protect the renter. Landlords also tend to require additional fees and tenants are granted only short terms leases. Rents are paid 'per person' and not by square meter, while flats rented to migrants are usually thought uninhabitable by the Italians because of their location and unsanitary conditions.[13]

Unfortunately, this situation does not limit itself to Rome, to which the above-cited article refers, but is a common pattern repeated throughout the peninsula. For migrants it is extremely difficult to find an adequate place to live, particularly if they do not possess a regular residence permit. Without a residence permit, they cannot pass through the letting agency system and are therefore forced to contact private owners who can impose their own conditions, which migrants are compelled to accept. This is also reiterated in the comical dialogue from *Divorzio all'islamica* between Akram, the phone centre's owner, and Christian/Issa,[14] the male protagonist:

> Infine, mi mette in guardia contro l'avidità della mia futura padrona di casa. 'Teresa è una stronza, ti chiederà duecentocinquanta euro al mese. Cercherà di fregarti per farsi qualche viaggio a tue spese'. 'Un viaggio a mie spese?'. 'Teresa ha un

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[12] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 65.

[13] Flavia Cristaldi, 'Multiethnic Rome: Toward Residential Segregation?', *GeoJournal*, 58 (2002), 81–90 (pp. 86–87).

[14] Christian is an Italian man hired by the secret services to play the part of a Tunisian migrant, Issa, and infiltrate in the migrant community in viale Marconi and more specifically in the phone centre 'Little Cairo' suspected to be the basis of a terrorist cell. The character of Christian will be investigated in Chapter 3 along with the role of the phone centre.

soprannome: Vacanza. Hai capito?'. 'No'. 'Le piace molto viaggiare, per questo ha sempre bisogno di soldi'. 'Insomma come devo comportarmi con lei?'. 'Tieni duro su duecento euro. Tu hai il permesso di soggiorno, quindi non può trattarti come i suoi inquilini senza documenti'.[15]

The first consequence of this unfair housing management, is overcrowding and thus, unacceptable sanitary conditions. This common circumstance has led to the creation of expressions like *case-dormitorio*, *palazzi-dormitorio* and *appartamenti-dormitorio* which now form part of the Italian lexicon. The press has been denouncing this system, with monotonous regularity. In Rome, and particularly in the Esquilino neighbourhood, several cases have been described by the press, often blaming the proximity of Termini station, seen as the first meeting point after migrants' arrival in the capital:

> Escono come fantasmi dalle stanze trasformate in dormitorio, dai letti a castello separati da uno spazio così piccolo da sembrare loculi, dal bagno. […] Si sale a piedi, incrociando due bengalesi che stanno già andando a lavorare (e che vengono immediatamente bloccati e controllati) e un paio di inquilini mattinieri che guardano le divise con un filo d'apprensione. […] Tre stanze, neanche 80 metri quadrati e 22 posti letto accatastati all'inverosimile. […] Tutti mostrano la stessa espressione rassegnata, gli stessi occhi liquidi, le stesse facce che parlano di miseria, di dolore, di precariato, di famiglie lontane e di telefonate piene di nostalgia nei phone center dei cinesi.[16]

A similar description of the migrants' plight is provided by Christian/Issa in *Divorzio all'islamica*. After having contacted the Roman landlady, Vacanza, and followed the instruction given by Akram, Christian/Issa moves into the flat that he shares with other migrants. The flat is overpopulated and governed by a clear power hierarchy:

> Una delle cose positive di questa settimana complicata è che un po' alla volta ho cominciato a conoscere tutti i miei undici coinquilini: otto egiziani, un marocchino, un bengalese e un senegalese. […] Il nostro appartamento non supera i sessanta metri quadri: cucina, bagno e due stanze. C'è un movimento continuo, ventiquattr'ore su

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[15] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 44–45.
[16] Massimo Lugli, 'Esquilino, in tre camere 22 immigrati. Ecco gli hotel della disperazione', *La Repubblica*, 3 March 2010
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/03/03/esquilino-in-tre-camere-22-immigrati-ecco.html> [accessed 6 June 2013].

ventiquattro, sembra di stare in un pronto soccorso. […] Sessanta metri quadri! Dividendo questa superficie per dodici avremmo cinque metri quadri a testa. […] Oltre il problema del sovraffollamento esiste un codice d'onore da rispettare. […] Prima di tutto, c'è una gerarchia su base religiosa, anche se siamo tutti musulmani. Gli osservanti godono di uno status privilegiato […]. Poi c'è un'altra gerarchia, di diversa natura, basata sul paese di provenienza: gli otto egiziani si sentono i veri padroni di casa.[17]

As previously mentioned, this is not only a Roman issue, but it is also a common problem for other Italian cities. In via Sarpi, the Milanese Chinatown, for instance, the police discovered an underground dormitory accessible by a drain, which was inhabited by around sixty people:[18]

Per bloccare la via d'uscita esterna, un tombino sulla pubblica via, hanno dovuto piazzarci sopra le ruote della volante. […] Cinesi stipati come topi a dormire in loculi, sessanta materassi separati da pareti di compensato, due soli sudici bagni, un cucinino con quattro bombole a gas, i fili elettrici a vista, afrori e condizioni igieniche disperate. […] Pagando pure un affitto: 100 euro al mese a coppia, 200 per portarci dentro anche i bambini o per avere il lusso di pochi metri quadrati da occupare al primo piano, quello dotato di finestre che peraltro restavano perennemente serrate.[19]

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[17] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 65–67–68.

[18] With regard to the city of Milan, I will mainly consider via Padova because of its presence in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*. I will also mention via Sarpi, but I will not investigate it as an area being inhabited by Chinese migrants; Chinese migration differs from other migrations and it requires a separate analysis. Chinese migrants started arriving in Italy much earlier than other communities and although the number of migrants arriving from the PRC has been growing since the early eighties, their modalities of settling down in Italy presents various differences. Chinese migrants have been working in specific economic sectors such as small manufacture ventures and the restaurant industry. Additionally, differently from other communities, the image of Chinese migrants in Italy has always been linked to an economic element. They are often seen as threatening competitors to the economy, driven by dynamics of corruption tied to the Chinese mafia, and their products are considered of low quality and the result of counterfeiting. For more information refer to *Come ci vedono e ci raccontano. Rappresentazioni sociali degli immigrati cinesi a Roma*, ed. by Maria C. Pitrone and others (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012); Laura De Giorgi and Guido Samarani, *Lontane, vicine. Le relazioni fra Cina e Italia nel Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2011); Gaoheng Zhang, 'The Protest in Milan's Chinatown and the Chinese Immigrants in Italy in the Media (2007–2009)', *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 1 (2012), 21–37.

[19] 'Milano, l'hotel dei Cinesi con ingresso dal tombino', *La Repubblica*, 25 March 2009 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2009/03/25/milano-hotel-dei-cinesi-con-ingresso.html> [accessed 6 June 2013]. The use of the word *loculi* (burial recess), both in this article and in the one mentioned before (Lugli), is an efficient tool in order to recall the idea of death, of fear and of impracticality of living there.

The situation is particularly critical, not only for the migrants, who are forced to live in substandard conditions, but also for the Italian residents of the neighbourhood, who perceive those buildings as migrants' dens, where criminal activity is organised, as well as a source of filth and disease which will, sooner or later, spread throughout the entire city. Emblematic of this intolerance is the neighbourhood of via Padova in Milan and the by now famous building in via Cavezzali 11. Often denominated *il residence degli immigrati*, the building in via Cavezzali 11, inhabited almost exclusively by immigrants, has undergone a series of dramatic events (scuffles, the killing of a Moroccan man, a fire in a flat) which led the *old inhabitants* of via Padova to be anxious about it, to be concerned about the sanitary conditions, and to consider it a refuge for criminals; a place to be scared of:

> Per molti è il palazzo della paura. Per altri un ghetto senza regole. Una sorta di casbah nel cuore di via Padova, la strada più multietnica della città. È il condominio di via Cavezzali 11, terra di nessuno. Con i suoi 194 mini appartamenti abitati da 500 persone di cui 350 straniere, sette delle quali agli arresti domiciliari. È l'edificio di nove piani, da poco ristrutturati, che ospita viados, prostitute, spacciatori e dove lo scorso lunedì ci è scappato il morto. Mentre ieri notte l'ennesimo incendio ha distrutto un'abitazione al sesto piano e mandato in ospedale per intossicazione da fumo un uomo di 40 anni e una neonata di soli 17 giorni.[20]

People's complaints are fuelled by the press, which, in turn, reports them with an abundance of adjectives and details. Indicative is also the expression 'terra di nessuno' which, in a sense, suggests that Italians have lost power over that area; by not saying

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[20] Michele Focarete, 'Fuoco nel ghetto degli immigrati, neonata all'ospedale', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 March 2006
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2006/marzo/04/Fuoco_nel_ghetto_degli_immigrati_co_7_060304007.sh tml> [accessed 2 May 2013]. See also: Massimo Pisa and Lorenza Pleuteri, 'Rissa nel residence degli immigrati. Clandestino ucciso da un vigilante', *La Repubblica*, 28 February 2006
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/02/28/rissa-nel-residence-degli-immigrati-clandestino-ucciso.html?ref=search> [accessed 5 April 2013]. For further information about the building in via Cavezzali 11 see: Michele Focarete, 'Marocchino ucciso da guardia giurata, tensione a Milano', *Corriere della Sera*, 28 February 2006
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2006/febbraio/28/Marocchino_ucciso_guardia_giurata_tensione_co_9_0 60228035.shtml> [accessed 5 April 2013]; Massimo Pisa, 'Il Residence è una polveriera. "Così non si può andare avanti"', *La Repubblica*, 28 February 2006
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/02/28/il-residence-una-polveriera-cosi-non-si.html?ref=search> [accessed 6 April 2013]; Massimo Pisa and Lorenza Pleuteri, 'Rissa'; Gianandrea Zagato, 'Via Padova, benvenuti nella casbah di Milano', *Il Giornale*, 14 June 2006
<http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/padova-benvenuti-nella-casbah-milano.html> [accessed 5 April 2013].

'migrants' land' but 'nobody's land' it emphasises that what matters is that it does not belong to Italians anymore.

In the majority of Italian newspapers, the building of via Cavezzali 11 plays a key role and it can be considered a metaphor for the entire phenomenon of immigration in Italy: disorganised, amplified and manipulated by politics. Via Cavezzali 11 in Milan like the Pantanella factory, or the *Roma Residence* in via Bravetta in Rome, is the culmination of circumstances which forced migrants into those difficult conditions:

> I believe that the difficulty in finding a home is an emblematic sign not only of the breaking of the social 'pact of hospitality' on the part of state institutions, but also of the breaking of the 'absolute hospitality' given to immigrants in a fair society. Immigrants are caught in the ambiguity in Italian legislation and society between a *de jure* endowment of housing rights and a *de facto* discrimination in rental policies all over Italy. The lack of institutional hospitality is linked to the lack of the recognition of their status as Italian citizens.[21]

The unspeakable conditions in which migrants are forced to live, are seen as unacceptable by the press which, as representative of Italians' opinion, '"blames" the migrants for occupying squalid accommodation and lowering the tone of certain neighbourhoods'.[22] Untroubled by the absence of a proper housing policy, Italians are rather disgusted by the lack of hygiene and scared of the tension that could be produced by the overcrowding of immigrants. The lack of 'institutional hospitality', as pointed out by Lombardi-Diop, beyond being linked 'to the lack of recognition of their status as Italian citizens',[23] is also strictly connected to the inability of the Italian population to overcome the metaphor of the immigrant as a guest; as highlighted by Mireille Rosello, 'this is a metaphor that has forgotten that it is a metaphor'.[24] The perpetration of this image in which the migrant is a guest and Italy is the *nazione ospitante*, implies the reiteration of the idea of immigrants

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[21] Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Roma Residence; Senegal, Italy and Transnational Hybrid Spaces', *Interventions*, 11 (2009), 400–419 (p. 401). About the Pantanella issue see: terWal, 'The social representation of immigrants'; Jennifer Burns, 'Provisional Constructions of the Eternal City: Figurations of Rome in Recent Italophone Writing', in *Imagining the City. Vol 2. The politics of urban space*, ed. by Christian Emden, Catherine Keen, and David Midgley (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2006), 357–73.

[22] Campani, p. 44.

[23] Lombardi-Diop, p. 401.

[24] Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

as non-equals and therefore expected to be grateful for what they are getting. As Rosello explains:

> If the roles of guests and hosts are set in stone, if immigrants are treated as if they always have to behave as guests, if hosts are always generous to their poor relations […] the continuum between guest and host disappears. Ironically, guests who are forced into the systematic position of the guest are often accused of parasitism, the host refusing to take responsibility for the historical position that deprives others of the pleasure and pride of taking their place.[25]

This accusation of parasitism is in line with Campani's previous quotation and reflects the Italian population's tendency to blame migrants for their condition of migration, particularly in relation to houses and the acceptance of living in a desperate condition. A clear portrait of this plight is given in Italo Fontana's *Non sulle mie scale*. Fontana is a retired psychoanalyst from Turin, who lives and used to work in San Salvario. During the 1990s he had to cope with the difficult situation his neighbourhood was experiencing. In his book he recalls how he managed to *survive* and to fight against drug dealers, prostitutes and illegal migrants who had established their workplace and their dwelling, in Fontana's building hall, stairs and lift. At the beginning of the book, he also explains how the attic of his building was inhabited by migrants; Fontana highlights that the attic was initially conceived to accommodate railwaymen in their afternoon break, but that, over the years, its occupants have changed:

> Un nipote di Quintino Sella, […] fece dividere le soffitte in tanti piccoli vani ma non li fornì di servizi igienici. […] La logica perversa dei facili guadagni portò a mutare la popolazione delle soffitte. Ai ferrovieri si sostituirono prima le prostitute […]. Poi vennero i travestiti e infine, in numero spaventoso, in un *turn over* frenetico, gente di ogni colore, in maggior parte clandestini. […] Nel 1995 gli abitanti regolari dello stabile erano diciotto, nelle soffitte si può calcolare con buona approssimazione che vivessero, nelle condizioni che ognuno può immaginare, da cento a centoventi persone. […] Si era venuto così a creare una sorta di zona extraterritoriale, di cui

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[25] Rosello, p. 167.

nessuno poteva avere il controllo. Ciò che accadeva in quel formicaio lo descrivono
gli stralci di documenti che riporterò.[26]

Unlike the railwaymen who used to spend a small amount of time there, migrants are overpopulating the attic and have made it their residence. It is here that the conflict takes place: migrants are experiencing a space in a different way from Italians' expectations; the attic was configured in order to accommodate the railwaymen who needed to rest for only few hours (the emphasis on the absence of the toilet is emblematic of this time limit). The migrants' use of the attic as a permanent abode, is going against common sense and in doing so it is perceived as wrong, *inappropriate*.[27] Turin and particularly San Salvario, experienced this issue at an earlier time when compared to Via Padova; with time the situation has improved and, in a study carried out by *Cooperativa Antilia* and *Cooperativa Sociale Senza Frontiere di Torino* in 2005, the housing issue if not totally solved, seems to have been ameliorated:

> Gli immigrati non si accontentano più di vivere in 10 in una stanza. La gente vuole anche vivere qui… Non ce n'è più una scelta di immigrazione di una parte del Marocco, che aveva solo l'obiettivo di raccogliere soldi e tornare. Ultimamente è cambiato, non ci sono più case in comune, la gente cerca una casa per poter vivere. È scomparso questo fenomeno di affollamento. Magari trovi case con quattro o cinque adulti, ma con due camere, con queste situazioni buone.[28]

Although the situation is improving, discriminating criteria are still applied in the renting system both in Turin and in the rest of Italy; the afore-mentioned study in fact, also shows the difficulties that migrants have to face when looking for a place to rent, specifying, nonetheless, that the situation in Turin is better than in cities like Bologna, Perugia or Milan:

> Trovare una casa in affitto per un singolo o per una famiglia straniera è difficile; quando la si trova, occorre accettare le condizioni imposte: spesso la casa è piccola, degradata, senza servizi ed in ogni caso costa cara. Sembra inoltre persistere un forte

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[26] Italo Fontana, p. 31.
[27] Tim Cresswell, p. 10.
[28] Extract from *Moschea della Pace* in Cooperativa Antilia and Cooperativa sociale Senza Frontiere di Torino, 'Politiche urbane, immigrazione e coesistenza sociale a Torino', 2005, pp. 51–52 <http://www.antilia.to.it/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Report_ATC_DEF.pdf>.

> pregiudizio nei confronti degli immigrati: se i cittadini provenienti dall'est Europa, in genere non incontrano grosse difficoltà, gli immigrati dal Maghreb sono certamente meno favoriti; in ogni caso pare che i pregiudizi maggiori interessino gli immigrati dell'Africa sub sahariana. Molti proprietari degli immobili chiedono esplicitamente di non avere inquilini extracomunitari; la causa prima di tale situazione sembra essere il timore che affittare una casa a stranieri esponga a rischi elevati d'insolvenza, di degrado dell'abitazione e di contezioso, e svaluti l'immobile.[29]

This differentiating behaviour is a pattern which carries on repeating itself in other Italian cities. Interestingly enough, the housing issue was not completely unexpected in these areas. Via Padova, the Esquilino neighbourhood, San Salvario, were all also initially chosen by migrants from the south of Italy, since the beginning of last century. Also at that time, the overcrowding and the unfair housing management were two relevant problems; but as Petros Petsimeris analysing Milan, Genoa and Turin, underlines, the criterion behind the discriminating behaviour against the two groups of migrants was different: 'Between 1950 and 1985 the most important division of space was social, having more recently (post-1985) become ethnic'.[30]

The housing policy, therefore, has always applied discriminating criteria which have tended to damage the migrants from both the south of Italy and from abroad. This parallelism between the two migrations can be considered a leitmotiv in the press narrative relating to the urban areas of San Salvario, Esquilino and via Padova.

1.2 'Un tempo ci vivevano gli operai, i tranvieri, i meridionali, le piccole famiglie che facevano l'Italia. Adesso era il regno degli stranieri'.[31] Comparing Two Migrations

> Il signor Berti aveva sette anni quando, ricorda, un'immigrata della via, una signora bresciana, appendeva alle finestre un cartello con scritto sulla prima riga 'si affittano posti letto' e sulla seconda 'no meridionali'. Il signor Berti ha 59 anni e ha appena

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[29] Cooperativa Antilia, p. 52.
[30] Petsimeris, pp. 450–451.
[31] Giorgio Fontana, *Per legge*, p. 86.

venduto casa. Ci ha impiegato due anni e mezzo. 'Più che vendere, ho svenduto. Non la voleva nessuno. Per il posto, per il quartiere, per questo ghetto'.[32]

It is common among journalists to draw a comparison between migrants from the south, *i meridionali*, and migrants from outside Italy, *gli extracomunitari*.[33] This parallel works extremely well as the two migrations share several features; however, in the contemporary representation offered by the press, the most recent migration is depicted as more difficult to accept and impossible to deal with, because it is culturally too distant:

> Quando negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta arrivavano famiglie dal Sud e dal Veneto, trovavano case di ringhiera con comunità operaie già strutturate: 'La città teneva - racconta una donna che in via Padova vive dal '67 - condividevamo tutti la stessa miseria'. Oggi si incontrano invece due mondi che non potranno mai dialogare: anziani soli e poche famiglie da una parte; immigrati dall'altra.[34]

The contemporary description of internal migration, is often permeated by a nostalgic atmosphere, with references to the *babà* or to the harmony of the life together, too often overlooking that during that time *i meridionali* had to face serious racial discrimination.

As Dario Fo recalls in the *Corriere della Sera*: 'Si usano nei confronti degli extracomunitari le stesse espressioni che una volta si ascoltavano contro i meridionali: terroni sporchi, che coltivano i pomodori nella vasca da bagno'.[35] Memory is obviously used in a manipulative way; the reference to the internal migration by some journalists (or interviewees) is deceptive in order to demonstrate, in a moment of need, that the two

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[32] Andrea Galli, 'Condomini multietnici, quartieri a rischio. "Debiti, zecche, spaccio. Difficile convivenza"', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 January 2010 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2010/gennaio/10/Condomini_multietnici_quartieri_rischio_Debiti_co_7_100110011.shtml> [accessed 25 April 2013].

[33] Both expressions, *meridionali* and *extracomunitari*, are used in this chapter in line with their use by the press. Their use here, does not want to imply offensive connotations, although acknowledging such risk.

[34] Gianni Santucci, '"Spaccio e immigrati, questa è terra di nessuno"', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 October 2007 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2007/ottobre/30/Spaccio_immigrati_questa_terra_nessuno_co_6_071030003.shtml> [accessed 1 May 2013]. Despite the fact that migrants arrived both from the south of Italy and from Veneto, the *meridionali* were those that, according to the articles collected, created more problems. This also justifies the previously mentioned quotation about signor Berti hanging the sign 'no meridionali' when renting a bed.

[35] Fabrizio Gatti, 'Franca Rame, le parrocchie e il Leonka. Catena di solidarietà per i senza tetto', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 January 1999 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1999/gennaio/17/Franca_Rame_parrocchie_Leonka_Catena_co_0_9901173507.shtml> [accessed 3 May 2013].

migrations were different: the internal one could be accepted, the culture was the same, and Italian society as a whole shared these same difficulties. Contemporary migration, on the contrary, is too different, too disorganised and too conspicuous to be integrated.[36] That was not the reality; memory is obviously being used in a selective way in order to overlook problems that marked migration from the south of Italy and, at the same time, to emphasise what makes immigration from abroad impossible to be accepted. Accordingly, when the internal wave of migration is compared to the external one, the former is depicted as totally unproblematic, whereas in reality the two waves present many similar aspects, as Fo has pointed out.

Concerning the housing issue, for instance, and the problem of overcrowded flats and unhygienic conditions, an article published in *La Stampa* in October 1956 gives the following description of the situation in Turin:

> A Torino ci sono quasi 30 mila persone per cui l'inverno che avanza è un terribile spettro. Il freddo fa più atroce la miseria. Il riparo precario della baracca, della cantina, del carrozzone, diventa nemico, la soffitta si trasforma in un gelido buco. Disoccupati, pensionati, immigrati che 'non tengono ancora casa e lavoro', sottoccupati a poche centinaia di lire al giorno. […] Secondo il censimento del 1951, le baracche, le cantine, le grotte, gli scantinati e i carrozzoni erano 1345, abitati da 1396 famiglie per un complesso di oltre 5000 persone. […] Costoro vivono per la maggior parte nelle soffitte, nei sottotetti, negli scantinati o nei vani ricavati dalle scale.[37]

The same happens with the juxtaposition of the terms immigrants and criminals; in 1957 *La Stampa* was denouncing the urgency of the situation:

> Il fenomeno deve essere studiato seriamente per ridurre le cause d'una gran parte della delinquenza. L'altra sera a Cavoretto Domenico Luca, un giovane calabrese, per spalleggiare un amico che molestava una ragazza, sferrava una coltellata al viso

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[36] An insightful comparison between the two waves of immigration to Milan is the essay by Gianfranco Petrillo, 'The Two Waves. Milan as City of Immigration, 1955-1995', in *Italian Cityscapes: Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy*, ed. by John Foot and Robert Lumley (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2004), pp. 31–45.

[37] 'Trentamila persone vivono nelle baracche e nelle soffitte', *La Stampa*, 27 October 1956, <http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/It eIte,3/page,2/articleid,0061_01_1956_0253_0002_14608723/> [accessed 3 May 2013].

a un altro giovane. Lunedì sera in corso Sebastopoli, Giovanni Penella di 32 anni, da

Potenza, incontrata sua moglie in compagnia di un loro amico, calabrese, estraeva di

tasca un pugnale e colpiva la donna e l'amico al petto e alla schiena.[38]

The journalist provides other examples, but it needs saying that he also clarifies that this association between migrants and criminals does not imply a generalisation, but that he refers only to the people listed in the article. Despite the housing problem and the recurrent association between immigration and criminality, an additional similarity between the two migrations is the one related to hygiene: both groups of migrants were and are perceived as dirty. The most common repeated feature is the image of the *terroni sporchi* and of the filth in general, which is now used to describe immigrants.

The idea of dirt and diseases coming from these desperate situations is a powerful tool in the construction of boundaries, and most of all, what should remain outside them. If 'dirt is essentially disorder'[39] and the representation of migrants is often attached to the idea of dirt and disease, then migrants by creating disorder, are threatening the safety produced by normality, inducing therefore 'a whole set of anxieties'.[40] Noteworthy here, is an article from *La Stampa* published in 1995 in which the journalist, wandering around San Salvario in Turin, interviews the locals; one interview in particular, stands out:

Il parrucchiere Luciano che arrivò a Torino da Caltanissetta 37 anni fa non consente

ai neri di entrare nel suo locale 'esattamente come un tempo qui non si accettavano

meridionali perché eravamo brutti, sporchi e cattivi'. E aggiunge: 'Niente razzismo:

portano l'Aids addosso, non si lavano, sono arroganti, parcheggiano in seconda fila,

non pagano le tasse, i maschi si ubriacano di birra in mezzo alla strada, le donne

battono, ti urtano per strada e la polizia fa soltanto delle sortite di parata'.[41]

In this article, a hairdresser who migrated to Turin from Sicily in 1958, is using the same discriminating strategies against migrants that were used against him and more generally

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[38] 'Cronaca nera ed immigrati', *La Stampa*, 28 June 1957
<http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/Itemid,3/action,detail/id,0062_01_1957_0153_0002_14725563/> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[39] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2.
[40] Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2004) p. 43.
[41] Paolo Guzzanti, '"Non chiamateci nuovi barbari"', *La Stampa*, 24 June 1995
<http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/Itemid,3/page,13/articleid,0712_01_1995_0168_0013_10555361/> [accessed 5 April 2013].

against the *meridionali*, forty years earlier; the images he delineates are references to the lack of hygiene, the fear of contagion and the danger of criminality. According to this portrayal, migrants from South of Italy, though Italian, were also considered different, underdeveloped and of course, dirty; as seen in Lakhous's *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario* where Enzo, the protagonist, comments on one of his neighbours' incapacity of remembering what Italian internal migration was really like:

> Arrivavano alla stazione di Torino Porta Nuova dopo un lungo viaggio nel 'treno del sole', che partiva da Palermo e Siracusa per formare un solo convoglio, che poi attraversava la Calabria, la Basilicata, la Campania, il Lazio, la Toscana e la Liguria. Anche allora, come oggi, si diceva che i nuovi arrivati (chiamati *napuli* o addirittura *marocchini*), non erano 'integrabili'. Li si dipingeva come arretrati, analfabeti, pericolosi e portatori di delinquenza di ogni genere. Tanto meglio tenerli lontani. 'Non si affitta ai meridionali' era lo slogan di quell'accoglienza dimenticata in fretta. Io mi ricordo, mi ricordo tutto […] Quanto disprezzo, quanta umiliazione. Poi si è pensato fosse meglio nascondere la merda sotto il tappeto. Voltare pagina senza nemmeno leggerla. Mi chiedo: ci potrà mai essere un'integrazione senza accettazione, senza rispetto, senza comprensione, senza memoria?[42]

Enzo Laganà is a journalist who was born in Calabria but lives and works in Turin. The expressions used both to describe migrants from the south, and migrants from abroad, as also evidenced by the two previous quotations, belong to a discourse of *infantilisation*: 'Fanon (1986) has observed infantilisation as one of the ways in which racism is manifested. People are assumed to have reduced capacities. Placed as minor in a social hierarchy, they are assigned as having lesser faculties'.[43]

The efficacy of this process in everyday Italy, is evident for example, in the surprise provoked in public opinion following the appointment of the Italian Congolese-born *Ministro dell'Integrazione* Cécile Kyenge in April 2013.[44] The language used in these

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[42] Lakhous, *Contesa*, pp. 45–46.
[43] Puwar, p. 60.
[44] See also: Eleonora Capelli, 'Cécile Kyenge all'integrazione dal Congo al cuore dell'Emilia', *La Repubblica*, 27 April 2013 <http://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/04/27/news/c_cile_kienge_all_integrazione-57570954/> [accessed 6 February 2014]; 'Lega contro la Congolese. Gli elogi di Balotelli', *Corriere della Sera*, 28 April 2013 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2013/aprile/28/Lega_contro_congolese_Gli_elogi_co_0_20130428_088 16578-afc3-11e2-ae57-a5d8f44c6979.shtml> [accessed 5 April 2014]; Michele Smargiassi, 'Cécile, la

circumstances tends to underline the difference between Italians (and their implicit superiority) and the migrants:

> In order to legitimate their exclusion, people who are defined as 'other' or residual, beyond the boundaries of the acceptable, are commonly represented as less than human. […] The perception of minority cultures as being beyond the boundary of 'society' is associated not only with characterisations of the group but also with images of particular places, the landscapes of exclusions which express the marginal status of the outsider group.[45]

The outsider group whether it comes from the south of Italy or from outside it, is frequently depicted by means of images which are normally considered deviant; these are for instance the unacceptable hygienic conditions in which they are forced to live (although this is often perceived more as a choice than as a constraint as highlighted above) and the lack of permanent employment and the consequent wandering around the city. Both groups of migrants were, and are represented, by these characteristics, which are considered as contributing to the degeneration of the neighbourhood. This degeneration is frequently lamented by the present and past press, in which the word *degrado* has become commonplace.

1.3 'Fino a quel momento dovevo entrare a patti con la situazione di disagio e di grande degrado ambientale in cui vivevo'.[46] Physical and Social Decay in Italian Multi-ethnic Neighbourhoods

An additional link between internal and external migration is that migrants belonging to both groups have been blamed as the primary cause of the physical and social decay of their areas of residence. An article from *La Stampa*, published in 1953, was explicitly clear about this topic: 'Qualche torinese sostiene che la sporcizia delle nostre strade è

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prima Ministra Nera. Diritto di cittadinanza agli stranieri nati in Italia', *La Repubblica*, 28 April 2013 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2013/04/28/cecile-la-prima-ministra-nera-diritto-di.html> [accessed 6 February 2014]; Sergio Rame, 'Chi è Cécile Kyenge, primo Ministro di colore', *Il Giornale*, 27 April 2013 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/chi-c-cile-kyenge-primo-ministro-colore-912216.html> [accessed 6 February 2014]. Since May 2014 Cécile Kyenge is also a member of the European Parliament; for more information about Dr Kyenge please refer to her website: 'Cécile Kyenge' <http://www.cecilekyenge.it/> [accessed 6 August 2015].

[45] David Sibley, 'Outsiders in Society and Space', in *Inventing Places, Studies in Cultural Geography*, ed. by Kay Anderson and Fay Gale (Melbourne, Australia: Longman Cheshire, 1992), pp. 107–22 (p. 107).
[46] Italo Fontana, p. 15.

causata, o almeno incrementata dal numero sempre crescente degli immigrati dal Meridione'.[47] Filth in the streets with the addition of objectionable people wandering around, are seen as causes of an increasing situation of decay. The word *degrado* is extraordinarily common in the press narrative. The meaning of this word is controversial, as Pierpaolo Mudu, in an accurate study about the Esquilino area explains:

> È necessario cercare di chiarire che cosa si intenda per degrado di una zona. L'etimologia della parola degrado indica la diminuzione di grado, quindi lo scendere da un livello a uno più basso. La diminuzione di grado può essere riferita principalmente alla popolazione e alle strutture fisiche. Riferita alla popolazione, l'uso della parola degrado denota l'idea che una sostituzione degli abitanti di un luogo con abitanti di una classe inferiore è negativa. Invece della precedente definizione si può alternativamente definire il degrado come un processo estremo di esclusione […] La presenza del mercato e dei giardini di Piazza Vittorio, della stazione Termini e dei centri di assistenza furono interpretate da molti come le principali fonti di degrado del quartiere.[48]

The use of this word in relation to the Esquilino area does not differ from its use to describe the situation in other Italian neighbourhoods. Via Padova, for example, is frequently portrayed as undergoing an unstoppable process of decay. In *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*, the protagonist of the first part of the book, Anita Patel, describes her neighbourhood:

> La povertà è la madre dei reati, d'altronde. È sempre stato così, in questo quartiere anche. In questa strada soprattutto. Già negli anni '50 via Clitumno, insieme a via Arquà che le sta attaccata, parallela e simile, veniva considerata 'la via dei ladri, degli assassini e delle puttane': una fama che si tiene ancora addosso. [...] Storie intrecciate di ottanta appartamenti di cui trenta sotto sequestro, accalcati uno all'altro e stipati oltre la loro capienza, allineati su più piani a delimitare un rettangolo di cemento, che non è un giardino: non ci sono alberi ma immondizia e non ci sono

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[47] 'Salerno insegna', *La Stampa*, 20 November 1953
<http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/Itemid,3/page,2/articleid,0051_01_1953_0270_0002_12147895/> [accessed 10 April 2013].
[48] Pierpaolo Mudu, 'Gli Esquilini: contributi al dibattito sulle trasformazioni nel rione Esquilino dagli anni Settanta al Duemila', in *I territori di Roma. Storie, popolazioni, geografie*, ed. by Roberta Morelli, Eugenio Sonnino, and Carlo M. Travaglini (Rome: Università degli studi di Roma La Sapienza, Tor Vergata, Roma Tre, 2002), pp. 641–80 (pp. 654–655).

fiori ma biciclette. Dei nanetti non se ne parla neanche. Però vedo un bambolotto, dentro una voragine, provocata da un incendio e utilizzata come una discarica: tra una catasta di materassi, sedie e televisori rotti spunta la faccia di un Cicciobello nero, ha ancora il ciuccio in bocca e il vestitino addosso.[49]

Anita Patel connects the issue of both social and urban *degrado*, to poverty; noteworthy in this context is the dreadful image of the black skinned doll sticking out from a mountain of rubbish almost as a paradigmatic depiction of the immigrant situation in Italian cities.

The use of the expression *lotta al degrado*, mentioned quite frequently in the articles I collected, implies not only an effort to refurbish old buildings or to sanitise streets, but it also entails an attempt to 'clean' these areas from the presence of migrants, particularly if illegal and unemployed:

Ma le doglianze di Magnolfi non finiscono qui: al degrado contribuiscono negozi trasformati dagli extracomunitari in magazzini, appartamenti-dormitorio dati in affitto, dove gli immigrati vivono ammassati e in condizioni precarie; un numero eccessivo di centri di accoglienza, spesso ricettacolo di delinquenti.[50]

According to Mudu's research, in the year 2000, Lazio Regional Government approved a programme of surveillance of the Esquilino urban area:

Il progetto di screening era generato dalle 'pressanti istanze e sollecitazioni pervenute dai cittadini del quartiere Esquilino che da anni lamentano il degrado della zona e chiedono di ristabilire una normale vivibilità nel quartiere' […]. Popolazione obiettivo del progetto: 'immigrati irregolari, immigrati extracomunitari, con permesso di soggiorno indigenti e non, soggetti senza fissa dimora, nomadi e profughi'.[51]

The 'normale vivibilità del quartiere' is therefore closely connected to the presence of migrants (with no distinction between legal, illegal, unemployed and homeless people) and, according to this deliberation, only with the transfer of the unwanted inhabitants will the situation improve. The market in Piazza Vittorio has always represented a source of

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[49] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 10–11.
[50] 'All'Esquilino piano di recupero e tolleranza zero', *La Repubblica*, 6 October 1999 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1999/10/06/all-esquilino-piano-di-recupero-tolleranza-zero.html> [accessed 6 February 2013].
[51] Mudu, pp. 653–654.

income for the migrants who could, every now and then, find sporadic jobs and occasionally open their own businesses in the area. In the last twenty years, numerous commercial enterprises have been opened by and for migrants.[52] The high density of these shops, as will be later shown in more detail, is considered to be another important source of decay. Beyond the specific case of the Esquilino this problem is also present in Turin and Milan.[53] The press, in order to offer a clear idea of the situation, uses terms whose meanings are not related to a situation of decay, but have now become synonyms: *casbah*, *suk*, *Chinatown* and *Bronx*:

> Ma il degrado è poi congiunto all'uso di termini che hanno un'origine geografica differente dal contesto spaziale in cui vengono successivamente usati: Chinatown, Bronx, casbah e suk […]. Questo sottolinea il fatto che gli immigrati sono stranieri che costruiscono uno spazio non integrato, ma 'alieno'.[54]

An effective example of this use and of its purpose of exclusion, is an article published by *Il Giornale* in 2006, entitled *Quella casbah chiamata Milano*. The journalist, Filippo Facci, wandering around Milan, describes:

> E invece no, la casbah è quella dietro Porta Venezia, zona via Lecco-viale Tunisia, quella coi phone center e gli internet point, il bar Eritrea e il ristorante Addis Abeba: se elimini il Lazzaretto e il Multisala pare davvero periferia africana. E poi sì, certo, via Padova, tre chilometri e mezzo di via, oltre 400 numeri civici: a percorrerla tutta, martedì notte, si potevano contare 85 probabili islamici, divisi in gruppetti, più una prostituta filippina. Nessun autoctono. C'era una macelleria islamica che a mezzanotte e 18 era ancora aperta, c'erano insegne di parrucchieri arabi, trionfo di kebab: in tutto 96 attività commerciali straniere aperte solo negli ultimi tre anni,

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[52] Mudu, p. 649.

[53] In Milan, the situation became so unbearable that the locals decided to constitute a committee: *Comitato Vivere in Zona 2*. One of the projects of the committee was to find effective solutions against the situation of abandonment of the area; the title was: *Luoghi e strutture da riqualificare*. The plan provided pictures of the area and of specific spaces as the Trotter park, the station underpass or the amphitheatre of the Martesana, with all the improvements that the committee is planning to make. See: *Comitato Vivere Zona Due Milano* <http://www.vivereinzona2.it/> [accessed 10 October 2013]. Additionally, even if Sarpi is not an area analysed in the present research, it is worth mentioning its commitee: *viviSarpi* <http://www.vivisarpi.it/wb/> [accessed 10 March 2014] which was created in 1999 'anno in cui l'attività commerciale all'ingrosso cinese cominciò ad espandersi, facendo sprofondare il quartiere in uno stato di totale insostenibilità e degrado'; 'chi siamo' in *viviSarpi* <http://www.vivisarpi.it/wb/pages/lassociazione.php> [accessed 10 March 2014].

[54] Mudu, p. 662.

compresi 40 phone center e 43 minimarket. È qui la casbah: perché la casbah è Milano.[55]

The presence of immigrants in these areas is perceived as a form of transgression from normality.[56] The depiction provided by the press is therefore functional to highlight the discrepancy between Italian society and the newcomers, once again between *noi* and *loro*. This is, according to Mudu, a contemporary form of racism:

> Il vecchio razzismo basato su differenze biologiche cede il passo a più articolate elaborazioni basate sull'impossibilità di integrazione, la criminalizzazione delle minoranze e il controllo del territorio. […] I numerosi richiami a 'Bronx', 'casbah', e Chinatown servono a commentare ed esporre uno spazio alieno. Nei quotidiani immigrati, crimine e degrado sono diventati sinonimi e con molta chiarezza è emerso il conflitto tra la rappresentazione dello spazio dell'Esquilino da parte degli immigrati e la rappresentazione che ne fanno i quotidiani e le forze politiche.[57]

The discrepancy between the representation of the urban areas portrayed by migrants, and the representation exposed by media and politicians, is often evident in the novels selected. In *Per legge superiore* by Giorgio Fontana for instance, the protagonist, the magistrate Roberto Doni, is coping with a case of violence in via Padova. According to the evidence and to the witnesses, the truth is clear: Khaled, a young migrant who lives in via Padova, attacked a young couple; the girl is shot and will be paralysed thereafter. Apparently, it was a settling of score for a failure to make a payment for drugs. After the meeting with a freelance journalist, Elena, who gives him additional information, the magistrate is not sure anymore that this is really what happened. For the first time in his life, he goes to via Padova:

> 'Lei cosa sa di via Padova?' Doni allargò le braccia. 'Quello che sanno tutti. Immigrati, povertà, spaccio, le camionette dell'esercito per strada'. 'Esatto. La cronaca. Ma c'è molto altro, dottore. […] Vuole camminare con me fino a Loreto? Le chiedo solo questo'. […] Cosa c'era da vedere Doni non lo capì fino a quando, all'altezza del parco Trotter, una donna non insultò in napoletano un ragazzo cinese

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[55] Filippo Facci, 'Quella casbah chiamata Milano', *Il Giornale*, 26 October 2006
<http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/quella-casbah-chiamata-milano.html> [accessed 6 February 2013].
[56] Cresswell, p. 9.
[57] Mudu, p. 673.

perché le aveva tagliato la strada, in bicicletta, sulle strisce pedonali. Due vecchi peruviani risero. […] Milano era insapore, inodore – era un luogo fatto di negazioni. […] Eppure via Padova sfuggiva a quel teorema.[58]

As evident from this passage, there are two via Padovas, the one depicted by the press and the one experienced by Robeto Doni or by Anita Patel for example. The via Padova Anita describes presents a situation of social and physical decay, as previously shown, but it also represents a part of Milan which welcomes her, more than any other place in the city: 'Via Padova mi accoglie, sempre. E io mi sento accolta'.[59] In the same way the Esquilino, and particularly Termini station, welcomes Igiaba Scego:

L'unico luogo che a Roma potevamo chiamare davvero casa. L'unico posto davvero somalo della capitale. L'unico che ci ha accolti e ci ha chiamati fratelli e sorelle. […] Che ci facevi con Piazza di Spagna? E con Campo dei Fiori? Nessuna di queste zone sapeva coccolarti o schiaffeggiarti come la Stazione Termini.[60]

Via Padova, Esquilino, San Salvario, all present situations of poverty and decay but they also are, as expressed by Mudu, places of resistance and integration; they are *existential spaces*:

The meanings of existential space are therefore those of a culture as experienced by an individual, rather than a summation of the meanings of individual perceptual spaces, though in many cases the two coincide. […] Because such existential space is meaningful within one culture group does not mean that it is communicable to members of other cultures, at least not without some considerable effort of understanding on their part.[61]

The challenge is to show the meanings and values of these neighbourhoods to those who consider the *lotta al degrado* a mere campaign against migrants.

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[58] Giorgio Fontana, *Per legge*, pp. 94–95.
[59] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 7.
[60] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 99–100–101.
[61] Relph, pp. 12–14.

1.4 'Aprivano i fruttivendoli e gli internet point cingalesi, i ristoranti e gli alimentari sudamericani, le macellerie e i kebab arabi oltre, ovviamente, alle molte attività dei cinesi'.[62] The Invasion of *Ethnic Shops*

This sense of decay is closely connected to the question of ethnic shops which are *invading* Italian neighbourhoods.[63] In the language of Italian media, the expressions *ethnic activities* or *ethnic shops*, define all the restaurants, shops and commercial ventures owned by migrants and those which expect migrants as primary clientele. It is here crucial to make a brief digression on the use of the word *etnia* and its derivatives such as *etnico* in *negozi etnici*. Giuseppe Faso highlights how this word has become the acceptable version of *razza*:

> Ma la tendenza a usare 'etnico' è forte, e deriva dalla improponibilità del termine 'razza', interdetto dopo Auschwitz. […] Screditato il termine, per le nuove forme di razzismo ne era necessario un altro che permettesse la naturalizzazione delle identità storiche, sociali, culturali. Come è mostrato ne *L'imbroglio etnico* di Rivera, Gallissot e Kilani (ed. Dedalo), grazie all'uso disinvolto dei termini 'etnia' e 'cultura' il razzismo costruisce 'universi più o meno separati, chiusi e incomunicabili', immediatamente identificati con gli individui che ne sarebbero portatori.[64]

As a matter of fact, in the last twenty years, if on the one hand the appearance of the *negozi etnici* has been seen as an exotic and fashionable tendency, on the other hand, this issue has been considered increasingly serious.[65] Kebab shops, phone centres, Chinese restaurants and several other commercial enterprises have been labelled by the press as dangerous both on a practical level, as meeting points for migrants and consequently for criminals; and on a theoretical level, the presence of such a growing number of migrants and of their businesses is perceived as damaging to the neighbourhood. These shops are

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[62] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 20.
[63] Antonella Piperno, 'Sulla frontiera dell'Esquilino', *La Repubblica*, 30 May 2000 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/05/30/sulla-frontiera-dell-esquilino.html> [accessed 6 February 2013].
[64] Giuseppe Faso, *Lessico del razzismo democratico. Le parole che escludono* (Roma: Deriveapprodi, 2008), p. 65.
[65] Anna R. Cillis, 'Market africani e macellerie kosher. Il sogno italiano degli immigrati', *La Repubblica*, 12 October 2010 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/10/12/market-africani-macellerie-kosher-il-sogno-italiano.html> [accessed 18 April 2013].

the tangible evidence of migrants' presence in the city. Through them, migrants become visible as outsiders in a neighbourhood previously demarcated as a white space.[66]

While, on the one hand these shops are seen as troublesome by the Italian population, migrants find them extremely useful in order to stay in contact with compatriots and to find items belonging to their culture, which would otherwise be difficult to purchase. In *Madre Piccola*, the shop owned by Qamar, which in Italian would be defined as *negozio di chincaglierie*, is the place where information coming from Somalia or about Somalis in Italy, is exchanged:

> Il negozio di Qamar: le posso lasciare l'indirizzo se le interessa. Vende tutto ciò che una donna somala può desiderare. *Shaash* sgargianti, *garbasar* di voile a fiori, *diric Jibuuti*, sottogonne di raso con ricami di perla, *goonooyin* lunghe, *guntiino* di stoffa grezza tessuta a mano che una volta tutti snobbavano e oggi – poiché gli oggetti diventano tanto più preziosi quando sono introvabili – sono tornate di moda. Perché da Qamar si va anche per cercare lavoro. O per cambiare dollari. O per ricevere una telefonata.[67]

Shops like Qamar's are perceived as useless and dangerous by Italians who consider them simply as meeting points for migrants. Additionally, the idea of goods arriving from Africa or from other continents is often depicted as mysterious and alarming: 'Rumore e sporcizia. Ma anche il sospetto e in alcuni casi anche qualcosa di più, del riciclaggio di denaro sporco e traffico di documenti falsi'.[68] In particular, as will be shown in the following chapters, phone centres and internet points have been portrayed as the worst kind of criminal dens, which have to be regularly controlled and, when possible, closed. The major problem concerning *ethnic activities*, however, is related to the accumulation, and particularly to the high density of these shops in certain areas of Italian cities. The expressions *invasion* or *colonisation* are common in reference to this issue; examples from the press are indicative of these unfortunate lexical trends: from the *Corriere della Sera* about Rome: 'Piazza Vittorio, Roma, Italia. Una città nella città, un intero quartiere

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[66] Puwar, p. 49.
[67] Ali Farah, pp. 29–30.
[68] Giannino della Frattina, 'La Lega: "I phone center sono fuori controllo"', *Il Giornale*, 9 May 2006 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/lega-i-phone-center-sono-fuori-controllo.html> [accessed 6 March 2013].

colonizzato da commercianti stranieri'.[69] From *Il Giornale* about Milan: 'una sorta di colonizzazione di negozi stranieri, che non si alternano ma soffocano gli artigiani locali'.[70]

In Milan, this problem is particularly critical: surveys relating to the number of ethnic shops are carried out on a regular basis and various legislation has been applied in order to regulate them as much as possible. In via Padova, in 2006, 96 businesses were owned or managed by migrants: 'Novantasei attività commerciali intestate a immigrati, soprattutto egiziani, di cui 39 centri di telefonia internazionale e 42 kebab e minimarket arabi';[71] in 2008 it was calculated that more than two hundred migrants' businesses were present in the neighbourhood: 'In via Padova le imprese individuali che fanno capo a un immigrato sono il 27 per cento, più di una su quattro. Parliamo di 239 attività'.[72] However, the data shown by the two preceding quotations, appear to be questioned in an article published in 2009, about the work of the committee *Vivere in Zona 2*:

> A proposito di stereotipi. La sicurezza non è la priorità […] Come 'la favola' dei negozi che parlano solo straniero. Nei quasi 4 chilometri di via Padova ci sono 438 negozi e solo 101 sono a titolare straniero. Meno di 1 su 4. E secondo la ricerca realizzata dal Comitato la metà di questi 101 esercizi 'extracomunitari' parlano cinese.[73]

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[69] Monica Guerzoni, 'Fiorisce l'altra Roma', *Corriere della Sera*, 22 July 1995 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/luglio/22/fiorisce_altra_Roma_co_10_9507227537.shtml> [accessed 5 May 2013].

[70] Maria Sorbi, 'Troppi kebab, la Lega copia il modello Harlem. La proposta per evitare le colonizzazioni', *Il Giornale*, 30 August 2010 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/troppi-kebab-lega-copia-modello-harlem-proposta-evitare.html> [accessed 4 May 2013]; see also Piperno, 'Sulla Frontiera'.

[71] Michele Focarete, 'Via Padova, kebab e clandestini. Frontiera multietnica della città', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 April 2006 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2006/aprile/16/Via_Padova_kebab_clandestini_Frontiera_co_7_060416 034.shtml> [accessed 21 March 2013].

[72] Rita Querzè, 'Boom di negozi stranieri. "I Milanesi? Non fanno più sacrifici"', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 September 2008 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/settembre/30/Boom_negozi_stranieri_milanesi_Non_co_7_08093 0043.shtml> [accessed 22 April 2013].

[73] Cesare Giuzzi, '"Via Padova, integrazione fallita". I residenti: traditi dal comune', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 March 2009 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2009/marzo/04/Via_Padova_integrazione_fallita_residenti_co_7_09030 4025.shtml> [accessed 22 May 2013]. The committee was established the 28 November 2008 with the goal of improving the life in the area of Milan called Zona 2.

