Postmemory and migration in contemporary multilingual literature by Tomer Gardi, Katja Petrowskaja and Igiaba Scego

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary multilingual writing often reveals and works through collective memory and trauma inscribed in language, such as the Shoah, wartime atrocities, colonialism, genocide, exile and migration. Often composed by members of the second or third generation, these texts can be considered postmemory narratives (Marianne Hirsch). In this contribution, I scrutinise how these texts, with their particular multilingual poetics, question official memory discourses and offer an alternative perspective, often that of underprivileged subjects such as immigrants, guest workers and former colonial subjects. My comparative analysis focuses on texts by Tomer Gardi, Katja Petrowskaja and Igiaba Scego. In my study, I am particularly interested in the nexus of language, migration, multilingualism and memory that is suggested in the texts and that offers a starting point for the negotiation of new, inclusive concepts of belonging.

KEYWORDS

Postmemory narratives, literary multilingualism, migration, contemporary literature

Introduction[1]

Although multilingual authors and multilingual literature are not recent phenomena, growing attention has been given to these texts and their writers in the past decade or so. This has to do with an increased general

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awareness of multilingualism in society that is also reflected in the literary scene (although the latter usually views it in a more positive light than the former, where multilingualism is often perceived as a problem or a possible threat to the main language in a given society). This growing interest in multilingual literature can be seen both in the broader readership and in the writings of literary scholars. Multilingual authors have been among the winners of prestigious prizes such as the Nobel Prize in Literature (awarded to Herta Müller and Kazuo Ishiguro in 2009 and 2017, respectively), the Ingeborg-Bachmann Prize (awarded to Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Olga Martynova in 1991 and 2012, respectively), and the Prix Goncourt (awarded to Jonathan Littell in 2007), which has helped to raise the profile of multilingual literature among the general public. In literary studies, increased interest in intercultural and transcultural phenomena brought about by the "cultural turn" has prompted greater awareness of multilingual and translingual aspects in literature.

Indeed, literary multilingualism has been a growing field of research and is now an established interdisciplinary and comparative discipline. Recent handbooks (Dembeck and Parr 2017; Kellman and Lvovich 2022) and the launch of the new *Journal of Literary Multilingualism* (published by Brill and scheduled for 2022) are evidence of this trend. Thus far, research has concentrated on descriptions and analyses of forms and functions of literary multilingualism, and the texts have been read in their particular (cultural, historical) contexts (see Bürger-Koftis, Schweiger and Vlasta 2010). Scholars have worked in close collaboration with multilingual authors (see Bürger-Koftis, Pellegrino and Vlasta 2018; Lecomte and Bonaffini 2011; Marianacci and Minore 2010; Siller and Vlasta 2020), and new directions in literary multilingualism studies, such as diachronic studies, have recently been proposed (see Anokhina, Dembeck and Weissmann 2019 and the conference *Le multilinguisme évité, contourné et caché: Le monolinguisme, le multilinguisme et la (non)traduction au 19e siècle*, organised by Jana-Katharina Mende and Myriam-Naomi Walburg at the Université de Liège in May 2021).

Just as literary multilingualism within texts comes in different forms, the terminology and definitions used to describe multilingualism vary markedly. Steven G. Kellman, for instance, uses the term "translingual writing" (2000) and restricts it to authors such as Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, who write in an acquired language rather than (or in addition to) their primary language. Other researchers have applied a broader concept; Rainier Grutman, for example, created the term "hétérolinguisme" (1997) to denote the concept of trans-(or multi-)lingualism that encompasses Michail Bachtin's concept of polyphony. Accordingly, "hétérolinguisme" comes in social, regional and historic varieties, such as dialects, sociolects and non-standard variants. Both Kellman's and Grutman's concepts include both manifest and latent forms of literary multilingualism, a distinction that was introduced by Giulia Radaelli (2011; 2014). According to Radaelli, manifest multilingualism may include linguistic forms such as code switching. Other forms of literary multilingualism include implicit or, as Radaelli calls it, latent multilingualism, for instance when conversations are conducted or letters are written in a different language than the main text. Literary multilingualism can be defined even more inclusively, however, to include things like reflections on language learning and language change, thus introducing an element of meta-multilingualism. In this article, I define literary multilingualism in an equally broad manner, encompassing manifest and latent forms of multilingualism and taking into account the multilingualism of both protagonists and authors. In so doing, I will identify the specific multilingual poetics of these texts, showing how they are used to reveal and work through collective memory and trauma inscribed in language, such as the Shoah, wartime