This last quotation is an exception that confirms Puwar's theory about *amplification*, according to which:

> For those for whom the whiteness of these spaces provides a comforting familiarity, the arrival of racialised members can represent the monstrous […] Amplification of presence is intrinsic to the way in which terror/numbers/paranoia work together in this scenario. […] They can be perceived as being 'terrifying' […]. Their presence is ordinary even as it is peculiar, but it is also ever bordering on being suspiciously alarming.[74]

The data collected and reported by the press are often vague with a constant tendency towards exaggeration, in order to increase a sentiment of xenophobia and make the problem even more urgent. Finding a solution to the high density of these shops, became exceptionally urgent in 2010, that the extreme right party Lega Nord proposed the so-called 'project Harlem' to solve the problem. An article from *Il Sole 24 Ore* explains what this project entailed:

> Quattro panetterie, tre negozi di ortofrutta, due edicole, cinque bar, un supermercato, kebab e phone center con moderazione. Questi potrebbero essere gli 'ingredienti' scelti da un'amministrazione cittadina per riqualificare un quartiere. Una proposta che era stata accennata in campagna elettorale in occasione dei disordini scoppiati in via Padova a Milano […]. In questo modo, secondo il punto di vista dell'esponente leghista, si contribuisce alla riqualificazione di aree urbane compromesse, evitando la concentrazione di determinate attività commerciali.[75]

The plan of the Lega Nord was not only to limit the quantity of shops in a specific neighbourhood, but also to select the categories of various businesses, in order to avoid the concentration of the same venture within a few metres. The Lega, in line with the general sentiment of intolerance in Italy, was fighting against the *shop invasion*, which on a physical level, was damaging the area, but most of all, endangering Italian identity.[76]

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[74] Puwar, pp. 50–52.

[75] Matteo Prioschi, 'Il modello è Harlem: così la Lombardia frena i negozi etnici', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 16 June 2010 <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2010-06-16/modello-harlem-cosi-lombardia-095200.shtml?uuid=AYdqk0yB&fromSearch> [accessed 22 May 2013].

[76] As a matter of fact, according to Andall and Duncan 'Seventy years from the promulgation of the fascist racial laws, racism remains a largely unspoken dimension of Italian social and political life, despite

1.5 'Ma tu sai chi sono Pinelli, Valpreda, Veronelli, Rossi e Paolini?'.[77] Migrants: a Threat to National Identity

A recurrent tool used by the press to underline the consequential danger caused by the presence of migrants in Italy, is the frequent allusion to the risks Italian cultural heritage is facing by entering into contact with different cultures. Certain journalists have deemed migrants' activities and migrants more generally, a threat to the preservation of indigenous Italian traditions and heritage. A common and effective way of demonstrating this threat is the nostalgic allusion to *the way a place was* and how that same space has been adversely transformed following the arrival of migrants. This transformation is considered a confirmation of the fact that the surge in migrant owned businesses has distorted Italian memory and has become a serious threat to Italian national identity. This strategy is not surprising:

> The myth of cultural homogeneity is needed to sustain the nation-state, to ensure support for domestic and foreign policies which are conducted on behalf of the nation. Relations between groupings of states are similarly informed by notions of purity and defilement, good and evil, in order to secure solidarity in the conduct of international relations.[78]

The arrival of migrants, with their traditions and their cultural background is also seen as a real threat to national memory because migrants are treated as inferior subjects, as explained by Faso:

> Simili atteggiamenti inferiorizzanti sono visibili in altri termini di largo uso, da 'benevolenza' a 'integrazione', da 'civiltà' (che è accompagnato spesso da 'nostra', contrapposta alle 'loro' abitudini) a 'valori' (che sono sempre e soltanto 'nostri', e a cui 'loro' devono primo o poi accedere). Tutte 'voci' che escludono.[79]

The fear is that the incivility of migrants will spread and contaminate Italian neighbourhoods destroying those spaces which are considered reference points for Italian

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its relevance to recent social and political acts that seek to prevent the contamination of spaces deemed as vested with national authenticity'. Andall and Duncan, 'Introduction', p. 7.

[77] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 70.

[78] Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, p. 110.

[79] Giuseppe Faso, 'La lingua del razzismo: alcune parole chiave', in *Rapporto sul razzismo in Italia*, ed. by Grazia Naletto (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2009), pp. 29–36 (pp. 32–33).

national identity. Newspaper articles frequently make reference to a particular famous person who used to live in a certain area, or to an important event that took place in that same area. An example is via Gluck in Milan. As clearly told by the song *Il ragazzo della via Gluck*,[80] via Gluck is the street where Adriano Celentano was born. An article published by the *Corriere della Sera* in February 2013 was entitled: *In via Gluck oggi si parla cinese. 'Salvate i luoghi di Celentano'*;[81] the issue at the core of the article was the high presence of migrants in this street of the Milanese periphery. The use of the verb *salvare* is suggestive of the seriousness of the problem. This was not the only article on the topic; another from *La Repubblica* few years earlier recalled:

> Pier Paolo Pasolini è stato a un passo da trasformare in film la storia autobiografica di quel ragazzo, 'anche lui nato per caso in via Gluck' […]. Oggi via Gluck è una strada stretta e lunga, dimenticata, abitata in massima parte da extracomunitari arabi e cinesi (ci sono ben tre centri massaggi). […] Una palazzina degradata, color grigio e nocciola, su tre piani, molto povera, in stato di semiabbandono. […] Gli stranieri che ci abitano nulla sanno del ragazzo della via Gluck, di Celentano e di una celebre canzonetta entrata nella storia del costume di Milano. […] Oggi là dove c'era la città industriale è avvenuta una nuova mutazione, è arrivata la metropoli multietnica. Non c'è più il falegname, se ne sono andati il barbiere, la sarta, la merciaia.[82]

In this passage the journalist manages to gather together at least four elements in order to describe the risks to which this area, and in general Italian heritage, is exposed: first of all, the reference to the fact that via Gluck is the place where Adriano Celentano was born, and also, that the homonymous song is now part of Milanese culture; secondly, to support the general idea of the article the journalist makes a reference to Pier Paolo Pasolini, a recognised pillar of Italian culture, who had the idea to film Celentano's life – an intention which was never fulfilled. The following allusion to the indication that the

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[80]This famous song, written by A. Celentano, M. Del Prete e A. Beretta, was presented at the Sanremo Festival in 1966; the song was eliminated from the competition after the first night. Despite the failure at the festival, it achieved resounding success, becoming one of the most renowned of Celentano's songs. Cotti, Sergio, *Adriano Celentano 1957-2007. Cinquant'anni da ribelle* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2007)

[81] Paola D'Amico, 'In via Gluck oggi si parla Cinese. "Salvate i luoghi di Celentano"', *Corriere della Sera*, 3 February 2013 <http://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/13_febbraio_3/via-gluck-petizione-salvare-strada-celentano-cinesi-ricordi-2113826842762.shtml> [accessed 4 February 2013].

[82] Carlo Brambilla, 'Nella strada simbolo dove il giovane Adriano ha lasciato il suo cuore', *La Repubblica*, 4 September 2011 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2011/09/04/nella-strada-simbolo-dove-il-giovane-adriano.html> [accessed 4 February 2013].

foreigners now inhabiting this area do not know either Adriano Celentano or his famous songs, indicates that they undeservedly inhabit a *sacred* space in Italian memory. Lastly, the journalist is implying that with the arrival of migrants and the constitution of a multicultural society, the old traditional Italian city is losing important elements, such as the barber shop, the carpenter and the tailor. These elements are all factors of the same process in demonstrating on the one hand how Italian culture is in danger, and on the other hand how migrants are *out of place* in Italy: they do not know the traditions, they are not familiar with Italian history, they do not share the same memory, thus they do not belong here. The preservation of the national cultural hegemony is crucial, and it recalls Cresswell's analysis of Gramsci's theories:

> Gramsci's concept of hegemony insists that people are not simply imposed upon by dominant groups but are convinced that the ideas of dominant groups will also benefit subordinate groups. Domination thus occurs through common sense. The concept of cultural hegemony places a significant burden of the concept of culture, as power is seen to occur in the realm of meaning rather than in the formal political arena.[83]

This threat to *Italian culture* is also pointed out by Duncan who, analysing the film *Passo a due* featuring the dancer with Albanian origin Kledi Kadiu, affirms that:

> This form of hybridity adds a twist to older debates and fears about the bastardization of Italian culture due to excessive foreign influence. This anxiety was most intense around television as an instance of mass culture commonly seen as being over-burdened by foreign imports.[84]

Interesting from this perspective is a dialogue from *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* between an Egyptian migrant Samir, and an Italian woman, Gioia who are talking about a famous Milanese club:

> 'Ah, sei stato al circolo anarchico Ponte della Ghisolfa: da giovani ci andavano anche mia madre e mio padre […]. Oltre a fare delle feste, hanno sempre portato avanti varie iniziative: dalle campagne per Giuseppe Pinelli e Pietro Valpreda alle

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[83] Cresswell, p. 18.
[84] Derek Duncan, 'Kledi Kadiu: Managing Postcolonial Celebrity', in *National Belongings*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 195–214 (pp. 208–209).

degustazioni di cibi e bevande organizzate con Luigi Veronelli fino agli spettacoli
teatrali di Paolo Rossi e Marco Paolini'. Sikut: silenzio. Poi ha aggiunto: 'Ma tu sai
chi sono Pinelli, Valpreda, Veronelli, Rossi e Paolini?'. 'Io sì. E tu sai chi sono Galal
Amin, Abdel Wahab Elmessiri, Bahaa Taher, Youssef Chahine, Khaled el-Khamissi
e Ala Al-Aswani?', non volevo essere provocatorio e neanche metterla in difficoltà,
ma la domanda mi era uscita spontanea. L'eurocentrismo che diventa italiacentrismo
e finisce con il milanocentrismo spesso mi irrita.[85]

Taking for granted that migrants are less educated, with an inferior culture and that they
are not familiar with Italian culture, is another example of the previously described
practice of *infantilisation*, which is often present in Italian daily language. In *Scontro di
civiltà* for instance, Amara Lakhous tries to fight this assumption by making his
protagonist Ahmed, who is called Amedeo by everyone, expert of Italian culture and
history. This knowledge is at the basis of Ahmed's success in passing as Amedeo,
analysed in Chapter 5, because he knows so much about Italy that he must be Italian;
throughout the novel he makes few interesting points:

Questa sera ho finito di leggere *Il giorno della civetta* di Leonardo Sciascia,
considerato uno dei romanzi più belli mai scritti sulla mafia […]. Tornando a casa
ho incontrato l'olandese biondo, gli ho parlato a lungo di Giugurta e della sua
resistenza contro i romani. Mi ha detto: 'Sei l'unico italiano che conosce la storia di
Roma. […]' […]. Sono diventato un credente estremista della triade cappuccino,
cornetto e *Corriere della Sera*. [86]

The reference to familiar food, like *cornetto* and *cappuccino*, as important feature of
Italian identity might sound excessive, however, not all the allusions that journalists draw
upon in order to explain their point, belong to a high brow culture or extend to a national
level:

Lo chiamavano la 'corte dell'America'; ci abitò, spiegano con orgoglio gli anziani,
il primo italiano di via Padova emigrato Oltreoceano. Adesso lo chiamano la

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[85] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 69–70.
[86] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 60–126–139. There are many other references: 'Questa sera ho visto alla tv un
bel film con Alberto Sordi e Claudia Cardinale che racconta la storia di un certo Amedeo, un immigrato
che lavora in Australia. […] Sono andato al cinema Tibur a San Lorenzo. Abbiamo visto *Cosi ridevano* di
Gianni Amelio. […] Questa mattina ho letto come al solito la rubrica di Montanelli sul *Corriere della
Sera*' (pp. 100-113-116).

'casbah', e dicono che non c'è nulla da spiegare. Difatti la polizia lo martella, un po'

per la droga, un po' per la ricettazione, un po' per mille reati vari. Civico 275 di via

Padova. Quattro piani, una trentina di alloggi.[87]

The 'corte dell'America' was neither property of a famous Italian personality, nor part of Italian cultural heritage, but is part of a neighbourhood tradition which, for the journalist, is sufficient to create dynamics of social exclusion.[88] In this case attention has been narrowed from a national context to a local one, where it is the identity of a single neighbourhood that defines those who belong, not only to a specific neighbourhood, but also to Italy. An ironic example of how the question of identity is often a pretext to underline migrants' being *out of place*,[89] can be found in *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo a San Salvario*:

'Portare un maialino in moschea è una grande offesa'. 'Enzo, ti ripeto che il maialino

è solo un pretesto. In gioco c'è la nostra dignità e il nostro onore, direi la difesa della

nostra identità'. 'Che c'entra un maialino con la nostra identità?'. […] 'A me non

me ne frega un cazzo. Se viene un immigrato musulmano e mi dice che vuole stare

nel nostro Paese e forse diventare cittadino italiano, sai cosa gli chiedo?'. 'Dimmi'.

'Ti piace la birra? Mangi il prosciutto?'. 'E se risponderà di no?'. 'Caro musulmano,

mi dispiace ma non hai i requisiti necessari'. 'Molto interessante'.[90]

The situation presented by Lakhous is just an example, but the limits of what, in this context can be considered part of Italian identity, are extremely flexible. In March 2013 two brothers, newly arrived from Afghanistan as political refugees, decide to open a kebab shop in San Salvario. After successfully overcoming through the long and slow bureaucratic procedures, they open their shop in via Saluzzo, in the ground floor of an old building at the core of the neighbourhood. The name of the shop, chosen by the two brothers with a clear attempt to establish a connection with their origins, is *Kebab*

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[87] Andrea Galli, 'Noi, in fuga dai palazzi della paura', *Corriere della Sera*, 29 October 2009
<http://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/09_ottobre_29/via-padova-fuga-palazzi-paura-
1601932375082.shtml> [accessed 16 February 2015].
[88] Alan Murie and Sako Musterd, 'Social Exclusion and Opportunity Structures in European Cities and
Neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies*, 41 (2004), 1441–59 (p. 1451).
[89] Cresswell, p. 10.
[90] Lakhous, *Contesa*, pp. 44–45.

Kabul.[91] Right after the opening, the apartment block administrator, supported by the residents of the building, forbade them to use their chosen name, forcing the two brothers to cover the sign:

> E così si scopre che il nome Kebab Kabul, in quanto tale, non va bene. 'Non è decoroso per un palazzo storico'. 'Evoca brutti pensieri'. 'Rovina il prestigio dello stabile'. 'Non è razzismo: è solo che non c'entra niente con noi'. Noi e loro. Latitudini, pregiudizi. Certe volte basta una parola su un'insegna per innescare la paura. […] A Tofan Wardak l'hanno detto senza tanti giri di parole, passando di fretta nel suo locale nuovo, in via Saluzzo angolo corso Vittorio Emanuele: 'Se cambi l'insegna, se lo chiami "Kebab Torino", oppure meglio "Gastronomia", ti firmiamo subito l'autorizzazione'. […] 'Kebab va bene, Kabul no. Non piace. Ma non è un discorso di razzismo. Questo è un palazzo d'epoca, è come se mettessero la parola Kabul davanti alla Mole Antonelliana'.[92]

The word Kabul is too strictly connected to concepts of war and terrorism.[93] For this reason it does not fit with the building, and with the neighbourhood 'non c'entra niente con noi'.[94] Kebab Kabul, according to the protests of the residents, would instill fear of the above-mentioned concepts, ruining, simultaneously the image of the building and that of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood would suffer from the presence of this outsider element (a kebab shop with a scary name) and, consequently, would be damaged by it.

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[91] This name recalls the name of the phone centre in *Divorzio all'islamica*, 'Little Cairo'; the relevance of including one's own city in the name of the commercial venture opened in Italy will be investigated in Chapter 3.

[92] Niccolò Zancan, '"Quel kebab non si può chiamare Kabul"', *La Stampa*, 7 March 2013 <http://www.lastampa.it/2013/03/07/cronaca/se-ti-chiami-kebab-kabul-in-questo-palazzo-non-apri-M9GcgG0yzc7gDeqYVgOVjP/pagina.html> [accessed 9 March 2013]. The residents' sentiment was not shared by the entire neighbourhood. A group of people, mainly young people, decided to regularly meet in the kebab shop to support the two brothers. The meetings were planned on Facebook and several people used to show up. For further information: Niccolò Zancan, 'Torino, il kebab che non può chiamarsi Kabul', *La Stampa*, 7 March 2013 <http://www.lastampa.it/2013/03/07/multimedia/cronaca/il-kebabbaro-che-non-puo-chiamarsi-kabul-vyABGTyC158mTyMbvNSwUK/pagina.html> [accessed 9 March 2013]. However, after few days the press ceased reporting any information related to the event, but in an article published in July 2013 in the website *MigrantiTorino.it* it is reported that Tofan Wardak had to leave the building, looking for another place for is shop. 'Kabul Kebab – Mercoledì 3 Luglio, dalle 19 fino a sera | Migranti Torino' <http://www.migrantitorino.it/?p=29835> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[93] Paolo Hutter, 'Torino, residenti vs negozio di kebab: "No 'Kabul' in insegna, ricorda terrorismo"', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 13 March 2013 <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/03/13/torino-condominio-contro-negozio-afghano-di-kebab-no-a-kabul-nellinsegna/527585/> [accessed 15 March 2013].

[94] Zancan, 'Quel kebab'.

The *quartiere* will be *snaturato* as the writer Sveva Casati Modignani fears for via Padova:

> 'Dovrei fare come gli altri: vendere e andarmene. Ma non ce la faccio...'. A trattenere la scrittrice Sveva Casati Modignani in via Paruta, nella villetta d'inizio Novecento all'altezza del Ponte Nuovo di via Padova, sono solo 'il mio passato, i miei ricordi: i mobili della bisnonna, i mughetti del giardino, le rose muschiate del Settecento. […] È un problema di proporzione tra italiani e stranieri. E qui si è ribaltata: 20 a 80. Così non mi va più bene: impongono il loro modo di vivere, il loro chiasso, la loro mancanza di rispetto per l'ambiente. […] Via Padova non parla più a noi: il salumiere, l'ortolano e il macellaio con cui fare due chiacchiere non ci sono più. Il Comune dovrebbe chiedersi: "È giusto snaturare un quartiere?"'.[95]

The sentence 'via Padova does not speak to us [the old residents] anymore' is meaningful of how the presence of migrants makes old inhabitants feel not at home; they do not recognise the area anymore because the changes brought by migrants are too significant to be overlooked. According to this, Casati Modignani draws upon the verb s*naturare*; its use implies that the presence of migrants and their way of living is going against the nature of the neighbourhood it has therefore to be denounced. The problem, according to the writer and to the inhabitants of the different neighbourhoods, could be solved only with a trenchant action by the authorities. Apparently, however, the authorities are often blamed for being indifferent to the problem.

1.6 'Avevo scritto a ogni Autorità a proposito del degrado […] "Risposta zero"'.[96] Authorities' Indifference to Neighbourhoods' Degeneration

The denunciation of the authorities' careless attitude about the immigrant situation is frequently reiterated. Repeatedly, local and national authorities are depicted as indifferent to citizens' complaints. Italo Fontana, in his book *Non sulle mie scale*, complains that

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[95] Armando Stella, 'Casati Modignani: qui non mi sento più a casa', *Corriere della Sera*, 23 November 2005
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2005/novembre/23/Casati_Modignani_qui_non_sento_co_7_051123021.shtml> [accessed 15 April 2013].
[96] Italo Fontana, p. 74.

after several attempts to get in contact with local and national institutional figures, nobody could, or wanted to help him in his fight to restore a safe environment in San Salvario:

> Nonostante tutto quello che si muoveva intorno lo negasse con evidenza, per me era scontato che esistesse uno Stato, dove c'erano i cittadini e le Istituzioni, a cui i cittadini si rivolgevano in modo corretto e paziente. Non esistevano un Sindaco, un Prefetto, un Questore, un Arcivescovo, un Parroco? Non esistevano la magistratura, la Polizia Municipale e Statale? Non c'erano anche i Carabinieri, le Guardie di Finanza, l'Ufficio di Igiene e così via? Tutto ciò era previsto dalle leggi di uno stato democratico costruito per tutelare i diritti dei cittadini e per far loro rispettare giusti doveri. […] È stato un approccio deludente.[97]

The rhetorical questions asked by Fontana do not find an answer in other cities either. Often citizens interviewed by various journalists blame the absence of the authority for the current situation of their neighbourhoods. In Milan for example:

> Quando i cittadini dicono 'ci sentiamo abbandonati dalle istituzioni', pensano a situazioni così. Piccole e grandi. Pensano al Trotter, al 'degrado ambientale' […], alla 'mancanza di controlli sugli orari dei negozi etnici' […], all'arroganza dello spaccio di droga nei portoni, allo squallore della prostituzione, all'inciviltà della movida sregolata […] e al limbo del campo rom di via Idro.[98]

This accusation is present in the majority of the articles selected, becoming more pressing when a serious accident happens. In 2010 in via Padova, a young Egyptian man is killed by a Dominican migrant during a fight; the day after the area is cordoned off for the riots that broke out after the murder. This event had national resonance and the press targeted via Padova for several days following the accident. The majority of the articles formed part of a continual complaint against the institutions and their lack of interest in the situation:

> Ci sono assenze istituzionali di riferimento e c'è anche un oscuramento di alcuni valori umani in questo quartiere dove Milano non sembra Milano: è lontano il

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[97] Italo Fontana, pp. 35–36.
[98] Armando Stella, '"Questo quartiere non è un ghetto. Ecco i dieci punti per rilanciarlo"', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 February 2010
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2010/febbraio/16/Questo_quartiere_non_ghetto_Ecco_co_7_100216013
.shtml> [accessed 22 March 2013].

sindaco, è lontana la giunta, sono lontani da anni gli amministratori e per molti cittadini la paura è diventata un sentimento dominante, come il rancore, il senso di abbandono, la sensazione di non essere ascoltati. […] C'è poca polizia in strada, si lamentano i residenti, e i vigili hanno alzato bandiera bianca: 'Non siamo in grado di effettuare controlli notturni per mancanza di risorse straordinarie' è stata la risposta di un comandante di zona ad un recente appello, nell'ottobre 2007.[99]

As a response to the events and to the complaints, the mayor of that time, Letizia Moratti, and the city government, decided to apply stricter rules in order to better control the street. The curfew was one of the first measures that was adopted, as well as an obligation to close all the shops by a certain time and the presence of the army in the streets. Anita Patel describes the *new* via Padova with these words:

Da dieci mesi il quartiere è sotto assedio: non dei manifestanti magrebini ma delle forze dell'ordine italiane. Vigili, poliziotti e militari, inguainati nelle loro divise, armati di manganelli e pistole e inscatolati dentro auto, camionette e blindati, rastrellano via Padova, per ripulire il quartiere, come se i rifiuti da raccogliere fossero quelli umani. […] Via Padova si è ammalata, perché l'hanno curata male. […] Via Padova non è ancora morta, ma si diverte davvero poco.[100]

As evident from Anita's words, the actions taken by the authorities are not a solution to the formerly mentioned *degrado* or more specifically to fight against criminality; the measures put into practice are only a limitation of personal freedom. These measures belong to a specific political programme and to the question of *sicurezza*. This word has been overused by journalists, and particularly by politicians, in order to justify the kind of medicaments, to use Anita's metaphor, administered as a cure for the city. The use of the word *sicurezza* by the press and by politicians is effective in creating an increasing sentiment of xenophobia. The repetitive act of talking about safety emphasises the need to take action against criminality, and in a wider sense, against migrants who, in a synechdochic way, represent the real enemy. Faso analyses the use of this word:

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[99] Giangiacomo Schiavi, 'La città e quel muro invisibile tra gli stranieri e noi', *Corriere della Sera*, 14 February 2010 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2010/febbraio/14/Citta_Quel_Muro_Invisibile_tra_co_8_100214018.shtml> [accessed 24 March 2013].

[100] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 29.

Un percorso efficace viene invece escluso dalle ricorrenti campagne securitarie. Marcello Maneri ci ha mostrato come il panico morale, alla cui costruzione anche nelle ultime settimane concorrono giornalisti e politici, è un dispositivo che trasforma l'insicurezza di origine esistenziale (mancanza di 'security') e l'incertezza cognitiva (mancanza di 'certainty') in allarme per la mancanza di sicurezza personale ('safety'). Si tratta di un imbroglio, perché le fonti più oscure della nostra insicurezza vengono rimosse, e si dà un volto concreto al nemico-estraneo che, presente in mezzo a un 'noi' così ricreato, viene individuato come portatore di pericolo.[101]

The overabundance of the word *sicurezza* in the press narrative is only part of the smoke and mirror effect used by politicians to distract attention from the real problem: an efficient immigration policy which would safeguard citizens' rights, whether migrants or not.

Conclusion. 'Questo posto non è tuo, è di tutti'[102]

The points analysed in this chapter are issues present on almost a daily basis in Italian newspapers. As demonstrated by the analysis of the literary sources, the situations depicted by the press could be interpreted very differently, with plausible explanations. The neighbourhood is a strongly identifiable space which, as mentioned at the beginning, shapes its inhabitants' identity and vice versa. Additionally, the neighbourhood can become 'an extension of the home';[103] smaller areas and streets can be perceived as even more intimate and familiar spaces:

The smallest unit of neighbourhood, here referred to as the 'home area' is typically defined as an area of 5-10 minutes walk from one's home. [...] In terms of Brower's (1996) outline of the 'good neighbourhood', the home area can serve several functions, most notably those of relaxation and re-creation of self; making connections with others; fostering attachment and belonging; and demonstrating or reflecting one's own values.[104]

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[101] Faso, *Lessico*, p. 121.
[102] Giorgio Fontana, *Babele 56*, p. 11.
[103] Forrest and Kearns, p. 2130.
[104] Ade Kearns and Michael Parkinson, 'The Significance of Neighbourhood', *Urban Studies*, 38 (2001), 2103–10 (p. 2103).

The recognition of the neighbourhood as a 'home area' is crucial in the objectives of this chapter. The way migrants inhabit the city, is considered *inappropriate* by Italian neighbours, despite the fact that the majority of their behaviours is the consequence of a failed immigration policy. Migrants' strategies to be part of the neighbourhood as well as of Italy, are attempts to find their own space in the new country, to feel welcomed and, finally, to belong. These are in fact *practices of belonging*:

> The women and men who live in the city have, or may claim, a right to the city that includes on the one hand the right to appropriate urban space and on the other hand the right to participate in its production and in decisions about it but also in (re)defining patterns of living it. In this context, migrants reconfigure the meanings of belonging against dominant spatializations through their everyday practices.[105]

The 'right to the city' to which Kalandides and Vaiou refer, is the right to live in the city and to belong to it, whatever this might entail. The opening of commercial enterprises, for instance, is a clear strategy to appropriate the space, for two reasons: on the one hand to open a shop or more generally to undertake a commercial venture is from the entrepreneurs' perspective, a form of economic sustenance, which will provide them and their family, with an income in order to survive. On the other hand, it satisfies migrants' need to create a link with their past and their compatriots; this link will not prevent migrants' integration in the Italian society, but it will help the process, providing them with the necessary conditions:

> almost every newly arrived group has felt the need to express its community identity through the creation of its own enclave, its own space and place. [...] In recreating their past, migrants seek to reestablish a sense of home and also to reconnect with what they have left behind. [...] Places such as enclaves come to serve as a kind of 'psychic anchor' for displaced people, providing them with a 'symbolic life line to a continuous sense of identity'. [...] Loss of such places, according to Fired (1963, p. 232), represents a 'disruption in one's relationship to the past, to the present and the future'.[106]

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[105] Kalandides and Vaiou, p. 254.
[106] Sanjoy Mazumdar and others, 'Creating a Sense of Place: The Vietnamese-Americans and Little Saigon', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20 (2000), 319–33 (p. 320).

Even if the neighbourhoods taken into consideration in this study cannot be labelled as enclaves, they all undoubtedly present how migrants are attempting to settle down both by establishing a strong link with their past and, equally important, with their own compatriots in Italy. The magazine *Comunidad Latina*,[107] which was created with the purpose to connect South American communities in Italy to their countries of origin, has then developed into a magazine more involved in Italian and Milanese life. This is indicative of how urgent this need of connections is; as the founder affirms:

> 'Come residente in questa città, è bene che tu sappia cosa succede *qui*. Che tu sia informato. In genere se apri molte riviste sudamericane vedi solo articoli sulla Colombia o il Cile o il Perù. Noi invece andiamo a caccia di notizie locali. Anche di quartiere, di cose che possano coinvolgere il lettore, quello che vive quotidianamente. Il suo rapporto con la realtà italiana'. Un'editoria sempre meno *latina* e sempre più *globale* - più pezzi in italiano in modo che possa essere letta anche da africani o cinesi o chiunque altro.[108]

When José Gonzales, director of this successful magazine, decided to create *Comunidad Latina*, his primary goal was to remain in contact with his country of origin; at a later stage, he realised the importance of involving his community in the life of the neighbourhood. The magazine is still publishing articles about South America, but it is interested mainly in Milan's and Lombardy's news. To fund a magazine, to open a shop, to frequent the bars of the area, to buy or to rent a flat, to spend Sundays in the local park, to walk around the neighbourhood, are all attempts to belong, which make migrants aware of the space they inhabit, allowing them to establish strong connections with their neighbourhood, their neighbours and their city. Certainly, these practices proved to be effective, as Anita Patel affirms:

> Anche se in via Padova puoi vivere, o sopravvivere, pure con pochi soldi. Infatti ci vivo anch'io. E rintraccio la mia ipotesi di natura mentre sto in un fazzoletto d'erba e individuo una scarna porzione di cielo, seduta sulla mia panchina. […] la mia panchina è sempre piena. Come il mio bar. Il mio bar assomiglia alla mia panchina

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[107] *Comunidad Latina*'s success pushed the funder to integrate it with a periodical insert: 'Guialatina - Guida ufficiale dei negozi e dei servizi latinoamericani in Italia.', *Guialatina Italia* <http://www.guialatina.it/index.php> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[108] Giorgio Fontana, *Babele 56,* p. 33.

che assomiglia al mio palazzo. […] Esco dal mio palazzo di tutti e vado nel mio bar

di tutti. Mio è nostro: non è privato ma è sempre pubblico, in questo quartiere.

Quando dici mio comunichi nostro e partecipi a un mondo.[109]

Via Padova belongs to Anita and to those who, like her, are ready to accept that: 'questo posto non è tuo, è di tutti'.[110] If for migrants this is clear, for the Italian inhabitants, this is a requirement which is extremely difficult to accept. The work of the press, as it was shown, does not help. The constant separation between us and them, Italians and foreigners, is an effective tool of exclusion which reaches its highest peak with the use of the word *quartiere*. This personification is constantly repeated in articles like *Quartiere contro gli immigrati*, or *Rissa tra Sudamericani, il quartiere si ribella*, where *il quartiere* stands for a limited group of people who arrived earlier or who simply were born (of Italian parents) in Italy.[111] The expression *il quartiere,* therefore, defines those who belong to the neighbourhood and those who do not have the right to be there. This separation between *il quartiere* and those who should stay outside, is so effective that via Padova has been targeted by the press as the Bronx of Milan and it has been the location of racist attacks, such as the one led by Forza Nuova:

Lo striscione 'Lasciate ogni speranza o voi che entrate' e i cartelli: 'Attenzione da

qui finisce la zona italiana'. E via Padova bloccata. […] Nel mirino del gruppo,

spiegano, 'non ci sono gli immigrati', ma le politiche della Moratti […]. Perché ha

consentito che 'interi quartieri della nostra città divenissero zone off-limits per i

cittadini italiani'.[112]

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[109] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 8–9–12–13. The special role of the *panchina*, clearly pointed out in this quotation, will be examined in Chapter 5.

[110] Giorgio Fontana, *Babele 56*, p. 11.

[111] Michele Focarete, 'Quartiere contro gli immigrati. "Spacciano, arrestateli tutti"', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 October 2006 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2006/ottobre/05/Quartiere_contro_gli_immigrati_Spacciano_co_7_0610 05029.shtml> [accessed 24 March 2013]; Michele Focarete, 'Rissa tra Sudamericani, il quartiere si ribella', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 2004 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2004/agosto/30/Rissa_tra_sudamericani_quartiere_ribella_co_7_040830 020.shtml> [accessed 21 March 2013].

[112] Benedetta Argentieri, 'Striscione neofascista blocca la via. "Non è Italia"', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 February 2010 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2010/febbraio/21/Striscione_neofascista_blocca_via_Non_co_7_100221 014.shtml> [accessed 25 March 2013].

With the reference to *cittadini italiani* the separation between those two groups is stressed once again. This is emphasised also in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene,* where Anita declares:

> Mi piacciono le sfogliatelle, invece, ma nella pasticceria che le fa ottime non torno più, da quando dietro al bancone hanno appeso uno striscione con scritto 'Orgogliosi di essere napoletani'. Che a me sembra un modo per prendere le distanze, dagli altri negozianti: quelli stranieri. […] E mi piacciono le sigarette, anche, ma nella tabaccheria che sta di fianco alle roulotte degli zingari non torno più, da quando sopra le pareti hanno affisso dei cartelli con scritto: 'Prodotti italiani, qualità italiana, personale italiano'. Che è evidentemente un modo per prendere le distanze, dagli altri negozianti: quelli stranieri. Io prendo le distanze da chi prende le distanze dagli stranieri.[113]

Despite this excluding remark, the situation in these areas appears as undergoing a process of improvement. Several associations have been created with the purpose of facilitating the settlement and the integration of the newcomers in the city.[114] In this process a key role is played by the so called *seconde generazioni*.[115] The association *Italiani +* as well as *Associna* are indeed very active in facilitating the cohabitation of new and old residents of these areas.[116] Italian cities have changed, just as Italians have changed. The acknowledgement of this transformation has not yet been accepted at least not by the majority of the population; this is in line with Rosello's analysis of hospitality and, in particular, how the precondition of hospitality is the mutual change:

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[113] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 21.

[114] Examples of these associations are: in Milan, *Via Padova è meglio di Milano*: 'Via Padova è meglio di Milano' <http://www.meglioviapadova.it/> [accessed 6 February 2015]; the school, *La Casa del Sole* inside the Trotter park: 'Istituto Scolastico Comprensivo Casa del Sole' <http://www.casadelsoleonline.it/template.php?pag=4004> [accessed 6 February 2015]; in Turin, 'La comunità di San Salvario' <http://www.sansalvario.org/> [accessed 6 February 2015] and 'Casa del Quartiere San Salvario' <http://www.casadelquartiere.it/index.php> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[115] A group of second generation migrants funded *Italiani +* <http://www.italianipiu.it/> [accessed 6 February 2015], a webpage in which it is possible to publish articles, interviews and useful information. The same happens with the Italian – Chinese association *Associna* <http://www.associna.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=485> [accessed 6 February 2015]. Additionally, according to the Istat, the number of children born in Italy from migrant parents is annually increasing; see Mauro Albani, 'Stranieri residenti in Italia', 2012 <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/96694> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[116] For insightful analyses on second generations in Italy see: Jacqueline Andall, 'The G2 Network and Other Second-Generation Voices: Claiming Rights and Transforming Identities', in *National Belongings*, ed. by Andall and Duncan, pp. 171–93; Jacqueline Andall, 'Second-Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28 (2002), 389–407.

The very precondition of hospitality may require that, in some ways, both the host and the guest accept in different ways, the uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other. Some degree of mutual metamorphosis, brought about by the presence of the other, of his or her different values or points of view, will undoubtedly constitute the by-product and the visible evidence of hospitable gestures.[117]

As remarked by the press, the difficulty is precisely in accepting these changes; in Chapters 2 and 3, where the analysis will consider specific places, this refusal will be even clearer. However, the situation is, hopefully, enhancing; in Turin for example, where migrants arrived at an earlier stage; San Salvario is slowly gaining a multicultural identity as Enzo from *Contesa per un maialino italianissimo* affirms:

San Salvario è molto cambiato. […] Non ci facciamo mancare nulla, […] dalla sinagoga alle piccole sale di preghiera per i musulmani, dai tanti ristoranti che rappresentano tutte le cucine del mondo ai due storici cinema porno di via Principe Tommaso. Per non parlare dei residenti, venuti sia dal nord che dal sud d'Italia, così come da tutto il mondo. […] San Salvario è il luogo delle nuove scoperte per eccellenza.[118]

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[117] Rosello, p. 176.
[118] Lakhous, *Contesa*, p. 120.

Chapter Two

'E spesso a Termini succedono fatti incredibili, degni di nota':[1] a
Place to Arrive, a Place to Leave and to Live

> In Paddington all Cornwall is latent and the remoter west; down the inclines of
> Liverpool Street lie fenlands and the illimitable Broads; Scotland is through the
> pylons of Euston; Wessex behind the poised chaos of Waterloo. Italians realise this,
> as is natural; those of them who are so unfortunate as to serve as waiters in Berlin
> call the Anhalt Bahnhof the Stazione d'Italia, because by it they must return to their
> homes. And he is a chilly Londoner who does not endow his stations with some
> personality, and extend to them, however shyly, the emotions of fear and love. To
> Margaret—I hope that it will not set the reader against her— the station of King's
> Cross had always suggested infinity. Its very situation—withdrawn a little behind
> the facile splendours of St. Pancras—implied a comment on the materialism of life.[2]

In this passage from *Howards End*, published in 1910, Forster describes London railway stations. Surprisingly, there are no references either to the power of the train, or to modernity; just the year before Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published *Il Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909) in which he stated: 'canteremo […] le stazioni ingorde, divoratrici di serpi che fumano'.[3] On the other hand, Forster looks at the stations and sees what they represent; he figures the destinations that can be reached. What is crucial for the present analysis is Forster's statement: 'he is a chilly Londoner who does not endow his stations with some personality, and extend to them, however shyly, the emotions of fear and love'.[4] The sentiments Forster alludes to are, however, linked to the traditional imaginary surrounding railway stations: they are steeped in melancholia, full of memories of departures, separations and reunions. In this chapter I will look at the role played by the train station, and particularly by Termini, Rome's main railway station, which, alongside

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[1] Ali Farah, p. 29.

[2] E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, vol. 4, Abinger ed (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 9; This passage was also mentioned in Italian by Remo Ceserani in *Treni di carta. L'immaginario in ferrovia: l'irruzione del treno nella letteratura moderna* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), p. 184.

[3] Marinetti in Mario De Micheli, *Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1988), p. 236.

[4] Forster, p. 9.

the conventional function of train station, has also become the meeting point of several migrant communities who have turned it into a home space. This other purpose of the station is not well accepted by locals who perceive migrants as creating crime and dirt. As Graziella Parati argues:

> What is at stake is the appropriation of urban space interpreted by a multiplicity of migrants coming from very different cultural contexts. In fact, the city reveals itself as a fluid entity composed of spaces to which migrants want to assign new meanings. The modification of space aims to construct new proximities. […] The urban space of Rome is thus filled with the anxieties and the tensions inherent in acts of appropriation between the native and the non-native. What is at stake is the construction of new urban proximities.[5]

Parati looks at the city as a fluid entity, porous and prone to modifications, as shown in the previous chapter; in the same way, the train station is inhabited by its users in various forms and procedures giving to this space different meanings and values. The way migrants inhabit Termini, however, is often perceived as dangerous and unhealthy, as overall inappropriate, exactly because migrants mistake a place of transition, of passage, of movement from one place to another, as a place of stability; a place in which to pause and recover one's own identity.

In his *Treni di Carta*, Remo Ceserani investigates the role of trains and of train stations in literature; he analyses Pirandello's work and, on the role played by railway stations, he argues:

> Sono la stazione ferroviaria, la grande galleria dei treni, la sala d'aspetto, il caffè della stazione. Sono, tutti quanti, per loro natura e per loro funzione, luoghi di anonimo incontro, terra di tutti e di nessuno. Sono i luoghi del tempo sospeso, della lunga attesa, dell'appisolamento, della conversazione vuota della luce artificiale e artificiosa (spesso illuminati per tutta la notte), della luminosità opalina, del fumo del chiasso. […] Insomma, è come se la conversazione in uno scompartimento

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[5] Graziella Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live? Amara Lakhous's "Scontro Di Civiltà per Un Ascensore a Piazza Vittorio"', in *Annali d'Italianistica*, 2010, XXVIII, 431–46 (p. 433).

ferroviario, l'incontro in una sala d'aspetto o nel caffè della stazione rivelino il
contenuto vero di ogni nostra esperienza, oggi.[6]

Such a description can be read from two different perspectives: the perspective of those
who experience the train station as a place of passage, and the perspective of those for
whom the train station means something more. Ceserani's statement is particularly
relevant for this analysis; the *tempo sospeso* or *la lunga attesa* are elements which might
have a self-explanatory significance in our understanding of the train station as the place
where travellers can wait for a connection or for someone to arrive. On the other hand,
these two features typical of any railway station acquire a new meaning if considered
from migrants' point of view. What is suggested is that migrants are at the station also to
wait, not for someone to arrive, but for their wish of returning to come true.

2.1 Termini: a Conflicting *Non-Place*

> Qui tutto è misto, anche la musica, [...] ciascuno cerca i propri suoni e i propri sapori.
> È anche per questo che tutti gli immigrati del mondo girano attorno alle stazioni, è lì
> che sono arrivati, la stazione è il posto più vicino a casa.[7]

In 1995 the *Corriere della Sera* published an article on the situation in the Roman area of
Esquilino, and in particular on the fulcrum of this neighbourhood, Termini Station; the
evocative title was: *Una notte tra i neri*. *I neri* of the title is the synecdochic term with
which the journalist defines all people (migrants, homeless, prostitutes and so on with no
distinction) that spend their time (and in this specific case their nights) at Termini station.
According to Merlo, migrants used to meet at Termini because it was the first contact
they had with Italy, the place where they had arrived and therefore 'il posto più vicino a
casa'.[8] Twenty years after this article was published, the train station still represents a
point of convergence for all the migrant communities living in the Italian capital.
Migrants' presence in this specific place is problematic because they spend time, they
dwell in a place that was supposed to be used as a passage, as a transition from one point
to another. As Sandra Ponzanesi argues: 'They (the migrants) are present as outsiders, as

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[6] Ceserani, p. 291.

[7] Francesco Merlo, 'Una notte tra i neri', *Corriere della Sera*, 1995
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/novembre/19/UNA_NOTTE_TRA_NERI_co_0_9511194717.sht
ml> [accessed 23 March 2013].

[8] Merlo.

appendages in the public spaces of transit through which "full" Italian citizens pass on their way between home and work, while for them the stations even act as makeshift homes'.[9]

In the station, unlike travellers, migrants can retrieve some sort of stability that they are finding particularly difficult to retrace in their lives which are often characterised by the need to move from one house to another, from one city to another, from one nation to another. For those who see the station as a space of transition, this stability represents a threat. This is one of the major differences between migrants and travellers (be they business travellers or tourists). The former live constantly in a situation defined by an arrival and a new departure; even after living in the same city for years, their life is marked by this lingering sentiment of an upcoming move. The latter instead bring with them an inner consciousness of stability even when they are on the move. As Iain Chambers points out:

> For to travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour becomes an impossibility.[10]

For the first group, as Ponzanesi pointed out, the train station embodies home feelings. As Ceserani's comment on Pirandello's work has highlighted, literary texts have very often described the station from the travellers' perspective. The railway station played an important role in the reader's imaginary exactly for its transient nature, for the possibility of sharing conversations with strangers, and the opportunity of being invisible; as Ceserani again describes as a:

> luogo di rumore e di fumo, di grandi spazi vuoti o percorsi da folle anonime, di piattaforme dove vengono consumati i rituali (socialmente forti e culturalmente

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[9] Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Imaginary Cities. Space and Identity in Italian Literature of Immigration', in *Italian Cityscapes*, ed. by Foot and Lumley, pp. 156–65 (p. 160).

[10] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

codificati, spesso accompagnati da una simbologia complicata, spesso pronti a una facile trascrizione allegorica) dell'attesa, dell'arrivo, della separazione, dell'addio.[11]

Ceserani's description of the train station is undoubtedly recalling Marc Augé's definition of *non-places*;[12] the railway station belongs to that group of *non-places* theorised by the French anthropologist:

> Clearly the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially (individuals travel, make purchases, relax), they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality.[13]

Augé describes the *non-place* as possessing a specific purpose which is well-known by everyone who uses such a space; in the case of the train station the purpose is obviously that of the travel. The recognition of this purpose by the users entails the implicit acceptance of an unwritten contract, again clear to everyone, according to which the users' behaviour is restricted and controlled. The respect of such a 'solitary contractuality' brings the users to act on themselves so that the use of a non-place becomes an anonymous and individual experience.[14] Considering, therefore, the train station as a *non-place*, excludes the possibility of accepting migrants' recognition of Termini as a *makeshift home*, as Ponzanesi pointed out. The locals, however, who look at Termini as the *non-place* described by Augé, perceive all migrants' behaviour as inappropriate, as *out of place*.[15] Behaviour such as eating, pausing for a chat and more generally the habit of hanging out at Termini, performed mainly by migrants, functions as a trigger to the

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[11] Ceserani, p. 189.

[12] See also Ponzanesi, 'Imaginary Cities', p. 158.

[13] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, (London; New York: Verso Books, 2009), p. 76.

[14] Augé, p. 83. More recently, however, train stations have been renovated with the inclusion of several bars and shops of different kinds; these changes, on the one hand, might appear as an attempt to make the station as a place to hang out independently from the need to travel; on the other, they provide an additional cue to experience the station solitarily.

[15] Cresswell, p. 10.

ignition of a series of complaints against the presence of immigrants at the train station, and by extension in Italy.

The journalist Fabrizio Peronaci in an article for the *Corriere della Sera* published in 2010, for example, describes the station and how it has changed after the arrival of immigration; he also points out some of the habitual gatherings taking place there: 'ogni giovedì e domenica decine di sudamericani bivaccano cucinando riso, carne e intingoli a base di cipolle'.[16] The same habit is described in *Scontro di civiltà* where Maria Cristina, the Peruvian carer, plans her day off around her regular visits to Termini station where she meets and spends time with other Peruvians; she says: 'saluto e bacio tutti anche se alcuni non li ho mai visti prima, poi mi siedo sul marciapiede e divoro i cibi peruviani, il riso con il pollo e il lomo saltado e il sibice'.[17] This specific habit of eating in a public space, for instance, is deemed to create filth, regardless of any hygienic rule, therefore threatening people's health: 'La Stazione Termini è considerata luogo a rischio per gli extracomunitari che consumano pasti e lasciano sporcizia'.[18] 'La polizia ci ha cacciato via dalla stazione. Ha detto che facevamo sporco. Così ci siamo spostati qui'.[19] In particular, it is significant the clause *facevamo sporco* which, according to the interviewee, was used by the police in order to justify migrants' removal from the station. The verb *fare*, used in this context, can be either translated with *to produce*, in the sense that their behaviours - as eating, washing and so on - were in some way producing dirt, or it can be interpreted in a more problematic way. As a matter of fact *fare* can in this case also be translated with *to consitute, to form* filth; according to this interpretation it is not migrants' behaviours that is questioned but rather migrants themselves, their presence which is perceived as transgressing the boundaries of common sense thus endangering the order. As Douglas points out

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[16] Fabrizio Peronaci, 'Lampada Osram, che nostalgia! Oggi la stazione Termini è un suk', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 August 2010 <http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/10_agosto_11/reportage-peronaci-termini-1703556864800.shtml?fr=correlati?fr=correlati> [accessed 28 March 2013].

[17] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 90–91.

[18] Francesca Giuliani, 'La mappa dei "Bronx". Il centro che fa paura', *La Repubblica*, 1 October 1997 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1997/10/01/la-mappa-dei-bronx-il-centro-che.html> [accessed 6 February 2013].

[19] Elena Dusi, 'Suk Piazza Indipendenza', *La Repubblica*, 29 July 2000 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/07/29/suk-piazza-indipendenza.html> [accessed 6 March 2013].

The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the power inhering in the cosmos. […] Purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise. Most of us indeed would feel safer if our experience could be hard-set and fixed in form.[20]

The good order is threatened by the presence of migrants at Termini, as well as in Italy. The *Corriere della Sera*, section of Rome, for instance, used to host a column entitled *La città ne parla*, managed by the journalist Maria Latella, to whom Roman citizens could write letters and open discussions; this section was suspended for a while to then open again in September 2003; only a few days after its launch this letter was published:

Gentile signora Latella, pensavo: considerato che ormai la stazione Termini è già di per sé un polo di attrazione autonomo e sufficiente per garantire l'afflusso e l'accoglienza di ladri, borsaioli, stupratori, prostitute e lenoni, immigrati clandestini, manigoldi, et similia, che possono fruire comodamente e liberamente di negozi, supermercati, bar, ristoranti, punti telefonici (ho scoperto ora anche l'esistenza di una mostra d'arte - al binario 24!) non si potrebbe finalmente tener conto anche delle esigenze dei poveri viaggiatori. Non potrebbero agevolmente raggiungere i treni senza dover fendere folle multietniche e versicolori?[21]

Despite the rude way of writing and the racist messages conveyed, what is relevant for this passage is the clear belief that the *poveri viaggiatori* are those who have every right to use the station, that they should have a preferential treatment exactly because by being travellers they are inhabiting the station in the only proper way possible, with the appropriate behaviour. On the other hand, this other group of people, which again includes with no distinction migrants (legal and illegal), thieves, prostitutes, criminals of different kinds all of them summarised in the strategic expression *multi-ethnic and colour-changing crowds*, is not using the station properly, but rather dwelling in it. It is noticeable here how, once again, there is no distinction between the people inhabiting the station, as before with *i neri*. The combination of the different categories of people in one single group, seen as strongly contributing to the decay of the area, is indicative of the

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[20] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp.162–63.
[21] Maria Latella, 'Termini, quando la gentilezza commuove', *Corriere della Sera*, 12 September 2003 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2003/settembre/12/Termini_quando_gentilezza_commuove_co_10_030 912036.shtml> [accessed 23 March 2013].

tendency of depicting all the different marginalised groups as equally dangerous. It is therefore common, especially in the article concerning Termini, that terms such as homeless or migrants are used interchangeably. Since the arrival of immigrants in Italy, Termini has been depicted as an area at risk, as the following extracts indicate:

> Un episodio sconcertante, che dà la misura dello stato di degradazione, umana e materiale cui sono arrivati i dintorni della principale stazione romana. Una zona diventata ormai da tempo il rifugio dei paria urbani: eroinomani in caccia di una bustina di polvere bianca, immigrati senza permessi di soggiorno.[22]

> La piccola Soweto romana è intorno alla stazione Termini, dove alle nove di sera scatta il coprifuoco. Facce nere al bar, nessun viso pallido in giro.[23]

> Di mattina la città è frettolosa ed i 'disperati'[24] della stazione Termini si riposano, dopo una notte passata a vagabondare o a bere. […] Bisognerà aspettare l'ora di pranzo per vedere spuntare dagli anfratti, dai sottopassaggi, dagli ostelli i nordafricani, i polacchi, gli indiani. […] Eppure appena un mese fa era stato presentato dal ministro dei trasporti Raffaele Costa un progetto per il recupero di tutta la zona.[25]

Leaving aside the explicit racist expressions, the presence, once again, of this undefined group of human beings is depicted as dangerous and producing a situation of both physical and social decay. Peculiar, in my opinion, is the idea of *degradazione umana* which not only recalls the sense of decay aimed by the article, but the combination of the word *degradazione* with the adjective *umana* implies a deeper judgment, even maybe a moral one, which perceives the group of people previously listed as undergoing a process

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[22] Massimo Lugli, 'Per l'aggressore in ottanta assistono allo stupro', *La Repubblica*, 9 June 1989 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/06/09/per-aggressore-in-ottanta-assistono-allo.html> [accessed 22 March 2013].

[23] Corrado Ruggeri, '"Italiani, vi abbiamo stancato?"', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 November 1992 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1992/novembre/11/italiani_abbiamo_stancato_co_0_9211117053.shtml> [accessed 23 March 2013].

[24] Noteworthy is also the use of the term *disperati*; Giuseppe Faso writes a short but insightful chapter about the use of this term, he argues: 'usando una parola densa di nutrimento per giustificare processi di esclusione, la si involgarisce e snatura. La parola "disperazione" è ricca come poche. È questa parola preziosa, almeno per la nostra possibilità di riconquista di una speranza vitale, che viene profanata per ridurre a un minimo (e disprezzabile) comune denominatore i migranti che tentano di attraversare il canale di Sicilia'. Faso, *Lessico*. p. 58.

[25] 'La lunga notte dei disperati', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 July 1993 <http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1993/luglio/21/lunga_notte_dei_disperati_INDAGINI_co_10_9307216850.shtml> [accessed 24 March 2013].

of dehumanisation, transforming them into something not completely human. This representation is in line with Sibley's argument who, drawing on Douglas, explains how also the reference to dirt works in the attempt to portray migrants as *matter out of place*:[26]

> Dirt […] is matter out of place. Similarly, the boundaries of society are continually redrawn to distinguish between those who belong and those who, because of some perceived cultural difference, are deemed to be out of place. […] in order to legitimate their exclusion, people who are defined as 'other' or residual, beyond the boundaries of the acceptable, are commonly represented as less than human.[27]

The expressions used in these articles (and in all the articles concerning Termini, more in general) are strategically chosen in order to create a feeling of insecurity. If some expressions are quite explicit, as for example *facce nere* in contrast to *visi pallidi*, other expressions are slightly more vague, but still effective in building up a sentiment of fear and danger. *Paria urbani*, *Soweto* or also *progetto per il recupero*, for instance, have a less immediate meaning, but still a problematic one; these are what Giuseppe Faso defines *parole-schermo*, words that by conveying a meaning also suggest an offensive connotation;[28] as for example the term 'recupero' which means to retrieve, to recover, to gain back from the immigrants.[29] In particular, Faso comments on the linguistic role of the words *badante* and *clandestino* but his consideration can be easily used for the expressions highlighted above:

> In parole povere: se si trovasse – per il gusto della *variatio* – un sinonimo o una riformulazione a 'clandestino' (ad esempio: irregolare, senza documenti, *sans papier*, ecc.) o a 'badante' (ad esempio: assistente domiciliare, infermiera, dedita al lavoro di cura, ecc.), forse qualcuno potrebbe sospettare che quei due termini rigidi nascondo qualcosa, hanno una funzione connotativa (denigratoria, discriminatoria, inferiorizzante) e soprattutto non ci permettano di comprendere il fenomeno di cui si

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[26] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 41.

[27] Sibley, 'Outsiders', p. 107.

[28] Faso, 'La lingua', p. 31.

[29] In particular, the reference to Soweto works at the same way as the references to suk and casbah mentioned in the previous chapter. The association with Soweto is a successful one both on a spatial and on a social level; Termini is depicted as an area in a state of decay, characterized by social apartheid and criminality, also corroborated by the reference to the *coprifuoco*. A description able to effectively mirror the image of Soweto that was quite common at the beginning of the 1990s when Ruggeri's article was published. The presence of this element can be read almost as a sort of warning on how the city is changing due to migrants' arrival.

sta parlando. E sarebbe un vero autogol, all'interno di un'intenzione comunicativa fortemente connotata e intesa allo stigma.[30]

If for example instead of *paria urbani* journalists had used *emarginati* or *reietti* the intent of depicting migrants (and all the other people mentioned in the previous quotations) in a derogatory way would be too explicit and clear also for a lazy reader. The tone used in the examples reported above is not an exception but is actually common in all the articles about the train station, and the attempt to convey a sentiment of danger around Termini is quite successful. As a matter of fact Termini has become also a geographical landmark: every time a crime or an accident involving migrants takes place, journalists tend to also give information on how close Termini is from the area where the event has taken place. With expressions such as *nei pressi*, *nelle vicinanze*, *vicino* or *a due passi*, for instance, journalists depict the entire area around Termini as dangerous:

> Integrazione? Una parola che fa rima con 'inclusione', termine spesso usato dal sindaco Veltroni ogni qualvolta si parla di immigrati, ma che, soprattutto in alcune zone della città, risulta di difficile attuazione. A cominciare dall'Esquilino, il rione vicino alla stazione Termini ormai considerato la vera Chinatown romana.[31]

> Violentata la notte di Natale. […] Il fatto sarebbe avvenuto in via Giolitti, nelle immediate vicinanze della stazione ferroviaria della Capitale.[32]

Over the years, in order to at least limit this problem – if not to solve it – many works of renovation have been carried out, especially before the Jubilee in the year 2000.[33] These works to *save* the station have often been defined *lavori di recupero*, to convey the idea that they could bring back the station to how it was before, before the 'arrivo dell'immigrazione straniera'.[34] These have brought a great improvement from an

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[30] Faso, 'La lingua', p. 32.

[31] 'Dalla stazione all'"Es Qui Lin" l'Oriente che cancella gli Italiani', *Il Giornale*, 31 October 2007 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/stazione-all-es-qui-lin-l-oriente-che-cancella-italiani.html> [accessed 25 March 2013].

[32] 'Senzatetto violentata la notte di Natale', *Corriere della Sera*, 26 December 2009 <http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/09_dicembre_26/senzatetto_violentata_notte_natale-1602208913118.shtml> [accessed 25 March 2013].

[33] All the information regarding the history, the urban and architectural development of Termini station has been collected from the official website *Grandi Stazioni* <http://www.grandistazioni.it/cms/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=06c48bc16f09a110VgnVCM1000003f16f90aRCRD> [accessed on the 12th December 2014]

[34] Mudu, p. 659.

architectural point of view, as Igiaba Scego describes it: 'La stazione in questi ultimi anni è migliorata tantissimo'.[35] On the other hand, however, they did not solve the problems detected before:

> Nonostante le importanti opere di ristrutturazione e riqualificazione di Termini, in vista del Giubileo, nonostante le vetrate, i tapis roulant, centri servizi ed altre eccellenti novità, il principale scalo cittadino non ha ancora perso la sua funzione di rifugio dormitorio per barboni e stranieri. Si tratta di un'umanità disperata che di giorno trascina la sua grama esistenza nei dintorni della stazione e di notte cerca un rifugio al suo interno, sotto i porticati, dentro vagoni in sosta o nei mille anfratti del monumentale scalo.[36]

Therefore, despite the works, migrants carried on meeting at the station and, consequently, citizens' complaints did not stop. As described by the article just reported, the geography of this *umanità disperata* revolves around Termini, both during the day and during the night. This way of dwelling in Termini, in particular during the day, has brought to the opening of shops managed by migrants, of restaurants with different food traditions and therefore to the redefinition of migrants' geographies; as an article from the *Corriere della Sera* affirms:

> Quando le massaie romane entrano per fare la spesa nei negozi di alimentari o girano fra i banchi dei mercati rionali, le donne musulmane si mettono in viaggio verso la stazione Termini. Soltanto lì infatti, in alcune macellerie specializzate segnalate da un'insegna in caratteri arabi, sono sicure di trovare la carne 'purificata', macellata con tecniche particolari.[37]

The presence of other members of one's own community, but also of all the shops a migrant might need, increase the value of a place like Termini; this was also described in the previous chapter, particularly in relation to the novel *Madre Piccola* where Barni describes the area of the train station with these words: 'E spesso a Termini succedono

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[35] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 103.

[36] 'Cercano riparo, uccisi dal treno', *Corriere della Sera*, 14 February 1999
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1999/febbraio/14/Cercano_riparo_uccisi_dal_treno_co_10_9902143957
.shtml> [accessed 28 March 2013].

[37] Monica Guerzoni, 'Musulmane, una lotta quotidiana per non tradire il Corano', *Corriere della Sera*,
1994
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1994/settembre/23/musulmane_una_lotta_quotidiana_per_co_10_94092
37529.shtml> [accessed 28 March 2013].

fatti incredibili, degni di nota. I nostri luoghi, vecchi e nuovi, ruotano intorno a quel polo: il negozio di Qamar, il call center di Xassan, la draddorio e dintorni'.[38] By considering (and therefore using) Termini as a place for socialising, migrants are crossing the border of what is acceptable or not. This transgression is also perceived as a way of threatening the homogeneity of a place that, before the arrival of migrants, used to carry out only the function of train station. As Papastergiadis affirms: 'Whenever the process of identity formation is premised on an exclusive boundary between 'us' and 'them', the hybrid, which is born out of the transgression of this boundary, figures as a form of danger, loss and degeneration'.[39] This transgression produces feelings of fear and insecurity in line with what Puwar affirms about the visibility of migrant minorities: 'For those for whom the whiteness of these spaces provides a comforting familiarity the arrival of racialized members can represent the monstrous'.[40] Migrants are therefore perceived as taking over Termini by their constant presence and by this disorderly transgression. They become the paradigm of all migrants in Italy and complaints against the situation in Termini are simply complaints against the situation of immigrants in Italy as might be understood from this passage from *Il Giornale*:

> Benvenuti alla stazione Termini. […] Qui si trova di tutto: dal romeno manolesta con famiglia al seguito che si mescola alla folla per agire indisturbato al borseggiatore part-time che viene in stazione ad arrotondare lo stipendio da operaio […]. Arrivano da ogni parte del mondo. Soprattutto dalla Romania, poi America Latina e Nord Africa. Ma tra loro c'è anche qualche italiano. E pensare che in seguito all'imponente opera di restyling di cui è stata oggetto la stazione nel recente passato, per un istante era parso che le cose si fossero messe sul binario giusto, che la situazione fosse in via di miglioramento. Che il virus fosse stato debellato. […] I reati contestati? Chi più ne ha più ne metta. Furti, borseggi, scippi. Lesioni, risse, tentate aggressioni. Spaccio di droga e ubriachezza molesta. E naturalmente decreti di espulsione e ordini di carcerazione non rispettati.[41]

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[38] Ali Farah, p. 29.
[39] Papastergiadis, p. 174.
[40] Puwar, p. 50.
[41] 'Termini, viaggio nelle bolge della criminalità', *Il Giornale*, 27 November 2009
<http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/termini-viaggio-nelle-bolge-criminalit.html> [accessed 20 March 2013].

In 1996 *La Stampa*, after a Somali girl gave birth in a bathroom in Termini, interviewed one of the cleaners, Rossella:

> Rossella ne vede passare di tutti i colori: 'dai drogati che molte volte siamo riusciti a salvare prima della morte per overdose agli omosessuali che a volte si picchiano. Dicevo che le somale e altre arabe stanno spesso chiuse a lungo perché a volte tirano fuori il loro tappetino e pregano. Oppure si lavano completamente, o scrivono a casa. Noi lo sappiamo e le lasciamo fare, cercando di rispettare tutti'. […] È davvero un altro mondo, sconosciuto e con le sue regole.[42]

The fact that many women use the restroom to pray or to write a letter is not surprising. The bathroom in train stations can be locked and therefore the occupants feel protected and they can be sure they will not be bothered.[43] Additionally, the mention to the gesture of washing oneself is indicative of a recurrence of actions belonging to the sphere of cleansing and purifying (for instance the adjective 'purificata' in a previous quotation); this is noteworthy especially in the light of the discourse around the idea of migrants producing dirt, as previously pointed out. The journalist is right in affirming that it is an unknown world with its own rules; the truth behind this affirmation is evident for example in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* in which she dedicates an entire chapter to the role of Termini in the life of her family (but also in the life of the Somali community in Rome):

> La stazione era entrata nella mia vita, come nella vita di tutti i somali della diaspora romana, immediatamente. Non si è nemmeno presentata. È piombata nella mia vita senza preavviso, senza cerimonie. Molte delle mie fotografie da piccola sono state scattate lì. […] Però la merce più preziosa che si trova alla stazione sono le chiacchiere. […] È qui che fai la lista dei nuovi nati e dei morti recenti. È qui che incontri per caso una zia che non vedevi da sei anni. Alla fontanella di via dei Mille mi è capitato di vedere spesso dei ragazzi che fanno le abluzioni.[44]

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[42] Giovanni Bianconi, 'Vite allo sbando a Termini dove si partorisce in bagno', *La Stampa*, 27 March 1996
<http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/Itemid,3/page,14/articleid,0637_01_1996_0086_0014_8670437/> [accessed 13 March 2013].
[43] The restroom as a space of seclusion will be analysed in Chapter 5.
[44] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 99–100–104–105.

The image of the boys who wash themselves (going back to the previouse focus on the vocabulary related to actions of cleansing) to get ready for their daily prayers is in line with the statement of the cleaning lady about Somali women who pray in the restrooms. Yet these are just examples as the variety of activities that take place at Termini is really wide. By inhabiting Termini in this way, migrants' *appropriate* a space which was already there but over which they had no power:

> Every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors; these actors are collective as well as individual subjects inasmuch as the individuals are always members of groups or classes seeking to appropriate the space in question. This pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance.[45]

The Roman railway station comes to serve also the new purpose of *home space*, without losing its original role. The new migrants' way of occupying such a space is only adding new values to it. The ways migrants *appropriate* the space is what De Certeau defines *ways of using*;[46] the French scholar, drawing the example of a North African living in Paris, affirms:

> Thus a North African in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates *into* the system imposed on him […] [he] creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the costraining order of the place or the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.[47]

This *being in between* is concretely put into practice at Termini station which is transformed into an extra-spatial and extra-temporal space, existing in different time and space dimensions. Termini as an in-between microcosm becomes indispensable for migrants; their personal geographies, as pointed out by Parati, start from there:

> At the same time, this particular station is a crossroads of encounters where people of different social classes, origins, ages, and identities are intertwined. It is the space

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[45] Lefebvre, p. 57.
[46] De Certeau, p. 30.
[47] De Certeau, p. 30.

where many immigrants gather since it is the location of all arrivals and departures. It is also the point from which any linear knowledge of the city becomes impossible, because the city becomes the projection of personal maps: these can be facilitated by official maps, but not documented.[48]

2.2 Termini Railway Station: a Motionless Journey through Space and Time

Tutte le stazioni di ferrovia si rassomigliano, e trovo modo, essendo a due passi da casa mia, di convincermi di essere lontano da Roma, colla scelta fra il Cairo e Pietroburgo, fra Parigi e Londra, fra Londra e Calcutta. Più o meno grandiose, più o meno pulite (quella di Roma è certamente la meno) più o meno animate, le stazioni si assomigliano tutte, come i carabinieri, i negri, i preti ed i cani barboni. Viaggio senza muovermi, colla immaginazione riprendo le mie peregrinazioni, nelle spire di fumo della sigaretta rivedo lontani orizzonti, rievoco i ricordi de' miei viaggi, fantastico di spedizioni future… Quanti drammi, quanti idilli si rivelano all'osservatore nel via vai dei viaggiatori di una grande stazione![49]

In 1895 the Italian journalist and writer Achille Bizzoni published the novel *L'onorevole*. As Ceserani recalls, Ettore Ruggeri, one of the minor characters in this novel, lives in via Cavour right outside Termini. Ruggeri frequently wanders around Termini railway station because there he can travel with his imagination to places he has visited in the past or to places he would like to visit in the future.[50] This 'viaggio senza muovermi' occurs also for the migrants in the novels I have considered, but it is a different kind of travel: if for Ruggeri this was an attempt to escape from the melancholic boredom of his daily life, for migrants the imaginary travel becomes an endeavour to go back home. Taking place at the station, this imaginary travel imbues such a space with warm and familiar feelings which, along with the presence of other compatriots, make Termini a *makeshift home*, thus evoking Ponzanesi's initial argument. This home space of the station is in stark contrast with Augé's definition of *non-place*, in which one of the most important characteristics is the possibility for the user to be, if not invisible, at least hidden in the crowd:

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[48] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 442.
[49] Bizzoni in Ceserani, p. 190.
[50] Ceserani, pp. 189–190.

> The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of a non – place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude.[51]

In a partially flâneuristic demeanour, as also the example of Ruggeri has demonstrated, the aware user of the *non-place* makes his/her own way through the crowd to reach his/her train or to move around the city. Inside the *non-place* the user is anonymous, one among many; by behaving in accordance to the rules he/she becomes part of the same undefined horde.[52] Conversely, migrants individually dwell in the station and by sharing this space with other members of their community, they retrieve their own identity; as for example Maria Cristina in *Scontro di Civiltà*

> Faccio di tutto per non perdere minuti preziosi, metto a punto un programma ricco di impegni, ma ogni volta faccio la stessa cosa: vado alla stazione Termini, dove si incontrano gli immigrati peruviani. I loro volti soddisfano la sete dei miei occhi e le loro parole riscaldano le mie orecchie fredde. Mi sembra di tornare a casa, a Lima.[53]

By meeting with her fellow countrymen, speaking her language and, as previously mentioned, eating Peruvian food, Maria Cristina retrieves her identity as a Peruvian woman; an identity that is often obfuscated in her daily life when she takes care of the old Italian lady. Additionally, on a more practical level, Maria Cristina's identity is always threatened by the lack of a residence permit; Termini helps Maria Cristina to recover her identity as a Peruvian woman living in Italy precisely because it is her nationality that is called into question outside the station precinct:

> Vorrei essere tranquilla ma non ho nemmeno i documenti. Sono come una barca con le vele distrutte, sottomessa alla volontà delle rocce e delle onde. Se avessi il permesso di soggiorno non permetterei alla portiera napoletana di prendermi in giro e di offendermi. Mi chiama sempre la Filippina. Le ho ripetuto più volte: 'Io non vengo dalle Filippine ma dal Perù'.[54]

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[51] Augé, p. 83.
[52] Augé, p. 82.
[53] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 90.
[54] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 92–93.

The Neapolitan doorwoman's failure to acknowledge Maria Cristina's origin mirrors the absence of the Italian authorities' official recognition of her legal status. Both these deficiencies are partially compensated for by the few moments that she spends at Termini where, as she says herself, she feels at home. Maria Cristina's special relationship with Termini is also described by Ahmed/Amedeo, the protagonist of *Scontro di civiltà*, who affirms: 'Questo pomeriggio ho visto Maria Cristina alla Stazione Termini insieme ai suoi connazionali e mi è sembrata felice, come un pesce che torna nel mare dopo una breve agonia lontano dall'acqua'.[55] The beautiful simile used by Ahmed/Amedeo of the fish that goes back to the sea, besides paralleling the maritime context of Maria Cristina's analogy of the drifting boat, suggests the crucial role played by the station for her survival in Italy.

This idea of Termini as an unavoidable source of life was also evident in Maria Cristina's wonderful synaesthesia present in the previous quotation, where she describes the vital role played by her compatriots: 'I loro volti soddisfano la sete dei miei occhi e le loro parole riscaldano le mie orecchie fredde'.[56] Maria Cristina's eyes are eager for familiar faces and her cold ears need to be warmed up by familiar words. The Italian language is not able to warm her ears up; Italian is a cold language for Maria Cristina; it is the language of death, the deaths of her children before they were born, and the death slowly approaching the old lady she is taking care of: 'non sono l'unica che ha a che fare ogni giorno con la vecchiaia e la morte incalzante. Siamo tanti, e ci unisce il destino del lavoro comune con gli anziani in procinto di passare all'altro mondo da un momento all'altro'.[57]

On her day off she only needs to go to Termini and recharge her batteries for the following week: 'Quando il sole inizia a tramontare, la mia angoscia aumenta e sento che il viaggio della libertà sta per finire'.[58] This excursion into freedom is the time she spends in Termini, which gives her the feeling – not only of being at home – but also of being alive again. The Peruvian community is not the only one to gather regularly at Termini.

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[55] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 99.
[56] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 90.
[57] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 91.
[58] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 91.

A notable case, for instance is that of the Nigerian community. In particular, a corner of the station is called *Lagos* by its habitués:

> 'Vai a Roma? E allora vediamoci, passa per Lagos'. Quando due nigeriani si incontrano in giro per l'Europa, a Parigi o a Londra, e devono darsi un mezzo appuntamento a Roma, finiscono sempre per fissare l'incontro su quel marciapiede scalcinato, che tutti chiamano Lagos. […] Ma le geografie dell'emigrazione, sovrapponendosi alla toponomastica ufficiale, seguono altri punti cardinali. La capitale della Nigeria, nella capitale della Repubblica italiana, si è così ufficiosamente installata alla periferia della stazione Termini, dietro le balaustre di un ballatoio che sembra demarcare i confini di uno spazio extraterritoriale: un'area frammista eppure ben distinta da quelle occupate da indiani, arabi, cinesi.[59]

The journalist defines that corner as an *extra-territorial space*; the corner called *Lagos* is extra-territorial because it is a space where only people from Nigeria would regularly meet up;[60] it is not Italy anymore, but it is not even Nigeria, perhaps it is both, a spatial compromise through which two countries, Italy and Nigeria, overlap; but, from a temporal point of view, also two temporary dimensions overlap: past and present hybridise into a single temporal crossing.

One of the communities most connected to Termini is the Somali community, widely present in the articles, but even more represented in Italian postcolonial literature, where Termini is often described as an inescapable turning point in the community's life.[61]

> Credo che non si possa scrivere della comunità somala a Roma senza partire dalla stazione Termini, crocicchio, luogo delle nostre nostalgie. Mi sono anche voluta

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[59] Luca Villoresi, 'Dalla Nigeria alla savana urbana', *La Repubblica*, 22 May 2004 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2004/05/22/dalla-nigeria-alla-savana-urbana.html> [accessed 23 March 2013].

[60] The fact that this corner takes the name from the capital city of Nigeria (motherland of the inhabitants) is relevant but not at all an exception. Another example of this tendency of creating a connection with a past geography was underlined in the previous chapter where two brothers from Afghanistan had decided to open their kebab shop in Turin and call it Kabul. In the following chapter I will highlight the relevance of the phone center in *Divorzio all'islamica* named 'Little Cairo'.

[61] An example of this is provided by the documentary directed by Italian director Claudio Noce, *Aman e gli altri* (2006), shot at Termini station, regarding the Somali community in Rome and more specifically young Somalis hanging around the area of the Roman station. The documentary was included in the dvd of Claudio Noce's *Good Morning Aman* (DNA Cinematografica, 2009). For more information about the film, see Derek Duncan, 'Shooting the Colonial Past in Contemporary Italian Cinema', in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. by Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, pp. 115–124.

convincere, per un periodo, che fosse un posto squallido buono solo per turisti e sfollati, dove stare attenta alla borsa e alla catenina. Preconcetti dei miei risentimenti. Chi poteva non desiderare quel fermento? Quello che ti scuoteva avvicinandoti appena, nel corridoio centrale, al lato dei binari, al bar come un altro, il bar dei somali. Non perché ci fosse qualche insegna, né il gestore era dei nostri, ma semplicemente perché lì di somali ce n'erano davvero tanti. Soprattutto quando l'esodo era al culmine, nove anni fa.[62]

The way Rome's central station is portrayed is exceptionally close to the way it was described by Maria Cristina. Barni, for example, one of the protagonists of *Madre Piccola*, describes Termini as follows: 'Ora Termini è talmente piena di dolore. Ma quando voglio riaffondare il braccio nel liquido che brucia, liquido di ricordi e di distacchi, quando sento questo bisogno, ecco che ci torno. Giusto per respirarne un po' l'aria'.[63]

Barni goes to Termini *to breathe*, the use of this verb is obviously suggestive of the need of Termini in order to survive; Termini is as important as the oxygen, which recalls also Maria Cristina's personal experience of the same place. Likewise, Igiaba Scego in *La mia casa è dove sono* clearly describes the concrete role of Termini for the Somalis living in Rome:

Molte diaspore, quella somala in testa, hanno fatto di questa zona di Roma il loro campo base. […] In quel triangolo di strade che comprende via dei Mille, via Magenta, via Vicenza ci sono i bar dei somali. Non sono gestiti da nessuno del Corno d'Africa. Non ci sono insegne che segnalano la particolarità della clientela di questi bar. Ma sono diventati i luoghi di ritrovo per eccellenza (insieme ai negozi gestiti da connazionali).[64]

Termini is defined as the 'base camp' of the Somali diaspora; in an initial moment, as Merlo pointed out in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Termini was the space where migrants used to arrive, therefore it was the space in Rome that was closest to home.[65] It was where those who arrived could look for information about their relatives

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[62] Ali Farah, pp. 27–28.
[63] Ali Farah, p. 29.
[64] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 103.
[65] Merlo.

and friends who were already in Italy or about any other useful detail for their living in Rome; additionally, for those already in Rome, it was a good way to meet people who had just arrived from Somalia and to collect the latest news from there, as mentioned in an article from *La Repubblica*: 'È qui nell'atrio della stazione, che i somali si incontrano tutti i giorni per scambiarsi lettere, notizie e soldi per i parenti rimasti a Mogadiscio'.[66] Clearly, the fact that the journalist highlights *tutti i giorni* is indicative of the regularity of these reunions among Somalis. In *Nuvole sull'Equatore* by Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, for instance, Giulia affirms:

> Molte volte bastava andare alla stazione Termini, e anche se non ci si conosceva risultava facile individuare i propri compaesani, dalla fisionomia e dalla parlata somala. Ti potevi avvicinare e iniziare a raccogliere notizie sulla Somalia, c'era continuamente qualcuno che era appena arrivato. Questi incontri portavano sprazzi di energia nella mente di Giulia. Era il pentolone da cui attingere i sapori mai dimenticati di una terra che si stava lentamente sgretolando.[67]

At the beginning Termini was a source of hope; it was enough to go there and dream about a possible return; also Barni shared this dream of going back: 'Nove anni fa ero serena e credevo che presto la guerra sarebbe finita, che saremmo tornati a casa più felici di prima. Questo all'inizio, quando ero convinta che ce l'avremmo fatta tutti'.[68] Termini represented the beginning of migrants' life in Italy but also the starting point for their plans of going back.

As will also be analysed in Chapter 4, in most of the texts considered in this thesis, migrants share a strong hope to return home, and Termini concretely embodies this hope. As for Maryam, one of the protagonist of *Oltre Babilonia* by Igiaba Scego:

> Un tempo tutte le sue strade erano orientate verso la preghiera di Termini. Guardava i tabelloni e sognava di tornare indietro […]. Sperava nel ritorno, un ritorno senza partenze. Per non illudersi più. Era da tanto che Maryam non andava più a guardare i tabelloni di Termini. Non voleva più sognare l'impossibile. Però il suo cuore sapeva

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[66] Riccardo Luna, 'E a Roma ora i Somali hanno paura', *La Repubblica*, 4 July 1993 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1993/07/04/roma-ora-somali-hanno-paura.html> [accessed 15 March 2013].

[67] Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull'equatore. Gli italiani dimenticati. Una storia* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010), p. 201.

[68] Ali Farah, p. 28.

che la stazione era là. Vicina. La sentiva scorrere nelle vene. Si trattava solo di
ignorarla, per sopravvivere. Però la stazione Termini era un po' come un magnete,
prima o poi riacchiappava i suoi adepti. Era sempre in agguato.[69]

Maryam's personal geography unfolds around Termini. Moreover, in this passage there
is a clear comparison with religion: Termini works as Mecca towards which Maryam and
other members of her community can direct their hopes and wishes in particular those of
going back home. This is actually specified in the passage immediately before:

Tutte le strade portano a Roma. Per lei, ma per tutti i somali, tutte le strade portavano
alla stazione Termini…almeno un tempo era così. Tutte le sue strade, tutti i suoi
vicoli, tutti i suoi itinerari, tutti i passaggi, i percorsi, i tragitti, tutti i suoi incroci,
persino le fermate erano orientate verso Termini. Un po' come la preghiera verso la
Mecca. Poi un giorno, Maryam cambiò strada. E non ci finì più lì.[70]

This comparison between Termini and Mecca is suggestive of the constant and important
role of Termini in migrants' life, exactly as the Islamic daily prayers have to be
pronounced looking at Mecca, in the same way migrants' prayers of going back home
have to look at Termini. Relating the station to a religious site is not surprising in
literature;[71] particularly alluring is the description provided by Chesterton and reported in
Italian by Ceserani:

L'unica maniera giusta da me scoperta per prendere un treno è di perdere quello
precedente. Fate questo, e scoprirete che in una stazione ferroviaria si può trovare la
stessa quiete e consolazione di una cattedrale. Essa ha molte delle caratteristiche di
un grande edificio ecclesiastico: le vaste arcate, gli spazi vuoti, le luci colorate e,
soprattutto, la ripetitività del rituale. L'edificio è dedicato alla celebrazione
dell'acqua e del fuoco, i due elementi primi di tutte le categorie umane. Inoltre, c'è

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[69] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, p. 52.
[70] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, p. 50.
[71] Ceserani indeed affirms: 'La metafora religiosa, applicata alla stazione, è molto frequente, e frequenti sono anche le sottolineature della sua atmosfera mistica, della sua possibile funzione religiosa (suggerita anche dall'analogia con le stazioni della Via Crucis). Ma è chiaro che un simile atteggiamento mistico può degenerare facilmente in malattia, diventare ossessione: il praticare la stazione, godere l'atmosfera di sospensione dell'attesa, provar gusto a vedere (come un *voyeur*) i treni arrivare e partire, a riconoscerli, o a vedere la folla assemblarsi e disperdersi, diventa un costume, un'innocente mania, un'inclinazione morbosa'. Ceserani, pp. 187–188.

un aspetto per cui la stazione assomiglia più alle religioni antiche che a quelle moderne: la gente vi accorre.[72]

In the light of this parallel, it is peculiar that Rossella, the cleaner previously interviewed, used the example of the Somali women praying in the restrooms and that Igiaba Scego made the example of the boys performing ablutions.

Unfortunately, however, Termini is letting its followers down, as the plan of going back is doomed to remain unfulfilled. Once Maryam realizes the impossibility of her dream, she tries to avoid the station because, in that place, the illusion seems more real; because it is at Termini that Somalia feels so near that Maryam can practically grasp it. It is a painful illusion but if on the one hand she wants to avoid it, on the other she knows that her life in Rome cannot exclude Termini. Additionally, by using the very well-known saying 'tutte le strade portano a Roma' and displacing it into the context of the Somali diaspora, rephrasing the sentence into 'per tutti i somali tutte le strade portavano alla stazione Termini', Termini station is transformed into a synecdoche for Rome, and for Italy. Moreover, the repetition of *tutti* and *tutte*, beyond echoing Luna's article quoted above, is functional to highlight the ordinariness of this situation. As also a passage from *La mia casa è dove sono* emphasizes: 'Che ci facevi con piazza di Spagna? E con Campo dei Fiori? Nessuna di queste zone sapeva coccolarti e schiaffeggiarti come la Stazione Termini'.[73] This synecdochic representation of Termini as Rome – and Italy – is also identified in a following chapter in *Oltre Babilonia* about the same character, Maryam; this description revisits a moment in the past, when she first arrived in Italy:

> Cos'era Milano? Si chiese Maryam Laamane in quel momento. Lei conosceva solo la stazione Termini. Le avevano detto di andare là e di non fare deviazioni. Perché era lì che si ricreavano i sogni. Era lì che si ritrovavano tutti i somali. Lo sapeva perché Elias stava alla stazione e glielo aveva scritto in una lettera. […] Italia… ecco dove andava la ragazza. Italia. Stazione Termini.[74]

Beyond the final equalisation of Italy and Termini, the central part is crucial 'Perché era lì che si ricreavano i sogni', Termini station is where dreams that were thought to be

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[72] Chesterton in Ceserani, p. 188.
[73] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 100–101.
[74] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, pp. 104–105.

lost forever can be re-created; the reason why this is possible is explained right after: 'Era lì che si ritrovavano tutti i somali'.

The re-construction of the community outside the motherland provides migrants with the hope that their dreams might exist again, and maybe they can also come true. This argument recalls Parati's first quotation about the fluidity of the city: 'the city reveals itself as a fluid entity composed of spaces to which migrants want to assign new meanings. The modification of space aims to construct new proximities'.[75] These 'new proximities' that are created at Termini are the requirements to recover not only the dreams of return, as just mentioned, but also one's own home and, consequently, one's own identity as Maria Cristina's example has demonstrated. On the other hand, the construction of these new proximities materially brings migrants closer, or better, more visible to locals. The hanging out of migrants at Termini which, as seen above, is perceived as dangerous, leads to the redefinition of borders between migrants and non-migrants; as Sara Ahmed points out:

> To be an alien in a particular nation, is to hesitate at a different border: the alien here is the one who does not belong in a nation space, and who is already defined as such by the Law. The alien is hence only a category within a given community of citizens or subjects: as the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land). Aliens allow the demarcation of spaces of belonging: by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains.[76]

Using Ahmed's words, the alien creates a new space of belonging in Termini which is transformed into a space close to home. In addition, going back to Scego's novel, Elias, Maryam's partner at that time, '*stava* alla stazione'. The use of the verb *stare* is indicative of the role of the train station as a place *to stay* and not just to pass through. Also the verb tense at the *imperfetto* is suggestive of the regularity of this action. Furthermore, the fact that regardless of the day or time she could find him at Termini emphasizes the relevance of the station in Elias' life.

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[75] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 433.
[76] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

The same vital role of Termini can be explored by looking, once again, at Scego's autobiographical text *La mia casa è dove sono* in which the writer describes how, gradually, Termini has become something else, something more:

> La stazione è entrata nella mia vita, come nella vita di tutti i somali della diaspora romana, immediatamente. […] Allora Termini dava loro l'impressione che Mogadiscio fosse dietro l'angolo. Bastava prendere un treno e volare via lungo i binari di un sogno. Poi Termini con il tempo è diventata un'altra cosa: un microcosmo di vita e di morte; una galassia di affetti; un amico caro da cui non puoi prescindere, un nemico acerrimo e cattivo. […] A Termini potevi ritrovare te stesso o perderti per sempre.[77]

Scego's description of Termini is ambivalent; Termini is very often described through conflicting elements: *vita* and *morte*, *amico* and *nemico*, *ritrovarsi* and *perdersi* as well as, going back to a previous quotation, Termini's ability of *coccolarti* and *schiaffeggiarti*. These opposing features reflect Scego's troubled, as well as vital, relationship with this space. She remarks again on the role of Termini for her and her community; and again the element of the dream, 'i binari di un sogno', surfaces as a constant presence in migrants', and more specifically in Somalis', relationship with Termini. In this passage the author describes also what Rome's central station became once migrants have started abandoning their hopes of returning home. Termini is 'a microcosm of life and death', a world shrouded in the perpetual tension between hope and disillusion. Crucial in this passage is the last sentence: 'a Termini potevi ritrovare te stesso o perderti per sempre'.[78] Abandoning oneself to these hopes and dreams is actually a risky endeavour. As shown by the example of Maria Cristina, meeting with one's own community can be, on the one hand, a means to retrieve one's own identity. On the other hand, this time spent with one's own compatriots speaking one's own language, eating familiar food and so on, can be alienating:

> Quando il sole inizia a tramontare, la mia angoscia aumenta e sento che il viaggio della libertà sta per finire. Allora mi aggrappo alle bottiglie di birra e di Pisco per

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[77] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 99–100.
[78] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 100.

mettermi al riparo da quella tempesta di tristezza. Bevo molto per dimenticare il mondo e i miei problemi.[79]

The hope of going back, recurrent in migrants' life, could be perceived as a disturbing element preventing the acceptance of a future in Italy and consequently the beginning of a proper life in Rome, making them feel lost, as Scego suggested. This is also the case of Igiaba Scego in *La mia casa è dove sono*:

Mi inquietava la stazione da piccola. Non ci andavo volentieri. Quando i miei volevano salutare un amico mi ci trascinavano a forza. Spesso frignavo. […] Consideravo quella stazione infame la madre di tutte le sventure. Se io e i miei non facevamo quello che faceva la gente normale era colpa sua, unicamente sua. Le avevo dato la colpa di tutti i nostri dolori, delle innumerevoli nostre separazioni.[80]

Igiaba Scego was born in Rome from Somali parents; her relationship with Termini is a complex one, mainly because when she was just a girl, that place was not imbued with her hopes and dreams, but rather with her family's; hopes that, at that time, she could not understand, let alone share. Outside her household, her teenage friends or their families would not see Termini as something more than a train station; therefore Termini represented for her an additional difference between her and *la gente normale*.[81] As a matter of fact, as Scego herself asserts in another chapter of the book, as a teenager she would try her best to flatten and hide all the elements that she perceived as a difference: 'a sedici anni la mia differenza mi pesava. […] La mia differenza era un macigno. Avrei pagato per poter essere come gli altri, anonima'.[82] Scego's anonymity, which goes back to Augé's argument about *non-places*, is also prevented by the presence of the train station in her life, as a distinctive mark of her difference, like the colour of her skin or her mother's veil: 'ci guardavano tutti e ci indicavano con il dito, come si fa allo zoo con la gabbia del leone'.[83] This is in line with Maria Cristina and the question of identity analysed above; for Scego, Termini is the space of her Somali background, something that was preventing her from being unconditionally included. However, if during her

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[79] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 91.
[80] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 101–102.
[81] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 102.
[82] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 138–139.
[83] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 75.

adolescence she tries to avoid the station, with time she realizes the value of Termini also for her own existence:

> Ci misi un po' per capirla questa zona, per non odiarla più. Per anni mi sono sentita minacciata dal carico di dolore e speranza che Termini si portava addosso. Volevo essere altro da lei. La percepivo come un ostacolo per la mia formazione. Non sapevo ancora che una vita serena non poteva prescindere da lei. Perché lì c'era il principio. Perché lì era seppellito il mio cordone ombelicale da cui ho tratto il nutrimento prima di nascere. Allora forse la mia casa era la Stazione Termini. Il principio che non dovevo dimenticare.[84]

Termini is perceived as the *beginning*; it is Scego's beginning because it is the origin of the Somali community in Italy. A place that has been incorporated by the Somali community, so deeply, that a serene life in Italy could not overlook its presence; a life in which both Igiaba Scego's Italian and Somali identity meet. Ironic in this situation is the name of the Roman central station: Termini. As also remarked by Parati, the word *termini* literally means *ends*, and it can maybe be read as the end of a journey;[85] it is a name that in itself conveys a sense of pause, of a final stop from moving.[86] Igiaba Scego, again in *La mia casa è dove sono*, reflects on the name:

> Il nome Termini però mi ha sempre dato l'idea di una pausa da questa corsa continua. Ho sempre pensato che Termini significasse 'meta finale' o 'fine del viaggio'. Mi piaceva, suonava come un messaggio dato a noi viandanti isterici, figli della modernità.[87]

According to Parati, however, these endings might rather represent new beginnings; new starting points from which migrants could undertake their experience of the city,[88] but also, as in this case, Scego's personal origin, the space where she can retrieve her identity. Considering also the fact that Igiaba Scego is a second generation migrant, Termini

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[84] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 103.
[85] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 442.
[86] Termini railway station owes its name to the near Baths of Diocletian which in Latin were called Thermae.
[87] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 93.
[88] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 442.

becomes another source from which she can retrace her Somali identity; Termini might indeed represent an additional pole to the two outlined by Fulvio Pezzarossa:

> Componenti esistenziali di questo mondo immaginario sono infatti le due polarità della famiglia e della scuola: la prima rappresenta la sintesi degli elementi della cultura di provenienza; e la scuola raffigurata come microcosmo della realtà esterna, in cui si concentrano le opportunità e gli ostacoli offerti dal nuovo paese.[89]

In the urban area of Termini station, as is the case for Maria Cristina in *Scontro di Civiltà*, the gathering of the migrants from the same country becomes the space in which the identity of an entire community rediscovers itself. For a second generation migrant the relevance of a space like Termini is perfectly plausible and in line with what Benedict Anderson pointed out; by using the suggestive example of a baby's picture he argues:

> How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. […] Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated.[90]

Scego needs this contact with her community to retrace a metaphorical image of the Somalia that she is part of, but that at the same time she does not fully know nor understand. It is the same idea behind the act of literally drawing a map in the first chapter of *La mia casa è dove sono*:

> Disegnavamo Maka al Mukarama perché i nostri ricordi stavano sbiadendo. […] Avevamo bisogno di quel disegno, di quella città di carta per sopravvivere. […] Me li ricordavo a malapena, i ristoranti, ma cercavo di sforzare la memoria per non chiedere ogni due secondi informazioni ad Abdul, al cugino o addirittura a Nura e mamma nell'altra stanza. Certo, avevo più dimestichezza con Roma. Garbatella, Testaccio, Trastevere, Esquilino, Primavalle, Tor Pignattara, il Quadraro erano zone a me più familiari.[91]

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[89] Pezzarossa, p. 92.
[90] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), p. 204.
[91] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 21–26.

This deep relationship with the station creates an imaginary of Termini as a place in Italy but also outside it, located in each migrant's country of origin. The sentence pronounced by Maria Cristina: 'mi sembra di *tornare a casa*',[92] is suggestive of how Rome's main railway station can become the Italian outpost of various countries in Rome. Retrieving these countries at Termini represents for migrants the possibility of bringing back their past, deeply woven with their countries. As Ranajit Guha affirms:

> Far from being dead that past has remained embedded in its time fully alive like a seed in the soil, awaiting the season of warmth and growth to bring it to germination. As such, what has been is nothing other than a potentiality ready to be fertilized and redeployed. It anticipates the future and offers itself for use, and through such use, renewal as the very stuff of what is to come.[93]

Termini provides migrants with the necessary warmth to include their past in their present; it is peculiar that Guha uses the same metaphor of the *heat* used by Maria Cristina in a previous quotation.[94] Termini becomes a symbolic space and as such is just an illusion, an unreal construction; it is Peru, but it is really not, it is Italy, but not only that. This is what Lefebvre calls *representational space*:

> space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'[…]. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.[95]

Termini as *representational space* is a straightforward connection; Termini keeps performing its role of railway station but at the same time it becomes something more. Borrowing Lefebvre's terminology, it is also possible to draw an additional distinction by defining *users* those who indeed use the station for its conventional purpose, and the *inhabitants*, that is, those who dwell in the station as a place in which it is possible to

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[92] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 91.
[93] Guha, p. 159.
[94] 'le loro parole riscaldano le mie orecchie fredde'. Lakhous, *Scontro,* p. 90.
[95] Lefebvre, p. 39.

spend time, a space of transition versus a place of stability.[96] Edward Soja, analysing the Lefebvrian *representational space*, also specifies that**:**

> they are the 'dominated spaces', the spaces of the peripheries, the margins and the marginalized, the 'Third Worlds' that can be found at all scales, in the corpo-reality of the body and mind, in sexuality and subjectivity, in individual and collective identities from the most local to the most global. They are the chosen spaces for struggle, liberation, emancipation.[97]

Termini is indeed the space of the marginalized, the space where the excluded subject gains power by inhabiting it according to his/her own rules. This act of resistance leads to the creation of a hybrid space that represents a microcosm, as Scego remarked, full of emotions belonging to another country but also to another time. A microcosm hanging on the present as a bridge between different worlds, a bridge which instead of performing its role of passage, keeps its users stuck in the middle. This suspended dimension is remarked in *La mia casa è dove sono* where Scego points out:

> Il cuore di questa stazione è la Galleria Centrale, un cuore fisico ed anche un po' metafisico. Quello che doveva essere un semplice collegamento pedonale tra via Marsala e via Giolitti si è trasformato nel tempo nella metafora di una sospensione, del passaggio tra due o più mondi.[98]

The metaphor of the *Galleria* as the bridge between two or more worlds is also concretely represented by the space of the arcades. Lidia Curti, although she is referring to Naples, describes the space of the *Galleria* as follows:

> The Galleria has in fact been for some time one of the meeting points of domestic workers, in this case mainly women from Eritrea. With its post office and telephone centre, this space constituted a bridge between their new residence and home, a material and symbolic link with their distant homeland, and a meeting place. Further, it offered a way of inhabiting the city - being separate and at the same time proximate to their 'others', us, me, the natives. With its simultaneously closed and open

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[96] Lefebvre, p. 39.
[97] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 68.
[98] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 94.

architecture, it evoked the patio: a hybrid space destined for women in most of the countries they come from.[99]

Despite the fact that Curti is describing Galleria Umberto I in Naples, the idea of the hybrid 'material and symbolic link' is the same as for the Galleria in Termini. It is not Italy, but it is not even somewhere else and depending on the situation it could be closer to one place or to the other, creating different proximities.[100] It is a *zona franca*, as a journalist from *La Repubblica* defines another Italian station, Garibaldi railway station in Naples:

> Non sembra, ma il problema del binario numero 23 è che non appartiene allo Stato. È una specie di zona franca, una enclave fra la città e il mondo dove i sans papiers della società che produce possono più o meno liberamente scavarsi un buco per continuare a vivere o magari, è accaduto ieri, per morire.[101]

Noteworthy is the expression 'non appartiene allo Stato' because, going back to Soja and Lefebvre, this is the *space of struggle*,[102] an *appropriated space*[103] and therefore untied from any ownership. Simultaneously this idea of self-rule in Termini is also one of the accusations brought up by locals to complain against the insufficient authorities' control over the area, as pointed out in the previous chapter.

Going back to the Galleria, it is essential to underline how the space of the Galleria recalls another very famous analysis of this space. Walter Benjamin looking at the arcades of Paris defines them as *ambiguous*; he affirms:

> Ambiguity of the arcades as an ambiguity of *space*. […] The outermost, merely quite peripheral aspect of the ambiguity of the arcades is provided by their abundance of mirrors, which fabulously amplifies the spaces and makes orientation more difficult. Perhaps that isn't saying much. Nevertheless: though it may have many aspects,

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[99] Lidia Curti, 'Female Literature of Migration in Italy', *Feminist Review*, 87 (2007), 60–75 (p. 61).
[100] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 442.
[101] Eleonora Bertolotto, 'Gli ospiti del binario 23. Stanotte dove si dorme?', *La Repubblica*, 19 March 2000 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/03/19/gli-ospiti-del-binario-23-stanotte-dove.html> [accessed 22 March 2013]. Platform 23, in Garibaldi railway station, was often intended to accommodate abandoned carriages which were used as temporary shelters by homeless people. In March 2000, when Bertolotto's article was published, a fire burst out and two illegal immigrants sleeping in one of the carriages were killed.
[102] Soja, p. 68.
[103] Lefebvre, p. 57.

indeed infinitely many, it remains – in the sense of mirror world – ambiguous, double-edged. It blinks, is always just this that transforms itself does so in the bosom of nothingness.[104]

The arcades of Termini do not have mirrors but they, nonetheless, instil this feeling of disorientation, of multiple and indefinite sides, particularly if relating this to the way migrants' inhabit the station. Just like Paris arcades, Termini's gallery, but also Termini more generally, is marked by ambiguity, a double ambiguity, both in space and in time.

As a matter of fact, in the definition of Third Space given by Homi Bhabha there is a strong emphasis also on the relevance of the temporal dimension:

> The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. […] The implication of this enunciative split for cultural analysis that I especially want to emphasize is its temporal dimension. The splitting of the subject of enunciation destroys the logics of synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge.[105]

Termini is not only geographically suspended between Italy and migrants' country of origin, but it also stands still in an uncertain temporal frame. The time does not move for the *inhabitants* of Termini, it is as if they have just arrived and simultaneously it seems that it is already the moment to leave, recalling the *tempo sospeso* Ceserani detected in Pirandello's work.[106] Guha describes this temporal ambiguity as a trademark of the *migrant's time* and speaking about the *diasporic subjects* he affirms:

> For it is in their everyday dealings with one another that people in any society form such links in a present which continually assimilates the past to itself as experience and looks forward at the same time to a future secure for all. The loss of that present amounts, therefore, to a loss of the world in which the migrant has had his own identity forged. [...] A diaspora's past is, therefore, not merely or even primarily a

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[104] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 877–878.
[105] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 53.
[106] Ceserani, p. 291.

historiological question. It is, in the first place, the question of an individual's loss of his communal identity and his struggle to find another.[107]

This is exceptionally clear at Termini. Considering the already analysed character of Maria Cristina, for instance, her reaction to her compatriots speaking Spanish and to the possibility of eating Peruvian food highlights the importance of spending her time at Termini, in order to retrieve her identity. The sharing of the same background brings back memories and emotions that belong to the past, but that are barely retraceable in the present. Furthermore, this moment of remembrance, of retracing one's own past trying to find a place for it in the present, is also an attempt to shape one's own future. Such a future is in fact standing between the acceptance of a life in Italy and the perpetration of the dream of going back one day. This struggle takes place at Termini because it is at Termini that Maria Cristina's identity as Peruvian woman comes forth, strongly enough to balance her new identity, the one other people have assigned to her: the Peruvian carer often called *la Filippina*.

This is quite close to what happens in *La mia casa è dove sono* where for Igiaba Scego, Termini is the embodiment of a past that is not only hers, but it is her family's. It is the community's past that is re-enacted at Termini through daily encounters and exchanges of information among Somalis. Termini is for her a temporal dimension that she has never directly experienced; a time that, as noted before, occurred before her birth: 'Non sapevo ancora che una vita serena non poteva prescindere da lei. Perché lì c'era il principio. Perché lì era seppellito il mio cordone ombelicale da cui ho tratto il nutrimento prima di nascere'.[108] The difference between Maria Cristina and Igiaba Scego lies in the fact that for the former the retrieval of the communal past is connected to the sharing of time, of food and conversations and in particular to the process of remembering those specific emotions belonging to a different time and a different place. On the other hand, in Scego's situation, the personal memory is almost completely absent, but the same role is played by the encounters with the other Somalis who, going back to Anderson, narrate to Scego her Somali identity.