atrocities, colonialism, genocide, exile and migration. The texts that are at the centre of my analysis, by Tomer Gardi, Katja Petrowskaja and Igiaba Scego, are written by members of the second or third generation and can thus be considered what Marianne Hirsch (2008; 2012) has called "postmemory narratives". The multilingual poetics they apply challenge official memory discourses and offer alternative perspectives. As I will show, the texts thereby connect language, migration and memory, offering new ways of negotiating inclusive concepts of belonging (see Vlasta 2020).

Multilingual poetics

My central thesis is that, like the three authors whose texts I will discuss in further detail below (Tomer Gardi, Katja Petrowskaja and Igiaba Scego), contemporary authors such as Bernardine Evaristo, Jhumpa Lahiri, Elvira Mujčić, Sharon Dodua Otoo, Ornela Vorpsi, and Uljana Wolf (to name just a few) have developed specific multilingual poetics. Although this poetics is highly individual, several common features can be identified: the texts include both manifest and latent forms of multilingualism; they play with translation; they question (common) etymologies and explore similarities and differences in different languages (again to name just a few such elements). Thus, they are what Waïl S. Hassan has called "translational literature" (2006; 2016), i.e. a kind of literature for which translation has become a fundamental practice and which "calls into question the implicitness of translation, by expressing the possibilities and limits, the intentions and the consequences of translation" (Ivanovic and Seidl 2016). Moreover, the multilingualism of these texts is often closely connected to formal experiments, whether intertextual, intermedial or crossing the boundaries of genre.

Such a multilingual poetics – which comes in different forms and varies among authors and works – can have a number of possible functions and effects. For instance, it enables a change of perspective, an alternative view of language(s), playing with polyvalent meanings, but also the defamiliarization (or estrangement, in Viktor Shklovsky's sense) of literature through multilingualism (see Blum-Barth 2021; Helmich 2016). Multilingual writing thus transgresses supposed linguistic boundaries and, through intense but at times playful examination, attempts to lay bare the constructedness of cultural identities grounded in language. Indeed, these texts deterritorialize language, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's sense (1975); i.e. they reveal that languages are not tied to particular places and elude power hierarchies. Thus, multilingual texts firmly maintain that no one (or rather, everyone) is 'in command' of language (Siller 2020).

Multilingual literature questions the idea that literary works are ever unilingual and asks us to understand literature as multilingual per se – an idea that George Steiner (1972) articulated at the end of the 1960s but which has not been taken up adequately since then. Moreover, literary multilingualism makes us reconsider our concept of culture and reassess the supposedly fixed relation between territory, language and culture that informs identity, in particular collective identities such as national identities. Rather, we are made aware of the constructedness of such identities and are invited to think about new, more inclusive forms of belonging. As the writer Jhumpa Lahiri put this idea in her recent W.G. Sebald lecture, writing in a different language (in her case, in Italian rather than English) and the processes of translation and self-translation (from Italian to English) have made her question the idea of "the original". Lahiri extended this idea to the question of who counts as being original to a place and why those who are not considered original to a place, such as migrants, are treated differently. Her experience of multilingualism (which this time was a conscious one, unlike her childhood in the USA, where she would speak Bengali at home and English at

school) and translation disclose the constructedness of any static relation between language, place and culture.