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[107] Guha, p. 156.
[108] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 103.

Conclusion

Over the last fifteen years Termini has been renovated so as to accommodate shops, cafes, restaurants and different kinds of events. One of the changes which have made the station more accessible to its users is the creation of an official website in which is proudly displayed the logo of the station: 'Roma Termini: un luogo da vivere'.[109] In the light of the analysis carried out in this chapter, this sentence sounds quite anachronistic. The articles collected have indeed shown how Termini represents a crucial space in the relationships between migrants and non-migrants. The railway station has been shielded by the locals as if it were under attack by the presence of migrants. This act of protection toward Termini was an attempt to construct the image of the migrant as out of place in Italy, that is the stranger as defined by Ahmed:

> Strangers are suspicious because they 'have no purpose', that is, they have no legitimate function within the space which could justify their existence or intrusion. […] The stranger's presence on the street is a crime (waiting to happen). […] The ultimate violent strangers are hence figured as immigrants: they are the outsiders in the nation space whose 'behaviour seems unpredictable and beyond control' (Merry 1981:125). Cultural difference becomes the text upon which the fear of crime is written […]. The projection of danger onto that which is already recognisable as different – as different from the familiar space of home and homeland – hence allows violence to take place.[110]

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the analysis of the literary texts, Termini constitutes a bridge connecting Italy and various countries. Thanks to the sharing of memories and emotions with other migrants, they turn the station into a *makeshift home*.[111] It is precisely through this process of remembering that Termini gains the importance described in this chapter; as Ceserani – again referring to Pirandello – highlights: 'è come se la conversazione in uno scompartimento ferroviario, l'incontro in una sala d'aspetto o nel caffè della stazione rivelino il contenuto vero di ogni nostra esperienza, oggi'.[112] The

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[109] 'Home Page | Roma Termini' <http://www.romatermini.com/it/> [accessed 6 February 2015].
[110] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, pp. 31–36.
[111] Ponzanesi, 'Imaginary Cities', p. 160.
[112] Ceserani, p. 291.

sharing of the same past in a present characterised by insecurity and the lack of steady reference points renders migrants' future in Italy possible; as Guha affirms:

> There is no way for those who live in a community to make themselves intelligible to each other except by temporalizing their experience of being together. Temporalization such as this has, of course, all the strands of past, present and future inextricably woven into it. [...] Since the now is the mode in which everydayness articulates mostly and primarily, it serves as the knot that ties together the other strands of a community temporal bonding. The past is gathered into this knot and the future projected from there as well. […] In other words, it is anxiety which enables him to look forward to his own possibilities, helps him to mobilize the past as a fund of energies and resources available for use in his project to clear for himself a path which has the future with all its potentiality on its horizon.[113]

Beyond Termini, this knot of times, of past and present, of memories and projects for the future is also detectable in another place, the place that will be investigated in the following chapter: the phone centre.

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[113] Guha, pp. 156–157–158.

Chapter Three
The Phone Centre, a Place to Call Home

In the previous chapter, Termini railway station was investigated as a home space where migrants gather and share memories and moments of familiarity to retrieve a sensation of being at home. Termini therefore becomes the space where migrants' past and present convene and where their future starts taking shape; it is where Guha's knot of temporalities gets untangled: 'Temporalization such as this has, of course, all the strands of past, present and future inextricably woven into it. […] The past is gathered into this knot and the future projected from there as well'.[1]

There is, nonetheless, another place in which this crossing of different temporalities becomes even more recognizable: the phone centre.[2] Especially in the first decade of the twentieth first century, the phone centre has been constantly used by migrants to call their relatives who have remained in the country of origin or those who have migrated to other destinations, to send money and to surf the internet.[3] These places have quickly become gathering points for the different communities of migrants who found the phone centre a useful reference point for information about their lives in Italy: available jobs, rooms and flats to rent, updates about Italian Immigration laws and so on. In a very short amount of time, phone centres opened up in every Italian city; this overnight phenomenon did not go unnoticed: even Italian television presented two programs with the phone centre as their main set: *Phone center Brambilla* and *Tintoria*.[4] The importance of such a place is

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[1] Guha, pp. 156–157.

[2] In order to avoid any ambiguities between the *phone centre* as the place offering services such as telephone calls, internet connection and money transfer, and *call centre* as companies' switchboard, I will always use the definition *phone centre* rather than *call centre*. However, in Italian this is a confusing issue and therefore in some of the sources cited the two definitions are used interchangeably and often with the American English form *center*.

[3] This space played a crucial role from its creation since when, more recently, phone companies have considerably reduced their call rates; nonetheless, this change did not completely erase the usefulness of the phone centre, rather it limited its services.

[4] *Phone center Brambilla* was a sit-com aired on *Jimmy* a channel of the broadcasting company Sky; this sit-com was about the events taking place in this phone center owned by an Italian man supporting the Lega Nord party who saw in this venture an opportunity to solve their economic problems. For more information please see: *Jimmy Factory* <http://www.film.it/televisione/notizie/factory-2007/> [accessed 6 February 2015]. *Tintoria*, on the other hand, was a variety show set in a laundrette which also offered few telephone booths. The three editions were aired on Rai 3, from 2006 to 2008; the host was Taiyo Yamanouchi supported by a different co-host in each edition. The show consisted of different comedians'

noticeably demonstrated by the massive presence of this space in Italian postcolonial texts. In *Divorzio all'islamica*, for instance, it becomes almost the main setting for all the chapters narrated by Christian/Issa, the male protagonist; in *La mia casa è dove sono*, the phone centre is carefully described by Igiaba Scego who defines it as 'the only hope': 'in una Somalia dove non esistono né banche, né poste, né qualsiasi altra funzione sociale, il phone center diventa l'unica speranza'.[5] However, like Termini station, these spaces have become the target of locals' complaints and have been portrayed by the press as dangerous criminal dens:

> La principale accusa che il consigliere leghista muove nei confronti della pubblica amministrazione è legata alla mancanza di norme igieniche e controlli di questi locali e il grave disturbo che inevitabilmente arrecano alla quiete pubblica tenendo sollevate le saracinesche fino a tarda notte. 'C'è l'anarchia più assoluta – continua Rixi – In tutta Italia ci sono state varie inchieste da parte della guardia di finanza su questi centri. L'ultima è stata a Roma dove proprio nel phone center del fratello è stato trovato Osman Hussein, uno degli organizzatori dell'attacco terroristico del 21 luglio 2005'.[6]

This quotation is indeed paradigmatic of the way the majority of the Italian population looks at the phone centre and it briefly summarises the most important accusations addressed to such a space. The 'mancanza di norme igieniche', for instance, often implies the lack of hygiene of the customers. The 'grave disturbo che arrecano' is seen, as the consequence of phone centres' late closing times; nonetheless, this 'disturbo' can also be metonymically read as a complaint against migrants in general. Lastly the recurrent suspicion of the phone centres being linked to terrorist cells is reiterated.

Therefore, on the one hand, by offering useful services and information and by creating a familiar environment, the phone centre becomes one of the migrants' favourite places,

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monologues (Beppe Grillo was one of the recurrent guests) often about the topic of immigration; despite the clear attempt to ironically describe changes in Italian society, the show was frequently marked by stereotypes and clichés. Additionally, the fact that the programme used to be aired late in the evening limited the audience in terms of both numbers and age. For more information: *Rai.tv* <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/page/Page-aa3e1c7d-0c5d-4e85-9bb7-1006caa717bd.html?refresh_ce> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[5] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 133.

[6] Roberto Bottino, 'Il comune non vuol dare regole ai phone center per immigrati', 1 December 2005 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/comune-non-vuol-dare-regole-ai-phone-center-immigrati.html> [accessed 23 March 2013].

on the other, its sudden eruption on the urban scene and its role as a gathering point negatively attracted the attention of the press and of the majority of Italians who started a real witch-hunt against these shops.

In this chapter I will first look at the phenomenon of phone centres and their setting up around the Italian peninsula and how these spaces have been portrayed by the press as outposts of foreign organized criminality. I will then look at the role played by the phone centre in migrants' lives: how it became a crucial reference point for migrants in Italy. The analysis will again take into consideration both a collection of articles from Italian newspapers and Italian postcolonial novels; I will also refer to some of the laws that have been issued in order to limit and control these commercial activities.

3.1 Origin and Development of the Phone Centre

Unlike Termini railway station, the phone centre has been created in order to satisfy the need of an increasing number of immigrants to stay in contact with their families; initially, it was possible to call home using the telephones provided by different shops, such as grocery or clothes shops, for instance; these shops were usually owned or managed by migrants who used to make a telephone available for their customers to call home. As Taageere from *Madre Piccola* explains: 'Avevo comprato una scheda, una scheda da cinque dollari. Ci potevo parlare per trecento minuti. […] Ero dal barbiere quel giorno. […] Ti ho chiamato dal suo telefono. È gentile il barbiere'.[7]

With the constant increase in the number of immigrants in Italy, the phone centre became an independent and fruitful commercial enterprise.[8] The major economic profit of such a venture comes from the use of a system called VOIP, *Voice Over Internet Protocol*, thanks to which several telephone sets can work simultaneously using one single internet connection;[9] calling abroad with this method significantly diminished the cost of an international phone call, thus making the connection between migrants and people in other countries much easier. A growing number of migrants called for more

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[7] Ali Farah, p. 59.

[8] For more information about the origin of the phone centre please see: Marco Baffa, Phone centre 'Gli effetti della sentenza costituzionale' in *Infocds* <http://www.infocds.it/item.aspx?IDArticolo=901> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[9] See: Andrea Marzillo, 'Il pacchetto VoIP' in *Voip.html.it* 03 June 2011 <http://voip.html.it/articolo05.aspx> [accessed 6 February 2015]

phone centres which, thanks to the quick and easy profits, were readily established all around Italy, in particular in those areas where migrants' presence was more substantial. As Vera Horn noticed:

> Gli effetti della mobilità dei popoli a livello mondiale hanno indotto una riformattazione complessa della città, in cui la crescita e lo sviluppo generano al contempo tensioni che si riflettono nel modo di stare nella stessa […], e ad una diversificazione dell'offerta di servizi: sono entrati in scena il *kebab fast food*, i centri telefonici e punti internet, i locali ed i negozi etnici, che si trovano spesso nei pressi delle stazioni e sono utilizzati non solo per l'acquisto di merce importata (per lo più alimentari) ma anche come luogo di ritrovo, sostenendo nuove forme di socializzazione e di consumo.[10]

The phone centre indeed became one of the migrants' favourite *luoghi di ritrovo*, gradually expanding its services but also the number of shops on Italian soil: 'Hanno contato oltre quaranta phone center nel raggio di 200 metri. Una concentrazione di cabine telefoniche a tariffe stracciate, che offrono anche servizi di trasferimento di valuta che il comitato spontaneo di San Salvario ha censito palmo a palmo'.[11]

On the other hand, the transformation of a commercial enterprise into a meeting point for different communities was looked on negatively by non-migrant residents who then started to push politicians towards the issuing of laws in order to control – if not to close – phone centres. An example of how locals' discontent worked alongside the press in order to create a negative image of the phone centre can be found in an afore-mentioned article from *Il Giornale*:

> Rumore e sporcizia. Ma anche il sospetto e in alcuni casi anche qualcosa di più, del riciclaggio di denaro sporco e traffico di documenti falsi. Riparte la campagna della Lega Nord contro i phone center, i negozietti gestiti principalmente da extracomunitari utilizzati dagli stranieri per telefonare nelle terre d'origine.[12]

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[10] Vera Horn, 'Reinterpretazione degli spazi urbani nella letteratura italiana della migrazione', in *Shifting and Shaping*, ed. by Bullaro and Benelli, pp. 169–85 (p. 172).
[11] Fabio Marzano, 'Phone center: "troppi a San Salvario"', *La Repubblica*, 27 September 2003 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2003/09/27/phone-center-troppi-san-salvario.html> [accessed 22 March 2013].
[12] Della Frattina.

Here the journalist is referring to specific suspicions about illegal activities taking place inside the phone centre; one in particular is a recurrent accusation: money laundering. International companies, such as *Money Gram* or *Western Union*, based their services in Italian phone centres; this introduction was particularly significant as it satisfied a fundamental need of migrants: to send money back home without risks or high charges.[13] This was an exceptional improvement for migrants; before the introduction of such a service, there were only a few – and often unreliable – ways to achieve this goal:

> The transfer channels through which migrants send remittances home is one area on which the policy community has focused its attention. Migrants transfer a large part of global remittances through various informal channels rather than through the banking system or established money transfer operators. These include organized transfer services via third parties, such as the *hawala* informal value transfer system (El-Qorchi et al. 2003), unregistered or unlicensed operators (such as minibus drivers), as well as the cash (foreign exchange) that migrants or their relatives and friends transport personally.[14]

Trusting these channels was often risky: in addition to the high charges, the mediators would not always deliver the load or they could easily be robbed during the journey; therefore, there was no certainty that the recipient would receive the money.[15] As the owner of a phone centre points out:

> 'È importante per i nostri connazionali potersi servire di una finanziaria che si avvale
> di una rete capillare di sportelli che quindi è in grado di recapitare i soldi

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[13] In October 2014 the first ATM was installed in Mogadishu; the fact that such a normal event took place for the first time only in 2014 underlines the relevance of the services provided by the money transfer companies during the last decades; as an article about this news points out: 'Il governo somalo ha reintrodotto, dopo vent'anni di caos, il servizio postale e ha istituito i codici postali in tutta la nazione per la prima volta nella storia del paese. […] Ulteriore novità, avvenuta circa una settimana fa, è stata l'installazione nella capital, Mogadiscio, del primo bancomat per il prelievo di contanti'. ('Somalia: la normalità arriva anche con lettere e bancomat' in *Café Africa* 15 October 2014 <http://cafeafrica.it/2014/10/15/somalia-la-normalita-arriva-anche-con-lettere-e-bancomat/> [accessed 6 February 2015]). For further information see also: 'Somalia's first cash machine opens in Mogadishu' in *BBC News Africa* 07 October 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-29519877> [accessed 6 February 2015].

[14] Melissa Siegel and Matthias Lücke, 'Migrant Transnationalism and the Choice of Transfer Channels for Remittances: The Case of Moldova', *Global Networks*, 13 (2013), 120–41 (p. 121).

[15] For more information concerning the informal channels of money transfer see: Mohammed El Qorchi, Samuel Munzele Maimbo and John F. Wilson, *Informal Funds Transfer Systems* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2003).

praticamente a domicilio. La Somalia è infatti infestata da bande armate e non è consigliabile muoversi col denaro in tasca'.[16]

The establishment of a reliable way of satisfying this need represented a great achievement and the fact that companies, like the afore-mentioned, would bank on phone centres made this space even more appealing, as Igiaba Scego specifies in *La mia casa è dove sono*: 'Questi tipi annotano tutto, ci prendono una percentuale per la spesa di trasporto. E poi dopo due giorni i soldi arrivano al destinatario. Fungono da banca, i call center scalcinati dell'Occidente'.[17]

However, after the events of September 11, Bush's war on terror influenced also Italian phone centres as branches of money transfer operators. A Somali money transfer company, Al-Barakaat, was accused of financially supporting Al-Qaeda; this company had several branches scattered all around US, Canada and Europe which were quickly shut down:

> On November 7, 2001 President George W. Bush […] announced: 'Today, we are taking another step in our fight against evil'. Simultaneous police raids in the United States – Massachusetts, Minnesota, Washington, and Ohio – and overseas – Canada, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates – had shut down Al-Barakaat, a Somali remittance network headquartered in Dubai. In addition, 62 organizations and individuals had their assets frozen. […] President Bush added: 'By shutting these networks down, we disrupt the murderer's work'.[18]

This event had in Italy a notable resonance and the press used the occasion to attack all phone centres indiscriminately; in particular, a specific one in Florence was targeted by *La Repubblica*:

> La magistratura fiorentina ha sequestrato i cinque conti bancari italiani intestati al medico somalo Hussein Mahamud Abdullkadir, 35 anni, titolare del Phone Center di via Palazzuolo e referente locale di Al Barakaat, la banca finita nella lista nera

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[16] Maurizio Bologni, '"Non ho legami con Bin Laden"', *La Repubblica*, 8 October 2001 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2001/10/08/non-ho-legami-con-bin-laden.html> [accessed 15 March 2013].
[17] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 133.
[18] Ibrahim Warde, *The Price of Fear: Al-Qaeda and the Truth behind the Financial War on Terror* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 95.

dell'amministrazione Usa perché sospettata di essere la cassaforte di Al Qaeda, la rete terroristica di Osama Bin Laden. Il giovane medico è indagato per associazione sovversiva nell'ambito dell'inchiesta sull'attività di raccolta delle rimesse degli immigrati somali in Toscana, inviate in patria attraverso la sede di Dubai di Al Barakaat.[19]

The Al-Barakaat case, and more generally the work of companies such as *Western Union* and *Money Gram,* represented one of the many reasons for Italian non-migrants to complain about phone centres which were, now more than ever, perceived as dangerous. As this article from *La Repubblica* emphasises:

> I phone center sono locali pubblici con alcune cabine telefoniche che consentono di chiamare i paesi stranieri a tariffe convenienti sono quasi esclusivamente frequentati da immigrati asiatici, africani e sudamericani, che spesso, nello stesso negozio, hanno anche la possibilità di inviare o ricevere denaro, oppure di comunicare via Internet. […] Il monitoraggio effettuato da carabinieri e polizia ha riguardato la frequentazioni dei phone center, il curriculum vitae dei titolari, le forme dei pagamenti e altri aspetti dell'attività. Sembra che all'origine della segnalazione della nostra intelligence vi siano dei dossier provenienti dalle zone calde del fondamentalismo islamico.[20]

This article, which came out in 2004, paves the way to Lakhous's decision of setting a big part of *Divorzio all'islamica* in a phone centre. This novel, as will be closely analysed below, is set in 2005 and tells the story of an Italian man hired by the Italian secret services to play the role of a Tunisian immigrant in viale Marconi and gather information about a

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[19] Franca Selvatici, 'La banca al centro dell'inchiesta è sospettata di finanziare la rete di Bin Laden', *La Repubblica*, 24 November 2001
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2001/11/24/la-banca-al-centro-dell-inchiesta-sospettata.html> [accessed 9 March 2013]. This article was preceded by another one which came out just a couple of days before stating: 'resta al momento tutto da dimostrare il ruolo del dottor Hussein Mahmud Abdulkadir, il medico somalo di 35 anni che gestisce lo sportello fiorentino di Al Barakaat, la banca che provvede all'invio in Somalia delle rimesse degli immigrati e della elemosina rituale. Il dottor Abdulkadir, che raccoglie il denaro in un Phone Center in via Palazzuolo, è sotto inchiesta per associazione sovversiva, ma non è provata, al momento, una sua consapevole partecipazione alla rete terroristica'. 'Legata a Bin Laden. In genere sono piccole somme, ma con alcune eccezioni', *La Repubblica*, 9 November 2001
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2001/11/09/legata-bin-laden-in-genere-sono-piccole.html> [accessed 9 March 2013].
[20] Marco Preve, 'Terrorismo, allarme phone center', *La Repubblica*, 24 August 2004
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2004/08/24/terrorismo-allarme-phone-center.html> [accessed 9 March 2013].

potential terrorist cell. The explanatory letter that Christian (the male protagonist) is asked to read provides the reader with details about the operation:

> Due sarebbero le cellule terroristiche coinvolte nell'operazione. ▮▮▮▮▮▮ finora siamo riusciti ad identificarne soltanto una. I soggetti gravitano intorno al Little Cairo, un call center in zona Marconi. Il locale è gestito da un cittadino egiziano, ▮▮▮▮, e frequentato da molti stranieri, soprattutto musulmani. Questa segnalazione conferma la tesi dei servizi occidentali, secondo la quale al-Qaeda ha cambiato strategia rispetto all'11 settembre. […] Gli interrogativi sono molteplici: le due cellule in questione sono autonome o affiliate a qualche organizzazione di terrorismo internazionale come al-Qaeda? […] Alla luce di tutto ciò, riteniamo che sia indispensabile preparare l'opinione pubblica al peggio, a rischio di creare allarmismi.[21]

Considering also the journalistic background of the author, this choice is not fortuitous, but rather indicative of the role of the phone centre in the wider perspective of the war against terrorism and in the popular imaginary. However, going back to Al-Barakaat, the evidence considered as irrefutable by the US Government fell apart and the whole case turned out to be a *simple* misunderstanding; as Warde highlights about the work of the press in this situation: 'The media, while giving huge play to the news of the initial closure of Al-Barakaat, barely covered the epilogue of the story – the exoneration from charges of terrorist financing'.[22] Likewise in Italy the news passed almost completely unnoticed if not for a single article in *La Repubblica* in which the journalist wrote: 'Ma recentemente le agenzie antiterrorismo degli Stati Uniti hanno riconosciuto che dalle indagini non sono emerse prove di finanziamenti ad Al Qaeda o ad altre organizzazioni terroristiche da parte di Al Barakaat'.[23] The fact that the US Government was mistaken did not change anything in the Italian perception of the phone centres, but the way the entire event was managed is indicative of the attempt to build up an image of the phone centre as a dangerous place. After the initial media campaign, various laws were issued in order to limit the passage of money inside the phone centres, laws that were categorised as measurements against

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[21] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 19–20.
[22] Warde, p. 97.
[23] Franca Selvatici, 'Usa: Al Barakaat non ha finanziato Bin Laden', *La Repubblica*, 8 January 2004 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2004/01/08/usa-al-barakaat-non-ha-finanziato-bin.fi_030usa.html> [accessed 9 March 2013].

terrorism,[24] but this was obviously just a cover, as in reality they were clear measures taken in order to supervise and limit phone centres and their influence as much as possible.

In the last fifteen years, various actions have been taken in order to limit the distribution of phone centres. In particular, as Lakhous's example suggested, the first accusation against the phone centre was that of being strictly connected to Islamic terrorism, as several articles, from different newspapers, show:

'Phone center' e 'internet point' sono stati gli obiettivi dell'operazione svolta ieri […] nell'ambito della lotta al terrorismo ordinata dal ministro dell'Interno, Giuseppe Pisanu. […] Il Comitato nazionale per l'ordine e la sicurezza ha compiuto una approfondita analisi della minaccia terroristica di matrice islamica. Le valutazioni e quelle fornite dal Comitato di analisi strategica anti-terrorismo confermano che 'permane elevato il rischio di un attentato terroristico nel nostro Paese' e così anche in tutta la nostra provincia sono stati compiuti dei controlli.[25]

Articles on the same note were published with an outstanding regularity. For instance, an article from *La Repubblica* published in August 2005 affirmed: 'L'intelligence Usa punta il dito sugli internet point come nodi per le comunicazioni di Al Qaeda? In via Volturno ce ne sono sei'.[26] In those years, titles as *'Il kamikaze telefonava qui? Io conoscevo solo il fratello'*, *Antiterrorismo, nel mirino i phone center pakistani* or *La banca al centro dell'inchiesta è sospettata di finanziare la rete di Bin Laden*[27] gripped the public opinion so strongly that the Home Secretary of that time issued the so-called Decreto Pisanu but

[24]With the law defined 231/2007, specifically against money laundering, but still inside the more inclusive label of measures against terrorism, phone centres are much more controlled; see 'Decreto Legislativo 21 novembre 2007, n. 231' in *Camera.it* <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/testi/07231dl.htm> [accessed 6 February 2015].
[25] Stefano Origone, 'Terrorismo, controlli a tappeto nei phone center', *La Repubblica*, 31 August 2005 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2005/08/31/terrorismo-controlli-tappeto-nei-phone-center.html> [accessed 10 December 2014].
[26] Paolo G. Brera, 'Quei trecento metri di via Volturno. "Il terrorismo ci mette in ginocchio"', *La Repubblica*, 1 August 2005 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2005/08/01/quei-trecento-metri-di-via-volturno-il.html> [accessed 10 October 2013].
[27] Franca Selvatici, 'Antiterrorismo, nel mirino i phone center pakistani', *La Repubblica*, 13 August 2006 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/08/13/antiterrorismo-nel-mirino-phone-center-pakistani.html> [accessed 13 September 2013]; Marino Bisso, '"Il kamikaze telefonava qui? Io conoscevo solo il fratello"', *La Repubblica*, 1 August 2005 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2005/08/01/il-kamikaze-telefonava-qui-io-conoscevo-solo.html> [accessed 13 September 2013]; Selvatici, 'La banca'.

precisely denominated *Decreto legge 27 luglio 2005, n.144, recante misure urgenti per il contrasto del terrorismo internazionale*.[28] This situation concerned the entire peninsula but the dissatisfaction against phone centres was more accentuated and more openly manifested in the north of Italy, especially in Veneto and Lombardy where one law in particular – which was then rightly declared unconstitutional – asked the owners of these enterprises to carry out changes that were impossible to apply, such as very strict closing times (contrasting with the different world time zones) and the obligation to include at least two restrooms and a waiting lounge.[29] The fact that these requirements did not apply to other commercial enterprises, such as post offices, groceries or shops of various kind, shows that the target of these laws was very specific and that these measures were not devised so as to improve the quality of the service but rather they were meant as an obstruction to both the owners and the customers.

As the example of Al-Barakaat demonstrates, the majority of these suspicions turned out to be unfounded; however, the crusade against the phone centre did not stop. The image of this place as a criminal den persisted even after the retractions of any link between money transfer companies and terrorists; this image is what Relph defines as a mass identity:

> mass identities are assigned by 'opinion-makers', provided ready-made for the people, disseminated through the mass media and especially by advertising. They are the most superficial identities of place […]. This is so because mass identities

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[28] The integral version of this law can be consulted on the *Ministero degli Interni* website: <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/051551.htm> [accessed 6 February 2015]; the sections related to phone centres are articles 6, *Nuove norme sui dati del traffico telefonico e telematico*, and 7, *Integrazione della disciplina amministrativa degli esercizi pubblici di telefonia e internet*. It is also possible to look at the various decrees that have been issued over the years in the Gazzetta Ufficiale website: *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 27 July 2005 <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/do/gazzetta/serie_generale/3/pdfPaginato?dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=20050727&numeroGazzetta=173&tipoSerie=SG&tipoSupplemento=GU&numeroSupplemento=0&numPagina=1&edizione=0> (p. 4) [06 February 2015]; *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 17 August 2005 <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/do/gazzetta/serie_generale/3/pdfPaginato?dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=20050817&numeroGazzetta=190&tipoSerie=SG&tipoSupplemento=GU&numeroSupplemento=0&numPagina=2&edizione=0> (p. 12) [06 February 2015].

[29] *Norme per l'insediamento e la gestione di centri di telefonia in sede fissa* <http://www.vvaa.it/normativa/urb_lombardia/LR_03_03_2006_6.pdf> [06 February 2015]; on the website of Regione Lombardia it is possible to look at the reasons why the afore-mentioned decree has been considered unconstitutional: 'Corte cost., ord. n. 80/08' in *ISSiRFA* <http://www.issirfa.cnr.it/4665,1457.html?PHPSESSID=2048748931273543e043055487b5afa4> [06 February 2015].

are based not on symbols and significances, and agreed on values, but on glib and contrived stereotypes created arbitrarily and even synthetically. Mass media conveniently provide simplified and selective identities for places […], and tend to fabricate a pseudo-world of pseudo-places.[30]

The identity projected on the phone centre by the media is that of a meeting point not just for migrants, but more importantly for foreign criminals, often perceived as consequential elements. Every article about this space has at least one expression that aims to undermine the phone centre. An emblematic example is provided by an article published in *La Stampa* about these shops owned and managed by migrants in Turin:

Perché quando entri in uno di quei negozi trovi un mondo che fuori, nella città che si prepara alle Olimpiadi, neanche si riesce ad immaginare. […] E ci trovi uomini e donne che spediscono a casa i soldi che si sono guadagnati qui, a Torino. Lecitamente? Oppure sono il frutto di attività illegali? Se un gestore di phone center con sistema di spedizione del denaro non puoi sindacare. 'Perché le banconote non hanno memoria, non ti raccontano da dove vengono. Le prendi e basta: questa è l'unica cosa che puoi fare se vuoi mantenere questo servizio di money transfer'. Parola di Franco Trad, libanese d'origine, 40 anni, laureato a Torino in architettura e poi diventato imprenditore, con questo suo 'phone center' nel cuore di Porta Palazzo: corso Regina Margherita 158.[31]

The article starts by describing the useful role of phone centres, but right after, the journalist inserts a few rhetorical questions to recall the suspicions about such an enterprise; this is in line with what Federico Faloppa has pointed out about how Italian media work in portraying immigrants:

Sembra che – salvo (rare) eccezioni – l'informazione sia fatta per avvallare ciò che il lettore in qualche modo già pensa, immagina, vuole sentirsi dire. Dando credito, per esempio, al luogo comune. Come? Rimettendolo costantemente in circolo. […] È un'informazione che ripete stilemi e modalità (l'uso massiccio di virgolettati per riportare la vox populi esasperata della cittadinanza, che peraltro rimane quasi sempre anonima; sillogismi e paragoni che si basano su premesse discutibili;

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[30] Relph, p. 58.
[31] Ludovico Poletto, '"Il mio business? Servizi etnici"', *La Stampa*, 6 August 2005 <http://www.archiviolastampa.it/component/option,com_lastampa/task,search/mod,libera/action,viewer/Itemid,3/page,35/articleid,0236_01_2005_0214_0035_1823073/> [accessed 22 September 2013].

iperboli, titoli costantemente 'urlati'), che tenta di oggettivare opinioni, supposizioni.[32]

Many articles, as was also the case for Termini railway station, report explicit racist expressions such as, for example, this article from *La Repubblica* about the situation in Brescia: 'Ci sono tossici abbandonati sui gradini. Un gran viavai di neri dentro e fuori i "phone center". E al sindaco Corsini scappa detto: "Qui in certe vie si sente anche l'odore..."'.[33] The fact that such a sentence was not only pronounced but also published demonstrates the depth of the acceptance and the perpetration of what Faloppa defines as *razzismo democratico*:

> È il 'razzismo democratico' […]. Ha il suo lessico, i suoi stilemi stereotipati, le sue parole d'ordine: usi ormai talmente radicati da sembrare normali, condivisi, universalmente – e acriticamente – accettati. È un razzismo a parole. Ma non per questo meno nocivo, meno condannabile, meno degradante.[34]

And the space of the phone centre has been one of the favourite targets of this kind of racist demonstration.[35]

In addition to the suspicions already described, a crucial problem for locals was actually that these phone centres were always crowded with migrants from all around the world. This was also due to the fact that, obviously, there is a high concentration of the same shop in certain areas more than others, specifically in those areas where there is a higher density of migrants who might need such a service. The significant presence of people in front and inside the phone centres was obviously due to the services offered and

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[32] Federico Faloppa, *Razzisti a parole* (Rome: Laterza, 2011), pp. 97–98. For a deeper analysis of media language please see also: Faso, 'La lingua' and *Lessico*.

[33] Fabrizio Ravelli, 'Le notti violente di Brescia. Il sindaco contro gli immigrati', *La Repubblica*, 16 September 1999 <http://www.repubblica.it/online/fatti/brescia/ravelli/ravelli.html> [accessed 22 September 2013].

[34] Faloppa, p. 13.

[35] For some examples also of how the racist insults have sometimes transformed into racist attacks, see: Simone Bianchin, 'Attentato al phone center, paura e palazzina sgomberata', *La Repubblica*, 26 August 2011 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2011/08/26/attentato-al-phone-center-paura-palazzina-sgomberata.html> [accessed 15 October 2013]; Alessandro Cori, 'Fiamme in negozio pachistano attentato dopo volantini razzisti', *La Repubblica*, 23 August 2008 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/10/23/fiamme-in-negozio-pachistano-attentato-dopo-volantini.html> [accessed 15 October 2013]; Rosario Palazzolo, 'Phone center in fiamme a Sesto. Gli inquirenti: "Un attentato"', *Il Giorno*, 27 August 2011 <http://www.ilgiorno.it/sesto/cronaca/2011/08/27/569592-phone_center_fiamme_sesto.shtml> [accessed 23 September 2013].

to the possibility of meeting with fellow compatriots. Beyond the single phone call or the money transfer, the phone centre provides migrants with many other useful services, such as information about job opportunities, about how to fill forms for different purposes and so on, as the protagonist of *Divorzio all'islamica* affirms: 'Il Little Cairo è un posto strategico. Circolano tante persone, di conseguenza si scambiano informazioni di ogni genere: affitti, offerte di lavoro, eventuali regolarizzazioni dei clandestini, crisi di coppia, matrimoni e divorzi in vista eccetera'.[36] This picture is also present in an article from the *Corriere della Sera*:

> Il phone center di Miloudi (Milou per gli amici) è considerato dalla comunità marocchina di Bologna come un punto di riferimento dei connazionali. 'Arrivano in molti – racconta Milou – che non conoscono la lingua italiana e hanno bisogno di aiuto per compilare un modulo, oppure prenotare un appuntamento in Questura […]'. Si potrebbe dire che l'impresa di Milou svolge un ruolo di integrazione sociale.[37]

If, on the one hand, all these side-services made the phone centre an uncontested reference point for migrants, on the other, their presence both inside and right outside these shops created a feeling of anxiety in the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods. By gathering in these specific locations they are recognisable as alien elements in Italian society. In an article from *La Repubblica* this fear is clearly portrayed:

> Così, dieci phone center in cento metri, minimarket etnici, kebab: senza un criterio, senza un equilibrio. La paura è dei vecchi, che vedono sparire i punti di riferimento, delle donne anziane alle prese con giovani maschi in gruppo. […] I phone center sono il nuovo bersaglio per i controlli di polizia e vigili urbani. Perché sono il primo ritrovo. […] Parlano, scherzano, bevono. Lo stare insieme di questa gente, anche quando è innocuo, dà un'idea di fermento e di energia che spaventa i milanesi meno attrezzati per età e per abbandono.[38]

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[36] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 96.
[37] '"Milou", un phone centre a Bologna', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 March 2004
<http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2004/marzo/19/Milou_phone_centre_Bologna_cl_0_040319020.shtml>
[accessed 22 October 2013].
[38] Fabrizio Ravelli, 'Nella città africana', *La Repubblica*, 6 June 2009
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2009/06/06/nella-citta-africana.html>
[accessed 21 October 2013].

This brief passage adequately summarises *the phone centre problem*. According to the last sentence, what scares the citizens of Milan, especially women and elderly people, is 'lo stare insieme di questa gente', migrants socialising in a space previously demarcated as a white space.[39] Locals are bothered not only by migrants in Italy but more specifically with their visibility which is largely provided by the phone centre; by being a perfect meeting point, it grants migrants the conditions to inhabit a public space such as the neighbourhood. This recalls David Harvey's reflections on the political economy of public space; Harvey brilliantly starts his analysis with an extract from Baudelaire's 'The Eyes of the Poor' in which the French poet tells his lover the reason why he hates her; the scene takes place in Paris, in a café where the two lovers are sitting:

> The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the ardor of a debut, and lighted with all its might the blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings [...] On the street directly in front of us, a worthy man of about forty, with tired face and greying beard, was standing holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing, still too weak to walk. [...] They were in rags. The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and those six eyes stared fixedly at the new cafe with admiration, equal in degree but differing in kind according to their ages. […] I turned my eyes to look into yours, dear love, to read my thoughts in them; […] you said: 'Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away?'[40]

Harvey comments on this extract highlighting 'how it generates a sense of space where ambiguities of proprietorship, of aesthetics, of social relations (class and gender in particular) and the political economy of everyday life collide'.[41] This analysis can be perfectly transposed to the phone centre problem in Italy where the simple presence of migrants in the streets is enough to create a feeling of discomfort in Italian non-migrants, as the previously mentioned article by Ravelli pointed out. Migrants' differences (cultural background, language) become part of the Italian society and in doing so migrants are challenging the norm, the white norm.[42] As also affirmed by Caterina Romeo: 'in the

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[39] Puwar, p. 49.
[40] Baudelaire in David Harvey, 'The Political Economy of Public Space', in *The Politics of Public Space*, ed. by Setha M. Low and Neil Smith (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 17–34 (pp. 18–19).
[41] Harvey, p. 19.
[42] Puwar, p. 49.

national collective imaginary, the national space of Italy has always been and still is a white space'.[43] Migrants are perceived and represented as outsiders in the Italian society:

> A socio-spatial construction of certain groups as outsiders is a complex process but […] the problem can best be understood by focusing on boundary processes, the ways in which distinctions are made between the pure and the defiled, the normal and the deviant, the same and the other.[44]

If on the one hand this recalls what has previously been said about Termini station, that migrants become visible and present as out of place because they inappropriately inhabit a space over which they have no power;[45] on the other, the phone centre can be perceived as even more threatening. This space is more circumscribed than the station and therefore the perception of migrants' presence appears as more numerous:

> There is a terror of numbers, a fear of being swamped. The dread of being displaced from an identity that has placed the white subject as being central to the world propels one to be constantly vigilant as to the activities of the figures that make it uncomfortable to hold on to this position.[46]

In addition, the phone centre did not exist before migrants' arrival; it was devised almost exclusively to satisfy migrants' needs. This fact is in a sense more threatening in itself as it foresees a future in which migrants are a dynamic part of the Italian society; Italians' fear of migrants' definitive settlement in Italy is also exacerbated by the fact that the majority of phone centres' entrepreneurs have migrant origins. As a matter of fact, this commercial venture, before the introduction of the different local and national laws, used to represent one of the most advantageous enterprises owned by migrants: 'Cominciato qualche anno fa con una buona dose di improvvisazione (e anche con parecchi esercizi che aprivano e chiudevano dopo due mesi "dimenticando" di pagare bollette milionarie) il phone center sta diventando un boccone da gestire con approccio manageriale'.[47]

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[43] Caterina Romeo, 'Racial Evaporations. Representing Blackness in African Italian Postcolonial Literature', in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. by Romeo and Lombardi-Diop, pp. 219–34 (p. 220).
[44] Sibley, 'Outsiders', p. 120.
[45] Lefebvre, p. 57.
[46] Puwar, p. 49.
[47] Antonella Piperno, 'Ciao papà e lui dalla Cina ti può vedere in faccia', *La Repubblica*, 28 July 2000 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/07/28/ciao-papa-lui-dalla-cina-ti-puo.html?ref=search> [accessed 21 December 2014]. Over the years the situation has changed and

Furthermore, as the example of Miloudi's phone centre in Bologna demonstrated, the phone centre's owner performs the role of mediator between migrants and Italian society. As Christian/Issa, in Lakhous's novel, points out referring to the owner of the phone centre 'Little Cairo': 'Akram è troppo bravo, riesce a intercettare tutto questo flusso e sfruttarlo al meglio per accrescere il suo potere "commerciale". I miei complimenti!'.[48] By knowing the language and his customers, by keeping updated with the Italian regulations, the owner helps his customers to integrate into Italian society. Akram for instance is the one who helps Christian/Issa to find both a job and a place to live:

> Improvvisamente sento qualcuno alle mie spalle che mi chiama. È Akram: 'Tunisino!' 'Sì?'. 'Stai cercando ancora un posto letto?'. 'Sì'. 'Allora oggi è il tuo giorno fortunato! Si è liberato un posto in un appartamento qui vicino'. […] c'è Akram alias John Belushi che mi chiama. 'Tunisino!'. 'Sì'. 'Stai cercando ancora lavoro?'. 'Sì'. 'Insciallah, c'è qualcosa per te! Vuoi fare il lavapiatti?'.[49]

Also Safia remarks on Akram's power:

> Akram è un personaggio chiave nella vita del nostro quartiere. Se non ci fosse bisognerebbe inventarlo. È un mediatore indispensabile per concludere tutti gli affari: l'affitto di una casa, di una stanza o di un posto letto, l'organizzazione di un viaggio in Egitto o alla Mecca, la ricerca di un lavoro o di una moglie, il rinnovo del permesso di soggiorno, la richiesta della cittadinanza italiana eccetera eccetera.[50]

Obviously, Akram is a fictional character with his features taken to the extreme, but that considered, he embodies the typical figure of a phone centre's owner; for instance, an

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managing a phone centre is not as advantageous as it used to be before the different laws. However, for some statistics about entrepreneurs with migrant origins in the first decade of the 2000, please see: Elvio Pasca 'In Italia ci sono duemila e 400 phone center, l'80% dei quali gestiti da stranieri'. in *stranieriinitalia.it* 17 March 2003 <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/news/phone17mar2003.htm> [accessed 22 October 2013]; but also: Claudia Brunetto, 'Immigrati, il boom degli affari', *La Repubblica*, 7 March 2008 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/03/07/immigrati-il-boom-degli-affari.html> [accessed 22 October 2013]; Zita Dazzi, 'Diciottomila immigrati imprenditori ora danno lavoro anche agli Italiani', *La Repubblica*, 28 March 2006 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2006/03/28/diciottomila-immigrati-imprenditori-ora-danno-lavoro-anche.html> [accessed 21 October 2013]; Milena Vercellino, 'Imprenditori, avanza l'onda straniera', *La Repubblica*, 27 March 2008 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/03/27/imprenditori-avanza-onda-straniera.html> [accessed 22 October 2013].
[48] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 96.
[49] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 44–96.
[50] Lakhous, *Divorzio,* pp. 55–56.

article from *La Repubblica* has underlined also how this owner's power, as Issa defined it, is not only commercial but also sentimental:

> Ogni phone center è un mondo a sé, in cui si incontrano ogni giorno comunità di immigrati per condividere la nostalgia del Paese d'origine, parlare dei propri cari e avere notizie delle famiglie: 'Appena sono arrivato a Palermo - racconta il gestore sudanese di Sicilia Telecomunicazioni, in via Maqueda - ho voluto aprire un phone center. È l'unica attività che mi permette di essere utile alla mia comunità e di radunarla qui ogni giorno. Poi c'è sempre un viavai di gente, e conoscere persone nuove, anche scambiare soltanto due parole, mi fa piacere. Molti vengono sempre negli stessi giorni: per loro è quasi un rituale, e i parenti che stanno in patria sanno che quel giorno arriverà la telefonata attesa per tutta la settimana'.[51]

As emphasised by this entrepreneur, going to a phone centre becomes for migrants a sort of ritual, a habit that makes such a space a fundamental landmark in their daily geographies. It is a regular stop in migrants' lives, as shown by the female protagonist of *Divorzio all'islamica* who calls her family in Egypt every week: 'Chiamo la famiglia in Egitto una volta a settimana. Cerco di mantenere il contatto per non soccombere al fardello della nostalgia'.[52] The phone centre becomes a *habitual space*, which is, as defined by Anne-Marie Fortier, 'A space where I need not try to make sense of what was going on: all was familiar, intelligible, in an unpleasant and troubling way'.[53] According to this definition the phone centre becomes a home space, as will be analysed in the following section.

3.2 The Phone Centre and the 'Almost Home' Role

Fortier's definition of *habitual space* is reminiscent of Douglas's definition of home: 'home starts by bringing some space under control'.[54] The phone centre is a space under migrants' control in the sense that inside migrants do not need to make any effort in understanding the dynamics because everything is familiar (language, people, tv

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[51] Claudia Brunetto, 'Phone center, i nuovi imprenditori venuti da Sri Lanka e Bangladesh', *La Repubblica*, 6 March 2007 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/03/06/phone-center-nuovi-imprenditori-venuti-da-sri.html> [accessed 30 September 2013].

[52] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 53.

[53] Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space and Identity* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000), p. 133.

[54] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

programs) in such a space, as Fortier also pointed out. The diffusion of phone centres around Italy is also due to the *home value* that this space embodies and for this same reason the phone centre has become an important presence in Italian postcolonial novels. This recalls also Sara Ahmed's theory according to which: 'the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance – I am here – but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home'[55] and the phone centre, as will be analysed in this section, is perceived and represented as *almost home*.

As already mentioned, Lakhous chooses to set a large part of *Divorzio all'islamica* in the phone centre 'Little Cairo', owned – as foreseeable from the name – by an Egyptian migrant, Akram. Akram is also the first suspect of the anti-terrorist investigation at the basis of the plot. Even if at the end everything will be justified as a training process for the protagonist in order to become an intelligence agent, the story told by the secret services to Christian is that a terrorist cell is using the phone centre as the base to organise an attack against the Italian capital city. Therefore, to hang around the phone centre without arousing suspicions, Christian needs to disguise himself as a Tunisian migrant in order to gather information, as Barbara Spackman affirms: 'he takes on his new identity as the Muslim Tunisian "Issa"'.[56] This identity-change is obviously marked by the change of the name from Christian to Issa which embodies in itself the passage from one religion to another, from one identity to another:[57] '"Allora, tunisino, ti dobbiamo trovare un nome arabo. Hai qualche suggerimento?". "Ti propongo Issa". "Issa? E che vuol dire?". "Il corrispettivo di Gesù per i musulmani". "Gesù? Quello dell'altra guancia? Cominciamo bene!"'.[58] It is only after Christian becomes Issa that he is not just free to enter the phone centre but he is also, and more importantly, able to inhabit the phone centre as a different space.

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[55] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 331.

[56] Barbara Spackman, 'Italians DOC? Posing and Passing from Giovanni Finati to Amara Lakhous', in *Postcolonial Italy*, ed. by Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, pp. 125–38 (p. 131).

[57] Spackman directs the attention to the 'topos of posing as Muslim in order to enter a sacred space' (p. 126); in relation to Christian/Issa she affirms: 'Lakhous himself invokes the analogy: "A Muslim who is called Christian is pure provocation. It would be like going to Mecca with a cross around your neck, it's called apostasy, and the punishment foreseen is the death penalty" (98). The theme and possibility of conversion to Islam play a starring role in both of these two scenarios, […] At stake is a contrapuntual reading of several of the multiple migrations and identities evoked by Lakhous' (p. 126).

[58] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 32.

> Sto diventando un cliente fisso del Little Cairo? Pare di sì. […] C'è il rischio di essere smascherato? Non diciamo minchiate. Sono un povero immigrato tunisino giunto a Roma in cerca di un futuro migliore. I nuovi arrivati hanno sempre bisogno di qualche punto di riferimento e io l'ho trovato in questo posto fra i miei fratelli arabi. Non c'è proprio nulla di strano.[59]

The phone centre is mainly a space for migrants, therefore after Christian becomes Issa he is allowed to experience the phone centre as a familiar space where he can speak the same language of the other users and share the same life experiences of other migrants.[60] Christian's posing successfully as Issa is supported by his knowledge of Tunisian culture, by his fluency in Arabic,[61] but obviously, also by the story the secret services have fabricated to back up his fake identity.[62] The most important part of this story is Issa's family in Tunisia,[63] which he constantly calls from the phone centre; the fake family in Tunisia becomes Issa's first pretext to spend most of his time at 'Little Cairo'. Once he becomes a habitual customer, he starts spending more time there to the point that the phone call becomes just a fortuitous action: 'Dopo pranzo faccio un salto al Little Cairo. Do un'occhiata veloce al telegiornale di al-Jazeera, seguo un servizio sulla guerra in Iraq. […] Più tardi decido di chiamare "i miei" a Tunisi'.[64]

Issa's behaviour is not different from other migrants' way of inhabiting the phone centre. Indeed this place offers more to his customers than just the concrete possibility to send money home, for example. The presence of the television, as reported by Issa, despite appearing an insignificant element, is indeed an important asset for the phone centre: 'Dopo la chiamata in Tunisia decido di rimanere al Little Cairo. Mi siedo accanto a due giovani (a occhio e croce direi che sono egiziani) per guardare al-Jazeera. C'è la replica di un programma molto seguito nel mondo arabo'.[65] The TV, but in particular

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[59] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 42.

[60] The phone centre is also sometimes used by Italian non-migrants, especially by students, to surf on the internet, for instance.

[61] Spackman, pp. 131–132.

[62] Posing as migrant is for Christian a difficult assignment; as a matter of fact he has to remind himself of his task and of what it means to live as a migrant: 'A volte mi capita di dimenticare la parte che sto interpretando. Mi devo identificare nel personaggio di Issa, un immigrato tunisino. Cerco di ricordare la parlata dei miei conoscenti arabi soprattutto di quelli tunisini. Devo imitare anche il loro accento. […] Forse meno italiano parlo meglio sarà' (Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 45).

[63] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 121.

[64] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 74–75.

[65] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 42.

specific TV channels, might be seen as one of those instruments that Tiziano Bonini defines as *home-making tools*.[66] Bonini looks in particular at the satellite TV and at its role of creating feelings of home in migrants' houses:

> È il semplice fatto di avere la Tv accesa e sintonizzata sul canale nazionale turco, a far sentire a casa i migranti a Londra. La Tv come suppellettile elettronica, come ulteriore oggetto dal volto familiare. […] Aksoy e Robins enfatizzano un aspetto finora marginalizzato: la dimensione privata del consumo televisivo satellitare. Le trasmissioni transnazionali hanno, secondo loro, soprattutto la funzione di ricreare uno spazio domestico, familiare, privato. È prima di tutto il suono della televisione, le immagini di volti televisivi familiari, il continuo e banale sottofondo televisivo alla vita domestica, che contribuiscono a mantenere in vita la temperatura di casa.[67]

The study is here referring to the role of the TV in migrants' houses, however, in my opinion, the TV has the exact same function in phone centres. In addition, as the analysis carried out in Chapter 1 demonstrated, not all migrants can afford a satellite TV in their houses also because, sometimes, dwellings are shared by migrants with different motherlands and different mother tongues; this is also the situation portrayed by Issa in *Divorzio all'islamica*.[68]

The absence of a TV, but more importantly of satellite channels, emphasises the relevance of this appliance in the phone centre, thus echoing the goal expressed by the phone centre's owner interviewed in one of the articles reported above: 'mi permette di essere utile alla mia comunità e di radunarla qui ogni giorno'.[69] Going back to Bonini's description of the role played by the TV, the importance of a satellite channel is that of recreating a feeling of home and also of that everydayness lost with migration.[70] If on the

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[66] Tiziano Bonini, 'The Media as "Home-Making" Tools: Life Story of a Filipino Migrant in Milan', *Media, Culture & Society*, 33 (2011), 869–83 (p. 881).