Literary multilingualism, postmemory and migration

In her book *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as the memory of traumata of the 20th century – such as wars, persecutions, genocides, and the Holocaust – that have been transmitted by the first generation, who lived through these experiences, to subsequent generations. These memories become postmemory narratives if subsequent generations decide to narrate them, for instance in the form of books, films or other works of art. In her study, Hirsch analyses works by artists and writers including Art Spiegelman, W.G. Sebald, Eva Hoffman, Tatana Kellner, Murial Hasbun, Anne Karpf, Lily Brett, Lorie Novak, David Levinthal and many others. Some of these artists, such as W.G. Sebald, Eva Hoffman, Lily Brett and Art Spiegelman, are multilingual and at times make this a topic of their narratives. W.G. Sebald, for instance, develops his postmemory narrative in his adopted country, England, but does so in his native German.[2] Eva Hoffman's autobiography *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989) includes details about her acquisition of English following her family's relocation from her native Poland to Canada. In fact, her work can be considered a multilingual postmemory narrative, a term I would like to apply to the three texts at the centre of this article.

I would like to define multilingual postmemory narratives as texts in which a multilingual poetics is applied to tell a postmemory narrative. The multilingualism adds an innovative element to the postmemory, enabling these texts to challenge official memory discourse in original ways. They lay bare previously overlooked connections between culture, memory and language and reveal how collective memories and trauma are inscribed in language and culture. The examples discussed here also establish a link between postmemory and migration, flight and exile. In fact, they add underprivileged subjects' points of view to official memory discourses and relate memories from the position of immigrants, fugitives, guest workers and former colonial subjects. This perspective can provide us with a broader and more inclusive understanding of collective memory that allows for more heterogeneous forms of remembrance. In what follows, I will analyse the individual ways in which this is achieved in the three texts in question.

Translation and universal remembrance in Katja Petrowskaya's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) [*Maybe Esther: A Family Story*, 2018]

Katja Petrowskaja was born in Kiev (then in the Soviet Union, today in Ukraine) in 1970. She studied literary studies in Tartu, Moscow and the USA and moved to Germany for private reasons in 1999. In 2014, she published her first book, *Vielleicht Esther*, in German. *Vielleicht Esther* is a European family memoir – in the sense that it takes us to different places across Europe – whose several episodes concentrate on different members of Petrowskaja's family. One of its chapters provides a personal, multifaceted account of the

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[2] Interestingly, critics compared Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* to Sebald (see Feigel 2018).

massacre of Babi Yar, where on September 29th and 30th, 1941, thousands of Jews from Kiev were killed by the Nazis in World War II. As Maria Roca Lizarazu (2018) and Deirdre Byrnes (2020) have observed, this episode, like others in the book, is postmemory narrative in the sense that the narrator, who is identified as Petrowskaja herself, is a third-generation descendant reporting an event that was experienced by members of her family. The chapter is haunting, and its clear, concise and personal style (honest and reserved) reinforces this impression; indeed, Petrowskaja was awarded the Ingeborg-Bachmann Prize in 2013 for this section of the book.

The whole book, and in particular the chapter on Babi Yar, is even more remarkable as it is told in German – a language which is not native to the author and, moreover, the language of the perpetrators of the massacre, as the narrator herself states (Petrowskaja 2015, 80). Petrowskaja appropriates this language in order to overcome the silence surrounding the massacre and to retell it. That is, she purposefully uses German to tell a postmemory narrative in which the language is marked as the language of murderers.

Although Petrowskaja learned German by chance (again as a result of her family history – she fell in love with a German, as she tells us; Petrowskaja 2015, 78), her decision to write *Vielleicht Esther* in German was a conscious one. Still, the author/narrator marvels at this choice: as she tells us, her ancestors had founded a school for deaf-mute children in Warsaw, where they taught *nemeckij*, which in Russian means both the language of the deaf and German (Petrowskaja 2015, 79). Accordingly, the narrator first asks herself whether German is a mute language. Later, however, German becomes the idiom in which she succeeds in finding out about her family. The multilingual narrator uses *nemeckij*, the supposedly mute German, to speak (or rather, to write) about family members who taught deaf-mute children how to communicate. She thus continues on a path that her family has followed for generations: she is trying to find a language, trying to express in words, and thus to remember, what has been lost, hidden, forgotten and suppressed. In the text, she observes (with an ironic undertone): "aber wenn sogar ich auf Deutsch, dann ist wirklich nichts und niemand vergessen" (Petrowskaja 2015, 80), i.e. if even she – a Russian, Ukrainian Jew, a descendant of Jews who were killed by the Nazis and later persecuted and victimised by the Soviets – can write in German about all this, then it is possible to remember everything and everyone.

In an interview, Petrowskaja called the language the actual hero of her book, as the text is about how a language can be appropriated and consequently used to describe and discover a world (Petrowskaja 2020, 318). The decision to do so, however, is described both by the narrator in the text and by Petrowskaja in interviews as a difficult, strenuous one. At the same time, the stories themselves (and their historical context) are the actual challenge for which, in the course of writing, German turned out to be the suitable language: in an interview, Petrowskaja recalls that the text "demanded" to be in German (Krautstengel and Schneider 2016). At the same time, this choice of language reflects the "the dynamics of postmemorial discourse" (Lizarazu 2018, 169) which, according to Maria Roca Lizarazu, are illustrated by the text as a whole. These dynamics are characterised by discontinuities, by fractions and ruptures, rather than clarity and linearity. Postmemory narratives are particularly challenging as they deal with "discontinuities between generations" and try to narrate the "gaps in knowledge that define the aftermath of trauma" (Hirsch 2008, 107), as Marianna Hirsch puts it. In *Vielleicht Esther*, these gaps and discontinuities are visible at the level of *histoire*, but also at the level of *discours*: the family history is full of holes; the short chapters are marked by leaps in time, by analepses and prolepses, switching between narration and first-person reflection on the narrated events. On both levels, the German language is a further expression of these gaps: as a (formerly) mute language, as a language that linguistically separates the author from many members of her family and that,

on the contrary, approximates the perpetrators. At the same time, it is the appropriation of German that enabled Petrowskaja to write not from the point of view of the victims but from a universal perspective (see Byrnes 2020, 331), as she herself underscores.

Vielleicht Esther shows how language choice and literary multilingualism become intrinsic elements of a postmemory narrative. Petrowskaja's novel exists between languages, as the author has repeatedly stated in interviews (see Yaremchuk 2015); it is a book in translation, the original of which has been lost (see Petrowskaja 2020, 318). Thus, *Vielleicht Esther* can be considered a form of translational literature (Hassan 2006; 2016) that stresses the possibilities of translation: through the process of translation, the narrator is able to tell her family's history, putting it in a wider context that comprises the history, catastrophes and traumata of the 20th century. In this way, Petrowskaja's multilingual translational postmemory narrative becomes a personal – but at the same time universally valid – account that inscribes itself in collective memory.

Playful plurivalent semantics in Tomer Gardi's *broken german* (2016)

Tomer Gardi was born in Israel in 1974. He spent various prolonged periods of his life in German-speaking countries: as an adolescent, he lived in Vienna for three years, and he later studied in Berlin. In 2011, Gardi published his first book in Hebrew, a literary essay about the Kibbutz Dan, where he grew up. Five years later his second book came out, this time a novel – *broken german* – which Gardi wrote in German. The book is structured in shorter episodes that seem unconnected at first but are linked together in the course of the text, for instance by protagonists and objects. Many of the episodes are set in Berlin, telling of friends (many of them immigrants from different places) who meet in pubs and call shops; a (deliberate) suitcase mix-up at an airport which triggers a reflection on identity and identity construction; the aftermath of the Holocaust at a location in Eastern Europe; the relation between the Nazis and contemporary right-wing extremists; coming to terms with German-Jewish history, among other topics.