[67] Tiziano Bonini, *Così lontano, così vicino. Tattiche mediatiche per abitare lo spazio* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2010), pp. 90–91.

[68] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 67–68–69. An exception to this is representend by Felice, Safia's husband. Their economic situation is more stable and secure than Issa's or his flatmates': he has been in Italy for a while, has a regular and stable job and shares his house only with his wife and daughter. He therefore can afford al-Jazeera, which becomes a constant presence in his life, as described by his wife: 'Dopo aver mangiato l'architetto si piazza davanti alla TV per un altro round con al-Jazeera. Delle volte penso ad al-Jazeera come a una vera rivale, una sorta di amante alla luce del sole. Lui passa più tempo con me che con lei' (Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 88).

[69] Brunetto, 'Phone center'.

[70] For more information about the role played by the TV please see: David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000).

one hand the TV helps migrants feel at home, on the other it creates a dependence which can be perceived as dangerous, as Safia, the female protagonist of *Divorzio all'islamica*, describes:

> Il Little Cairo è affollato, molti clienti non si limitano come me a telefonare, ma si fermano a guardare Madame al-Jazeera. Il televisore serve ad attirare i clienti e a farli sentire a casa. Purtroppo sono in tanti a cascarci. […] Un autentico doping della mente e della memoria. Poveri immigrati, ogni giorno assorbono una quantità impressionante di negatività, rischiando di diventare dei malati, dei drogati. Aihmè, è un problema che conosco da vicino. Il mio felice marito appartiene a questa sfortunata e maledetta categoria! È una dipendenza molto pericolosa.[71]

A similar outcome is provided by the phone call which creates a situation of familiarity and normality but with the inherent awareness of being an illusion. This everydayness of the phone call is demonstrated not only by the regularity of this habit, the *ritual* mentioned by the owner in the article afore-mentioned,[72] but also by the content of these phone calls, usually belonging to the daily life, as Steven Vertovec points out:

> Whereas throughout the world non-migrant families commonly have discussions across a kitchen table (for example, can we buy a refrigerator? What do we do about the teenager's behaviour? Who should take care of grandmother?), now many families whose members are relocated through migration conduct the same everyday discussions in real time across oceans. Cheap telephone calls have largely facilitated this. It is now common for a single family to be stretched across vast distances and between nation-states, yet still retain its sense of collectivity.[73]

Safia enters the booth and she is back in Egypt, she is with her family, as the ordinary content of their conversations suggest: 'Dopo la breve chiacchierata con papà parlo con

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[71] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 145–146. Safia's relationship with the TV is different than her husband's. As will also be analysed in the next chapter, the TV represents for Safia a means to become involved in the Italian society; she affirms: 'Quando uno vive in un paese deve dare la precedenza alle notizie locali. Io ad esempio trovo interessantissimo il TgR Lazio su Rai Tre perché mi dà informazioni molto utili su Roma e dintorni. Voglio sapere come stanno le cose qui a Roma, non a Kabul o a Baghdad!' (Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 80). Also meaningful is the gendering of the TV channel al-Jazeera, which is defined 'Madame al-Jazeera', mirroring the different behaviour towards the TV of male and female subjects. The fact that Al-Jazeera is portrayed as a woman seems to imply that its power might be more effective on male migrants, as it is the case of Safia and her husband.

[72] Brunetto, 'Phone center'.

[73] Steven Vertovec, 'Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism', *Global Networks*, 4 (2004), 219–24 (p. 222).

mia madre. Mi aggiorna soprattutto sui preparativi del matrimonio di Layla, mia sorella piccola'.[74] At the same time, Safia is reminded of the physical distance between her and her family, of her not being really in Egypt:

> Interestingly, it is not that the substance of the conversations carries a high emotional charge, but rather the opposite, in that the detailed updates about everyday life in her family and home locality recreate an experience of the ordinariness of home which at once articulates her sense of belonging and serves as a reminder that she no longer belongs there.[75]

This reminder recalls Guha's statement: 'by going away, by breaking loose from the bonds of a native world is to be disowned and bring down on oneself the harsh sentence: "You no longer belong here; you are no longer one of us."'.[76] Also Safia clearly states this: 'Tornando a casa, riesco senza alcuna difficoltà a individuare il motivo del mio pianto: mi rattrista tanto il fatto di non essere presente al matrimonio di mia sorella. È duro non condividere con i propri cari momenti importanti come questi'.[77] This discomfort caused by the renewed awareness of the physical distance recalls Fortier's quotation about *habitual spaces* as being familiar in a troubling way:[78] if on the one hand this familiarity creates a pleasant feeling of being at home, on the other it is a hurtful reminder of the distance between migrants and their families. Raelene Wilding, in analysing the role played by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), points out:

> The use of ICTs is important for some transnational families in constructing or imagining a 'connected relationship', and enabling them to overlook their physical separation by time and space – even if only temporarily. To this extent, the fact of communicating may be seen as just as important as its content.[79]

Despite this fundamental role played by the ICTs, the physical separation cannot be completely overcome and this is the reason for the melancholic tears soaking the

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[74] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 147.
[75] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 121.
[76] Guha, p. 156.
[77] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 58.
[78] Fortier, p. 133.
[79] Raelene Wilding, '"Virtual" Intimacies? Families Communicating across Transnational Contexts', *Global Networks*, 6 (2006), 125–42 (p. 132).

telephone booth during Safia's call. As Safia's example points out, by being directly connected with the loved ones, the phone centre is imbued with pleasant feelings; migrants play what Bonini defines *il gioco del ritorno*:

> Quando siamo lontani da casa possiamo giocare il gioco del ritorno a casa, immaginare per un attimo di essere a casa, immaginare di avere accanto a noi la persona con cui stiamo parlando al telefono o via Skype […]. Lontani da casa, dalla famiglia, dai suoni e dalle immagini della nostra cultura, abbiamo bisogno di giocare con i media, per illuderci di non esserci mai allontanati da casa. Solo così, fingendo, possiamo godere del calore di casa, 'sentirci' pure brevemente, a casa.[80]

Bonini defines this *gioco del ritorno* as an illusion, a pretence of being at home which is, in any case, an emotionally charged experience. An article from *La Repubblica* entitled *Paradiso Inferno in via Faenza* reports: 'Dentro un phone center vedo un uomo che ride, e piange di gioia, aggrappato alla cornetta. Grida parole misteriose ma le sue emozioni sono universali, come l'amore per sua moglie, dall'altro capo del filo, in un altro spicchio di mondo'.[81] Happy events are shared in a phone centre; for instance Issa's fake mother reveals to him that he is going to become an uncle: 'Faccio la consueta chiamata alla mia "mamma tunisina". […] Infine, mia sorella Amel è incinta. Questa sì che è una bella notizia. Finalmente sarò zio'.[82] The phone centre, thanks to the services it offers, becomes the space where it is possible to live experiences that, due to the distance, would otherwise be lost, be these negative or positive events.

However, Bonini defines this experience a game: it is an illusion; it is not real, but just a fantasy. Nonetheless this fantasy can be so credible that it manages to redefine the distance between migrants and those who stayed at home; borrowing Parati's theory mentioned in relation to Termini, this game constructs 'new proximities'.[83] The distance between Italy and migrants' home countries is enormously narrowed in the phone centre so that despite being located far from home it is a *home space* so reachable that, using

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[80] Tiziano Bonini, *Così lontano*, p. 70.

[81] Emiliano Gucci, 'Paradiso e inferno in via Faenza', *La Repubblica*, 27 January 2008 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2008/01/27/paradiso-inferno-in-via-faenza.html> [accessed 25 October 2013].

[82] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 42.

[83] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', p. 433.

Ahmed's words, migrants feel: 'as almost, but not quite, at home';[84] as pointed out by Burns: '"Little Cairo", in effect, eliminates the distance between "here" and "there", and vivifies in the rhythms of its constant transmission and reception of telecommunications a mobility which disrupts the rigid opposition associated with immigration and articulates instead a constant and multi-directional flow of human contact and experience'.[85] In the light of this analysis the space of the phone centre closely recalls the context of Termini, but it is essentially different. Termini and the phone centre have in common the same knot of temporalizations:[86] just like Termini, the phone centre becomes the space where migrants can look back at their past but also shape their present in Italy. The main difference with Termini, however, does not lie in the temporal dimensions that come into terms in (and thanks to) these two spaces, but rather in the attempts to overcome distances, and on how successful these attempts are. In Termini, the sharing of the same problems, the opportunity of spending time with members of one's own community, speaking one's own language, make migrants feel *at home* as Maria Cristina from *Scontro di civiltà* pointed out: 'Mi sembra di tornare a casa'.[87] In the phone centre, on the other hand, in addition to all this, migrants can be directly connected not just with familiar and friendly voices and faces, but with the real faces and voices of family members and friends; as narrated by Safia:

> Dopo una lunga attesa si libera la cabina numero sei. Entro e digito il numero di casa mia al Cairo. La linea è occupata. Aspetto un minuto e riprovo. Inizia a battermi forte il cuore. Mi succede sempre così. Provo una forte emozione, come se dovessi incontrare dal vivo una persona cara che non vedo da anni. Mi risponde una voce maschile, seria. La riconosco subito.[88]

Safia is excited because she is going to hear not the familiar sounds of her mother tongue (as happened to Maria Cristina) but the real voices of her family members. The phone centre becomes the space where Safia, and like her all the *inhabitants* of this place, can be part again of their past life, of the country and, most of all, of the family left behind.

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[84] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 331.
[85] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 172.
[86] Guha, pp. 156–157.
[87] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 90.
[88] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 146.

Experiencing the phone centre in this way is emotionally challenging. As Burns points out describing Safia's relationship with the phone centre:

> Sofia's regular visits to the 'Little Cairo' call centre to telephone her family allow her, within the acutely confined and sealed space of a telephone cabin, to re-enter emotionally and imaginatively the home she no longer physically inhabits, and the effects – indeed, the affects – of this are striking: she tends to vacate the cabin in tears, and acutely aware of the contradiction this demonstrates in terms of her self-possessed performance of being at home in Rome, she anxiously dries her tears each time.[89]

Inside the telephone cabin, Safia goes quickly back home and lives for few moments the life she has abandoned; her tears are the manifestation of that melancholic feeling described by Taageere in *Madre Piccola*: 'pigiati in quella cabina e poi, le cabine dei call center hanno quell'odore puzzolente, odore di saliva e malinconia, odore uguale dappertutto, non è vero?'.[90] As soon as Safia gets out of the booth, she dries her tears because she is back to Italy where she has a plan to carry out.[91]

This being 'almost home' is also underlined by the name chosen for the phone centre of *Divorzio all'islamica*: 'Little Cairo'. This name comprises in itself the dichotomy outlined so far: 'Cairo' represents the majority of the users' home, but the 'Little' in the name is the constant reminder of the physical distance. As Burns highlights:

> The name itself, within an urban zone accommodating a significant Egyptian minority, suggests a capacity to be at once in one place and, quite immediately and meaningfully, in another, which offers a new inflection on the passage to 'elsewheres' […]. As well as overlaying one urban reality with another, the call centre, and its name, establish a line of connection across the Mediterranean which

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[89] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 121.

[90] Ali Farah, p. 90.

[91] As pointed out in Chapter 4, Safia was excited to leave her country and to move to Italy because she was planning to become a famous people's hairdresser; despite the fact that the reality she faces once in Rome is quite different, she is still trying to become an active part of the Italian society and to integrate herself as much as possible (Burns, *Migrant*, p. 119).

is virtual; constituted, as noted previously, by the phone calls which are carried in and out of its booths.[92]

This *elsewhere* outlined by Burns is a shared space, a common ground among members of the family. Families separated by migrations meet in this in-between space and, thanks to the services illustrated in this chapter, try to overcome the geographical distance; as Wilding states:

> Many described the sense of shared space and time enabled by the layering of ICTs as a miracle. Nevertheless, it also clearly provoked new problems in some family networks. Mediated intimacy at a distance often feels very tangible, so people describe not being constrained by the limitations of geographic distance or time. However, it is clearly an imagined construct in that kin continue to be physically separated.[93]

This passage clearly underlines the features of the phone centre explored so far. This *shared space* is lived by both migrants and their families but also by other customers of the phone centre; suggestive in this case is the description provided by Taageere:

> Al call center fanno prezzi buoni come quelli delle schede, ma passa molta gente e tutti ti parlano come non fossi già al telefono: *haye* Taageere come va? ah è tua moglie che ti sta parlando, salutamela; *haye* sorella, tutto bene? Il bambino è cresciuto, *mashallah*, quanto tempo eh?[94]

Taageere calling his wife becomes an event for the other Somalis who are in the phone centre; in a sense this recreates a sense of community that reinforces the value of the phone centre, its home value. This idea of the phone call as an individual but also as a communal experience is pointed out once again by Taageere in *Madre Piccola* who divorces his Somali wife who lives in Rome, through a phone call:

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[92] Burns, *Migrant*, pp. 171–172. The attempt to recreate the feeling of home through the name of the space where migrants spend most of time is the same reason behind the choice of calling the kebab fast-food mentioned in Chapter 1 'Kebab Kabul' or nicknaming that specific corner of Termini, inhabited mainly by migrants from Nigeria, 'Lagos', as seen in Chapter 2. In the same novel, this 'connection across the Mediterranean' is also visible in the name given to the daughter of the female protagonist: Aida which, as Spackman pointed out, remarks the nineteenth-century Italian presence in Egypt (Spackman 2013:131), but on the other hand it is also an attempt to connect to an important Italian cultural milestone.
[93] Wilding, p. 133.
[94] Ali Farah, pp. 59–60.

> Quella mattina, all'ombra di molti sonni, stavo ancora nell'altro mondo e voi lì, al call center, me lo immagino, pigiati in quella cabina [...]. Che cosa poteva fare alla fine se non dirmi autorevolmente: 'Ripeti tre volte la formula del *fasakh*, ripetila tre volte'. E mentre io ripetevo, ingannato da te, tre volte la formula di scioglimento e sentivo il *wadaad* che passava la cornetta del telefono e faceva ascoltare a tutti che la stavo ripetendo tre volte, immagino tu cosa facevi. Eri lì e ridevi, soddisfatta.[95]

The idea of the phone centre that creates – like Termini – a sense of community echoes what the entrepreneur, interviewed in the article quoted before, stated: 'È l'unica attività che mi permette di essere utile alla mia comunità e di radunarla qui ogni giorno'.[96] It also recalls Anne-Marie Fortier's analysis of the role of the Centro Scalabrini for the Italian community in London; after having taken part to one of the events that were regularly organised by the Centro, she comments:

> Life at the Centro takes place exclusively inside, invisible to the neighbouring Brixton residents, available only to a handful of people connected to each other through a close 'community' network. At first, this produced for me a sense that the place, the building was wrapped in an 'invisible pulsing membrane' (Myerhoff 1979:5) that separates it from the immediate surroundings. But this is indeed a 'pulsing' place. A place that vibrates, lives and is lived in ways that are continually redefined. Precisely because one crosses the building threshold to 'commune' with others, and to do *as* Italians, the Centro is stasis *and* process at once; it is both fixed location and 'trembling space', to use once again Kathleen Stewart's telling metaphor (1996:95).[97]

The events organised by the Centro are means for Italian migrants in London to get together and be a community; from the outside nothing is going on there, but on the inside there is an entire world, evoking also the article from *La Stampa* quoted at the beginning of this chapter about phone centers in Turin: 'Per favore non chiamateli soltanto "phone centers". Perché quando entri in uno di quei negozi trovi un mondo che fuori, [...] neanche si riesce ad immaginare'.[98]

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[95] Ali Farah, pp. 90–91–92.
[96] Brunetto, 'Phone center'.
[97] Fortier, p. 106.
[98] Poletto, 'Il mio business?'.

Conclusion

> Domani mattina, così abbiamo deciso io e mamma, devo andare alla stazione Termini a mandare alla zia Howa questi cento euro. Mi pesa farlo. Non perché non voglio mandarle dei soldi. […] è il gesto che mi frantuma l'anima. Non c'è niente altro che io posso fare per lei, solo mandarle soldi. L'amore da qui a lì è quantificato in denaro. […] Anche quando è morta mia zia Faduma ho mandato dei soldi. Sì, quando è morta sono andata in un call center. […] Giorni dopo la sua morte sono andata alla Stazione Termini. 'Abbiamo dei soldi da mandare' ho detto. E poi la solita trafila. Con quei soldi sono stati pagati i funerali della zia.[99]

This passage from *La mia casa è dove sono* summarises the analysis carried out in the present chapter. The distance between Italy and in this case Somalia is narrowed by the work of the phone centre. By allowing Scego to send money home, the phone centre provides her and her mother with the opportunity to concretely participate in such a crucial moment as the funeral of a loved aunt. However, the two countries are still separated and the participation to that event is only symbolic. The investigation carried out in this chapter has underlined how the phone centre played a controversial part in the Italian society; on the one hand the analysis of the articles has pointed out how the phone centre has been considered as a gathering point for migrants and, often consequently, for criminals. Some articles have attributed this same problem to all the commercial ventures owned and managed by migrants with no distinction; as shown in this passage from an article about the Lega Nord's project mentioned in Chapter 1, the so-called *progetto Harlem*:[100]

> 'Progetto Harlem', l'hanno chiamato i leghisti, richiamando alla memoria la New York divisa tra i quartieri bianchi e i ghetti dei neri. L'obiettivo è scongiurare la trasformazione delle città padane in banlieu affollate di insegne 'etniche' — un calderone in cui rietrano kebaberie, centri massaggi, parrucchieri cinesi, phone center, vetrine di chincaglierie. […] L'obiettivo della Lega è di affidare ai Comuni la programmazione di commercio e artigianato con regole più severe. La proposta

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[99] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 131–133–136.
[100] For more information about the *progetto Harlem* see: Andrea Montanari, 'Progetto Harlem in Regione; giro di vite sui negozi etnici', *La Repubblica*, 31 January 2012 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2012/01/31/progetto-harlem-in-regione-giro-di-vite.html> [accessed 24 October 2013]; Sorbi.

però va perfezionata […]. Così com'è scritta, rischia di impallinare, oltre alla piadina col kebab, anche il panino con la bologna.[101]

This article from *Il Giorno* groups under the same label of *negozi etnici* commercial enterprises as kebab shops, hairdressers, massage salons and phone centres; despite the fact that all these places to a lesser or greater extent may recreate *home* feelings, what this chapter has demonstrated is how the phone centre represents a unique home space. Thanks to all the services the phone centre provides, migrants feel 'almost home', to reference again Sara Ahmed.[102] More than the neighbourhood and more than Termini, the phone centre manages to transport its users to a *somewhere* that looks and feels exactly like home, but it is not.

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[101] Luca Zorloni, 'La Lega contro i negozi etnici: "Dove aprirli lo diciamo noi"', *Il Giorno*, 17 March 2011 <http://www.ilgiorno.it/sesto/cronaca/2011/03/17/475203-lega_contro_negozi_etnici.shtml> [accessed 23 October 2013].
[102] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 331.

Chapter Four

'Too many homes and hence no Home';[1] a Home to Leave, to Inhabit, to Return

The first part of this thesis has investigated public spaces and how these are charged with home values because, there, characters are able to experience familiar feelings. This is mainly due to the presence of specific elements that activate processes of remembering as well as of sharing, which help producing comfortable and warm environments where characters could feel at home. From this chapter onward I will look at individual characters in selected novels and at the way they personally inhabit specific places. According to Douglas 'having a shelter is not having a home, nor is having a house, nor is home the same as household'.[2] This was clearly shown in the analysis of the housing situation examined in the first chapter. To deal with this situation, migrants have started spending their time in places such as train stations and phone centres, finding in them a welcoming atmosphere. In this chapter I will look at the house, meaning by this word, the place in which characters have found a shelter. I will analyse these places starting from the premise that – at least in an initial moment – they fail to embody any *home value*. I will therefore investigate the processes of 'making home'[3] actualized by migrants in Italy, according to the situations described by primary texts; I will also examine how this home-making process is often influenced by an ideal, and unfortunately usually unfulfilled, intention of return. Initially, I will analyse how the literary texts taken into consideration, particularly *Divorzio all'islamica*, face the housing issue; I will then address Pap Khouma's description of the car as a home space in *Io, venditore di elefanti*.[4] I will also investigate how specific objects and mementoes are used in order to retrieve and preserve home feelings in Italy; in this analysis I will draw on *La mia casa è dove sono*, focusing particularly on Igiaba Scego's mother. In relation to the objects taken to Italy by migrants, and their metaphorical value, I will consider the suitcase as a transnational trope. Finally,

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[1] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 330.
[2] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.
[3] Violetta Parutis, '"Home" for Now or "Home" for Good?: East European Migrants' Experiences of Accommodation in London', *Home Cultures*, 8 (2011), 265–96 (p. 266).
[4] Pap Khouma, *Io, venditore di elefanti. Una vita per forza tra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* (Milan: Garzanti, 1990).

I will look at the former Somali Embassy in Rome which has been literally transformed into a Somali outpost in Italy.

4.1 An Indispensable Premise

When attempting to offer a clear definition of what *home* means, David Morley consults the Oxford English Dictionary which 'defines home as "a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, on which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction"'.[5] According to this definition when a house provides a refuge and a place to rest, it can be considered *home*. However, as it is clear from the definition itself, this is not enough, one must 'properly belong' in order to feel at home. The meaning of the word *home* is indeed almost impossible to define in an exact and unambiguous way, as it always needs to be redefined and renegotiated;[6] as summarised by Blunt and Dowling:

> What does home mean to you? Where, when and why do you feel at home? [...] Some may speak of the physical structure of their house or dwelling; others may refer to the relationships or connections over space and time. You might have positive or negative feelings about home, or a mixture of the two. Your sense of home might be closely shaped by your memories of childhood, alongside your present experiences and your dreams for the future.[7]

The idea of *home* is even more complicated for those who, as Blunt and Dowling affirm, 'leave home for primarily economic reasons, (for) those who are forced to do so because of war, persecution or dispossession',[8] including in this group, exiles, refugees and asylum seekers. In line with this, when leaving home, migrants (and by *migrants* I mean all the categories listed by Blunt and Dowling) are forced to renegotiate their

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[5] Morley, p. 16.

[6] Ahmed, 'Home and Away'; Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*; *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments*, ed. by David N. Benjamin and David Stea, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995); Alison Blunt and Robyn M. Dowling, *Home*, Key Ideas in Geography (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home'; bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990); Massey, *A Place Called Home*; Morley, *Home Territories*. Benchouiha, 'Dove È La Mia Casa' and 'Hybrid Identities? Immigrant Women's Writing in Italy', *Italian Studies*, 61 (2006), 251–62; Brioni; Burns, *Migrant*; Ponzanesi, 'Imaginary Cities' and *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture*.

[7] Blunt and Dowling, p. 1.

[8] Blunt and Dowling, p. 197.

understanding of the concept of home. The necessity of abandoning one's home leads to the production of a multiplicity of home spaces, as pointed out by Sara Ahmed:

> the narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves through the carving out of inhabitable space. […] In such a narrative journey, then, the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance – I am here – but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home. In such a space, the subject has a destination, an itinerary, indeed a future, but in having such a destination, has not yet arrived.[9]

Thus, in relation to migrants, home and house hardly coincide, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, where the analysis of train stations and phone centres has established that migrants have assigned to these places home values. Migrants' way of living in the destination country, in this case in Italy, is influenced primarily by the difficulties faced when looking for accommodation; additionally, as Ahmed has underlined, it is often the plan of going back home which prevents migrants from feeling at home in Italy.

In some cases however, it is also the Italian Government which impedes this, by forcing them to return home or by imprisoning them in the generally called *centri di accoglienza*. As a matter of fact, before moving forward with the analysis of the space of the house as a failed home space I believe it is necessary to look at the question of the CIE, CDA and CARA; despite the fact that these centres are not mentioned in the novels selected, the policy of these places is a topical issue in Italy, indispensable for an exhaustive and fair reading of the Italian contemporary society and the issue of the home. For many migrants these centres are the first and probably the last accommodation they could experience in Italy. According to the webpage of the *Ministero dell'Interno*, in Italy there are three different kinds of *Centri dell'Immigrazione*: *Centri di Accoglienza* (CDA), *Centri Accoglienza Richiedenti Asilo* (CARA) and the *Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione* (CIE). Officially, these structures are presented as structures devised to accommodate and assist irregular migrants, but, as the *Centro Studi sull'Immigrazione* (CESTIM) confirms, they are detention centres, with licence to prevent and limit migrants' freedom on the basis of their illegal presence on Italian soil, when lacking a

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[9] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', pp. 330–31.

residence permit.[10] The CIEs, in particular, are centres from which irregular migrants are repatriated after a detention time that could last up to 18 months, according to the last Decree Law.[11] Several reports have directed attention to the inhumane conditions of these centres as, for instance, the work of the journalist Fabrizio Gatti who pretended to be a *clandestino* just arrived in Lampedusa:

> Un nome inventato e un tuffo in mare. Non serve altro per essere rinchiusi nel centro per immigrati di Lampedusa. Basta fingersi clandestino e in poco tempo ci si ritrova nella gabbia dove ogni anno migliaia di persone finiscono il loro viaggio e dove nessun osservatore o giornalista può entrare. […] Comincia e finisce così il diario di otto giorni da prigioniero nell'inferno di Lampedusa. Il prezzo da pagare per assistere in prima fila a umiliazioni, abusi, violenze e a tutto quanto l'Italia ha sempre nascosto alle ispezioni del Parlamento europeo e delle Nazioni Unite. Ma è anche l'opportunità per vivere l'immane solitudine di uomini, donne e bambini che, nella fatica di migliorare la propria vita, hanno avuto contro il deserto, i trafficanti, le tempeste e adesso che sono sbarcati hanno contro la legge che dovrebbero rispettare.[12]

Gatti's report, which provides a detailed description of Lampedusa's facilities, has been supported by the incessant and valuable denunciation work of the freelance journalist Gabriele Del Grande and his webpage *Fortress Europe* which dedicates two entire sections to the updates about the CIEs and the CARAs.[13] Generally speaking, migrants who arrive in Italy through the so called *sbarchi*, are distributed between these two types

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[10] The CESTIM defines these centres *centri di detenzione*. The official web page of the *Centro Studi Immigrazion* provides a clear framework of the laws and regulations related to illegal migrants both in Italy and in Europe: 'Centri di detenzione per stranieri' <http://www.cestim.it/25centri-detenzione.htm> [accessed 7 February 2015]. For further information about the purposes of each structure please refer to the Italian Government webpage: 'Centri per l'immigrazione' <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/immigrazione-e-asilo/politiche-migratorie/centri-limmigrazione> [accessed 7 February 2015].

[11] The laws related to the *Centri per l'immigrazione*, can be consulted on the Parliament webpage: 'Disposizioni in materia di sicurezza pubblica' <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/09094l.htm> [accessed 7 February 2015]. For later modifications see: 'Legge 2 agosto 2011, n. 129' <http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2011;129> [accessed 7 February 2015].

[12] Fabrizio Gatti, 'Io clandestino a Lampedusa', *L'Espresso*, 7 October 2005 <http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2005/10/07/news/io-clandestino-a-lampedusa-1.594> [accessed 9 February 2015].

[13] The blog *Fortress Europe* provides constant information about CARAs: 'CARA' *Fortress Europe* <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/cara_17.html> [accessed 7 February 2015]; an interesting feature is the project *La vita che non CIE*, which is directed by Alexandra D'Onofrio and is advertised on Del Grande's blog, from which it is possible to watch three clips: 'CIE' *Fortress Europe* <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/speciale-cie.html> [accessed 7 February 2015].

of centres: those who ask for the status of political refugee will be sent to the CARAs; the others will be escorted to the CIEs. Del Grande offers a complete view of both these facilities; from his blog it is evident how critical the problem of the *Centri dell'Immigrazione* is in Italy. The way the Italian Government defines these structures as *centri d'accoglienza* is grotesquely ironic; words such as *accoglienza* and *ospitare* are particularly striking, as Faso points out about the meaning of the word *ospite*: 'paradossalmente, a richiamare la condizione dell'ospite è chi nega la dignità dell'immigrato – che non è certo un ospite: è venuto qui per lavorare, non è stato invitato né accolto'.[14] The idea of considering the country of destination as host country and migrants as guests, and more specifically as unwanted guests,[15] is a common metaphor which, as also pointed out in Chapter 1, 'has forgotten that it is a metaphor'.[16] Italian policies of immigration, often violating human rights, corroborate Rosello's argument:

> our postcolonial times are scripting a new version of cynicism: rich Western states are purely and simply declaring that they can no longer afford to be hosts, that hospitality is a luxury beyond their means. Hospitable and powerful hosts that constantly threatened to swallow their guests have turned into supposedly weakened hosts that can no longer welcome the 'huddled masses' gathering on our 'uncertain shores'.[17]

The CIEs, the CARAs and the CDAs thus are not devised to welcome migrants, as the name would suggest, but to hold them in limbo, waiting for their repatriation. These facilities are an attempt to control, limit and hide their presence; as Paul Gilroy explains: 'anxiety about the criminal predisposition and activities of the immigrant population inspired demands for the introduction of immigration controls'.[18] The myth of returning home which has been described by the universal dream shared by the majority of the

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[14] Faso, *Lessico*, p. 102.

[15] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 45.

[16] Rosello, p. 3.

[17] Rosello, p. 32. *La Repubblica* has published an article which gives a clear idea of the Italian situation as it is perceived in other European countries, in this case, in Great Britain: Enrico Franceschini, 'Londra, la Corte Suprema: "Trattamenti inumani, non rimandate quei profughi in Italia"', *La Repubblica*, 21 February 2014 <http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/profughi/2014/02/21/news/profughi_londra_italia-79215827/> [accessed 7 March 2014].

[18] Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 78.

characters in the texts considered, often becomes in real life a nightmare for migrants who *are found guilty* of being in Italy.

4.2 A Place to Inhabit, a Home to Return

In Chapter 1, the analysis of the housing issue demonstrated how the search for a house is a difficult process for migrants. In addition to the discriminatory criteria applied by both private landlords and estate agencies, when migrants manage to find an accommodation, this is frequently provisional and in poor condition.[19] The reasons behind this issue are clearly explained by Khouma in his *Io venditore di elefanti*:

> La casa è il sogno irrealizzabile del senegalese clandestino e di qualsiasi clandestino di ogni parte del mondo, che non ha il permesso di soggiorno e, in aggiunta, si presenta al locatore con la pelle tendente al nero, i capelli sempre troppo lisci o troppo crespi, il portafoglio vuoto (semivuoto quando va bene).[20]

With this brief affirmation, Khouma underlines three important obstacles that a migrant has to face when looking for a place to live: insufficient economic resources, the physical appearance and, often, the lack of residence permit. This problem is underlined by Issa in *Divorzio all'islamica*: as soon as he moves into the flat he realizes that there are several hierarchies which are based on different criteria; one of these criteria is indeed, owning a residence permit:

> Quindi abbiamo una terza gerarchia, questa però imposta dall'esterno. […] Quindi siamo divisi in clandestini da una parte e regolari dall'altra. I primi vivono nel panico, sono terrorizzati all'idea di essere arrestati, rinchiusi in qualche lager ed espulsi.[21] […] Gli immigrati regolari, invece, usufruiscono di uno sconto di cinquanta euro sull'affitto (l'ha stabilito la finanziaria di Teresa alias Vacanza).[22]

Christian/Issa's perspective is a peculiar one as he is an Italian spy for the secret services, who, as seen in Chapter 3, infiltrated the Islamic community in viale Marconi, to gather information about a potential criminal cell linked to Al-Qaeda. Christian/Issa

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[19] Cristaldi, *Multiethnic*; Lombardi-Diop, *Roma Residence*.
[20] Khouma, p. 60.
[21] In the light of what has been said about the *Centri dell'immigrazione* the fact that Lakhous defines them *lager* is indicative of the notoriety of such places.
[22] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 69.

finds himself in an in-between situation, in which, despite living as a migrant and sharing a flat with eleven male migrants, he can easily return to his original identity and to the haven of his real life, as he does every time he takes a shower in Giuda's apartment, for example, or when he secretly calls his girlfriend in Sicily. This link prevents Christian from truly becoming Issa and, at the same time, living this situation as an external, as a privileged migrant, threatens his cover to the point that he has to constantly remind himself to stop thinking as an Italian: 'Continuo a pensare con la mia testa da italiano, non riesco a mettermi nei panni degli immigrati extracomunitari'.[23] On the other hand, this helps Christian, and through his eyes the reader, to notice aspects of the phenomenon of immigration which would otherwise, be taken for granted, if not completely ignored. One of the first problems he experiences in this new life, for example, is a difficulty in sleeping: 'Ho grossi problemi di adattamento, la notte non riesco a dormire per più di due ore di fila'.[24] This detail reminds the reader of Khouma's story in which the impossibility to sleep was provoked by the constant fear of the *Carabinieri*:

> Quando suona il campanello mi balza sempre il cuore in petto. Quasi non dormo più nell'attesa dei carabinieri: domani toccherà a me. Ancora oggi, a distanza di tanti anni, uno squillo o un rumore di passi mi spaventano. Il mio sonno è rimasto leggero.[25]

The deprivation of rest is for a non-migrant like Christian, generated by the difficult condition in which he is forced to live. For Khouma this problem is linked to the perennial situation of instability produced by the lack of residence permit. Even when the situation is not as bad as for Khouma, the insomnia faced by Issa is not always considered as important by other migrants, as the dialogue between him and one of his new flatmates Omar, points out:

> Attualmente il mio futuro coinquilino lavora al mercato, gestisce un banco di verdura con altri due connazionali. Non capisco perché accetti di vivere in un dormitorio anziché affittare almeno una stanza singola, per avere un minimo di privacy. 'Amico, il posto letto mi aiuta a risparmiare soldi'. 'Riesci a vivere con undici persone?'.

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[23] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 49. Christian/Issa's posing is different from Ahmed/Amedeo's act of passing which will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.
[24] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 64.
[25] Khouma, pp. 41–42.

'Certo. Ho vissuto anche con venti persone sotto lo stesso tetto!'. 'Come fai a riposarti?'. 'Il riposo? Voglio riposarmi, però non adesso e non qui'. 'Quando e dove?'. 'Quando tornerò in Bangladesh e mi sposerò'.[26]

Christian/Issa's and Omar's priorities have a different order which obviously depends on the projects they have planned for their future. As a matter of fact, this dialogue highlights a fundamental element: the constant idea of returning home.[27] The return intention is crucial in understanding the failure of investing the house with the role of home. In this relation, Parutis identifies two different categories of migrants, basing this differentiation on their intention to remain in the host country or to return home; she defines the former group as 'settled' migrants, and the latter as 'recent' migrants:

The difference between these two groups is usually related to their return intentions. While recent arrivals still tend to be in the process of comparing advantages and disadvantages of life in the immigration country versus their home country, settled migrants have already decided that they will live their lives in the host country. This decision is crucial in shaping their quality of life and accommodation choices.[28]

Belonging to one group or to the other is not related to the amount of time migrants have spent in Italy, but instead to their attitudes towards the destination country.[29] In this regard *Divorzio all'islamica* provides a further case. If Omar is an example of planned migration with his own 'progetto migratorio',[30] which envisages a moment in the future for the return home, the character of Safia can be said to belong to the 'settled' group. Although being remarkably connected to her family in Egypt – as seen in the previous chapter, she calls her relatives every week - she does not contemplate the possibility of a future in Egypt, as Burns points out:

Her vision of a home of the future is constructed around an image of herself as a successful businesswoman in Italy, and later, around the possibility of a future in Italy with Issa. […] Her mode of constructing a home in Italy is not by reproducing

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[26] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 48–49.

[27] In his contribution to the volume *Certi confini*, Comberiati points out how this theme is a constant presence, he indeed defines it as a *tema trasversale*: 'Anche il tema del ritorno è diffuso, un ritorno di cui viene asserita l'impossibilità […] o che provoca delusione'. Comberiati, 'La letteratura', p. 175.

[28] Parutis, p. 266.

[29] Parutis, p. 266.

[30] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 47.

the culture, the environment, and the practices of home, but rather by producing in her imaginary an entirely new social and physical location for herself, as a hair stylist to the stars in Rome.[31]

Safia has arrived in Italy due to her marriage with Said, an Egyptian architect who was already living in Italy, working as *pizzaiolo* and known as Felice. As soon as she arrives, she tries to become involved in the Italian society, as the change of her name from Safia to Sofia demonstrates.[32] What has affected Safia's approach to her new life in Rome is the project she devised even before moving to Italy:

> In fondo non ero felice del matrimonio in sé, ma dell'idea di venire in Italia: la Mecca della moda. Era un segno del maktùb. Mi vedevo già a gestire un salone di parrucchiera di lusso o a lavorare con stilisti famosi come Valentino, Versace, Armani, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana… Perché no? Ero certa del mio successo in Italia.[33]

Safia's migration is neither a plan like it was for Omar, nor a forced choice as it is for refugees. Since she arrived she has been living in a flat with her husband and their daughter, she has created connections with her neighbours, and she is living the life of her neighbourhood and of Italy at its fullest; as her attitude to the use of the TV shows:

> Quando uno vive in un paese deve dare la precedenza alle notizie locali. Io ad esempio trovo interessantissimo il TgR Lazio su Rai Tre perché mi dà informazioni molto utili su Roma e dintorni. Voglio sapere come stanno le cose qui a Roma, non a Kabul o a Baghdad![34]

Safia, therefore, belongs to the category of the 'settled' and, like her, Pap Khouma as remarked in his *Io, venditore di elefanti*. The latter, however, has a completely different story and his will to stay in the new country is not supported either by the financial situation or the owning of the residence permit which, as it is the case for Safia, would allow him to live in a safe and stable dwelling. In *Io, venditore di elefanti*, Khouma tells his migration journey through Europe to the journalist Oreste Pivetta. His experience of

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[31] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 119.
[32] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 120.
[33] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 38.
[34] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 80.

Italy and partly of France, as a *clandestino*, is a desperate one during which Khouma, like many of his compatriots, is forced to live in critical conditions. An element which comes to be representative of his life in those difficult years is the car which, as Francesca Messmer has underlined, represents for Khouma and his friends a substitute home, a religious place and a place for entertainment.[35]

Due to financial shortage and the condition of *clandestinità*, Khouma and his friends are not able to find a decent house. In order to avoid sleeping in the car, they have to ask for hospitality from other Senegalese migrants whose situation is no better:

> Non so quante case sono andato a vedere in quelle settimane tra ottobre e novembre. Ma non c'era mai posto per noi. Gli amici senegalesi ci risparmiavano la sofferenza del freddo e dell'auto per un paio di giorni. Alla fine se ne uscivano con il solito: 'Ragazzi, ve ne dovete andare'. Noi ce ne andavamo. Vedevamo in che condizioni erano costretti a vivere.[36]

Khouma's car performs the role of home as articulated by the dictionary's definition that is a refuge or a place to rest.[37] Metaphorically speaking, the process of acquisition of the car is as difficult as the procedure migrants have to undertake in order to find a house. As mentioned before, if migrants want to rent a house, in addition to financial resources, they must own a residence permit; in the same way, to buy a car, migrants need to show proof of residence in the country in which they are buying the vehicle. In *Io, venditore di elefanti*, the group of friends is in France and after the purchase of a second-hand car they do not manage to acquire ownership of it. Khouma decides then to go back to Italy with other migrants and their car. It is this second car that becomes crucial for the author's life:

> Era una bella macchina rossa targata Parigi, la nostra macchina rossa che per tanti mesi ci sarà compagna di viaggio, oggetto di un'infinità di guasti, di commerci e di perquisizioni. Ci farà conoscere un'infinità di meccanici. Ma per noi una casa, una

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[35] Francesca Messmer, 'Stabile Instabilità: La questione dell'alloggio nella letteratura di immigrazione di Khouma e Scego', *el-ghibli*, 6 (2009)
<http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php%3Fid=1&issue=06_24&section=6&index_pos=3.html>
[accessed 23 February 2013].
[36] Khouma, p. 66.
[37] OED in Morley, p. 16.

famiglia e tutte quelle cose che un senegalese immigrato può amare in una macchina rossa targata Parigi.[38]

As evident from this quotation and from the development of the narration, the car embodies values which are different from those usually assigned to a dwelling: the car becomes a migrant, as Khouma and his companions: a 'compagna di viaggio'. After this passage, the personification of the car becomes habitual:

La macchina *respira* […] La nostra *generosa* Peugeot rossa targata Parigi! Osano trattarla male! Non lo sopportiamo. […] La Peugeot rossa *soffre* moltissimo, per il freddo, l'umidità e i troppi anni che si porta addosso. […] La Peugeot *cambia* ancora senso di marcia.[39]

Unlike a traditional house, the car is a symbol of movement and, consequently, of instability;[40] in this case, however, the car is for the author a reference point, always present, despite the several journeys he is forced to undertake. In France or in the different Italian cities he passes through, the car is always with him, to the point that the red Peugeot starts being considered a living entity. The several repetitions of 'targata Parigi' underlines that, as the owners, the car is a foreigner in Italy, therefore they share also this condition of displacement. At the same time, the foreign number plate helps the group of migrants to avoid troubles with the police on various occasions:

'Ma che ci fate qui?'. 'Siamo studenti'. 'Fuori i documenti'. 'Siamo di Parigi, come vedete dalla macchina. E stiamo tornando a Parigi. Siamo venuti a Bologna per salutare alcuni amici'. Bologna poteva diventare Pesaro oppure Perugia oppure Padova, sempre una sede universitaria comunque, perché siamo studenti, sempre diretti a Parigi. Il trucco spesso funziona.[41]

The red Peugeot plays an active role in the group dynamics; it is the car's constant existence in Khouma's and his friends' lives that makes it so central; unlike anything else in their lives, they can rely on it. Despite Khouma's will to settle down, the car, as briefly mentioned before, still represents movement, which is, as seen in Chapter 2, part of

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[38] Khouma, p. 57.
[39] Khouma, pp. 57–71–73–81. My emphasis.
[40] Messmer.
[41] Khouma, p. 62.

migrants' existence in the destination country. Like Omar in *Divorzio all'islamica*, for several migrants the permanence in the new destination is perceived as temporary and intended to end with the final return *home*. Living in a constant condition of waiting implies, for migrants, the attempt to reconstruct in the new dwelling feelings of the lost *home*;[42] it also implies the need to redefine the meaning of the word *home*.[43] In the following part I will investigate how this reconstruction is portrayed in the texts I am considering.

4.3 Mementoes and Pictures: a Way Back Home

Burns, commenting on De Certeau's argument about migrants and their 'representation of everything that happens to lack',[44] affirms:

> Representation, in this view, is the mode of reconstructing or retrieving home: in this sense, the invention of home in the direct or indirect narrative of migration serves to compensate a specific and painful lack; it is the antidote to nostalgia, construed literally as the 'pain of loss'.[45]

'The antidote to nostalgia' therefore is the attempt to reconstruct one's own home in the often perpetual wait to return. In *Madre Piccola* for example, one of the protagonists, Barni, describes her house:

> La mia casa? La mia casa è un porto di mare. Pochi mobili essenziali, non ho mai avuto tanti soldi né il desiderio di spenderli in arredamento. In fondo – cosa occorre in una casa? Un tavolo, qualche sedia, un armadio, un divano, un letto e un frigorifero, lavatrice, televisione, stereo – cose che si possono condividere e sostituire con facilità. Quello che faccio è ridurre al minimo indispensabile. E poi, noi abbiamo questa abitudine. […] Fotografie antiche, gioielli, boccette di profumo ricamate d'oro, scialli fiorati, sottovesti dai raffinati merletti, sciarpe con ghirigori vellutati, video del proprio matrimonio, l'unica copia che ho della mia musica

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[42] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 102.
[43] Brioni, p. 25.
[44] De Certeau in Burns, *Migrant*, p. 102.
[45] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 102.

preferita, tutto circola vorticosamente, tanto che, alla fine, nessuno ricorda più chi ha che cosa.[46]

The objects that Barni possesses belong to her Somali past and, although she does not mention any intention to return, the sentence 'cose che si possono condividere e sostituire con facilità' conveys an idea of instability and uncertainty in the reader who is led to think that she will be moving again. The items listed in the second part of the quotation, which do not specifically belong to Barni, but to a general 'noi' ('E poi, noi abbiamo questa abitudine') which, in my opinion, stands for female migrants, and even more specifically, for female Somali migrants, are objects which have been probably brought directly from Somalia. These are the objects of nostalgia ('Gli oggetti della nostalgia costano cari'), evoking Burns' statement, which not only help migrants never to forget their past, but are also involved in a process of creation of the image of the real home, the one they have been forced to leave behind, and also the one they plan to reach again one day.

In a more detailed manner, but in line with Barni's description, Scego, in *La mia casa è dove sono*, describes the several attempts carried out by her parents, and more concretely by her father, in the pursuit of the return to Somalia:

> Papà non se la sentiva più di stare lontano dalla sua terra. Si imbarcò su un aereo della Somali Airlines e disse a mia madre: 'Questa è la volta che ce la facciamo a tornare. Fammi tanti in bocca al lupo. Vado a preparare tutto'. […] Il momento stava per arrivare, lo desideravamo tutti. Papà del resto era partito per preparare il nostro ritorno.[47]

For the Scego family, the prospect of returning is important and, apparently, always close to its realisation. They live in provisional accommodation, often small rooms in guest houses in the outskirts of Rome, receiving care packages from the local Caritas:

> Nella pensione in cui vivevamo lo spazio era stretto e si facevano continue economie. […] Vivevamo in una pensione alla Balduina, una zona conservatrice della città di Roma. […] I primi anni alloggiavamo sempre nelle camere di qualche pensione scalcinata. Erano stanze anonime, spoglie e spesso buie. […] La Caritas diocesana

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[46] Ali Farah, p. 26.
[47] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 116–117.

aiutava i più bisognosi con beni di prima necessità. Io mi vergognavo da morire a chiedere la carità. Pensavo 'Oh mamma, come siamo ridotti'.[48]

However, despite the perpetual, and sometimes obsessive, thought of returning to Somalia, Igiaba Scego's mother tries to make their temporary shelters welcoming and homely with objects and mementoes which remind them of their Somali roots:

> Mia mamma cercava di ravvivarle con qualche quadro e qualche foto. Ha sempre avuto il gusto dell'arredamento e del colore. Al centro c'erano i nostri lari e penati, gli spiriti protettori, che avevano il volto di zio Osman e dei nonni. Immancabile il quadro della sacra Mecca e di una donna somala che ci sorrideva scuotendo le lunghe trecce da bambina. In qualche angolo c'erano anche rinoceronti e dromedari, che mia madre spesso accarezzava con tenerezza. Con il tempo, le pensioni si sono trasformate in appartamenti, ma erano sempre molto scalcinati e dall'aria perennemente provvisoria.[49]

Two elements, in particular, are noteworthy in this passage: the objects that Scego's mother took with her during her relocations and the transition from small bedrooms into flats. This latter element demonstrates how with the passage of time and the increasing awareness of the impossibility to return, the Scegos are pushed to move to bigger and more comfortable dwellings which despite conveying an idea of permanence, continued to convey an atmosphere of transience, as Igiaba Scego implies when describing them as 'dall'aria perennemente provvisoria'. The author, however, as anticipated in Chapter 2, does not share this wish with her parents, at least not to the same extent; she was born in Italy and she has embraced the desire of 'going back' through the expectations transmitted to her by her parents and, more concretely, by the strategic presence of pictures, paintings and objects which remind all members of the family, and particularly Igiaba, of their roots and their homeland. As mentioned in the previous quotation from *La mia casa è dove sono*, Scego's mother used to hang pictures and paintings with African themes on the wall, and to display specific objects in the attempt to transform those shelters into homes. These items share a parallel story to the one of their possessor; they have been chosen among several other objects and selected to undertake the migration journey. As does the

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[48] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 46–75–114–119.
[49] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 114.

author's mother, at the moment of departure, migrants choose what they have to carry with them and often the choice is not linked to what could really be useful, but to other important values:

> Even under these conditions of immediate flight or departure, people do, if they can, seek minimal reminders of who they are and where they come from. Alongside the items to sell […] are sometimes the compressed family photos, letters and personal effects of little or no utilitarian or market value.[50]

After being chosen, these objects become part of migrants' lives and they will *follow* their possessors in their movements turning into stable reference points. As Jean-Sébastien Marcoux affirms:

> In this respect, tenants can probably be said to inhabit their belongings as much as their place. In fact, objects are at the heart of the problematization of the experience of mobility because while these possessions move in relation to a place, they may represent stability in relation to the people. This is probably why we can often hear people saying that things 'accompany' them in their move.[51]

The animal figurines previously listed by Igiaba Scego clearly represent a source of stability in her mother's life, being one of the few constant presences in the various shelters the family has inhabited. Additionally, and more significantly, these objects carry the family's memory and function as constant reminders of the migrants' past and roots; moreover, they embody the home migrants will return to one day. The presence of these objects in Scegos' dwellings acts as a bridge on a temporal level, they are *recollection-objects* as Marks defines them:

> an irreducibly material object that encodes collective memory. They can in addition be variously considered fetishes, fossils, and transnational objects. What is important

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[50] D. J. Parkin, 'Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement', *Journal of Material Culture*, 4 (1999), 303–20 (p. 313). Interestingly, David Morley points out as a recurrent object brought by migrants in their moves is the key of the house they left; this key: 'is taken on the exile's journey and comes to function as a synecdoche for the unreachable lost home, and to act as a focus for memories of the exile's past life'. Morley, p. 44.