These different elements alone suffice to establish the novel as a postmemory narrative. The most striking aspect of the text, at least at first sight, however, is its language. Using the book's title, this language might be called "broken German", that is, an "inaccurate" German which, compared to standard German, is full of mistakes in spelling, syntax, grammar and semantics. This language is remarkable in many respects; first, it can be interpreted as the language of someone who is learning German, perhaps an immigrant, just like many of the book's protagonists. Second, Gardi himself may be regarded as an immigrant to the German-speaking literary field (German is not his first language). Furthermore, readers quickly realise that the text is both rich and stimulating, full of playful allusions and creative wordplay. Critics like Anne Fleig (2020) have therefore emphasised that Gardi's broken German is an artfully constructed language that is used in a productive way, not least, as I argue, to tell postmemory narratives.

In addition to the artistic language in which it is written, *broken german* is characterised by multilingualism on many levels: its author is multilingual, as are the protagonists, the first-person narrator, and the other narrators (they change in the course of the book). Other languages besides German (such as English, Hebrew and French, among others) are also used in the text, both in manifest and latent forms of multilingualism. Finally, the book contains discourses and remarks about language, literature and narrating, i.e. elements of meta-multilingualism. Gardi succeeds in bringing together issues of language, memory, past and present in a novel way, developing an innovative mode of narrating postmemory narratives. Consider,

for instance, the following scene, in which three friends (Radili, Mehmet and Amadou) are walking in the street and are suddenly shouted at from behind:

> Von hinten schreit sie dann jemand nach. Hallo ihr! Hallo ihr! Was für Sprache redet ihr da! Radili und Amadou und Mehmet reden Deutsch aber kein Arien Deutsch sondern ihr Deutsch wie mein Deutsch auch die ich hier schreibe und wie ich die rede. […] Ihr da. Was ist das für eine komische Sprache, dass was ihr da redet! Dann hält Radili und sagt dass es Deutsch ist. […] Nein sagt eine. Glatze. Rote Augen von Trink. Nein, sagt er. Das ist kein Deutsch, sagt er. Was WIR reden ist Deutsch, sagt er. Das was WIR reden ist Deutsch. Das was ihr da redet ist kein Deutsch. Die drei wollen uns, sagt er zu seine Freunde, die drei wollen uns anscheint veraschen. (Gardi 2016, 6)

> Somebody yells at them from behind. Hello you! Hello you! What language are you speaking? Radili and Amadou and Mehmet are speaking in German, no aria German but their German such as my German in which I am writing This and which I speak. […] You. What funny language are you speaking in! Then Radili stops and says that it is German. […] No, one of them says. Bald head. Red eyes from drinking. No, he says. This is not German, he says. What WE speak is German, he says. What WE speak is German. That which you are speaking is not German. Obviously, these three, he says to his friends, obviously these three are taking the piss. (*my translation*)

In this short scene, and in a linguistically skilful way, Gardi links neo-Nazis, contemporary racism and its effects on the lives of immigrants, and the Shoah. The neo-Nazis are recognisable first by their appearance (bald heads) but immediately also by their behaviour. They seem aggressive because they are drunk, but also because of their way of speaking and their use of language. They yell at the three friends and insist on speaking to them. Furthermore, they present themselves with a normative concept of language: they deny Radili, Amadou and Mehmet their way of speaking and, on the contrary, propose their own German as the only correct one. Rather than using language as a means of communication, like Radili, Amadou and Mehmet, they believe they own it. Speaking with an accent thus excludes the three immigrants from the "WE" of the drunk neo-Nazis.