[51] Jean-Sébastien Marcoux, 'The Refurbishment of Memory', in *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), pp. 69–86 (p. 71).

about all these object-images is that they condense time within themselves, and that in excavating them we expand outward in time.[52]

Objects therefore, constitute a temporal bridge between past and present, but also, in my opinion, towards the future return home. They exist now, in a shabby room of a small hotel or flat, but they represent a past to which Scego's family and in particular her mother, need to stay attached; they also display the future, symbolising on a metaphorical level what Guha defines more generally as migrant's time:

> Since the now is the mode in which everydayness articulates mostly and primarily, it serves as the knot that ties together the other strands of a community's temporal bonding. The past is gathered into this knot and the future projected from there as well. The now is, therefore, the base from which all the distanciating strategies are deployed against the alien as the one who stands outside the community's time – its past of glory and misery, its future pregnant with possibilities and risks, but above all its present charged with the concern of an authentic belonging.[53]

Alongside with this temporal purpose, these knick-knacks also develop the same function on a spatial level, as they exist in Rome, but they represent another place, another country; for Igiaba Scego's mother they are the most immediate connection to Somalia. In the previous quotation, Scego briefly mentions her mother sweetly caressing the small figurines: 'In qualche angolo c'erano anche rinoceronti e dromedari, che mia madre spesso accarezzava con tenerezza'.[54] This intimate, possessive and close relation with the objects is manifested by her need to caress them, frequently, as magnets that tempt her to travel back home; even if this is only a brief sensation it has the power to recall important feelings.[55] The use of the verb *accarezzare* instead of the more direct *toccare* is indicative, as it conveys an emotional attachment to these items which seem to become alive under her caresses. The sentimental charge of this rapid movement is further underlined by the detail *con tenerezza*. This is no more the simple possession of an object, but it is a way of

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[52] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 77.
[53] Guha, p. 157.
[54] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 114.
[55] Marks, *The Skin*, p. 147.

fully experiencing it, in a deeper and reciprocal relation. Marks, analysing transnational films, argues:

> The ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image, to lose her sense of proportion. When vision is like touch, the object's touch back may be like a caress, though it may also be violent […]. Haptic visuality implies a tension between viewer and image, then, because this violent potential is always there. Haptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing.[56]

This is also the relation between the author's mother and her objects, in which the woman, through her touch, receives back a whole set of sensations. More specifically, the mother's relation with the object appears to be a extremely tender one, disclosing a profound sense of mutual identification between her and her belongings; they share the same situation of displacement, they both feel out of place: Scego's mother as a Somali nomad in Rome and the rhino and the dromedary as African animals in Italy. This comparison is parallel to the one drawn by Igiaba Scego herself in the same book, between her mother and the small elephant at the base of the obelisk sculpted by Bernini in Piazza Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome:

> L'elefantino del Bernini di piazza della Minerva è uno degli amici migliori che ho nella città di Roma. Per me quell'elefantino è somalo. Ha lo stesso sguardo degli esuli. […] Nel tempo ho scoperto che quell'elefantino ha lo stesso sguardo della mia mamma. Non può tornare, non può dissetare la sua angoscia. L'esule è una creatura a metà. Le radici sono state strappate, la vita è stata mutilata, la speranza è stata sventrata, il principio è stato separato, l'identità è stata spogliata.[57]

The elephant in the Roman square is as displaced as Scego's mother and her possessions, which have now become part of her existence; they accompany her, using Marcoux's

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[56] Marks, *The Skin*, pp. 184–185. Marks defines 'haptic visuality' as 'the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions […]. In haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. […] Thus the haptic image connects directly to sense perception, while by-passing the sensory-motort schema' (Marks, *The Skin*, pp. 162-163). Haptic visuality is therefore crucial in understanding Scego's mother's relationship with the objects; it is even more relevant in her relation with the paintings and the pictures where touching is impossible and the gaze becomes the only tool she has to connect with those people and places.
[57] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 55.

terminology. Those animals are memory containers, or as Marks defines them, transnational objects: 'Personal objects remember and attest to events that people have forgotten';[58] in performing this task they become an indispensable cog in the process of renegotiating migrants' identity in the destination country. Thus, items taken to the new country by migrants are also relevant in shaping their identity, as argued by Parkin:

> Thus, the personal mementoes taken by persons in flight may indeed re-articulate socio-cultural identity if and when suitable conditions of resettlements allow for the retelling of the stories that they contain. […] When people flee from the threat of death and total dispossession, the things and stories they carry with them may be all that remains of their distinctive personhood to provide for future continuity.[59]

These objects carry stories with them, and in *La mia casa è dove sono*, important narrations are also told by the paintings and the pictures. The central presence of the painting of Mecca for example is, in a country as Catholic as Italy, a clear attempt to cling to their Islamic religious background. The necessity of such a reminder lies in the fear of losing their identity, which is threatened by the external environment where such features are not shared by the community. The arrival in the new country has implied for Igiaba Scego's family, the loss of the hegemony which used to preserve their communal identity:

> It is, in the first place, the question of an individual's loss of his communal identity and his struggle to find another. The conditions in which that first identity was formed are no longer available to him. Birth and kinship which gave his place in the first community the semblance of so complete, a naturalness as to hide its man-made character, are now of little help to him as an alien set apart by ethnicity and culture.[60]

In this regard, in Scego's text, a pivotal role is played by the pictures of her uncle and of her grandparents, who are perceived as always vigilant to protect the entire household: 'Al centro c'erano i nostri lari e penati, gli spiriti protettori, che avevano il volto di zio Osman e dei nonni'.[61] The author has never met them, but at the same time, through their constant presence in the numerous dwellings the family had inhabited, she feels that she

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[58] Marks, *The Skin*, p. 107.
[59] Parkin, p. 314.
[60] Guha, p. 156.
[61] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 114.

knows them very well; they are part of a past that she has never experienced; a past which, however, is powerfully tangible in her life:

> O forse li ho conosciuti entrambi? […] Ogni tanto sento nel mio orecchio sinistro gli echi delle conversazioni che abbiamo fatto insieme. Sento quelle nostre voci ridere e commuoversi. Sento tutte le risate, tutte le parole, tutti i sospiri. Probabilmente sono avvenute davvero quando ero piccola. Io davanti alla sua foto e a quella di nonna Auralla. Io che dicevo buongiorno e buonanotte, io che raccontavo i miei progressi a scuola o le difficoltà con i compagni che mi gridavano parole sgradevoli sul colore della mia pelle. Io che li ho sempre sentiti vivi, accanto a me. Perché di fatto lo erano.[62]

The last sentence, 'perché di fatto lo erano', certifies the relevance assumed by those pictures in the house dynamics. These three pictures belong to a time situated in the past, and to a place located elsewhere but, at the same time, they are present in Rome and in the contemporary life of the family. The dialogues between Igiaba Scego and the pictures are parallel to the tactile relationship between her mother and the objects: both are one-way oriented but, at the same time, they are experienced as reciprocal. Furthermore, in both cases, the necessity of a physical contact is unveiled; in the case of the figurines this need belongs to the mother and her personal relationship with them; in the case of the pictures, the author is imagining a corporeal contact with the people portrayed. The fact that in the first case the touch is real and in the second the touch is imagined, does not make the latter less necessary. 'Mio zio Osman, con la sua faccia allegra, la fronte spaziosa, la bocca imperiale, per me è vero. Ho la sensazione di averlo visto, baciato sulla guancia, abbracciato'.[63] Both touches are consequences of the same situation of rootlessness; the mother tries to cling to her origins through the African animal figurines she took with her; the author, on the other hand, recovers her roots through her relatives' photographs. The fact that she tells them what happens in her life is not a way of metaphorically going to Somalia (there is no return for Igiaba Scego as she has never been to Somalia at that point), it is a way of connecting to a past that she did not share with other members of the family. From this perspective the author's relation with the

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[62] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 89–90.
[63] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 89–90.

pictures is perfectly described by Roland Barthes in his investigation on the essence of photography:

> it was History which separated me from them. Is History not simply that time when we were not born? […] Thus the life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses in its particularity the very tension of History, its division. […] For once photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance, […]. Nor could I omit this from my reflection: I had discovered this photograph by moving back through Time. The Greeks entered into Death backward: what they had before them was their past. In the same way I worked back through a life, not my own, but the life of someone I love.[64]

Scego is looking back to the lives of her closest relatives, disclosing also her own past and the story of her own country. This is, in my opinion, one of the reasons why Scego's mother decides to hang these specific paintings and pictures; they are present as mementoes for those who can remember *History*, as Barthes would say. Moreover, they have an educational purpose for Scego, who did not live in that time and in that place. They play a similar role to the one played by Termini, and just as the station, these pictures narrate to Igiaba Scego her story.[65] This is often the case for second generation migrants, who have to negotiate their identity between *where they are now and where their families come from*. Pezzarossa, as anticipated in Chapter 2, analysing the literary work produced by second generation authors, identifies two poles in this process of identity creation: the home environment, more specifically the family, and the school, as representative of the outside world:

> Componenti esistenziali di questo mondo immaginario sono infatti le due polarità della famiglia e della scuola: la prima rappresenta la sintesi degli elementi della cultura di provenienza; e la scuola raffigurata come microcosmo della realtà esterna, in cui si concentrano le opportunità e gli ostacoli offerti dal nuovo paese, […]. Complessi si rivelano gli atteggiamenti verso il paese da cui provengono i genitori e il patrimonio culturale ereditato, e in cui spesso il migrante investe ingenti risorse per costruire edifici destinati a incorporare nella saldezza strutturale il mito del

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[64] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 64–65–70–71.
[65] Anderson, p. 204.

ritorno impossibile, esibendo la pretesa continuità di partecipazione ai valori d'origine.[66]

As affirmed by Pezzarossa, the relationship with the country of origin is, for second generation migrants, often complicated; in order to reconcile themselves with the distance from their roots, they rely on the reconstruction of those roots provided by their families. These pictures, therefore, are for Igiaba Scego a mirror to her Somali background and, consequently, they provide her with the information she needs in order to feel part of her Somali community. This also means, however, that in facing these pictures the author felt the need to question herself:

> Ero frutto di un incontro tra diversi, tra un sedentario di una città di mare e una nomade delle savane orientali. Ricordo che in quella minuscola stanza di pensione alla Balduina c'erano un sacco di cose, tutte misteriosissime. Io ero attratta soprattutto dalle tre foto attaccate alla parete centrale. […] Guardo ancora la foto di mio nonno. Il bianco della sua pelle mi ha posto questi interrogativi irrisolvibili. Il bianco di quella pelle metteva in crisi la costruzione che mi ero fatta della mia fiera identità africana.[67]

In Italy Igiaba Scego had to construct her 'Africanness', because, as mentioned before, that part of her identity was not shared by the community: 'Io, mio padre e soprattutto mia madre con il suo velo islamico eravamo considerati come extraterrestri'.[68] If outside her house she was viewed as an extra-terrestrial, the pictures of her relatives are always there to confirm that there is a place where she belongs. In this sense it is particularly interesting to notice, however, how Scego's Somali identity is questioned also by the picture of her grandfather. As said in the previous quotation, she is surprised by her grandfather's paleness which does not reflect her idea of 'identità africana', supposedly marked in particular by the skin colour. Neverthless, the presence of the pictures gives her the real dimension of her Somali identity as it is not only the portait of a compatriot but it is most importantly the portrait of a member of her family; the same family that is considered extra-terrestrial in Italy. In this way the desire to return shared by her parents becomes, at least partly, her own. This is, in my opinion, evidence that in choosing these

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[66] Pezzarossa, pp. 91–92.
[67] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 76–77.
[68] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 75.

pictures her mother was also trying to offer answers to her daughter's questions; Igiaba Scego perceived this choice as an act of love:

> Ci siamo conosciuti tramite quelle fotografie in bianco e nero. Io e loro legati da uno scatto, da un clic di una macchina fotografica di altri tempi. Fin da piccola i loro volti fissi nei miei occhi sono stati il più bell'atto d'amore possibile.[69]

Interestingly enough, also in this case, as she did with her mother and the small elephant, the author draws a connection between the pictures and the city of Rome and specifically, piazza di Porta Capena. This square has a particular meaning in the Italian postcolonial context, as it used to accommodate the obelisk of Axum, which was returned to Ethiopia in 2002, after half a century of controversy.[70] This is another story of return, in which the obelisk, unlike Igiaba Scego's family, managed to go back home leaving an emptiness in the Italian square, which is described by the author as guilty: 'Il vuoto è colpevole, il vuoto mi sembra carico di odio'.[71] This emptiness is compared to the void left in her life, by the physical absence of her grandfather and her uncle; emptiness, however, which is full of meaning:

> Nel mio piccolo, nella mia geografia personale, piazza di Porta Capena, è legata al viso di due uomini [...]. Il primo si chiamava Omar Scego, era mio nonno. Il secondo si chiamava Osman Omar Scego ed era mio zio. Di loro ho visto solo fotografie in bianco e nero. Stessa fronte ampia, stesso sguardo sicuro. La piazza con il suo vuoto, orfana della stele, mi ha sempre ricordato la loro assenza nella mia vita. Ma anche la loro presenza.[72]

This connection is not surprising if considered in the wider frame of the text from which this passage is taken. *La mia casa è dove sono* is a map resulting from a series of negotiations, between past and present, Rome and Mogadishu. What is relevant in this context is that the pictures brought to Italy by Igiaba Scego's mother to remind the family of their roots have been interpreted, re-elaborated and negotiated by Scego including them in her personal experience of the city of Rome. The same happens for the members of her family; even if they represent her Somali part they are incorporated by the author herself

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[69] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 75.
[70] Alessandro Triulzi, 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8 (2003), 95–108.
[71] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 74–75.
[72] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 75.

in her Italian reality. Her origins and her contemporaneity are comprised in these pictures, but also in the objects carefully chosen by her mother; they are her past and her present, Somalia but also Italy: 'È centro ma è anche periferia. È Roma ma è anche Mogadiscio. È Igiaba ma siete anche voi'.[73]

4.4 Luggage Always Ready

The analysis of the objects and the pictures has pointed out that these items perpetuate the link with the motherland even in the country of migration, despite the difficulties encountered by migrants in feeling at home. The consequence of this uncomfortable situation, experienced particularly by first generation migrants, is the endurance of the return intention. As mentioned before, the question of the house, for migrants, is related to the degree of attainability of the project of returning back home. This 'mito del ritorno impossibile'[74] influences the way in which migrants decide to inhabit the destination country in two ways: adapting themselves to a difficult living environment, as described by Omar in *Divorzio all'islamica*; and by clinging to the country of origin by any means possible, as for instance, the items Scego's mother took with her to Italy. Related to this issue and comprising both the aforementioned paths, is the element of the suitcase. The suitcase is a recurring feature in migration discourse: 'Like many other important terms such as "exile", "diaspora", "migration" or "hybridity", the suitcase has become the signifier of mobility, displacement, duality and the overwrought emotional climates in which these circulate'.[75] This part will therefore investigate the trope of the suitcase and the various connotations that it entails in a migrant context. The short story *Dismatria* by Igiaba Scego, published in 2005 in the collection *Pecore Nere*, provides a clear example of the significance of this object.[76]

Dismatria tells the story of a young Italian woman of Somali origins who, after having decided to buy a house for herself, has to communicate the plan to her family, particularly to her mother. The story develops in the time frame of one afternoon during which, the

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[73] Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 160.

[74] Pezzarossa, p. 92; but also Chambers, p. 5.

[75] Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000) p 36. See also Morley *Home Territories*;

[76] Igiaba Scego, 'Dismatria', in *Pecore Nere*, ed. by Emanuele Coen and Flavia Capitani (Rome: Laterza, 2005).

protagonist, morally supported by her friend Angelique, decides to face her *genitrice* (as she defines her mother), to reveal her intention to settle down in Rome. Although this decision might not sound particularly problematic, the protagonist explains why such a choice may represent a serious shock for her mother. The problem is represented by the fact that until this point no member of her family has ever thought of settling down in Italy. They are so convinced that one day they will go back to Somalia, that the protagonist and her kin are still keeping all their belongings in suitcases:

> Mamma diceva sempre: 'Se teniamo tutte le nostre cose in valigia, dopo non ci sarà bisogno di farle in fretta e furia'. Il 'dopo' sottolineava un qualche tempo non definito nel futuro quando saremmo tornati trionfalmente nel seno di mamma Africa. Quindi valigie in mano, aereo, ritorno in pompa magna, felicità estrema, caldo e frutta tropicale. Il nostro problema era tutto lì, in quel puerile sogno infantile.[77]

This passage, with almost the exact words used in *La mia casa è dove sono* to describe the centrality of the intention to return, highlights the reasons why the suitcases are so important for the protagonist's mother.[78] The possibility that the day to return home will soon come, justifies the use of the suitcases instead of a more spacious closet. For the protagonist, the lack of a proper wardrobe was an insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of personal stability, which would eventually bring her complete integration to Roman and Italian society:

> Anch'io naturalmente avevo delle valigie. Ma le odiavo. Le trattavo male. Le cambiavo spesso. È che le valigie spesso mi esasperano. Avrei voluto un solido e robusto armadio. Avrei voluto tenere le mie cose meno in disordine. Avrei voluto sicurezza. [...] Io però mi ero stufata! Mi ero rotta! Mi ero stancata! Volevo un armadio, anche piccolo. Una casa, anche piccola. Una vita, anche breve.[79]

The repetition of the necessity of the wardrobe is indicative. The wardrobe is a clear metaphor for a situation of order and stability, which the protagonist and her family have

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[77] Scego, 'Dismatria', p. 10.

[78] The passage from *La mia casa è dove sono* is: 'Per questo eravamo sempre sul chi vive; con le valigie pronte e gli armadi vuoti. Mamma diceva: "Se teniamo tutte le nostre cose in valigia, dopo non ci sarà bisogno di farle in fretta e furia". Quel "dopo" alludeva a un futuro non meglio definito quando saremmo tornati trionfalmente nel seno di mamma Africa: valigie in mano, ritorno in pompa magna, felicità estrema, caldo e frutta tropicale'. (Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 117).

[79] Scego, 'Dismatria', pp. 10–12.

not found yet, even decades after their arrival. Despite being in Rome for several years, the protagonist's family is still fastening to the hope of going back home. This hope represents, on the other hand, the impossibility to fully take part in Italian society and, thus, to recognise Rome as home. Buying a house would not only represent the resolution to become Italian, but most importantly, it would signify the abandonment of the idea of going back home. The suitcase therefore symbolises, as the objects previously analysed, a connection between the past, the Italian present, and the future return home: 'Even when the migrant arrives at their destination, the suitcase often remains a potent symbol both of the journey they have made, and of the unstable potential for further movement'.[80]

The protagonist of this short story does not share, however, the same need to return to Somalia; she wants to buy a flat so that she can settle and feel at home in Italy. In order to achieve this feeling, her house must have a wardrobe, 'un solido e robusto armadio',[81] symbol of order and stability: 'In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder. Here order reigns, or rather this is the reign of order. Order is not merely geometrical; it can also remember the family history'.[82]

According to Bachelard, the wardrobe is, for the household, the source of order and, moreover, it is an intimate space.[83] As the suitcase, the closet is an intimate space and it can contain family's memories as well; however, the fact that the wardrobe cannot either be moved nor opened by simply anyone, conveys an idea of stability, often dreamt of by migrants. Except for the character of the daughter in *Dismatria*, an example of this urge for stability is provided by Khouma in *Io, venditore di elefanti* in which the protagonist, through a similar metaphor, describes the content of his suitcase:

> È mezza vuota questa volta perché non vi ho pigiato dentro collane, elefanti e altra merce, ma solo un paio di camicie e di pantaloni che viaggiano da una parte e dall'altra, con la speranza di finire prima o poi nella pace di un cassetto.[84]

'Il cassetto', the drawer, plays here the same stabilising role as the wardrobe. Both represent the awareness that when leaving something inside them, it will still be there the

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[80] Morley, p. 45.
[81] Scego, 'Dismatria', p. 10.
[82] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 79.
[83] Bachelard, p. 78.
[84] Khouma, p. 28.

day after; both the wardrobe and the drawer metonymically embody the idea of the house. As Bachelard, analysing Henry Bosco's *Monsieur Carre-Benoit à la campagne*, underlines:

> The only piece of furniture, among all that he possessed, for which Carre-Benoit felt real affection was his solid oak filing cabinet, which he contemplated with satisfaction whenever he passed in front of it. Here, at least, was something that was reliable, that could be counted on. […] In this well-fitted cube there was not an iota of haziness or shiftiness. Once you had put something in it, even if you put it a hundred or ten thousand more times, you could find it again in the twinkling of an eye, as it were.[85]

Carre-Benoit could rely on the drawer because, unlike anything else that was occurring in his life, it was a firm element which would not change its content. In the same way, a wardrobe, or a drawer, could represent for migrants the steadiness they are pursuing in the new country. Like for the daughter in *Dismatria* or for Pap Khouma, owning a wardrobe would imply settlement in the new country, inhabiting a proper house and, more importantly, getting rid of all the uncertainties and insecurities provoked by either the lack of means or the persistent illusion of returning home. In the migration journey, this yearning for stability is unlikely to be achieved, as Chambers affirms:

> Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility.[86]

The character of the mother, on the other hand, despite having the means to move on and buy a flat, is not ready, and probably she will never be, to give up her dream of returning to Somalia, of returning home. This is also true for Scego's mother in *La mia casa è dove sono*, as previously demonstrated with the analysis of the selection of items she decided to take with her. In this regard, the metaphorical content of the luggage, beyond mere clothes, is particularly interesting. It is perhaps redundant, but also

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[85] Bachelard, p. 79.
[86] Chambers, p. 5.

necessary, to underline that the suitcases are indispensable not least because migrants need them to carry what they think might be fundamental for their survival in the destination country. As Fazel explains:

> L'apriamo e Sonia comincia ad elencare: phon, solari, ciabatte… e tutte le diavolerie che intende portarsi dietro. Naturalmente ci dovrà essere anche lo spazio per i souvenirs. La guardo e realizzo che Sonia è una ragazza davvero fortunata. Sì perché lei non ha mai dovuto lasciare il suo paese per motivi economici, politici, religiosi o etnici. Quindi non può capire chi invece si lascia dietro gli affetti, una famiglia, una casa, gli amici, le sue abitudini, la sua terra le sue cerimonie, le sue feste, i suoi canti, la sua musica, le sue stagioni, i suoi morti ed i suoi riti religiosi. L'immigrato invece, nella piccola valigia che si porta dietro, dovrà farci stare tutto questo.[87]

In *Lontano da Mogadiscio* Fazel dedicates a section to the role of the luggage and to what it represents for a migrant; she emphasizes this by comparing the meaning of the suitcase for someone who is forced to migrate and for a traveller. When migrants are forced to leave their home, they try to collect important items belonging to their life in a suitcase, which will probably represent the most important link to their home. The content of the suitcase may vary according to various different factors, such as migrants' origins and their personality. This could contain pictures, heirlooms and personal symbols of what has been left behind:

> the suitcase circulates in culture as the cipher of memory, of that which is lost and to which one has no direct or easy access. It is the concrete embodiment of memories that cannot be recounted for they will not be understood, their context having changed in a highly dramatic rupture. As 'luggage', memories and cultural symbols are objectified, concretized, virtually museumified in a suitcase.[88]

The suitcase performs various roles: '"luggage" is perceived as a multiple marker: of memory, nostalgia and access to other histories'.[89] The suitcase contains, and at the same time tells migrants' stories; the interlocutors are, usually, migrants themselves who need this peculiar storyteller to remind them who they are and where they come from in order to renegotiate their identity. The centrality of that suitcase full of migrants' 'most

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[87] Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (Rome: Datanews, 1994), p. 58.
[88] Rogoff, p. 38.
[89] Rogoff, p. 37.

talismanic possessions'[90] is clear; however, what is important for *Dismatria* is how the suitcase is invested with an additional, and in a sense parallel, role. At the end of the short story, the members of the protagonist's family decide to empty all their suitcases showing, the rest of the family, the objects they have collected. This act of emptying the suitcases in front of everyone is mirrored by an emotional emptying. This is particularly true for the mother; the contents of her suitcases are what more intensely amaze not only her family but also the reader:

> Le svuotò tutte e quattro. Non la quinta. 'Fallo tu, figlia mia', disse. E lo feci. […] C'erano cose strane. Un pacco di spaghetti, foto di monumenti di Roma, il pelo di un gatto, un parmigiano di plastica, un souvenir pacchiano della lupa che allatta i gemelli, un po' di terra in un sacchetto, una bottiglia piena di acqua, una pietra… tante altre cose strane. […] 'Che significa?', dicevano i nostri occhi. 'Non mi volevo dimenticare di Roma', disse mamma in un sospiro. E poi sorrise.[91]

This echoes Morley's idea of the luggage as symbol of future movements,[92] a reminder of that 'promise of homecoming' pointed out by Chambers in the afore-mentioned quotation;[93] in line with this, the character of the mother in *Dismatria* is collecting mementoes to take with her in the journey back home, in order to remember Rome. The presence of suitcases, full of objects either from the motherland or from the country of immigration, is for the protagonist's mother an act of remembrance that there is a wardrobe waiting to be filled, inside a house back home, once this transitional moment is over and the return has eventually been actualised.[94]

Such transience is, in Italy, powerfully encouraged by the government which, instead of facilitating the permanence of migrants in the peninsula, is obstructing immigrants' attempt to settle down, as shown in Chapter 1 and also suggested by the mismanagement of the *Centri per l'Immigrazione*.

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[90] Morley, p. 44.
[91] Scego, 'Dismatria', pp. 20–21.
[92] Morley, p. 45.
[93] Chambers, p. 5.
[94] Morley, p. 46.

4.5 Former Somali Embassy in Rome

The texts taken into consideration have provided interesting elements for the analysis of the processes of *making home*. The analysis drawn in these pages however, left behind another situation in Italy which, although being only briefly mentioned in some of the texts considered is crucial for the purpose of this work. I would like to address a specific building which has been turned into *home place* for and by migrants: the former Somali embassy in Rome.[95]

In *Madre Piccola*, Barni, in search of information regarding another character, has to enter a crucial place in the life of the Somalis in Rome: the former Somali embassy in via dei Villini. Her description, despite being brief and not too detailed, provides a clear idea of the situation:

> Fuori, in giardino, un materassino srotolato vicino alla carcassa di una vecchia 127. […] Quel palazzo così prestigioso, così sontuosamente inappropriato, con i divani di velluto strappato e di gommapiuma scura in giardino, con i lampadari a gocce, era la sede dell'ex ambasciata somala. […] Avevo bussato per educazione. Stavo aspettando che qualcuno venisse ad aprirmi quando mi ha raggiunto un ragazzo dal passo dondolante. Ci siamo salutati. […] *Godka*, la fossa, cantina dove la notte dormono tutti quelli che non sono rimasti nel deserto o sepolti in fondo al mare o ricomposti nelle bare allineate. […] Come mi sentivo? Dentro, abbastanza a disagio. Ero l'unica donna e i ragazzi, che erano tutti mezzi distesi, si erano seduti per educazione. Indossavano abiti lisi raccattati chissà dove.[96]

Via dei Villini 9 is the address of the former Somali embassy or *Hotel Disperazione*, as it has more recently been renamed.[97] The building lost its role of embassy after the fall

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[95] I have decided to analyse this specific place because it is also mentioned by the literary texts. However, there are other similar situations, the already mentioned *Pantanella* building for instance (terWal; Burns, 'Exile Within Italy') or the *Roma Residence* (Lombardi-Diop); but also *Palazzo Selam*, a building that used to belong to the University of Tor Vergata now occupied by illegal migrants. It is possible to find more information in: Adriano Di Blasi, 'Palazzo Selam: la città invisibile dei rifugiati di Roma (I Parte)', *Piuculture - Volontariato Interculturale Roma Municipio II*, 2014 <http://www.piuculture.it/2014/06/palazzo-selam-citta-invisibile-dei-rifugiati-roma-i-parte/> [accessed 7 February 2015].

[96] Ali Farah, pp. 38–39.

[97] Giovanna Vitale, 'Via Dei Villini, hotel disperazione tanti allarmi e uno sgombero inutile', *La Repubblica*, 27 February 2011 <http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/02/27/news/via_dei_villini_hotel_disperazione_tanti_allarmi_e_ uno_sgombero_inutile-12952944/> [accessed 20 March 2014].

of Siad Barre's dictatorship in 1991, which marked the beginning of the on-going civil war in Somalia.[98] After its abandonment, the building was occupied by Somali refugees in Italy, the majority of whom possess the recognised status of political refugees. The hygienic and sanitary conditions of the building were alarming and more than one hundred Somali migrants were living without either electricity or heating:

> La struttura, abbandonata dalla rappresentanza diplomatica somala agli inizi degli anni novanta, è in uno stato di degrado totale ed è in alcuni punti pericolante. Non c'è corrente elettrica, né riscaldamento. Vi sono ovunque oggetti e mobilio in disuso, calcinacci e rifiuti accumulatisi nel corso degli anni, dove circolano indisturbati i ratti. […] Restano funzionanti solo due servizi igienici, in condizioni che si possono solo immaginare. […] Si tratta di una situazione che offre anche aspetti grotteschi, poiché questo autentico 'inferno dei viventi' sorge nel bel mezzo di uno dei quartieri più eleganti della capitale, a due passi da Porta Pia.[99]

The growing number of Somalis occupying the shabby building attracted the media attention, brought into focus particularly by the ceaseless work of Shukri Said, an actress of Somali origin, who publicly denounced the situation.[100] Italy, by granting the status of

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[98] Brioni, p. 25; see also'Nell'ex ambasciata somala a Roma. In 140 assiepati nel garage con due bagni', *La Repubblica*, 26 December 2010
<http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/volontariato/2010/12/26/news/ambasciata_somala-10583902/> [accessed 7 February 2014]; the embassy was closed in 1991, right after the end of the dictatorship (Carlo Ruggiero and Fabrizio Rizzi, *Roma, i fantasmi dell'ambasciata somala*, 2010
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btOtRT4Cei8&feature=youtube_gdata_player> [accessed 7 February 2015]). In the year 2000, Giuliano Pisapia denounced the occupation of the former Somali embassy on the grounds of it being inhabited by exponents of Barre's dictatorship, ten years after their leader's removal. The issue, for Pisapia and for Rifondazione Comunista, was that the occupiers could be associated with Siad Barre, they were not concerned about the condition of decay and precariousness of the building ('Occupata da abusivi l'ambasciata somala', *La Repubblica*, 9 August 2000
<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/08/09/occupata-da-abusivi-ambasciata-somala.html> [accessed 7 February 2014]).
[99] 'Nell'ex ambasciata'. See also: Carlo Ciavoni, 'Il dramma dei profughi di via Dei Villini. "Con lo status di rifugiato ma abbandonati"', *La Repubblica*, 30 December 2010
<http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/profughi/2010/12/30/news/profughi_di_via_dei_villini-10717359/> [accessed 8 February 2014]; Raffaella Cosentino, 'Somali, la vita degradante dei rifugiati in quel che resta della loro ambasciata', *La Repubblica*, 16 December 2010
<http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/profughi/2010/12/16/news/i_somali_perseguitati-10270373/> [accessed 8 February 2014]; Anna Maria De Luca, 'I rifugiati nell'inferno di via Dei Villini "In Italia senza dignità e diritti"', *La Repubblica*, 21 January 2011
<http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/profughi/2011/01/21/news/rifugiati_nell_inferno_di_via_dei_villini-11501329/> [accessed 7 February 2014].
[100] Shukri Said is also the founder of the association *Migrare*; the webpage of the association (A*ssociazione Migrare* <http://www.migrare.eu/migrarepress/> [accessed 23/03/2014]) offers information about, and for, migrants in Italy. Said's commitment for the building in via dei Villini has been described also in: Paolo Brogi, 'Un'attrice Tra i rifugiati somali di Roma: "Qui è peggio di Rosarno,

political refugees to Somali migrants, was drawing funds from the European Union in order to facilitate migrants' integration into Italian society.[101] These subventions however, were never used for the correct purpose and, moreover, due to the *Dublin II Regulation*, if migrants wanted to leave Italy and in some way managed to reach another country, they would have been sent back to the nation which first acknowledged their status as refugees, in this case, Italy.[102] Only after 25 February 2011, however, did the problem of the former embassy became known to everyone; that night a 20-year-old girl of Croatian origin was raped by three Somali men.[103] After this event and various demonstrations led by refugees in order to denounce the crucial condition in which they were forced to live, politicians, and Rome's mayor of that time, Gianni Alemanno, decided to clear out the building and, in a metaphorical as well as theatrical gesture, to wall up the entrance, leaving the occupiers in an even more desperate condition than before.[104]

It is interesting to notice how the building, despite being deficient of the most basic requirements to be considered accommodation, has, in a sense, kept its original role of an embassy sheltering many Somali migrants. With time, refugees have created a Somali

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aiutateli"', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 December 2010
<http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/10_dicembre_24/somali-rifugiati-examambasciata-testimonial-brogi-181140488416.shtml?fr=correlati> [accessed 23 March 2014].
[101] See: Lorenzo Galeazzi and Davide Pierluigi, 'I fantasmi dell'ex ambasciata somala', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 7 January 2011 <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/01/07/i-fantasmi-dellex-ambasciata-somala/85124/> [accessed 7 February 2015]; 'I fantasmi dell'ambasciata somala', *Rassegna.it* <http://www.rassegna.it/speciali/222/i-fantasmi-dellambasciata-somala> [accessed 7 February 2015].
[102] For detailed explanation on the law, please refer to the official web page of *European Council on Refugees and Exiles*: 'Dublin Regulation', *European Council on Refugees and Exiles* <http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/protection-in-europe/10-dublin-regulation.html> [accessed 7 February 2015].
[103] See also: 'Boldrini: "Una vicenda dolorosa e il degrado nel villino era noto"', *La Repubblica*, 26 February 2011 <http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/02/26/news/boldrini-12935448/> [accessed 7 February 2015]; Massimo Lugli, 'Stupro in ex ambasciata, rilasciato un arrestato. Alemanno: "espellere tutti gli occupanti"', *La Repubblica*, 27 February 2011 <http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/02/27/news/tre_fermi_per_lo_stupro_nell_ex_ambasciata_alemanno_espellere_tutti_gli_occupanti-12955872/> [accessed 7 February 2015]; 'Ragazza Stuprata Nell'ex ambasciata somala, due uomini fermati', *Corriere della Sera*, 26 February 2011 <http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/11_febbraio_26/stupro-villini-ambasciata-somala-190103493499.shtml> [accessed 8 February 2014].
[104] 'Chiusa l'ex ambascita somala dove è avvenuto lo stupro', *La Repubblica*, 2 March 2011 <http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/03/02/news/chiusa_l_ex_ambascita_somala_dove_avvenuto_lo_stupro-13085316/> [accessed 7 February 2015]; 'Murata l'ex ambasciata somala. "Non dovrà tornare come prima"', *La Repubblica*, 2 March 2011 <http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/03/02/news/stupro_roma-13091249/> [accessed 7 February 2014].

enclave in the centre of Rome and, apparently, an invisible one. The fence around its perimeter has helped the *fantasmi dell'ambasciata somala*,[105] to remain hidden from the Roman citizens, at least officially. The previous quotation from Ali Farah's novel is indicative of the atmosphere inside the building but more specifically of how this occupation is perceived amongst the Somali community in Rome; the need of the protagonist to knock at the door, 'avevo bussato per educazione', instead of entering directly what is, after all, an abandoned building, points out how this structure, despite its decaying aspect, is considered an intimate and private dwelling whose owners are its occupiers. The building itself, which used to be the Somali outpost in Italy, carries on this function, symbolising the difficult situation of decadence and occupation the African country is enduring. As soon as Barni approaches the palace, she is reminded of the parties and dinners that the building used to accommodate, in contrast to the current situation of decay. Barni identifies those who inhabit it as those who managed to flee from the desert and to escape death. The inclusion of the image of the 'bare allineate' is also noteworthy. The 'bare allineate' in *Madre Piccola,* however, refers to one of the many shipwrecks close to the shores of Lampedusa in which the victims were mostly Somalis. In *La mia casa è dove sono* the same event is mentioned in more details:

> Era successa una tragedia. Un'imbarcazione era colata a picco. Una di quelle che solcavano il mar Mediterraneo in cerca di un approdo verso un futuro qualsiasi in terra d'Occidente. […] Molti avevano preso quelle imbarcazioni di fortuna ed erano approdati dall'altra parte. Invece nell'ottobre del 2003 una di quelle barche era colata a picco. […] Tutti noi della diaspora somala il giorno in cui abbiamo appreso la notizia non sapevamo cosa fare dei nostri corpi. Quei morti al largo delle coste di Lampedusa avevano creato non solo una commozione senza pari, ma un senso di disagio.[106]

This accident is mentioned also in *Oltre Babilonia*.[107] These three texts not only mention the accident and the funeral, but they all refer to the image of the *bare*;[108] in *Oltre Babilonia*, for instance, Zuhra affirms: 'ma lì c'erano le bare in mezzo alla piazza. Avvolte nella bandiera somala. La stella della bandiera mi ha fatto impressione quel

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[105] Galeazzi and Pierluigi.
[106] Scego, *La mia casa*, pp. 96–97.
[107] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, p. 402.
[108] Ali Farah, p. 39; Scego, *La mia casa*, p. 95.

giorno. Stella mia, quanto hai sofferto?'.[109] The attention given to the detail of the coffins, if on the one hand might seem obvious, on the other recalls Morley's theory on the *Heimat* and the role of the coffin. Morley highlights how home is often symbolised by a container, whether a suitcase, a building or even a coffin. The coffin is perceived as the last dwelling, which, sometimes, accomplishes the long craved return home: 'only after death, with a burial place in the land of their birth, will many immigrants finally accomplish the return journey of which they have dreamed since their initial departure'.[110] The idea of the 'land of their birth' is also a complex one as shown for example by Geneviève Makaping. Several years after her arrival in Italy, she finally becomes an Italian citizen; meditating on this important moment, she affirms that the oath she is pronouncing during the ceremony requires 'che io muoia a qualcosa, per rinascere ad altro',[111] to be born again as Italian:

> Voglio ritornare dalla mia gente ed esserne coccolata e curata, voglio raccontare loro il mio viaggio. La mia vita da quel giorno. Vita che non è stata solo pianto e stenti. Voglio raccontare loro che cosa significa nascere in una terra, vivere in un'altra e magari morirvi. Quando morirò il mio cadavere rimarrà in patria, in Italia.[112]

Accordingly, Italy becomes the land of her second birth and as such the place where she wants to be buried, the end of her journey.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literary works has highlighted how migrants constantly need to renegotiate their concept of *home*.[113] The unwelcoming conditions in which migrants are forced to live in Italy have pushed them to put into practice several strategies in order to feel at home. If for Omar in *Divorzio all'islamica* the plan to return home makes him accept the difficulties of sharing a flat with one bathroom and eleven people, for Igiaba Scego's mother the simple idea of returning is not enough. She needs to retrieve her home,[114] to reconstruct home feelings through the exhibition of mementoes and pictures

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[109] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, p. 402.
[110] Hargreaves in Morley, p. 46.
[111] Geneviève Makaping, *Traiettorie di sguardi: e se gli altri foste voi?* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2001), p. 107.
[112] Makaping, p. 108.
[113] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', pp. 330–331; Brioni, pp. 25–34; Parutis, p. 266.
[114] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 102.

that remind her of her past and, at the same time, of her home. In the same way the protagonist's mother in *Dismatria* keeps all her belongings in suitcases, living therefore in a perennial period of waiting. Both objects and suitcases symbolise the in-between status in which migrants, as such, live.[115] They construct an idea of *home* which does not coincide with the house they inhabit at the present moment, and it cannot be the one they have left, at least not anymore. These two spaces are connected by the inclusion of the latter's memory in the former's reality creating a plurality of homes, of home places. The *home* to which migrants are attached, and according to which other places can be transformed into a *home space* is a *home* which only exists in the imagination of migrants: '"home" is a construction, imagined and put together from affective cultural and political principles and memories, and responding to an absence in the migrant's experience in Italy (or anywhere else that is not 'home')'.[116] This confirms Ahmed's affirmation:

> Indeed, if we think of home as an outer skin then we can also consider how migration involves not only a spatial dislocation, but also a temporal dislocation: 'the past' becomes associated with a home that it is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present.[117]

This failure is embodied in the constant thought of going back home, of always being on the move; with the migration's journey, migrants, and particularly the characters analysed, undertake a journey which will probably never end. The impossibility of inhabiting *that home*, as Ahmed points out, is reflected by the existence of that absence mentioned by Burns above. The theme of the absence will also be a crucial element in the next chapter where specific places play a special role because in these specific spaces the absence of a loved one haunting characters' lives becomes perceivable.

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[115] Bhabha, p. 56.
[116] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 102.
[117] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 343.

Chapter Five

Inhabiting the Other and the Self 'con la porta accostata, mai chiusa, mai aperta'[1]

Throughout this thesis I have noted how the detachment from the motherland, and consequently from Home, has caused a quest for alternative home spaces, both private and public, in the characters of the novels analysed. In the previous chapters I have investigated recurrent spaces charged with *home values* by several characters. The relevance of such locations - neighbourhoods, train stations, phone centers and private dwellings - was evident in all the novels examined, as all the characters are, in one way or another, emotionally attached to these spaces or, drawing on De Certeau, all characters *practice* these places.[2] The relevance of the spaces analysed in the first three chapters is also increased by the possibility of experiencing those places with other people, often with a similar background of migration. Therefore migrants' connections to these spaces are a shared experience. On the other hand, the process of transforming a house into a home is often a solitary experience. All the spaces examined so far are imbued with a wide range of emotions. As Sara Ahmed points out:

> Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition
> of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others.
> […] The 'aboutness' of emotions means they involve a stance on the world, or a way
> of apprehending the world. […] Emotions are both about objects, which they hence
> shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects. […] The memory can be the
> object of my feeling in both senses: the feeling is shaped by contact with the memory,
> and also involves an orientation towards what is remembered.[3]

This passage summarises various points that I intend to cover in the following pages. First of all, the spaces that I will analyse in this chapter are relevant only for the one character that inhabits such a space in the attempt to move away from other people, at least for a

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[1] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 18.
[2] De Certeau, p. xvii.
[3] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, pp. 4–7. In order to avoid confusion between Sara Ahmed and Ahmed, one of the characters that will be taken into consideration in this part, the former will be always identified by her complete name.

very limited amount of time. This attempt takes place always in the same space (a room inside a house, or an outdoor location) and through habitual procedures. Secondly, a pivotal role is played by memory; thanks to remembering processes characters go back to significant moments in their past and the spaces in which such processes take place are charged with emotional values. These processes are strictly connected to a double presence. As a matter of fact, all the spaces selected for this section are inhabited by a double presence, in which one subject is concretely there (and alive) and the other one is imagined, remembered, even reconstructed, but definitely absent. The focus on the behaviour of specific characters in relation to specific places leads to the disappearance of the dichotomy between migrants and non-migrants. The way characters inhabit these places is consequential to their personal experiences, experiences that are not connected to the journey of migration; these are ordinary events – such as the loss of a loved one – common to everyone.

The spaces selected are distinguishable into two main categories: private and public. Accordingly, this chapter will be divided in two parts; in the first section I will take into consideration two rooms: the bathroom in *Scontro di Civiltà* and the bedroom in *Rhoda* by Igiaba Scego.[4] In the second section I will look at two public spaces, more specifically the bench in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* and the park in Rome where Safia in *Divorzio all'islamica* spends some of her time. Despite belonging to the public sphere and therefore being accessible by everyone, both these locations are bestowed of values of intimacy and familiarity by the two women.

5.1 'Odio gli spazi stretti, tranne questo bagno'.[5] Ahmed, Amedeo and the Bathroom in *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio*

Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio is a detective novel;[6] the protagonist of the story is Ahmed, or Amedeo as everyone calls him; he is an Algerian migrant in Rome, but everyone is convinced that he is Italian, from the south of Italy perhaps, but still Italian.[7] The entire novel unfolds around the police attempts to discover the murderer

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[4] Igiaba Scego, *Rhoda* (Rome: Sinnos, 2004).

[5] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 57.

[6] An insightful article about space and this novel is Parati, 'Where do migrants live?'.

[7] In order to give the right relevance to this *doubleness*, from this moment onward I will use the double name Ahmed/Amedeo unless I want to underline the separation between the two.

of Lorenzo Manfredini aka *Il Gladiatore*, found dead in the elevator of the building in Piazza Vittorio where Ahmed/Amedeo lives. According to the police, the doubts around Ahmed/Amedeo's identity, along with the fact that he disappears right after the murder, make him the perfect suspect for the killing.[8] The story is therefore structured in an alternation of monologues. Each monologue represents a statement given to the police by the residents of a building in Piazza Vittorio in Rome, on possible culprits and motives for the killing but also on their personal relationship with Ahmed/Amedeo. Each resident's statement is followed by a chapter narrated in the first person by Ahmed/Amedeo who, in the form of a diary describes his relation with the character that was introduced in the preceding part.[9] Despite being structured as detective fiction *Scontro di civiltà* is more importantly about Ahmed's ability to pass as Amedeo, an Italian man. Ahmed/Amedeo speaks good Italian and his knowledge of Italian culture more generally, and of the city of Rome more specifically, makes him unquestionably Italian to the point that all residents struggle to accept that he is actually a migrant. For instance, Antonio Marini, one of the residents (who ironically is a migrant himself as he comes from Milan), affirms:

> Una volta solo gli ho sentito dire: 'Io sono del sud del sud'. Allora ho dedotto che Roma è del sud, e le città del sud d'Italia come Napoli, Potenza, Bari e Palermo sono l'estremo del sud! […] Ciò che ha attirato la mia attenzione è stata la sua buona conoscenza di Sant'Agostino. È indubbio che è un vero cattolico. […] Non posso credere che sia lui l'assassino.[10]

Ahmed passing as Amedeo, but primarily as Italian, is crucial for the purpose of this chapter, but also for Amara Lakhous's writing.[11] This act of passing does not entail the

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[8] Throughout the entire novel the detective is led to believe that Ahmed/Amedeo is the murderer also because he is impossible to find; the reason behind his disappearance is explained at the end, when the detective discovers that the suspect, due to an accident, has been at the hospital since the day of the murder and therefore he could not be the culprit.

[9] The chapters devoted to Ahmed/Amedeo are structured as diary pages, although he sometimes talks about 'recordings' which leads the reader to think that he is not writing his emotions and memories but rather recording them. This makes even more sense if considering the act of howling which will be analysed later in this chapter.

[10] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 107–108.

[11] In Lakhous's later novel *Divorzio,* even though differently than in *Scontro*, both protagonists pass as someone else. The male protagonist Christian/Issa has been analysed in Chapter 3 whereas the passing of the female protagonist, Safia, will be discussed below.

complete disappearance of Ahmed but rather the coexistence of the two identities, as Sara Ahmed affirms:

> passing is not becoming. In assuming the image of an-other one does not become the other. The fit does not constitute a proper identification. It is not a painless merger. Passing, to this extent, makes a difference: the subject does not stay the same through passing. The difference is one that mobilizes both identities: both the identity one 'already has' and the identity one takes on. In moving across identities perceived as inviolably distinct, passing may transform the conditions of their existence.[12]

This coexistence does not mean that both Ahmed and Amedeo are present in the same way and at the same time but rather that at specific moments and in specific situations one of the two identities is more visible than the other. Ahmed himself says so: 'Amedeo potrebbe essere una semplice maschera! Io sono un animale selvaggio che non può abbandonare la sua natura d'origine'.[13] Ahmed passing as Amedeo is in any case successful, as demonstrated by the fact that all the residents of the building are convinced that he is Italian. The choice of Ahmed to pass as Amedeo, or to be more precise Ahmed's acceptance of this new identity, that has been given to him almost by chance by Sandro,[14] perfectly mirrors Sara Ahmed's perspective according to which the act of passing is usually carried out in the attempt to improve one's position, often through the possibility of being more easily accepted, assimilated: 'Passing as white hence guarantees a form of social assimilation in which the gaze of the others hesitates only upon those that are already marked as different'.[15] She is looking at processes of passing as white or as black but her argument works perfectly for Ahmed who is, voluntarily or not, but certainly successfully, passing as Italian, thus as what is assumed to be the norm.[16] This entering

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[12] Sara Ahmed, '"She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger": Passing through Hybridity', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16 (1999), 87–106 (p. 96).

[13] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 186.

[14] The fortuitous misunderstanding of the name provides Ahmed with a new identity: 'quando Sandro mi ha chiesto il mio nome gli ho risposto: "Ahmed". Ma lui l'ha pronunciato senza la lettera H perché non si usa molto nella lingua italiana, e alla fine mi ha chiamato Amede', che è un nome italiano e si può abbreviare con Amed' (Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 139).

[15] Ahmed, '"She'll Wake Up"', p. 93.

[16] However, in *Divorzio all'islamica* Christian's act of passing as Issa is in this regard opposite to Ahmed's; Spackman defines Christian's endeavour as more posing rather than passing (Spackman, p. 126). As a matter of fact, the latter enters the space of the hegemony whereas the former infiltrates the minority's realm. The strategies used by Christian in order to successfully pass as Italian are in line with Sara Ahmed's point about a white passing as black: 'In successfully passing, the white subject inhabits the place of the other; the possibility of surveillance is expanded, exceeding the divisions imposed by

the norm, this *assimilation* as defined by Sara Ahmed, makes Ahmed/Amedeo's life much easier, as demonstrated by the fact that he often acts as a mediator and translator between Italians and migrants. As soon as Ahmed's real identity is exposed, he becomes a possible suspect, even a perfect one once that he is nowhere to be found. As Parati affirms:

> His physical disappearance, however, was preceded by another: by adapting to his new Italian name, Ahmed had disappeared. Once he is reassigned the identity of an immigrant, he becomes a criminal: a scapegoat to the police while for the people who knew him, he is the location of uncertainty.[17]

Ahmed, however, does not fully disappear; he cannot, as previously underlined by Sara Ahmed. Ahmed is, depending on the situations, perceivable to a greater or lesser extent; indeed, going back to the purpose of this chapter, it is in the small bathroom that Ahmed becomes alive.

The bathroom is associated with a series of taboos that have been discussed in detail by scholars from different fields.[18] In particular, one of the main features of such a room is the shared understanding that whatever happens there belongs, first and foremost, to the sphere of privacy and secrecy. This possibility of being hidden inside such a small place is ideal for Ahmed/Amedeo.[19] In the bathroom he is overwhelmed by memories which compel him to face his past, specifically Ahmed's past. It is only when Ahmed/Amedeo is in the restroom that the reader can discover information about

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time and space.[…] Through adopting or taking on signifiers of the subordinated other, passing becomes a mechanism for reconstituting or reproducing the other as the "not-I" *within* rather than *beyond* the structure of the "I"'. Spackman, pp. 99–100.

[17] Parati, 'Where Do Migrants Live?', pp. 438–439.

[18] For detailed information about the role of the lavatory, see: Marja Gastelaars, 'The Water Closet: Public and Private Meanings', *Science as Culture*, 5 (1996), 483–505; Nick Haslam, *Psychology in the Bathroom*, Reprint edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Maj-Britt Quitzau and Inge Røpke, 'Bathroom Transformation: From Hygiene to Well-Being?', *Home Cultures*, 6 (2009), 219–42.

[19] *Scontro*, however, is not the only novel in which the bathroom is described as a space of solitude, a space where characters find the right environment to individually deal with their emotions, both linked to the past but also to the present. In *Oltre Babilonia*, Zuhra Lahamane considers her bathroom a shelter to seek refuge in, so as to experience specific emotions she does not want to express in public: 'Quel Rafael in esilio a Roma e la Spagna intera mi ricordavano troppo l'esilio di me da me – una cosa incompiuta. Arginai le lacrime per farle straripare dopo, quando sarei stata sola nell'intimità del cesso di casa mia. Piansi tanto poi, soffocai le urla e mi accorsi solo allora che non avevo più i colori, li avevo persi tutti in giro per la città' (Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, pp. 8-9). For both characters the bathroom is secluded enough to live the emotions that they are not able to experience anywhere else, either because these are too painful or because they are scared of other people's judgment.

Ahmed's life. The importance of the privacy and the secrecy of the bathroom for Ahmed/Amedeo is explicitly described by the protagonist himself:

> Il bagno è l'unico posto che ci garantisca la pura tranquillità e la dolce solitudine, non a caso da noi viene chiamata la stanza del riposo. Io trovo la mia tranquillità in questo piccolo bagno. È il mio nido, e questa tazza bianca dove mi siedo per fare i bisogni è il mio trono![20]

As previously mentioned, Ahmed passing as Amedeo is so successful that even people who are close to him and who are aware of his original identity, such as his wife Stefania, do not fully know the truth behind it. The bathroom becomes therefore the only place where Ahmed can deal with his past. The 'sweet solitude' provided by this room is safeguarded by the locked door, as the bathroom's door is one of the few doors of the house that can be locked. The role of the door is twofold, as explained by Gastelaars 'the door behind which we disappear does not only hide us and our unmentionable activities from public scrutiny, it also protects us from intruders: behind this door we can be on our own'.[21] In the case of Ahmed/Amedeo the possibility of both being hidden and of leaving intruders outside allows Ahmed to become – even if for a short while – the preeminent identity. Additionally, the door represents a reliable escape route, which means that if 'the painful interior articulation of his memory'[22] becomes too strong, the possibility of opening the door and going back to be Amedeo is an effective relief. This mirrors the meaning of the door as explained by Latour:

> Walls are a nice invention, but if there were no holes in them there would be no way to get in or get out – they would be mausoleums or tombs. The problem is that if you make holes in the walls, anything and anyone can get in and out […] So architects invented this hybrid: a wall hole, often called a *door*, which although common enough has always struck me as a miracle of technology. […] So, to size up the work done by hinges, […] (i)f you do not want to imagine people destroying walls and rebuilding them every time they wish to leave or enter a building, then imagine the

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[20] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 34.
[21] Gastelaars, p. 496.
[22] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 92.

work that would have to be done to keep inside or outside all the things and people that, left to themselves, would go the wrong way.[23]

The possibility of going back and forth through the door and at the same time of locking that door transforming it into a proper wall, to carry on with Latour's description,[24] represents for Ahmed/Amedeo the possibility of moving between the two identities. It is indicative that Carole-Anne Tyler uses exactly the metaphor of the closed door to describe the act of passing: 'Passing speaks of a secret behind a closed door, which it opens as a space of difference in the heart of the same, disrupting identity'.[25] What happens to Ahmed/Amedeo inside the bathroom is at the basis of this section.

The chapters devoted to Ahmed/Amedeo's accounts are structured so that an initial section in which he talks about one of the other characters is often followed by a moment in which Ahmed/Amedeo talks to the reader from the bathroom. These moments are particularly significant because Ahmed overcomes his Italian alter ego and relives moments of his past through processes of remembering; these processes are so painful that he is not even able to refer to them in words, but he needs to draw from the language of the animals. Ahmed/Amedeo's chapters are in fact called *ululati* because he expresses his pain through a beastly sound effect: 'L'unica consolazione è questo ululato notturno. Auuuuuuuuu…'.[26] Ahmed's impossibility of expressing his pain through words is not an exception but it is in line with several studies on how pain defies language. For instance, Lucy Bending starting from the analysis of Virginia Woolf's essay *On Being Ill* (1926) and Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1982) affirms:

I aim to show that physical pain in all its forms, from a stubbed toe through flogging to cancer, is hard to convey, that there is a necessity for overcoming squeamishness, decorum, and the recalcitrance of language in writing about pain […]. The approbation with which Scarry cites Woolf's famous claim for the lack in the English

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[23] Bruno Latour, 'Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts', in eds., *Shaping Techonology/Building Society. Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. by Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 225–58 (pp. 227–228).

[24] Latour, p. 230.

[25] Carole-Anne Tyler, 'Passing: Narcissism, Identity and Difference', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6 (1994), 212+ (p. 212).

[26] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 60. This was also pointed out by Emma Bond during the seminar *Voicing the Stateless with a National Language*' that she held with Derek Duncan for the Institute for Contemporary and Comparative Literature Research Seminar (University of St Andrews, 6 October 2014).

language of 'words for the shiver or the headache' suggests this confusion. Either language is at fault and does not provide enough words for what would otherwise be expressible since pain is inimical to language, or the experience of pain breaks down the ability to find the right words: the two things are not the same. Scarry proffers the first as a possibility, but gives the second explanation as a certainty.[27]

Scarry gives as a certainty the fact that pain inhibits the complete mastery of language. This power of impeding the proper mode of operation of language is also underlined by Sara Ahmed who, again by referencing Scarry, points out: 'pain is not only a bodily trauma, it also resists or even shatters language and communication (Scarry 1985:2). So that which seems most self-evident […] also slips away, refuses to be simply present in speech, or forms of testimonial address'.[28] This is also true for Ahmed who expresses his suffering through the use of animal calls, in this case the wolf's wailing: 'La verità è che la mia memoria è un animale selvaggio, proprio come un lupo: Auuuuuuu…'.[29] However, this does not mean that pain cannot be described at all; Joanna Burke, for example, has highlighted how the role of metaphors is fundamental in the expression of pain:

> Through metaphor, a concept is transferred into a context within which it is not usually found, extending its meaning. Metaphors enable people to move a subject (in this case, pain) from inchoateness to concreteness. […] Metaphors are particularly useful when people are attempting to convey experiences most resistant to expression. […] It is difficult to imagine how people could communicate (to themselves as well as to others) the sensation and meaning of pain without metaphoric crutches.[30]

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[27] Lucy Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth–Century English Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 87–88.

[28] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, p. 22.

[29] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 186. Also the choice of the wolf is not fortuitous; first of all the she-wolf is the symbol of the city of Rome (the wolf is also Italy's national animal), and secondly, the title of the Arabic version of the novel could be translated as *Come farsi allattare dalla lupa senza che ti morda*, sentence that is also present in the text: 'Quello di cui mi importa veramente è come farmi allattare dalla lupa senza che mi morda e divertirmi con il mio gioco preferito: ululare! Auuuuuu…' (Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 116). By comparing himself to a wolf, Ahmed/Amedeo positions himself in the wider narrative of Rome's tradition.

[30] Joanna Bourke, 'Pain: Metaphor, Body, and Culture in Anglo-American Societies between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Rethinking History*, 18 (2014), 475–98 (p. 477).

In *Scontro di civiltà*, metaphors are consistently created, not only in order to describe pain but also to refer to the space of the restroom;[31] I will go on to explain the significance of each of these metaphors every time they appear throughout this chapter, but it is firstly necessary to look more generally at the role of this figure of speech. Going back to Bending who, exactly as Bourke, highlights the importance of metaphors to describe pain. She also adds that: 'The proliferation of metaphors is not a "sign of pain's triumph" but instead a mode of coming to terms with the nature of pain, a way of explaining and of understanding, both in personal terms and for others'.[32] Even though Ahmed/Amedeo's pain is not physical, his ways of coming to terms with it are expressed through metaphors. For instance, when Ahmed/Amedeo meditates about Parviz's situation and the injustice he has suffered, he says:

> Io chiedo a gran voce da questo tugurio che emana una puzza da togliere il fiato: chi possiede la verità? Anzi cos'è la verità? La verità si dice con le parole? […] Oggi il mio odio per la verità è aumentato e la mia passione per l'ululato è cresciuta. Ululerò il resto della notte da questo stretto buco e so che il mio ululato non lo ascolterà nessuno. Affiderò a questo piccolo registratore il mio incessante ululato, poi mi consolerò ascoltandolo. Auuuuuuu…[33]

The fact that Ahmed by listening to his *ululati* finds some relief suggests that this process of remembering, despite being painful, is necessary to deal with his past. The bathroom, this 'smelly hovel', as Ahmed defines it, is where he gets rid of Amedeo for a moment, metaphorically leaving him outside the locked door.

The success of Ahmed's passing is endangered only by the meeting with Abdallah[34] who is the only character that knew Ahmed before his arrival in Rome. He is not a resident

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[31]Metaphors are indeed crucial in Lakhous's writing as pointed out by Grazia Biorci who affirms: 'Metaphoric concepts and images are […] frequent and peculiar. At a conceptual level, these expressions show a way of perceiving and feeling, which appear to be the result of a blending of both the two language paradigms. It appears as a process of hybridization and integration obtained through an "addition" of experiences.' Grazia Biorci, 'Beyond Hybridization: Metaphors and New Visions in "Migrant Literature" in Italian', in *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. by E. Bond and others (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 203–20 (p. 213).

[32] Bending, p. 109.

[33] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 36–37.

[34] Despite the fact that, in one occasion, when Ahmed/Amedeo talks about his meeting with Abdallah he spells his neighbour's name as *Abdellah*, I will use the form Abdallah because it is the one used as title for the chapter concerning this character.

of the building, but a compatriot who, like Ahmed, migrated to Rome. It is Abdallah who tells the reader Ahmed's story and how he lost his fiancé Bàgia who was killed escaping from criminals who were trying to rape her. Abdallah is the only person that shares part of Ahmed/Amedeo's past and his arrival represents a fracture in Ahmed/Amedeo's life; by recognising Ahmed and by publicly exposing him, Abdallah threatens Ahmed/Amedeo's apparent equilibrium provided by his disguise. More importantly, however, Abdallah's presence allows the return of a series of fears connected to his past. Until the meeting with his compatriot, Ahmed/Amedeo was able to limit his remembrances and to relegate them to specific times of the day, usually at night, and to specific places, mostly the bathroom. As a result of this symbolic spatial separation Ahmed managed also to create a temporal separation; he succeeds in completely separating his past from his present. Unfortunately, the bursting on the scene of Abdallah poses a threat to this equilibrium; when Abdallah calls his name, he struggles to remember: 'Quando mi ha chiamato, "Ahmed!", non l'ho riconosciuto subito. Ho sentito una mano sulla spalla e ho cercato di ricordare. "Sono Abdellah, il figlio del tuo quartiere. L'amico di tuo fratello Farid". Ricordavo appena il quartiere, mio fratello Farid, l'Algeria'.[35]

Abdallah belongs to Ahmed's past; it has nothing to do with Amedeo and Rome. For this reason the meeting causes a break in Ahmed/Amedeo's stability which is evident from the fact that his diary's pages following this event are all about memories and nostalgia for the past. Seeing Abdallah generates in Ahmed/Amedeo fear and insecurity, culminating in a nightmare which awakes Ahmed/Amedeo making him run to the bathroom: 'Sull'onda di questo notturno ululato mi sono svegliato tremando, sono entrato in fretta in questo piccolo bagno e ho iniziato a registrare queste parole d'incubo'.[36] The reference to the *nightmare* is also recurrent in the different *ululati*. Nightmares are a typical symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychological condition that, in my opinion, can apply to Ahmed/Amedeo.[37] The view of Abdallah was enough for

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[35] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 168–169. It is significant here the metaphor of the *quartiere* as the father of the inhabitants. Abdallah and Ahmed are brothers in this sense because they share the same origin, in this the neighbourhood, and by extension the same motherland or as it is defined in Italian, the same *patria* – literally fatherland.

[36] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 175.

[37] James F. Pagel, *Dream Science Exploring the Forms Of Consciousness* (Oxford: Academic Press, 2014), p. 126.

Ahmed/Amedeo to bring back memories that until then had been relegated to very specific times and spaces. Additionally, as Michael Linden highlights, people who have passed through difficult situations, mainly violent and characterized by injustices, are often affected by what is called Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorders. These subjects usually try really hard to forget what happened to them, but at the same time they want to remember, precisely because *embitterment* would push them to find some sort of revenge, either literal or metaphorical.[38] This is exactly what happens to Ahmed/Amedeo who, so far, was able to relegate these processes of remembering to the bathroom; the encounter with Abdallah acts as a trigger to the nightmare which activates painful memories. In order to deal with them Ahmed/Amedeo seeks refuge to the small lavatory. The double identity of Ahmed/Amedeo is therefore also mirrored by this tension between forgetting and remembering; in a sense these memories overcome the attempt to forget in an excruciating manner:

> These are very negative feelings, and there is an urge to suppress such emotions and memories. But the more one tries to suppress and avoid the thoughts, the more emotionally intense they become, and the more frequent they pop up […]. Although persons try on one hand to suppress memories, they at the other hand nevertheless want to remember. Embitterment includes the urge to make events undone, to turn around what happened, or to get revenge and come even. Therefore, thinking about what happened and reenactment of the negative event in all details is not only hurting but at the same time necessary and to some degree even rewarding.[39]

This confirms also Ahmed listening to his own *ululati* as seen above. Furthermore the painfulness caused by this process of remembering is in line with Sara Ahmed's analysis of the contingency of pain; she writes: 'the sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories: one can feel pain when reminded of a past trauma by an encounter with another'[40] and this is what happens to Ahmed/Amedeo after the appearance of Abdallah. Abdallah is the only character who knew Ahmed/Amedeo before his arrival in Rome and he is therefore the only one who knows what happened. Ahmed/Amedeo kept even his

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[38] Michael Linden, 'Hurting Memories and Intrusions in Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) as Compared to Posttraumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD)', in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting*, ed. by Michael Linden and Krzysztof Rutkowski (Amsterdam; Burlington: Elsevier Science, 2013), pp. 83–92 (pp. 86–87).
[39] Linden, p. 87.
[40] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politcs*, p. 25.

wife Stefania in dark; he did so to protect her because 'è inutile farla partecipare al gioco degli incubi'.[41] The image of the *nightmare* occurs again, but this time Ahmed/Amedeo is scared that once his wife discovers his past she would be involved in these painful dynamics.

Going back to Linden's previous quotation, the *reenactment* of the traumatic experience in the case of Ahmed/Amedeo occurs through nightmares; the only place safe is the bathroom which is, as Gastelaars points out, 'an emotional sanctuary, a refuge that belongs to a person and that person alone, in which no one else may intrude',[42] not even bad dreams. In the bathroom, triggered by nightmares, the processes of remembering take place; these processes become also a way of exorcising the negative event:

> Mi ha svegliato poco fa l'ospite delle tenebre, lo stesso incubo che viene a trovarmi ogni tanto. Non torno a dormire. Cos'è l'incubo? L'incubo è un cane feroce. Mio nonno era un contadino, non ha mai abbandonato il suo villaggio nelle montagne di Djurdjura e mi diceva sempre: 'Quando un cane ti annusa non scappare, rimani fermo e fissalo negli occhi. Vedrai, farà un passo indietro. Invece se scappi ti correrà dietro e ti morderà'. Io non fuggo di fronte agli incubi. Li guardo in faccia ricordando tutti i dettagli. Li sfido senza paura, perché il cesso è la tomba dell'incubo.[43]

This passage is full of metaphoric images, going back to the previous discussion about metaphors and the writing of pain, but two of them are extremely significant for this part. The first one is the analogy that Ahmed/Amedeo draws by defining the nightmare as the 'guest of darkness', whereas the second one is the toilet as a 'tomb'. In particular, in the first metaphor, it is noteworthy the personification of the bad dream as a 'guest', an additional presence that is there but at the same time does not exist. This guest can be also seen as a ghost that haunts Ahmed/Amedeo, as Burns, quoting Cathy Caruth, affirms: 'to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event';[44] in the same sense Avery Gordon remarks:

> The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible,
> or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or

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[41] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 158.
[42] Gastelaars, p. 496.
[43] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 171.
[44] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 82.

apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.[45]

According to Gordon, this ghost is a way for something lost to become visible again. In Ahmed/Amedeo's situation this something is his past, but more specifically, it is Ahmed himself who haunts Amedeo, reminding him that Amedeo without Ahmed would never exist. Going back to Sara Ahmed's comment on passing, even when the disguise is successful, the first identity will never disappear,[46] but actually, through nightmares and the consequently *re-enactement* of Ahmed/Amedeo's past in the bathroom, Ahmed manages to overcome the Ahmed/Amedeo dichotomy. The idea of looking at Ahmed as a spectral presence is absolutely crucial and perfectly aligned with the other metaphor that was previously underlined: the toilet as a tomb. If Ahmed is perceived as a ghost, then the bathroom/tomb would be his home. The use of the image of the tomb is effective for different reasons; it implies an idea of ending, of no return; once these memories are buried into the intimacy of the bathroom/tomb they will not be able to come back. At the same time, however, the tomb plays an additional role; on the one hand the bathroom is a location for Ahmed/Amedeo where he can bury his nightmares but also his memories, as he explicitly affirms in another passage, quoted below; on the other, relating the bathroom to the tomb provides him with the possibility of metaphorically constructing a place where he can remember his past, he can commemorate it. Eelco Runia, analysing how the desire to commemorate has changed throughout the centuries, affirms:

> Burying the dead is an ambivalent practice, and an advantageous one at that. It is ambivalent because it combines things that seem to preclude each other: closure and perpetuation. Burying the dead is a means to take leave of the deceased without giving them up. It's an evolutionarily advantageous practice because it enables

[45] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 8.
[46] Ahmed, '"She'll Wake Up"', p. 96.

humans to bring much more to bear on the present than what their consciousness can contain.[47]

Runia then concludes his article affirming that 'by burying the dead we create, not our future, but our past'.[48] I would say that, in the case of Ahmed/Amedeo, the bathroom becomes the specific location of commemoration of Ahmed's memories; in particular, the restroom is also where another ghost belonging to Ahmed's past shows herself: Bàgia, Ahmed's fiancé. Therefore the bathroom becomes for Ahmed/Amedeo more than simply the space where memories are relegated in the attempt to be forgotten, to reach a closure, as highlighted by Runia; it is also the space of perpetuation of that past that Ahmed/Amedeo re-experiences over and over again. This goes back to that tension between forgetting and remembering that has been discussed above.

The metaphor of the bathroom/tomb is also present in another passage in the novel; this time, however, it is slightly concealed behind another, apparently incompatible, image:

> Odio gli spazi stretti, tranne questo bagno. È il mio nido. Oggi ho letto sulla rivista Focus un articolo sull'upupa, sembra sia l'unico uccello che fa i bisogni nel suo nido! C'è un altro uccello misterioso come l'upupa. È il corvo, che indicò a Caino il modo per sbarazzarsi del cadavere del fratello Abele scavando una fossa. Si dice che questo sia stato il primo omicida sulla terra, quindi il corvo è il primo esperto di sepoltura nella storia. Io sono un corvo particolare. La mia missione è seppellire i ricordi macchiati di sangue.[49]

Ahmed/Amedeo's aim is 'to bury (his) memories stained with blood' in the bathroom, but here the same bathroom is defined also as a nest. Despite the fact that the nest and the tomb can be seen as opposite concepts, the combination of the two works perfectly to describe the bathroom's functions. In the course of the narration, the parallelisms with the bathroom have shifted from a nice, cosy and safe refuge such as the nest, to a dark, sad and deathly space, such as the tomb. The biblical anecdote legitimates this shift. If, on the one hand, the bathroom provides Ahmed with the safety required to cope with the

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[47] Eelco Runia, 'Burying the Dead, Creating the Past', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 313–25 (p. 324).
[48] Runia, p. 325.
[49] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 57.

painful process of remembering, on the other it is perceived as a final destination for Ahmed's past and memories. In a sense the bathroom as both tomb and nest perpetrates the several dualisms at the centre of this analysis.

The metaphors used to describe the bathroom itself are mirrored by the similes used to describe the pain Ahmed/Amedeo is experiencing – confirming the theories previously mentioned about the writing of pain. Sara Ahmed affirms that 'pain can be felt as something "not me" within "me" […] It is hence not incidental that the sensation of pain is often represented […] through "the wound"'.[50] As a matter of fact the metaphor used by Ahmed/Amedeo to portray his pain is that of the *ferita*: 'La mia memoria è ferita e sanguina, devo curare le ferite del passato in solitudine. […] Oh, mia ferita aperta che non guarirai mai! Non ho consolazione al di fuori dell'ululato. Auuuuuuu…'.[51] This bodily metaphor, however, is not the only one drawn by Ahmed/Amedo; in the same *ululato*, for instance, Ahmed/Amedeo compares the memory to an aching stomach:

> Povera Stefania, è preoccupata per me, crede che soffra di dolori allo stomaco. Il problema è che lo stomaco della mia memoria non ha digerito bene tutto quello che ho ingoiato prima di venire a Roma. La memoria è proprio come lo stomaco. Ogni tanto mi costringe al vomito. Io vomito i ricordi del sangue ininterrottamente. Soffro di un'ulcera alla memoria. C'è un rimedio? Sì: l'ululato! Auuuuuuuuuu…[52]

The 'memory's stomach' is in pain because is not able to digest everything Ahmed had to experience, and this is why among the many possible diseases, it is the ulcer that has been selected to describe Ahmed's feeling. Like an ulcerate stomach, his memory is wounded and unable to heal; the recollections of painful events (literally of blood) carry on surfacing, preventing the ulcer from healing. This surfacing of memories is metaphorically represented by the action of vomiting which puts memory in the position of never being able to completely heal. The action of vomiting is also suggestive of

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[50] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, p. 27. Perceiving pain as *not me*, as an entity is an efficient tool in dealing with it; as Bourke affirms: 'Conceiving of pain as a separate entity could, in fact, help exert power over that unpleasant entity. As Nietzsche famously quipped, "I have given a name to my pain: it is called 'dog'". In this way, Nietzsche's pain was "just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as any other dog, and I can scold it and vent my bad mood on it, as others do with their dogs, servants, and wives"' (Bourke, p. 480).

[51] Lakhous, *Scontro*, p. 158. According to Biorci: 'Crossing different domains, some other metaphors are located differently. […] Likewise, the embodiment of memory as a wound, as stomach, as indelible tattoo, carved in flesh and blood is original and not conventional.' Biorci, pp. 213-214.

[52] Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 155–156.

Ahmed's necessity to release himself from the burden of his past. Additionally, this is in line with the image of the tomb previously described; *vomiting* these memories in the bathroom-tomb means for Ahmed to relegate them in the isolation of such a space.

A similar process to the one described in *Scontro di civiltà* takes place also in *È la vita dolcezza* by Gabriella Kuruvilla,[53] where the bathroom is a pivotal location in the short story entitled *Barbie*, the first of the collection. For Mina, the protagonist of this story, the bathroom represents a site of transformation. In order to understand the significance of such a space for Mina, a brief digression is necessary. Mina is an Italian divorced mother of Indian origin; her former husband's passion for India compelled her to intensify her Indian side during their life together; as she affirms: 'Lui ha avuto la sua succursale italiana dell'India'.[54] After a while he falls in love with a much younger American woman: 'una ragazzina americana bianca e bionda, di neanche ventiquattro anni, la succursale di una Barbie'.[55] Since he left her she has carried out a daily routine. Every day she enters a different bar, drinks a cappuccino and asks for the loo:

> Bar Accone: neanche a farlo apposta. Mi sembra il luogo migliore dove entrare, per indossare i miei abiti di scena. Ordino un cappuccino e una brioche. […] Pago e chiedo: 'Dov'è il bagno?' 'In fondo a sinistra' […] Entro in bagno. Mi sfilo la canottiera, i jeans e i tacchi. Indosso il sari, i sandali e mi lego i capelli in una treccia. Con il rossetto mi dipingo la tika. Con il kajal mi marco gli occhi. Mi appendo due enormi anelli alle orecchie e uno, più piccolo, al naso. Mi infilo una decina di bracciali ai polsi. Appena mi muovo tintinno come un lampadario a gocce percorso da folate di vento. Metto la fascia a tracolla e ci infilo dentro la Barbie.[56]

In the bathroom Mina changes her clothes using all the traditional Indian accessories and puts some make-up on in the attempt to go back to being the Indian woman she never really was. As for Ahmed/Amedeo the space of the bathroom is linked to the act of passing as someone else. In this case, however, Mina is passing not as someone she wanted to be, but as the Indian woman her husband was supposedly in love with. This transformation of identity is only temporary, but during this brief time-frame Mina is, and

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[53] Gabriella Kuruvilla, *È La Vita, Dolcezza* (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2008).
[54] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* p. 13.
[55] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* p. 15.
[56] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* pp. 8–9.

acts as, a completely different person, possibly an emotionally unstable one: 'Mi fermo al primo incrocio, di fianco al semaforo. E mi comporto esattamente come lui: rosso sto immobile e zitta, giallo attendo, verde mi agito e urlo: "Troia di una bambola!"'.[57] Insulting the doll is her way of giving vent to emotions she is not able to express when she is at home trying to be a 'mamma solida, serena, disponibile e affettuosa'.[58] This act of passing as someone she is not is also remarked by the fact that Mina compares herself to the traffic light ('e mi comporto esattamente come lui'), another external element which is also inanimate and therefore, going back to the image of the ghost previously seen, without life, just as the 'succursale italiana dell'India' that Mina briefly embodies. This process of identity-changing takes place in randomly-chosen public restrooms. The same happens when she transforms back; she uses the same procedure:

> 'Dov'è il bagno?' chiedo. 'In fondo a sinistra', risponde. Entro mi sciolgo la treccia, mi sfilo gli anelli, i bracciali, il sari e i sandali e indosso la canottiera, i jeans e i tacchi. Metto in borsa la fascia e la Barbie: 'Ciao piccola, a domani'.[59]

The bathroom is for Mina the room in which she can construct another identity; an identity that is not brand new but still attached to her past self (which was already a construction); for Amedeo/Ahmed the restroom becomes the space where Ahmed overcomes Amedeo and tries to exorcise his painful memories. If on the one hand the bathroom is where memory comes into action making all these other presences alive, on the other, the bathroom is inevitably the space of the absence. Lars Frers, analysing Derrida's work, affirms:

> An absence arises in the experience, it is a relational phenomenon that constitutes itself in corporeal perceptions. Someone has to miss something for it to be specifically absent. Different from a general not-being or not-existing, it is a not-being-here, a not-existing-now. […] To be absent, someone or something has to be experienced as being distanced from the place and time where the absence is experienced. Accordingly, an absence necessitates a relation to a lived place-time.[60]

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[57] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* p. 9.
[58] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* p. 8.
[59] Kuruvilla, *È La Vita,* p. 18.
[60] Lars Frers, 'The Matter of Absence', *Cultural Geographies*, 20 (2013), 431–45 (pp. 433–434).

The absence in this case is also represented by the memory of Bàgia, Ahmed's fiancé; when Ahmed comes back to life in the bathroom, also his fiancé's absence becomes present. Ironically enough, however, after the accident that generated his disappearance, Ahmed/Amedeo risks losing his memory; this loss would perhaps mark Ahmed's final disappearance, but Amedeo's life would probably be haunted by the *absence* of his past. This issue of the *absence* will be further analysed in the following section where I consider how for Aisha, one of the protagonists of *Rhoda* by Igiaba Scego, the bedroom is precisely the space where the absence becomes present.

5.2 Smelling the Absence: 'Di solito si chiudeva in camera';[61] the Bedroom in *Rhoda*

In *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* Sandra Gilbert analyses the processes of mourning and grieving through the investigations of literary texts; framing her analysis by her personal experience of becoming a widow, she writes

> He wasn't there, but he was *there*. And his thereness, his presence at the center of massive absence, was what made death plausible, what flung it open like a door into all too easily accessible space or like a black umbrella defining an indisputably real circle of shadow into which it would be frighteningly simple to step.[62]

In this section, as previously introduced, Aisha, one of the protagonists of *Rhoda*, deals with an important *absence* in her life: her sister Rhoda. This *absence* is particularly present in the bedroom, the space that will be analysed in this part. Unlike the bathroom in *Scontro di Civiltà*, the bedroom is not a recurrent space but it nevertheless plays a crucial role in Aisha's life: 'Poi in quella stanza ci stava bene. Lì si era creata un mondo simbolico che solo lei capiva. Ogni foto, ogni oggetto avevano un significato'.[63] This room becomes particularly important for Aisha only after her sister moves to Naples and passes away. Despite being the only user of the room, Aisha has not changed its arrangement and her sister's presence is still very much noticeable:

> C'era il letto a castello che divideva con Rhoda, prima che la sorella partisse per Napoli. C'erano ancora oggetti di Rhoda disseminati per tutta la stanza. Oggetti che

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[61] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 65.
[62] Sandra M. Gilbert, *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. 6.
[63] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 51.

la giovane Aisha trattava alla stregua di sacre reliquie. Una copia sbiadita de *L'insostenibile leggerezza dell'essere*; un braccialetto comprato a Ostia; uno smalto da unghie nero scaduto da tempo.[64]

After Rhoda's death, Aisha has preserved all her sister's belongings exactly in the way Rhoda left them, in the attempt to preserve her sister's memory. This room is where Aisha is completely at ease to the point that she can undress herself and look at her naked reflection in the mirror, without hesitation:

La ragazza entrò poi nella sua camera, a passi lenti e calibrati. Fece cadere l'accappatoio come una consumata attrice della vecchia Hollywood e poi si guardò allo specchio. Non le piaceva l'immagine di lei nuda. Ma si guardava ogni volta, ogni santa volta che finiva la doccia. Si guardava nuda in quel maledetto specchio ovale![65]

This action, however, has a deeper significance which is disclosed right after: 'Perché così era solita fare Rhoda e così avrebbe fatto anche lei. Ripetendo i gesti della sorella, Aisha sperava di farla tornare in vita'.[66] The repetition of Rhoda's actions and the religious preservation of her objects 'alla stregua di sacre reliquie'[67] provide Aisha with the necessary sensation that her sister is still there, that she is still alive. Therefore, the bedroom more than a space with memories of Rhoda, is the space where Aisha *meets* her dead sister. Rhoda's absence, as previously anticipated is perceived by Aisha as a strong presence, but only in the bedroom, the place that the two sisters used to share. It is Aisha herself who brings Rhoda back to life, in a sense; as Frers affirms:

Something that is experienced as absent, like a deceased relative, can be extremely powerful because the person who experiences the absent entity must raise it herself, from her own corporeality. The absent entity becomes sensible through the emotions, longings and incorporated experiences of the person who experiences the absence. This experience can be heart rending or terrifying, rooted in the strongest emotions,

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[64] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 51.
[65] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 50.
[66] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 50.
[67] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 51.

or – if it is only loosely anchored in the corporeality of those who experience it –
short lived and fleeting.[68]

It is through Aisha's repetition of Rhoda's habit that her sister is present in the bedroom; each time Aisha repeats her sister's gestures she also brings back strong emotions that leads her to believe that her sister is there, confirming Sara Ahmed's passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter.[69] Aisha's strategic arrangement of Rhoda's possessions is also a way of surrounding herself with possible strings to pull the dead sister's memories into the present in a very concrete way.[70] Going back to Gordon's theory, Rhoda's presence is haunting the sisters' bedroom; Rhoda, just like Ahmed, comes back as a ghost in that well-defined space anytime these strings are pulled either by nightmares in the case of Ahmed/Amedeo or, in the case of Aisha, by rituals, objects and other elements that will be described below. The bedroom, like the bathroom, and possibly even more literally, can be compared to a tomb. Everything in the bedroom is in the same position as when Rhoda was alive and Aisha's daily contemplation of the objects around her can be read as an act of commemoration, a way to hold on to her sister and her sister's memory.

However, Aisha pushes herself a step further by the action of re-enacting her sister's habit in order to feel not only closer to her, but rather to *feel her*. The action of getting naked in front of the mirror was Rhoda's habit, an extremely intimate one, to the point that Rhoda used to undress only when she was sure that Aisha was asleep: 'Quando ero sicura che Aisha dormisse, mi mettevo davanti allo specchio nuda e guardavo il mio corpo'.[71] The reactions to the same procedure, however, are diametrically opposite for the two girls. On the one hand, Rhoda looks at her naked figure because she likes her body: 'Non c'era vanità in me, né narcisismo. Solo voglia di condividere quella cosa bellissima con qualcuno'.[72] On the other hand, Aisha does not like what she sees: 'Non le piaceva l'immagine di lei nuda'.[73] She almost does it as an action out of her control, as

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[68] Frers, p. 438.
[69] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, p. 4.
[70] 'But there are many strings that are pulling memories into awareness: collections of photographs, notes, and a host of the other small or large items. The pull that extends from these things, these images of the past becomes tangible, it presents itself as a very corporal experience' (Frers, p. 438).
[71] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 76.
[72] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 76.
[73] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 50.

a reflex that she cannot neither enjoy nor avoid, as the expressions 'ogni santa volta' and 'maledetto specchio' demonstrate. Aisha looks at the mirror hoping to see Rhoda's reflection, maybe, she also succeeds for few seconds, but then reality strikes her and Aisha realises the impossibility of her fantasy. The presence of the mirror is also indicative. The mirror helps Aisha to see the ghost by creating a reflection which is visible only by the eye but not perceivable by other senses. The fact of being able to see something other than herself, of literally perceiving two presences, helps Aisha's imagination to picture her sister; the mirror, by reproducing exactly the same movements that Rhoda would have done, deceives Aisha that her sister can be brought back to life, even if only for few moments.

After these few seconds of illusion, the return to reality provokes in the younger sister fear and solitude:

> Però l'odore – come tutte le cose belle – scompariva presto e con esso l'illusione di poter far rinascere Rhoda. Era in quei momenti che Aisha si sentiva disarmata. La vita adottava le tinte fosche della realtà, abbandonando i toni pastello del sogno. La paura in quei momenti diventava cieca e l'avvinghiava come una bestia disperata. A lei non restava che cedere.[74]

This evokes again Sara Ahmed's ideas on pain and how and why pain is experienced: 'The experience of pain – the feeling of being stabbed by a foreign object that pierces the skin, that cuts you into pieces – is bound up with what cannot be recovered, with something being taken away that cannot be returned'.[75] In Aisha's situation, the *foreign object that stabs her* is the renewed awareness of her sister's absence, or more precisely the presence of Rhoda's absence, to rephrase Frers. Aisha tries to overcome this sufferance through two expedients: by clinging to her bathrobe and by listening to the music:

> Aisha si strinse l'accappatoio addosso come una ciambella di salvataggio. In quei momenti l'accappatoio diventava per lei la seconda via di fuga. La prima era la

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[74] Scego, *Rhoda*, pp. 51–52. The use of the expression *far rinascere* combined with the previously seen *farla tornare in vita* build up a clear sense of Aisha's real purpose behind all her rituals. In addition, it is noteworthy the use of the word *sogno* in opposition to Ahmed's *incubo*. Aisha's possibility of bringing Rhoda back to life is a dream, a utopic hope.

[75] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, p. 39.

musica. [...] Quel lettore era per lei l'ossigeno. Lo accese. E l'aria si riempì improvvisamente di una utopia possibile.[76]

Both strategies are indicative. The former (although, by importance, is ranked by Aisha as second) is absolutely fascinating as it represents the physical moment of rupture between the illusion of bringing Rhoda back to life and the immediately following disillusion given by the impossibility of reaching that result. As soon as Aisha realizes that the image reflected is her own, and not Rhoda's, she needs to cover her body as if she is ashamed of her image: 'La ragazza si ricoprì in fretta, quasi vergognandosi della vuota aria circostante. Non era più una diva di Hollywood, l'accappatoio non era più in terra, non era più nuda. Era coperta, ma del tutto indifesa'.[77] By covering herself Aisha re-appropriates her body, abandons Rhoda's halo and with it the hope of seeing her sister again. The sentence 'era coperta, ma del tutto indifesa' underlines that the strategy of covering herself is not fully effective as she knows that she will be tempted to make the same attempt all over again. Her physical vulnerability caused by her nakedness is reflected by her emotional exposure, demonstrated by the inability to reject the idea that Rhoda can be brought back to life. Listening to the music, on the other hand, is a cold comfort, but at the same time is a way of thinking again about Rhoda:

In quel momento nel lettore stava risuonando un disco comprato appena tre giorni prima in un negozietto del centro storico. Glielo aveva consigliato il proprietario della baracca, un tipo occhialuto dall'aria mista: un po' triste, un po' allegra. 'Deve comprarlo, signorina. Lenine diventerà il nuovo Caetano Veloso'. E Aisha se l'era comprato; non perché cercasse un nuovo Veloso, ma perché quell'uomo le sembrava un po' simile a Rhoda: inespresso. Anche il disco era molto simile a Rhoda! Stessa rabbia, stesso sgomento, stessa paura, stessa voglia di esistere. Sentendo quella musica totale la ragazza si chiese se avrebbe mai avuto il coraggio di vivere senza Rhoda. Senza Rhoda…[78]

Paradoxically, one of the ways through which Aisha tries to distract herself from the misery caused by Rhoda's absence is also a further attempt to look for her. Listening to the music, however, has a positive effect; it makes Aisha think about whether she would

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[76] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 52.
[77] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 52.
[78] Scego, *Rhoda*, pp. 52–53.

ever be able to survive this pain and live without her sister. The music fills the air with the hope that this might really happen, that a life without Rhoda, despite being perceived as an utopia, might one day be possible: 'E l'aria si riempì improvvisamente di una utopia possibile'.[79] Noteworthy is also the description of the air in the bedroom as a space to fill. When the illusion breaks, the air is described as empty ('vuota aria circostante'), but after the CD player (which is meaningfully equated to the oxygen) is switched on, the air is filled with Aisha's impression of a possible life without Rhoda. This, once again, brings the analysis back to the start and precisely to the fact that the music, just like Rhoda, is perceptible but at the same time is not there, is not graspable; nonetheless both Rhoda's presence and the music manage to fill the void of the bedroom. This void is also filled by another element: the air is pervaded by a specific odour. As quickly mentioned in a previous quotation, what makes Rhoda alive in the room is her smell which, according to Aisha, still permeates the bedroom:

> E poi in certe parti della stanza percepiva ancora l'odore della sorella. Era impercettibile, ma Aisha sapeva che se si fosse sforzata, se ci avesse messo impegno poteva ancora sentirlo come fosse ieri. Però l'odore – come tutte le cose belle – scompariva presto e con esso l'illusione di poter far rinascere Rhoda.[80]

Rhoda's smell is not perceivable by an untrained nose, but it is detectable by Aisha. Once again, like the music and Rhoda's ghost, the perfume is there but still not graspable if not for brief moments. It quickly disappears, like anything else related to Rhoda, leaving Aisha with a further painful absence.

The presence of the odour, however, is not fortuitous; it has been proved that the memory of a person's smell lasts much longer than other memories.[81] Additionally, smell, unlike any other sense, is a private experience, as Laura Marks affirms:

> This is not only because sight and sounds can be recorded, but also because sight and hearing are the most public of the senses. […] Smell, however, provokes individual stories, calling upon semiotics that is resolutely specific. […] The

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[79] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 52.
[80] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 51.
[81] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 205.

associations we have with odor are strongly individualized and context-dependent, and will be as long as humans have different life experiences.[82]

Aisha's perception of Rhoda is personal and individual. Smell works as a powerful memory trigger, so powerful that it can recover memories that 'our own bodies and memories fail to call forth'.[83] The scent in question is neither a perfume nor a specific fragrance; rather is an overall sensation of Rhoda's body odour. By detecting it Aisha is convinced that she feels her sister's presence in the room. Even if barely perceptible, Rhoda's odour, as any smell in general, can help a person to retrieve a significant memory. As Herz and Cupchick have tested through a series of experiments, odour-evoked memories are more emotionally loaded than other memories.[84] Marks also affirms that 'our smell memories are best encoded when there was a strong emotional charge to the original experience'[85] and this is especially true for Aisha, who is not only using smell to remember her sister, but to bring her back.[86]

The bedroom is however the only space where this odour or at least its trace is still perceptible; this is reinforced by the fact that the same chapter in which Aisha describes the bedroom starts with a reference to the odour of the entire house and of the aunt:

> La ragazza si intrufolò furtivamente nell'appartamento che divideva con la zia e notò con un certo sollievo che la casa era pregna di lavanda. Questo significava una cosa sola: la vecchia era uscita. La scia del suo orribile profumo persiano invadeva le pareti, ma invece di irritarla per una volta la rasserenò.[87]

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[82] Marks, *Touch*, pp. 118–119–121.

[83] Marks, *Touch*, pp. 121–23. See also: Kelvin E. Y. Low, 'Olfative Frames of Remembering: Theorizing Self, Senses and Society', *The Sociological Review*, 61 (2013), 688–708 (p. 693); David C. Rubin, Elisabeth Groth and Debra J. Goldsmith, 'Olfactory Cuing of Autobiographical Memory', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 97 (1984), 493–507 (p. 494).

[84] R. S. Herz and G. C. Cupchik, 'The Emotional Distinctiveness of Odor-Evoked Memories', *Chemical Senses*, 20 (1995), 517–28; Rubin, Groth and Goldsmith (p. 494).

[85] Marks, *Touch*, p. 121.

[86] Donald H. McBurney, Melanie L. Shoup and Sybil A. Streeter, 'Olfactory Comfort: Smelling a Partner's Clothing During Periods of Separation', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36 (2006), 2325–35. They have carried out an experiment to study the *comfort smelling* or *olfactory comfort*, the habit of smelling partner's clothing when they are absent. About this practice they point out: 'The salience of odor for memory is consistent with the fact that olfaction projects more directly to the amygdala, which is intimately involved with emotional memory, than any other sensory modality. […] the practice of comfort smelling is not limited to sexual partners and may be quite widespread among other family members, especially between parents and children' (pp. 2331-2332-2333).

[87] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 49.

The flat is permeated by the aunt's perfume, in the moment in which the aunt is not there, as the bedroom where Rhoda's smell still persists despite the fact that Rhoda is absent.

The smell as an indication of an absence but also as an omen of a future absence is a recurrent element in Igiaba Scego's writing. In *Oltre Babilonia* Mar, one of the protagonists, recalls her former partner Patricia by mentioning her usual (and apparently disagreeable) perfume:

> E così fu. Niente Patricia da un giorno all'altro. Niente profumo di papavero la mattina appena alzata […]. Ogni tanto Mar si sforzava di ricordare perché quella donna le piacesse tanto. Patricia non era bella. Vestiva pure male. Portava sempre jeans e maglietta. Strane scarpe scure e usava un profumo al papavero che lei mal tollerava.[88]

Also Mar's mother, Miranda, thinking about her daughter's partner affirms: 'Patricia era troppo bianca, troppo triste, troppo strana. Poi quell'odore nauseante di papavero che si portava addosso. Un odore di morte che non l'abbandonava mai'.[89] Praticia's odour is grotesquely described as a death odour. Unlike in *Rhoda* where the perfume is symptomatic of a present absence, in *Oltre Babilonia* the perfume symbolises an absence yet to come. Rhoda's odour, the music, the objects and the intimacy are all elements that make the bedroom a significant space in Aisha's life as well as in the narration. The bedroom, and more specifically the bedroom's door, represents in fact, also the physical symbol of the separation between the sisters; during a fight between the two girls, the older sister slaps the other who, humiliated and hurt, seeks refuge in the bedroom:

> Rhoda si alzò e presa quasi da un raptus schiaffeggiò con violenza la sorella minore. Aisha sentì volare pezzi di viso per tutta la stanza. Un pezzo di guancia a Est, l'altro a Ovest, l'orecchio sinistro a Sud e il mento a Nord. Il dolore fisico era stato intenso. Penetrante. Acuto. Ma il dolore fisico non avrebbe mai raggiunto l'intensità del dolore dell'anima. Tutto il suo essere si sentì umiliato. 'Khaxba', le disse Aisha con tutta la durezza di cui era capace. E ribadì il concetto precedente: 'Tu non sei più mia

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[88] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, pp. 76–166.
[89] Scego, *Oltre Babilonia*, p. 30.

sorella'. Così dicendo corse in camera sua e sprangò la porta. Barni guardò muta quella porta chiusa. Sentì che le conseguenze sarebbero state terribili.[90]

This slammed and thereafter locked door is absolutely crucial. On the one hand it evidently marks the bedroom's transfer of property from both sisters to Aisha only; a couple of months had already passed since the last time Rhoda slept in that bedroom ('Erano quasi due mesi che Rhoda non dormiva nel suo letto, quando successe l'incidente con la sorella'[91]) and she will never sleep there again. On the other hand, as perceived by the aunt, it foreshadows the physical and definitive separation between the two. This closed door represents the first of a series of partitions: in two different rooms (Rhoda in the living room and Aisha in the bedroom), in two different cities (Rhoda in Naples and Aisha in Rome), in two different countries (Rhoda in Somalia and Aisha in Italy) and the ultimate separation, after Rhoda's death: 'Oh, come le mancavano i baci della sorella! Aisha sentiva la mancanza di intimità con lei come un vuoto incolmabile. Era una mancanza che veniva da lontano, da molto prima della sua morte'.[92] However, as for Ahmed, the closed door represents the separation between the two sisters but also, recalling the previous discussion about the door, it is for Aisha the only way to access the bedroom and therefore to be in a space where Rhoda, her memory and also her ghost are still present and perceivable. Additionally, the door is that *hole* that Latour identified as the only element that differentiates a room from a real tomb;[93] Aisha, by entering the bedroom, can connect again with her sister through the tactics analysed in this section.

The lavatory and the bedroom provide the characters analysed in this section with the necessary feeling of safety and isolation from the rest of the world in order to re-collect memories from the past, but also, people from the past, as Burns points out:

> memory is represented as being not simply a recollection, indeed a re-collection, in the present of images, thoughts and feelings from a past clearly demarcated in space and time, but rather is part of a much broader condition of systematically recalling and referring to principles constructed as being of a past which is experienced as absence and loss. It is a condition of experiencing past-ness in every context, in the

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[90] Scego, *Rhoda*, pp. 69–70.
[91] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 64.
[92] Scego, *Rhoda*, p. 51.
[93] Latour, pp. 227–228.

sense that everything important to individual being appears to have been and gone, retrievable through memory but only with the impression enforced by memory that these are salvaged fragments of a coherent whole which may never again be one.[94]

Both places are associated with the idea of constructing something that in the outside world is absent: Rhoda in Scego's novel and Ahmed in Lakhous's.[95] Both the bedroom and the bathroom play a fundamental role in the narratives exactly because they provide the cues that make these processes of remembering and of dealing with the *other* (either a relative or the other self) possible. In this section I have analysed spaces where the double is separated and faced directly; the following section will instead deal with spaces that play a similar role, but instead of benefiting from a situation of privacy provided by their nature of being indoor and private spaces, the characters involved will need to construct their own intimacy in the publicness of a bench and of a park.

5.3 From the Inside to the Outside and Back Again

In this section the focus will move towards outdoor spaces and particularly two public areas of Milan and Rome. Firstly I will consider a bench in via Padova in Milan which, as I will argue, becomes an extension of Anita's home in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*. I will then look at the public garden of piazza Meucci in Rome where Safia from *Divorzio all'islamica* can undertake a process of identity-negotiation. What both these characters share is, not only their feeling of being at home in two traditionally defined public spaces, but also how these specific locations, similarly to the ones described in the previous section, become the setting where characters face the existence of their own double.

Müge Akkar, analysing the divergence between public and private spaces in post-industrial cities, defines public space as follows:

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[94] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 71.

[95] The psychologist Marco Gemignani has analysed the way memory works during interviews arguing that this is a constructional process undertaken by both parties. He highlights: 'remembering a meaningful experience is not about its cognitive retrieval, but its reconstruction. Because the content of memories does not exist or, at least, cannot be accessed without the act of remembering (whether conscious or automatic), memories and remembering do not exist independently from each other. Accessing memories, in other words, is always a constructive act'. Marco Gemignani, 'Memory, Remembering, and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20 (2014), 127–35 (p. 129). In this case, both Ahmed and Aisha work in the attempt to reconstruct what would not exist at all otherwise.

> 'Public space' can be described as space concerning the people as a whole, open to all, accessible to or shared by all members of the community, and provided by the public authorities for the use of people in general. […] Regarding the criterion of access, public space is a place which is open to all. This means its resources, the activities that take place in it, and information about it are available to everybody. Concerning the criterion of agency, public space is a place controlled by 'public actors' (i.e., agents or agencies that act on behalf of a community, city, commonwealth or state) and used by 'the public' (i.e., the people in general).[96]

On the one hand, the public nature of the bench and of the park can be perceived as an obstacle to the achievement of a situation of privacy which Anita and Safia long for. On the other hand, this feature will be overcome by both characters to the point that, for specific periods of time, they will not even notice the publicness of the environment. The boundary between public and private is constantly shifting.[97] According to Koch and Latham: 'what troubles many public spaces is that they are lacking in certain domestic qualities. That is, they fail to provide a sense of trust, comfort or amenity that might invite multiple publics to inhabit them'.[98] On the other hand this lack has been fought by the 'public actors' in the attempt to make any public space more homely;[99] as a matter of fact an increasing process of change has become evident, which may be related to the process that Kumar and Makarova define *domestication*. They underline how certain public spaces can be inhabited as private:

> The home is not the only site of private life. There are other places, sometimes nominally public, where one can engage in private behavior and have private thoughts. […] Society has ordered its arrangements in such a way that it has allowed for the existence of these public places where certain kinds of private activities can occur without breaching any of the accepted understandings governing the relations

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[96] Muge Z. Akkar, 'Questioning the "Publicness" of Public Spaces in Post-Industrial Cities', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 16 (2005), 75–91 (p. 76); see also Sylke Nissen, 'Urban Transformation From Public and Private Space to Spaces of Hybrid Character', *Czech Sociological Review*, 44 (2008), 1129–49 (pp. 1130–1131).

[97] Krishan Kumar and Ekaterina Makarova, 'The Portable Home: The Domestication of Public Space', *Sociological Theory*, 26 (2008), 324–43 (p. 324).

[98] Regan Koch and Alan Latham, 'On the Hard Work of Domesticating a Public Space', *Urban Studies*, 50 (2013), 6–21 (p. 9).

[99] Akkar, p. 76.

between public and private. Nevertheless, they are very different from the private space of the home.[100]

Kuma and Makarova highlight how actions such as eating, expressing one's own emotions and talking of personal matters, for example, are becoming acceptable when done in public spaces.[101] This is also the result of the increasing influence of Internet and social networks, as Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gomez-Cruz highlight in their article about the role of digital cameras in the renegotiation of what is private and what is public:

> Private and public evolve in relationship with the materiality of social life. Mobile phone uses the pervasiveness of digital photography, and the growing presence of pictures in the Web reveals how people move within and between the public and the private, at times being in both simultaneously. Some have even affirmed provocatively that contemporary technological affordances along with people's and institution's practices entail the disappearance of privacy […]. But privacy can also be understood as the control about the information about ourselves, not a territory with clear boundaries but an ability to control the access to us and our information.[102]

Both Anita and Safia, despite being exposed to the external world, have the power to control access to their lives, or to use Lasén and Gomez-Cruz's terminology, they can control information about themselves. This clearly recalls Douglas' statement: 'for home starts by bringing some space under control'.[103] This power, however, is paradoxically lacking when they are at home (for different reasons) where in theory they should be more self-assured to look into themselves and outside. This is in line with Burns' argument:

> A further important characteristic of such (non-)places is their public nature, which brings to light a key feature of place in Italian immigration literature: the habitation and use for private experiences and functions of public places. In fact, even in texts in which migrant characters have 'a place' in Italy and are securely housed, the enclosed domestic space figures faintly in the texts, which tend quite systematically

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[100] Kumar and Makarova, pp. 329–30.
[101] Kumar and Makarova, p. 325.
[102] Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gómez-Cruz, 'Digital Photography and Picture Sharing: Redefining the Public/Private Divide', *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 22 (2009), 205–15 (p. 213).
[103] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

to foreground exterior, public space as the theatre for various kinds of encounter, between strangers or intimates.[104]

Noteworthy is also the fact that both the park and the bench, like the few spaces of urban green in the cities, play a really important role in the community's dynamics. Beyond the numerous health benefits provided by the presence of green spaces in urban environments,[105] it has also been shown that 'people are happier when living in urban areas with greater amounts of green space'.[106] Additionally, and this is particularly relevant when thinking about Safia's relationship with the park:

> Contact with nature is important for urban residents but so too is the desire for social interaction in the open air. Parks and gardens and informal green areas are extremely significant for social encounters: for isolated mothers to meet others and escape the burdens of being cooped up with young children for a while. […] Open spaces are regarded as particularly important for children. […] Mothers especially, discussed their own use of parks in terms of the pleasure it gave their children and expressed preferences for certain open spaces because they had a good range of facilities for children.[107]

An additional – and particularly significant – feature that Safia and Anita have in common is that they are both women approaching a traditionally marked male area as – in general – public space. Regarding this spatial separation, for instance, in an analysis of Berthe Morisot's painting *On the balcony*, Griselda Pollock points out the symbolic importance of the balustrades: 'what Morisot's balustrades demonstrate is not the boundary between public and private but between the spaces of masculinity and of femininity inscribed at the level of both what spaces are open to men and women and

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[104] Burns, *Migrant*, pp. 133–34.

[105] Lee, Andrew C. K. and Ravi Maheswaran, 'The Health Benefits of Urban Green Spaces: A Review of the Evidence', *Journal of Public Health (Oxford, England)*, 33 (2011), 212–22. According to Andrew Lee and Ravi Maheswaran who reviewed the evidence supporting the health benefits of urban green spaces: 'Numerous health benefits of physical activity have been documented, such as the effects on cardio- and cerebro-vascular disease, diabetes, colorectal cancer, osteoporosis, depression and fall-related injuries. It also improves mental functioning, mental health and wellbeing and may have long-lasting psychological benefits. Benefits on longevity have also been reported' (p. 212).

[106] Mathew P. White and others, 'Would You Be Happier Living in a Greener Urban Area? A Fixed-Effects Analysis of Panel Data', *Psychological Science*, 24 (2013), 920–28 (p. 926).

[107] Jacquelin Burgess, Carolyn M. Harrison and Melanie Limb, 'People, Parks and the Urban Green: A Study of Popular Meanings and Values for Open Spaces in the City', *Urban Studies*, 25 (1988), 455–73 (p. 462).

what relation a man or a woman has to that space and its occupants'.[108] In this regard Sara Ahmed (referring to Elizabeth Stanko) argues:

> women's access to public space is restricted by the circulation of narratives of feminine vulnerability. Such narratives are calls for action: they suggest women must always be on guard when outside the home. They not only construct 'the outside' as inherently dangerous, but they also posit home as being safe. So women, if they are to have access to feminine respectability, must either stay at home (femininity as domestication), or be careful in how they move and appear in public (femininity as a constrained mobility).[109]

For both the characters I have discussed, the search for a space outside the privacy of the home represents a way of expanding their personal geography in an attempt to find a space to feel at ease (as Anita does) and to escape the monotony of the daily life as a mother and housewife whose life takes place mainly inside the household (which is Safia's case).

In particular, the way these two women inhabit public space reflects the way Helen Scalway describes her walks around London as expressions of contemporary *flânerie*, in which as she affirms: 'I am trying to find, or perhaps more accurately to build, something: a space, a path. […] *I want to see what I can see. But I also want to see what, in the city, acknowledges me*. So I am looking for a place in the city'.[110] Anita and Safia, although in very different ways, approach the space outside the domesticity of their own house similarly to the figure of the flâneur, a *female flâneur* as described by Scalway in the previous quotation. However, Safia's (more than Anita's) walking around the city cannot be fully compared to the activity of the flâneur as defined by Benjamin, where the male flâneur goes about the city aimlessly,[111] or Poe's man of the crowd who refuses to be alone,[112] but they can be better related to the figure of the *flâneuse* as an alternative of the

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[108] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 62.

[109] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*, pp. 69–70.

[110] Helen Scalway, 'The Contemporary Flâneuse', in *The Invisible Flâneuse?* ed. by Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 164–71 (p. 164).

[111] Benjamin, p. 417.

[112] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), p. 420.

male version.[113] The existence or inexistence of the *flâneuse* has been extensively studied;[114] if on the one hand it seemed that the *flâneuse* could not exist, or that she was invisible and therefore impossible to track,[115] more recent research has attempted to delineate such a figure. Tra My Nguyen and Akkelies van Nes for example, define the *flâneuse* with these words:

> The flâneuse is not a female flâneur, but she is a version of the flâneur. She does not experience the city in the same way as he does. It is hard to define the archetype of the flâneuse, because the flâneur himself consists of paradoxes and many subcategories. Key concepts for flâneur and flâneuse are the amount of spare time, the aesthetic detachment towards object, crowd and sceneries they see and their ambiguities about it.[116]

The amount of spare time for example is shared by Safia and Anita; this freedom from commitments gives them the chance to spend time around the city, and more specifically on the bench in via Padova and in the public garden of Piazza Meucci. Their wandering

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[113] The figure of the traditional *flâneur* works perfectly to analyse Ahmed/Amedeo – as also pointed out by Parati ('Where Do Migrants live?', p. 439) and his way of going about the city of Rome; his way of walking the city without a precise destination, just to possess it, can be read as a contemporary practice of *flânerie*: 'Non mi rendevo conto di avere tutte queste informazioni su Roma. Tutto il merito va ai miei piedi. Io adoro camminare, detesto la metro, l'autobus, le machine e gli ascensori, non sopporto la folla. Amo camminare per godermi la bellezza di Roma in tutta calma, la fretta è nemica dell'innamorato. Sono paziente e sogno di bere da tutte le fontane di Roma e scoprire i suoi angoli più nascosti' (Lakhous, *Scontro*, pp. 140-141). Also Stefania from *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* can be read as an example of contemporary flâneur in the more traditional sense; however, Stefania's wandering around Milan is often linked to her job as photographer: 'Spengo il computer e apro la porta. Macchina digitale appesa al collo. Mi tuffo in via Paolo Sarpi, nel cuore del mio quartiere […]. In giro incrocio solo visi gialli e occhi a mandorla. "Và via gialdùn!", gli avrebbe urlato mia nonna. Io invece li osservo, li fotografo e li dipingo. Cerco di raccontarli. Comunque, solitamente, prima di vederli vengo avvolta dall'odore dei loro cibi fritti e sono trapassata dal volume delle loro voci acute. Poi sbatto contro i loro carrellini, inciampo nei loro pacchi, mi scontro con le loro biciclette e alla fine investo i loro corpi. Loro non si spostano, io o mi divincolo o mi infortuno: non mi lasciano molta scelta. Dopo svariate colluttazioni: li guardo' (Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 97). This list of involuntary *accidents* and scuffles pushed by the crowd build up an idea of Stefania abandoning herself to the crowd's flow. Additionally, her motivation to walk the streets of Milan to collect images and story for her photographer's work provides her with 'the social legitimation of [her] habitus' (Benjamin, p. 442).

[114] Pollock, *Vision and Difference*; Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2 (1985), 37–46.

[115] Pollock, p. 67; Wolff, pp. 41–45.

[116] Akkelies van Nes and Try My Nguyen, 'The flâneur and flâneuse of the 21st Century', *Proceedings of the 7th International Space Syntax Symposium* ed. by Daniel Koch, Lars Marcus and Jesper Steen, Stockholm: KTH, 2009, 122:1-7 (p. 122:2) available online from <http://www.sss7.org/Proceedings/08%20Spatial%20Configuration%20and%20Social%20Structures/S12 2_vanNes_Nguyen.pdf> [accessed 20-09-2014]. The issue of free time is especially relevant in Anita's case: 'E come molti anch'io, non facendo niente, ho tempo per osservarmi intorno' (Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 17).

might appear purposeless at the beginning, especially Anita's, but as I will explain in the following pages, is absolutely meaningful. If for the flâneur the aim was to look at what was going on around him, trying to be absorbed by the crowd that surrounded him, for Anita and Safia the aim expands further. Both of them are looking for a place from which to direct their gaze towards the world around them ('un tempo osservavo le galline, oggi osservo bene via Padova'),[117] but also towards themselves. As Scalway says:

> I'm looking for a place, places, where the city will speak for me – speak me, indeed. *Utter me*. […] I am still looking for the place in the city that lets me take up a wider range of positions beyond the dyad of threatened walker/seduced shopper. A place that embodies fuller *citizenship*. […] My question then as a walker is not how can I possess the city as an occupying force, but *how can I be in it at all?*[118]

Indeed both the bench and the park *speak for them – speak them. Utter them.*[119]

5.4 'E in via Padova mi succede, quando mi siedo sulla mia panchina'.[120] Looking at the World from a Bench in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*

The first chapter of *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* tells the story of Anita, a young Italian mother who lives in via Padova in Milan. Her parents (her father migrated to Italy from India whereas her mother was Italian) died in a car accident leaving their nineteen-year-old daughter alone, in a flat in piazza Ferravilla. Anita decides to start fresh and to move in a twenty-square-meter flat in via Clitumno, a secondary street of via Padova:

> A diciotto anni ero matura, secondo la legge, ma anche orfana di entrambi i genitori e proprietaria di un appartamento in piazza Ferravilla: quando mi hanno detto che mamma e papà erano morti in un incidente stradale ho lasciato l'infanzia, insieme alla casa della mia infanzia. Non ci abito più, perché non saprei più come viverci. Ma ci vivo mettendola in affitto e abitando qui dentro.[121]

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[117] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 17.
[118] Scalway, pp. 167–168.
[119] Scalway, p. 167.
[120] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 8.
[121] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 10. Noteworthy in this passage is the use of the verbs *vivere* and *abitare* to indicate the protagonist's different attitudes towards the two places. The house in piazza Ferravilla is Anita Patel's home but Anita, since the death of her parents, does not exist anymore: 'Diventando orfana sono morta'(Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p.12). Anita is Paola Rossi now, and Paola *inhabits* the flat in via Padova.

Anita's life, as she repeatedly affirms, develops all around via Padova and its cross and parallel streets; she feels she belongs to via Padova; this area of Milan has become her world. The flat is notably small and it is situated in an old building dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, a traditional 'palazzo di ringhiera'.[122] Almost as a refrain, every time Anita mentions her house she makes a reference also to an unspecified bench which is simply defined as *her* bench:

> Il mio bar assomiglia alla mia panchina che assomiglia al mio palazzo. […] E invece io, tra il mio palazzo e la mia panchina e il mio bar, ce ne ho proprio uno. […] Quelli che stanno insieme anche nel mio palazzo, sulla mia panchina e nel mio bar. […] Mi limito a passargli davanti tutti i giorni per andare dal mio palazzo, alla mia panchina, al mio bar: il Lord Bar.[123]

The repetition of the possessive adjectives before these spaces is an efficient tool in mapping the area in which she lives with her son. The recurrent use of the possessive referring to the building, the bench, and the bar is also indicative, as it parallels the incessant use of the same possessive when she quotes her mother; for instance: '"La miglior difesa è la fuga" avrebbe detto mia madre'[124] or '"Meglio poco che niente" diceva mia madre'[125] and so on. The repetition of *la mia panchina* – especially – and of *mia madre*, almost as a constant stock phrase, leads the reader to be reminded of the former expression when encountering the latter and vice versa. The memory of her mother's voice and warnings is as present in Anita's daily life as the bench that she regularly visits: 'Mi limito a passargli davanti tutti i giorni per andare dal mio palazzo, alla mia panchina, al mio bar'.[126] The bench and the mother's voice are a constant in Anita's life along with her son.

Anita's relationship with her bench, however, is slightly different from the ones analysed in this chapter. As is clear from the previous paragraph, Anita also deals daily with the presence of a ghost: she is haunted by her mother's voice that, despite being

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Anita, however, despite the fact that she changes her name and moves out of her childhood house, is still connected to it, to that part of her life. By renting it Anita still *lives* there.

[122] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 6; Ornella Selvafolta, 'Housing the Urban Industrial Work Force: Milan, Italy, 1860-1914', *IA. The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology*, 6 (1980), 9–24.

[123] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 9–13.

[124] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 21.

[125] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 23.

[126] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 13.

dead, carries on speaking to and through her daughter's mind. Additionally, it is noteworthy to notice that after the trauma caused by her parents' death, Anita moves to another area of Milan and unofficially changes her name:

> Diventando orfana sono morta, vivendo di quello che mi hanno lasciato: la casa dei miei genitori e la voce di mia madre. Sono una parassita, degli oggetti e dei pensieri degli altri. Mi approprio dei loro beni, materiali o immateriali che siano. E li uso per stare al mondo, nell'unico posto in cui mi sento accolta: via Padova, quindi. Anita Patel abita ancora in piazza Ferravilla, Paola Rossi vive da oltre vent'anni in via Clitumno 11.[127]

The name-change recalls Ahmed/Amedeo's but the two situations are different as for Ahmed/Amedeo it was a welcomed contingency, whereas for Anita it is a voluntary choice. Despite this, what the two characters have in common is the attempt to isolate the past-self in a delimited space, Anita in the flat in piazza Ferravilla where she used to live with her parents, and Ahmed/Amedeo in the bathroom where the processes of remembering occur. Additionally, Anita like Ahmed is trying to pass as someone else and in both cases they are successful, but only to a certain extent. Ahmed's passing fails when his nightmares force him to run to the bathroom and deal with his past, whereas Anita's act of passing is unsuccessful, even more than Ahmed's, every time her mother's voice is heard. This voice speaks to Anita, not to Paola, and it is a reminder of her real identity; as Sara Ahmed remarks: 'The traversing of distinct identities materializes itself through *the discontinuities of the subject's biography*'.[128] The constant presence of the mother's voice threatens Paola's existence and prevents the complete removal of Anita.

The bench is maybe the only place in which the mother is silent; she does not pass any judgement from or about the bench. The bench is therefore the only place where the haunting voice is absent; this absence, as well as the fact that the bench is perceived as an escape from the claustrophobic sensation caused by via Padova, makes the bench a special place. As a matter of fact when considering the spaces that Anita identifies as her own, they all have also a negative aspect which is emphasised by a statement that the mother would have said. For instance, about the fact that *il mio palazzo* is in a situation of decay,

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[127] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 12.
[128] Ahmed, '"She'll Wake Up"', p. 98.

she adds: '"Non c'è limite al peggio", avrebbe detto mia madre';[129] about *il mio bar*, il Lord Bar that has been nicknamed *Lurid bar*, she says: 'Non che sia sporco, anche se pulito non sembra. "Invano si lava il corpo, se non si lava l'anima" avrebbe detto mia madre'.[130]

Also via Padova is described as a lively street, but as Anita affirms right after: 'questa strada non è il paese delle meraviglie, e per entrarci non devi seguire il coniglio bianco'.[131] Despite loving this street, sometimes Anita finds the situation in via Padova so claustrophobic that she needs to escape: 'mi piace com'è, ma a volte ho bisogno di prendere le distanze'.[132] Also in this case the mother has something to say: 'E a volte mi vien voglia di spegnerla. Ma non posso, ci sono in mezzo, a questo gran casino: di persone di tutti i tipi. "Il troppo stroppia", avrebbe detto mia madre'.[133] In order to distance herself from the daily routine of via Padova, Anita either seeks refuge on the roof of her building, 'vado sul tetto, uscendo da una botola, mi siedo sulle tegole rotte, tra le cacche di piccioni e le antenne delle televisioni, e guardo via Padova dall'alto',[134] or she sits on her bench, the only place where she can create a contact with nature:

> A Milano, infatti, la natura è un'ipotesi: la puoi rintracciare mentre stai in un fazzoletto d'erba e individui una scarna porzione di cielo. E in via Padova mi succede, quando mi siedo sulla mia panchina. […]. Anche se in via Padova puoi vivere, o sopravvivere, pure con pochi soldi. Infatti ci vivo anch'io. E rintraccio la mia ipotesi di natura mentre sto in un fazzoletto d'erba e individuo una scarna porzione di cielo, seduta sulla mia panchina.[135]

Abandoning the voice, only if for few moments, is a relief for Anita and this is possible only on the bench, where the passing is totally successful and therefore there are no links with Anita's past. For this reason, in my opinion, the bench becomes so important to be included in the list of spaces that Anita owns. She owns them in the sense that she perceives these spaces as an extension of her house, despite being aware that she shares

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[129] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 9.
[130] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 13.
[131] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 6–8.
[132] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 7.
[133] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 7.
[134] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 7.
[135] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 8.

these properties with the other residents of the area. At a certain point, Anita clearly states that every time she says *mio* referring to an element of via Padova (be this the bench, the bar or the building where her flat is situated) she actually means *nostro* and she goes on adding that nothing is private in this area, but public. She says: 'Esco dal mio palazzo di tutti e vado nel mio bar di tutti. Mio è nostro: non è privato ma è sempre pubblico, in questo quartiere. Quando dici mio comunichi nostro e partecipi a un mondo'.[136] Despite this acknowledgement of the public nature of these places, Anita seems to consider them as private, meaning that her attitude towards the building, the bar, but especially towards the bench is comparable to the attitude towards any other private space. In this case, the use of the words *privato* and *pubblico* is peculiar. When Anita defines the various places as *mio* or *mia*, she is not asserting that she actually owns these places, but she is referring to the fact that she feels welcome when she is there, that she belongs there; she feels at home. In the same way, when she changes *mio* into *nostro*, she is simply affirming that this feeling of belonging is shared by the other residents of via Padova; indeed she says: 'Via Padova non è che accoglie me perché io sono io, è che via Padova ha sempre accolto tutti: lei si dà a chi la vuole'.[137] By personally and regularly occupying these spaces, Anita establishes a personal connection, she *domesticates* them (to use the term previously introduced by Kumar and Makarova). *Domestication* is relevant in Anita's case because, as Koch and Latham affirm:

> domestication not as a form of imposition, but as the cultivation of a whole range of intimate relationships between humans and other forms of life, artifacts and environments. […] Each of these perspectives shares a common sense that domestication is not simply a relationship of domination. Rather, it is a process in the formation of certain kinds of (variably) beneficial relationships between humans and other things—be they objects, sets of ideas or other forms of life. These relationships, which maybe first be alien, novel or incomprehensible, evolve over time and in various non-determinate ways to become familiar, ordinary, routine and most of all useful.[138]

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[136] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, pp. 12–13.

[137] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 7.

[138] Koch and Latham, pp. 13–14; *Domestication*, however, does not change the nature of the actions it just displaces them from a private to a public environment; going back to Kumar and Makarova: 'The argument is that many of the things once done privately, in the confined domestic space of the home eating, talking intimately, expressing emotions, entertaining oneself are now increasingly being done

For Anita the bench becomes an extension of her house. The extent to which this affirmation is true is traceable, for instance, when she meets some of her acquaintances in the bar, *her bar*; she defines them with these words: 'Sono i miei vicini di casa e di panchina: ci salutiamo e ci parliamo'.[139] Defining them as *vicini di casa e di panchina*, Anita draws a strong parallel between the two sites. With the combination of the terms *casa* and *panchina* she collocates these places on the same level, as playing the same role. This association pulls together the ultimate private space, the house, and a place as public as the bench; after all, Anita's flat is described as not private at all: 'Siamo sparpagliati sul pavimento, in mezzo agli oggetti. Non c'è privacy, nel mio appartamento'.[140] She is therefore looking for the privacy missing from her flat in the outside world; she is moving the boundaries between what is private and what is public. This is because, as seen in the introduction to this section, Anita has the power of controlling 'the access to (her) and (her) information'.[141] Her flat, on the other hand, is described as lacking a proper lockable door: 'Quasi tutte le altre, di porte, sono aperte o accostate, anche la mia lo è'.[142] The role of the door, as described for the analysis of Ahmed/Amedeo's relationship with the bathroom, is recalled here where it lacks its power of protecting Anita from the intruders.[143] The impossibility of locking herself inside turns what was supposed to be one the most intimate spaces in one potentially accessible by anyone, consequently denying Anita the chance to decide who to include and who to exclude:

> Quasi tutte le altre, di porte, sono aperte o accostate, anche la mia lo è. Non perché lo voglia, ma perché la serratura è rotta. Spero che nessuno entri: odio che qualcuno mi venga a trovare all'improvviso. È già tutto troppo promiscuo, tra gli sconosciuti in questo palazzo, perché io possa accettare anche la promiscuità, tra i conoscenti, dentro il mio appartamento.[144]

This impossibility concerns Anita about who might invade her privacy, a worry that she does not have when she sits on her bench, since it does not provide this opportunity from

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outside the home, in what were formerly thought of as public spaces. But they still remain intensely private, even intimate, activities. They still carry the sign of the private. They represent the incipient, and still ongoing, "domestication of the public space"' (p. 325).

[139] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 14.

[140] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 9.

[141] Lasén and Gómez-Cruz, p. 213; but also Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

[142] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 11.

[143] Gastelaars, p. 496.

[144] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 11.

the beginning; there is no expectation of intimacy on a public bench, nevertheless Anita reaches a point in which she feels safe and relaxed there. This is once again underlined by the fact that she identifies her 'vicini di panchina', but on the other hand she defines her *real* neighbours as 'gli sconosciuti in questo palazzo'.[145]

Additionally, the choice of the bench is not fortuitous. Benches have been at the centre of several discussions in Italy (but also abroad, especially in the US) because they used to be considered as one of the elements producing decay in certain areas of Italian cities.[146] This was because *homeless people*, a category often compared - when not superimposed - to the one of *migrants*, used to sleep on public benches in parks and on sidewalks. In order to avoid this problem, some Italian mayors have decided to introduce the so-called *panchine anti-bivacco*, which are benches equipped with several armrests to prevent people from laying down.[147] Anita owns two houses and therefore the bench does not serve the purpose of dwelling, but a different one. On the bench she is free from her mother's voice, by using Douglas's idea, she has the power to control that space and, for this reason, she feels at home. This power mirrors the role of the door as she can prevent her mother's (and with it her) memories from appearing.[148]

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[145] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 11.

[146] Concerning New York, for instance, this hostility against benches, which mirrored the more general attempt to hide homeless people's presence in public space, was part of Mayor Giuliani *zero tolerance* policy. For more information on Giuliani's policy more generally, please refer to Judith A. Greene, 'Zero Tolerance: A Case Study of Police Policies and Practices in New York City', *Crime & Delinquency*, 45 (1999), 171–87.

[147] Cecilia Gentile, 'La guerra contro i clochard. Arriva la panchina antibivacco', *La Repubblica*, 22 October 2009 <http://roma.repubblica.it/dettaglio/la-guerra-contro-i-clochard-arriva-la-panchina-antibivacco/1755959> [accessed 23 October 2014]; 'Nel 2010 a Roma panchine anti-bivacco braccioli divisori contro i senzatetto', *Il Messaggero*, 21 October 2009 <http://www.ilmessaggero.it/HOME_ROMA/CITTA/nel_2010_a_roma_panchine_anti_bivacco_braccioli_divisori_contro_i_senzatetto/notizie/77534.shtml> [accessed 23 October 2014]; Giulia Guerri, 'Controlli e panchine anti-bivacco per ripulire la passeggiata di Nervi', *Il Giornale*, 22 January 2012 <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/controlli-e-panchine-anti-bivacco-ripulire-passeggiata-nervi.html> [accessed 23 October 2014]; Andrea Priante, 'Le panchine anti-bivacco nel presepe del procuratore', *Corriere del Veneto (Corriere della Sera)*, 11 December 2010 <http://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/veneto/notizie/politica/2010/11-dicembre-2010/panchine-anti-bivacco-presepe-procuratore-18154032251.shtml> [accessed 23 October 2014].

[148] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

5.5 'Vado con Aida ai giardini di piazza Meucci'.[149] Rethinking One's Own Identity in a Public Space

The last space considered in this chapter is the public garden of piazza Meucci, which becomes a crucial location for Safia, the female protagonist of *Divorzio all'islamica a viale Marconi* by Amara Lakhous. Safia is an Egyptian woman who migrated to Rome with her husband Said. Despite her experience as hairstylist when she was still in Cairo, and her willingness to carry on practising this profession, she is officially a full-time mother and housewife.[150] Every morning she takes her daughter Aida to the public garden of piazza Meucci. Unlike Anita, Safia never explicitly refers to this garden as a particularly special place, but it represents indeed a significant moment during her daily life. Spending most of her time at home with her daughter, the park becomes an escape from the monotony of the house, and also, it is where she can have a direct contact with the Italian reality that she insistently looks for. As it has been described in the previous chapter, Safia is fascinated by Italy and Italian culture; when she is at home she spends most of her time watching Italian movies trying to practice her pronunciation. Even before her arrival in Rome, when she was still in Egypt, she used to dream about her future as a businesswoman in Italy.[151] Her arrival in Italy, however, is a puzzling experience for her, since she is not allowed to practice her profession and she is relegated to the space of the house and to the area closely surrounding it. The park represents not only the space where her *imagined Italy* meets *real Italy*, but also the space where Safia faces the idea of herself in Italy as she had imagined before arriving in Italy; an idea that has a specific name: Sofia. This last character differs from the others included in the present analysis, as Safia is not coping with an absence but with her personal yearned evolution from Safia to Sofia; an identity's development that mirrors her physical relocation from Egypt to Italy and which is already in action as demonstrated by the change of her name.

Like Anita, Safia visits the park daily, but unlike all the situations described in this chapter, Safia's experience of the park is often supported by the presence of other people: 'Verso le dieci porto Aida al giardino di piazza Meucci per farla giocare con gli altri

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[149] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 123.
[150] Despite her husband's prohibition Safia is secretly working as a hairstylist for her friends and acquaintances.
[151] Burns, *Migrant*, p. 119.

bambini […]. Lì mi capita di incontrare qualche giovane mamma e ci mettiamo a parlare del più e del meno'.[152] This *del più e del meno* turns out to be exceptionally meaningful for Safia. Among the mothers she meets at the park, two women in particular share these moments with Safia:

> Mi siedo accanto a Giulia, una romana che conosco da due anni. Col passare del tempo siamo diventate amiche. Lavora part-time in un'agenzia immobiliare. Ha trentotto anni e un bambino molto vivace. […] Dopo una ventina di minuti ci ha raggiunto Dorina, la nostra amica Albanese. È musulmana come me però non porta il velo. Fa la badante a Giovanni, un anziano che cammina con molta difficoltà. Dorina ha ventinove anni e vive a Roma da sei. Ha alle spalle una storia bruttissima.[153]

By telling their stories and chatting about their daily adventures Giulia and Dorina manage to make Safia question what it means to be a migrant, a Muslim, an Egyptian as well as what it means to be Italian.[154] The dialogues between the three women cover various subjects which, to recover a word previously used to talk about memory, become triggers for Safia's reflections; these considerations will bring her to reshape her identity as an Italian woman. Giulia, for instance, is a mother but she is not married; this is perceived by Safia as an incongruence particularly difficult to understand:

> Giulia non è sposata, però vive con un uomo che è anche il padre di suo figlio. Non lo chiama mai marito, ma compagno. Lei non è una moglie ma una compagna. Vivono sotto lo stesso tetto e dividono lo stesso letto però non sono sposati! È una situazione un po' complicata da capire per una musulmana egiziana come me. […] Devo ammettere che la difficoltà non è capire, ma accettare. […] La verità è che

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[152] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 83.

[153] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 83–86.

[154] Also Giovanni, the old man brought every day to the park by his carer Dorina, provides Safia with cues for useful reflections about Italy and Italians. Giovanni is a xenophobic eighty-year old man who spends his morning at the park reading *Il Giornale*, *La Padania* and *Libero*. His comments about migrants and Muslims, despite being to the limit of the absurdity, provoke in Safia the need to answer, at least mentally, and to give an explanation: 'Nonno Giovanni mi chiama "suora". Gli ho detto più volte: "Non sono una suora, io sono musulmana". […] Non ho la minima voglia di spiegargli che le suore non esistono nell'Islam e che il Profeta Maometto ha fortemente sconsigliato il monachesimo. […] Quando uno si sposa riesce a tenere meglio a bada le tentazioni. Ma forse questo discorso vale più per gli uomini che per noi donne, o sbaglio?' (Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 87).

non riesco a mettermi nei suoi panni: non posso pensare di vivere con un uomo, e
per giunta avere un figlio da lui, senza matrimonio. Per me è impossibile.[155]

This consideration is followed by a digression of a few pages on marriage and on divorce (both in Egypt – as an Islamic country – and in Italy) in which the reader gains knowledge of the fact that Safia and her husband already had two divorces and if the third should arrive, it will be the final one. Sitting on a park bench, while looking after her daughter, Safia is free to ask questions to the women there as well as to herself. She is not at home where she needs to be the perfect wife, housewife and mother, or where she is secretly working as hairdresser. At the park she is just Safia, or better Sofia. As already pointed out in the previous chapter, Safia has changed her name into Sofia after her arrival in Italy. Actually, she did not change her name on purpose; as for Ahmed/Amedeo it was a coincidental event:

> Però da quando vivo a Roma ne ho un altro: Sofia. Che sia chiaro: non è uno pseudonimo, nel senso che non me lo sono andato a cercare. Mi è stato regalato e io l'ho accettato. […] Perché mi chiamano così? Non è molto chiaro. Diciamo che ci sono due ipotesi. Primo: la gente scambia facilmente (e senza cattiveria) 'Safia' per 'Sofia'. 'Ciao, come ti chiami?'. 'Safia'. 'Sofia! Che bel nome!'. […] Seconda ipotesi. Per molti conoscenti italiani, io (senza il velo) assomiglierei molto a una famosa attrice italiana. 'Ciao, come ti chiami?'. 'Safia'. 'Sofia! Complimenti hai proprio un bel nome'. 'Grazie'. 'Sai a chi assomigli?'. 'A chi?'. 'A Sofia Loren'.[156]

The act of passing is often present in Lakhous's work, but here the situation is different. Safia, despite changing her name in circumstances similar to Ahmed's, is not passing as someone else, she is evolving. The new name she receives comes to symbolise the possibility of a future as the Italian woman she imagined to become when she was still in Egypt. The identity of the two characters are on different temporal dimensions; on the one hand Ahmed belongs to the past and Amedeo to the present, on the other Safia belongs to both the past and the present whereas Sofia is Safia's future, at least this is what she hopes. Subsequently also their relationship with their *special space* is different. The protagonist of *Scontro di civiltà* seeks refuge in the restroom in order to deal with his original identity, to become Ahmed again and to face his past. In *Divorzio all'islamica* Safia/Sofia uses the

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[155] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 83.
[156] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 25.

arena of the park as a place of negotiation; Safia deals with the possible existence of *Sofia* trying to define her new identity, by meeting and talking to her friends. As Burns points out:

> Sofia's sense of self, place, and attachments seems absolutely to be in movement, responsive to her local surroundings and to possibilities that it offers as well as to principles and affects established in the country and culture from which she departed. Her adaptation of her name (Safia to Sofia) to suit her new environment marks this passage.[157]

In the park, Safia's certainties become Sofia's hesitations and the other way around when Safia comes back home with her husband, or when she visits the phone centre to call her family in Egypt. It is also noteworthy how for Safia this passage is also underlined by her daughter's habit of calling her Sofia when they are outside, as a sort of legitimation: 'Fuori di casa si diverte a chiamarmi Sofia e non mamma'.[158] It is in the garden of piazza Meucci that Safia's sense of self, as defined by Burns, receives more stimulus as it is in this location – through the encounter-clash with other characters – that she can deal with completely different opinions, and decide whether it is the case to revaluate hers or not. She does not usually change her mind, but she starts a sort of negotiation with herself, ruminating on those issues even when she goes back home:

> Chiudo la porta della camera da letto per non disturbare il mio architetto mentre sbrigo le faccende di casa con la radio accesa, anche se non è tanto facile svegliarlo. Ha un sonno pesantissimo. […] Per fortuna non russa. È una cosa di non poco conto. Giulia mi ha detto che ci sono coppie che si sfasciano esclusivamente per questo motivo. E allora? Allora niente. Direi che in Italia si divorzia per motivi piuttosto futili, o sbaglio?[159]

Noteworthy in this passage is also the reference to the closed door which represents, as for the previous characters, a strong symbol of demarcation; in this case it grants Safia with the necessary seclusion to think about those matters that she discussed at the park

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[157] Burns, *Migrant,* p. 120.

[158] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 83. Noteworthy here is also the fact that Safia's double identity changes also for her daughter for whom she is mum at home but Sofia outside, totally disregarding Safia, the original identity.

[159] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 122.

and it also separates her from an element (her husband) that – involuntarily or not – is obstructing the formation of Safia's new identity. The park represents for her a chance to escape from her house but most of all to find the suitable environment to escape from the identity that her husband has imposed on her. It does not have to be an important topic to activate Safia's flow of thoughts; it could also be a simple chitchat about superficial subjects like, for example, cosmetic surgery. Safia has a different opinion on the matter; not only does she need to justify it; in a sense she is also trying to convince the others that her perspective is the right one:

> Oggi si parla del seno. Della prevenzione del cancro al seno? No, della chirurgia estetica. […] Io, personalmente, la penso in maniera diversa. Perciò non posso rimanere zitta, devo intervenire per difendere le mie convinzioni. La mia teoria è semplice: il velo non è sempre di stoffa, ci sono altri trucchi, paragonabili al nostro velo, che nascondono altre parti del corpo. […] Devo cambiare strategia e trovare qualcosa di più convincente. Passo alla religione, una materia che conosco meglio.[160]

She carries on speaking about her opinions for a few pages. Safia is not changing her beliefs, nonetheless she is reshaping her identity by positioning it in a new context, an Italian one. This *reshaping* process takes place in the park where she can compare her ideas with the two women's, deciding which ones can be changed and which one should be kept. However, the differences are sometimes insurmountable: 'Per Dorina e Giulia la situazione è completamente diversa. Diciamo che loro navigano in altri mari'.[161]

The presence of Dorina and Giulia is obviously important for this identity-negotiation process to happen, but it is not indispensable. An example of this can be traced in one of the chapters where Safia and Aida are at the park but Safia's friends are not there. Despite the fact that the environment is obviously less entertaining for Safia (and that she will therefore decide to leave earlier than usual), she still manages to find cues to reflect upon:

> Guardo mia figlia giocare con due bambine. È serena e tranquilla. Sono sicura che la sua sarà un'infanzia diversa dalla mia e da quella delle mie sorelle. […] tuttavia sono certa di una cosa: non subirà la peggiore violenza in assoluto, la circoncisione

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[160] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, pp. 102–103.
[161] Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 103.

femminile. Questa non è una promessa, ma un giuramento che intendo onorare a tutti
i costi. Piccola mia, tua mamma non permetterà a nessuno di farti del male!¹⁶²

The flow of thoughts carries on with a passionate reflection on the topic of infibulation
and the personal recall of Safia's experience with that practice; the choice of this specific
matter, which is obviously a critical issue for Safia's culture, is not at all accidental. The
park provides Safia with the necessary serenity and quiet to distract her mind from the
usual thoughts; in these moments she rethinks her identity by going back to her origins,
to her culture and to her beliefs. However, it might be argued that the way she challenges
her identity remains on a superficial level, as the issue of the veil demonstrates. As
previously said, her husband *had imposed* on Safia the role of housewife forbidding her
to practice the profession of hairdresser; it is the same husband who forces her to wear
the veil: 'Qualche giorno prima del matrimonio l'architetto mi chiese di mettere il velo.
[…] Mettere il velo? Forse non avevo capito bene. […] Un vero colpo basso'.¹⁶³ At first
Safia perceives it as an imposition, as a limit to her personal freedom, but it then becomes
a significant sign of her identity. This does not diminish her process of identity shaping,
as Burns argues:

> What is important to recognize within Sofia's story in this novel is, however, the
> force of her agency in constantly reviewing and negotiating her position as a wife,
> mother, Muslim, migrant, daughter, Italian citizen, linguist, businesswoman, etc. [...]
> She is, arguably, complicit in her identity remaining in many respects as her husband
> and others would wish it, but this is not a static or passive complicity, but rather a
> restless process of negotiation.¹⁶⁴

In Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle*, the churchyard of Giorgis in Addis
Ababa plays a similar role to the one played by the park in *Divorzio all'islamica*. The

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¹⁶² Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 123. Safia's decision to leave earlier from the park is also linked to another
factor: 'Stare in questi giardini senza la compagnia di Dorina e di Giulia non è il massimo. Una donna con
il velo seduta da sola su una panchina pubblica non passa inosservata. Preferisco togliere il disturbo e
andarmene' (Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 129). This decision of leaving is strictly connected to what Nirmal
Puwar affirmed commenting on Doreen Massey's analysis of women and public space: 'The sheer
maleness of particular public spaces and women's experience of increasingly occupying them while still
being conscious of being 'space invaders' even while they enjoy these places is vividly captured by
Massey. To this, of course, we could add that the sheer whiteness of spaces is also being altered' (Puwar,
pp. 7-8). Safia is a woman who belongs to a racialized minority, for this reason, when she is by herself
she decides to leave earlier.
¹⁶³ Lakhous, *Divorzio*, p. 39.
¹⁶⁴ Burns, *Migrant*, p. 54.

protagonist of this novel, Mahlet, is an Ethiopian young lady, who went to Italy to attend university. At a certain point Mahlet has to go back home to mourn the loss of one of the elders of her family. During her stay in Ethiopia she spends most of her time in a specific churchyard, as she was asked to do by the old Yacob before passing away.[165] During these hours she prays in the attempt to ride the sorrow out, but more importantly she meets several people willing to tell their stories about their relations with Italians and with Italy more in general. At the beginning she does not understand the meaning of these encounters, but by the end of the novel she will realise that Yacob's plan was, from the beginning, for her to become the *cantora* of her people's past: 'Ed è per questo che oggi vi racconto la sua storia. Che poi è anche la mia. Ma pure la vostra'.[166] This process of listening and collecting the stories of Ethiopian people helps Mahlet to understand her role in the community and also to define who she is and where she wants/needs to be. Like Safia, Mahlet is at ease in the churchyard which, despite being situated in a congested area of the city, is surrounded by silence and quiet:

> Ad ogni chiesa si accede da una strada, sempre caotica, e appena varcato il cancello, come se essa avesse un'aura magica capace di rinfrangere i suoni, si viene immersi in un silenzio infinito, avvolgente e riposante come l'ombra di un grande sicomoro nelle ore più calde del giorno… A Giorgis l'effetto è maggiore. […] Varcato il cancello mi fermai, toccai terra con la punta delle dita, quindi sollevai la mano, mi feci il segno della croce e inspirai più volte per assorbire il silenzio, poi, proprio mentre decidevo di muovermi per raggiungere il giardino, mi bloccai.[167]

This situation of isolation, which is shared by both Mahlet and Safia (it also recalls Anita's will to escape from via Padova), helps them to deeply connect with themselves but also with the outside world; for Safia this means her present – and future – in Italy, whereas, in Mahlet's case, it is hers and her people's past:

> Pregai inginocchiandomi qua e là fino a quando il dolore alle ginocchia diventò una massa di spilli che punzecchiavano. Solo a quel punto andai a sedermi sulla lastra di pietra sotto lotto l'albero. Allungai lo sguardo sul lento incedere dei fedeli per

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[165] Before his death, Yacob left to Mahlet two requirements: she has to sleep in his bedroom and she has to go to St George church in Addis Ababa and pray for him.

[166] Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), p. 251.

[167] Ghermandi, p. 124.

accorgermi che non avevo più bisogno di incantarmi sui loro passi. Oltre al dolore
era scomparso anche quel brusio interiore, e persino il senso di mancamento. Potevo
chiudere gli occhi e volgermi dentro di me. Ero sprofondata in me stessa quando
passò la signora della tartaruga. […] 'Senti figliola, ti piacciono o no le storie?'. […]
'Allora intanto ascolta, poi quando arriverà il momento te ne ricorderai. E
l'userai'.[168]

The park and the churchyard are places of negotiation on multiple levels; from a
temporal perspective the past comes to terms with the present through the reflections of
the two women: Safia rethinks her past in the light of her contemporary experiences in
Rome (in order to shape her future), whereas on a more communal level Mahlet tries to
mediate the problematic history between Italy and Ethiopia by listening to past stories
from the privileged point of view of being a young woman born after those times. On a
spatial level, despite the fact that the park is in Rome and the churchyard is in Addis
Ababa, both places enclose Italy and an additional country, either Egypt or Ethiopia.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated four different spaces from four different novels;
however through the chapter it has become evident how these differences can be easily
surmounted by the consistent and compelling similarities that have emerged. The logical
structuring of the chapter in two macro-parts, private and public spaces, could have
perhaps, from an analytical point of view, been avoided because the way all characters
inhabit those spaces is intimate and personal regardless of their conventional nature of
either public or private environments. This intimacy allows the characters to deal with
their doubles, be this external as in the case of Aisha, or internal as for Ahmed and Sofia,
or both as for Anita. And if according to De Certeau: 'memory is a sense of the other',[169]
all these spaces, to a greater or lesser extent, allow the characters to cope with the *other*
only through the work of memory. Only by dealing with their past are these characters
able to face their present and construct a future; as Anita points out:

E continuo a sentirmi spaesata, anche. Come se fossi un viaggiatore in terra straniera,
che vede, tocca, annusa, assaggia, ascolta e vive tutto per la prima volta. Come mio

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[168] Ghermandi, p. 170.
[169] De Certeau, p. 88.

figlio. Eppure io vedo, tocco, annuso, assaggio, ascolto e vivo tutto da ormai più di vent'anni, con la porta accostata, mai chiusa e mai aperta.[170]

In a sense, all the characters might have pronounced this reflection as what all of them have in common is this necessity to make peace with a past that is preventing them from moving on. They need to gain power over that door which, as described by Anita, is always 'accostata, mai chiusa e mai aperta;' only when they will be able to bring that door under control, going back to Douglas,[171] when they will be able to lock it or to open it, once and for all, they will *feel at home* everywhere, but most of all, in themselves.

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[170] Kuruvilla, *Milano*, p. 18.
[171] Douglas, 'The Idea of a Home', p. 289.

Conclusion

> The Scarecrow listened carefully, and said, 'I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas'. 'That is because you have no brains' answered the girl. 'No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home'. The Scarecrow sighed. 'Of course I cannot understand it', he said. 'If your heads were stuffed with straw, like mine, you would probably all live in the beautiful places, and then Kansas would have no people at all. It is fortunate for Kansas that you have brains'.[1]

'There is no place like home' is maybe one of the most renowned and reiterated sentences when analysing concepts and theories about home; however, if read in the light of the investigation carried out in this thesis, the entire dialogue between Dorothy and the Scarecrow acquires an interesting meaning. It is not my intention to compare the difficulties migrants experience in the destination country to a children's novel, but I think this passage recalls ideas that have recurred quite regularly throughout this thesis. The most immediate connection is the almost never fulfilled intention to return and the role played by memory. Every place has been read through migrants' attempt to inhabit it as a *home space*. When these attempts are successful, it is because memory can connect the present to a past which is displaced somewhere else, to a home that belongs to the past. It is therefore necessary to go back to what was stated in the introduction and particularly to Sara Ahmed's statement, in which she declares the impossibility – in the transnational journey of subjects – of finding a proper *home* as in no place can memory bind the past to the present;[2] she also adds:

> The analogy between places and memories is suggestive, though we may want to make such an analogy on different grounds: it is the impossibility of return that binds them together. That is, it is impossible to return to a place that was lived as home, precisely because the home is not exterior to a self, but implicated in it. The

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[1] L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Rockville, Maryland: Arc Manor LLC, 2008), pp. 20–21.
[2] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 330.

movements of selves between places that come to be inhabited as home involve the discontinuities of personal biographies and wrinkles in the skin.[3]

Ahmed also points out that this process of remembering is perceived by migrants as a painful experience because it implies the impossibility of the sought return. Nonetheless, I have shown how it is precisely this process of remembering that leads to the transformation of ordinary places into *home spaces*. If, on the one hand, Ahmed is right in highlighting how a sense of discomfort is created by the awareness of the impossibility of returning, which is revealed by acts of remembering,[4] on the other hand, it is also true that these very acts of remembering are the basis required to experience a place as *home space*. As a matter of fact, all the spaces considered provide their users with particular memory triggers that would activate the process of remembering; the presence of these triggers – by allowing these processes – makes these spaces potential *home spaces*. This can also be seen in the quotation opening this section, specifically in the Scarecrow's inability to attach himself to a place; he has no brain and, as it is emphasised throughout at least the first part of the story, he cannot store information thus he repeats the same mistakes all over again. The Scarecrow is not linked to Oz for particular reasons, but because it is a beautiful place, and it is indeed the only place he has ever been.

In the first part of the thesis, these memory triggers were represented by the possibility of sharing moments with other compatriots or fellow migrants, by home-making tools such as the TV, or by the opportunity to call home and be directly connected with relatives and friends,[5] abolishing therefore, at least metaphorically and for a brief period of time, any geographical distance. The attention has then been narrowed down not only to more circumscribed spaces but also to specific characters, for instance, Scego's mother and the role played by her knick-knacks in transforming cold and anonymous rooms, in anonymous guest houses, into familiar environments. If, on the one hand, the last chapter has restricted the field of enquiry, as the focus moved to small and very specific places such as the bathroom or the bedroom, for instance, on the other, it has paradoxically opened up the discussion. The investigation of these places and the ways they are inhabited is not influenced by the migrant background of the characters involved, but

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[3] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 343.
[4] Ahmed, 'Home and Away', p. 343.
[5] Tiziano Bonini, 'The Media', p. 881.

rather by their personal experience. These are characters that find themselves in a difficult situation that has little to do with migration, but has everything to do with the loss of a beloved person. Paraphrasing Igiaba Scego's final paragraph of *La mia casa è dove sono*, this is Ahmed's story (or Aisha's or Anita's) but it could easily be mine as well as everyone's.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this work is to analyse how characters in selected novels inhabit specific spaces in order to feel at home; the characters I have chosen have a migrant background. This is evident in their way of occupying the space, as migration is a crucial element in this process; it is precisely the experience of migration that would require these spaces to become something more. The analysis of these spaces is also underpinned by the use of the journalistic sources through which I attempted to integrate additional elements to the information provided by the novels. Both literary and journalistic sources were investigated in order to delineate a representation as complete as possible of the spaces selected, and more specifically of the role they play in Italian contemporary society. This representation included the perception of Italians - with or without migrant origin - of these same spaces. This is mirrored by my difficulties with definitions pointed out in the introduction; my choice of the term postcolonial was indeed an attempt to include the corpus of this doctoral work in a wider scenario in which the *migrant* – as well as *non-migrant* – feature is an additional value; in one case or the other they would belong to the same scenario. This attempt culminated in the final chapter in which the *migrant* feature almost completely disappears from the analysis, the focus of which moved more decisively towards the personal experiences of these characters.

There are, however, issues that were beyond the purpose of the present investigation, but that would provide a significant contribution to the field of Italian Studies. In particular, I think that these same spaces could be studied from a gendered perspective in order to highlight potential differences and similarities as many of the characters analysed in this work have suggested. Additionally, a comparison between generations and how age influences the way these spaces are inhabited would certainly call attention to meaningful dissimilarities useful for a proper understanding of a changing Italian society.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown different ways of inhabiting a place and transforming it into *home space*; going back to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy,

regardless of the problems connected to her home, wants – and manages – to go back to her family in Kansas. This book is, however, only the first of a series of thirteen during which many events occur. In relation to the analysis conducted in this research, I believe that what happens in book six is a crucial turning point. In *The Emerald City of Oz*, Dorothy and her entire family decide to move permanently to Oz, leaving Kansas for good. In analysing this event, Salman Rushdie provides an insightful comment on this which goes beyond the interpretation of a children's novel, and becomes an almost psychological analysis of the contemporary condition of movement and the process of *home spaces' negotiation* and, as such, the perfect conclusion for this doctoral thesis:

> So Oz finally *became* home; the imagined world became the actual world, as it does for us all, because the truth is that once we have left our childhood places and started out to make up our lives, armed only with what we have and are, we understand that the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home', but rather that there is no longer any such place *as* home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz: which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began.[6]

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[6] Salman Rushdie, The Wizard of Oz, BFI Film Classics (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 57.

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