In the quote, the narrator briefly describes Radili, Amadou and Mehmet's German, comparing it to his own way of speaking and writing. Moreover, he states that this kind of German is no "Arien Deutsch". Further down, at the end of the quote, one of the neo-Nazis suggests that the three friends are trying to muck about with them, which he expresses in a rude and offensive manner ("verarschen", though spelt "veraschen" in the book). In both instances, the text's own language, i.e. broken German, twists these two terms. "Arien Deutsch" may be intended to signify *Hochdeutsch*, standard German, but rather than using this term Gardi expresses this concept in an unusual way, via wordplay invoking different meanings: on the one hand, it might signify "Arie", i.e. an aria, a piece from an opera, thus calling to mind Germany's self-image as a nation of culture and civilisation, an idea that has been repeatedly evoked since Goethe's time (not least by the Nazis themselves). Furthermore, "Arien" strongly recalls the word "Aryan" and thus the antisemitic Nazi ideal of a German people. Both meanings imply exclusiveness: "Arie" by pointing to a notion of high culture that is only accessible to those with the necessary cultural capital (i.e. education, sophistication, experience, etc.) and economic means (an upbringing of this sort, including learning a language, is time consuming and expensive, as the author Barbi Marković highlighted in a recent text (2020, 196)). The second meaning, "Aryan", implies fatal exclusiveness, which is the idea that also underlies the neo-Nazis' normative understanding of the German language. Their "WE" certainly does not include Radili, Amadou and Mehmet. This second meaning is further emphasised by the final play on words in the paragraph,

"veraschen". Here, the missing "r" in the verb "veraschen" (which would otherwise render the verb "verarschen", to "take the piss out of someone") approximates it to the word "Asche", ashes, which in the German historical context evokes those who were incinerated in the Nazi concentration camps. What is more, the verb "veraschen", usually used in a chemical context, means "to reduce to ashes without using a flame". Thus, both the play on words and the more specialised, technical meaning refer to the Nazi past.

In this way, the linguistic creativity in *broken german* has historical implications, and the text becomes a postmemory narrative whose references function mainly through its multilingualism. As the critic Klaus Kastberger (2016) observes, *broken german* uncovers the dents that history has left in the German language (rather than featuring possible linguistic gaps due to the fact that Gardi is not a native speaker). The book's creative approach to the German language is enabled through the author's and the protagonists' multilingualism, which turns the text's own language, broken German, into a medium that links historical memory, remembrance and the present (see Fleig 2020, 232).

Historical sensitivity in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) [My Home Is Where I Am]

Igiaba Scego is an Italian author who was born in Rome in 1975. Her parents fled to Italy from Somalia following Siad Barre's coup d'état in 1969. In 2003, Scego published her first book, *La nomade che amava Alfred Hitchcock* (The Nomad Who Loved Alfred Hitchcock), and since then she has written several volumes, published in anthologies, and collaborated with several newspapers and magazines. She was awarded numerous prizes for her work, including the Premio Mondello in 2011 for *La mia casa è dove sono*. Returning to Italy, experiences of racism and a new, more inclusive Italian self-image are topics that are central to Scego's writing.

La mia casa è dove sono is an autobiography as well as a family memoir, told along the lines of the narrator's relationship with her hometown, Rome. The text is divided into eight chapters, the titles of which often refer to concrete places in Rome, such as the *Teatro Sistina*, the *Piazza Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, the *Stadio Olimpico* and the *Stazione Termini*, Rome's main station. In the individual chapters, the narrator links these locations both to her own history and to that of her family. Her family, in turn, is a transnational one; its members live in different countries (Italy, Somalia, the United Kingdom, among others), although they maintain their bonds across borders. In this manner, the Roman localities are linked to both transnational places and transnational memories. The latter are not only of a personal nature but also have collective importance. In her work, Scego thus relates a transnational postmemory that, as I will show, is closely linked to multilingualism.

The narrator in *La mia casa è dove sono* links places in Rome to places in Somalia via her personal and family history. In so doing, she sketches a "personal geography", as she calls it (Scego 2010, 75). At the same time, the narrator makes clear that both these places and the family history are linked to the (shared) history of Italy and Somalia, and ultimately to European and world history. Thus, the book is also a history of Italy's time as a colonial power in Somalia (including the period in which Italy was granted trusteeship of one part of the country) and, in particular, of the aftermath of this era. This is a time that, until recently, has received little attention in Italy's official history, particularly its negative sides.

Accordingly, the shared history of Italy and the Horn of Africa, which has consequences that carry over to the present day, are not part of Italy's collective memory. Scego's book counters this development by making readers aware of the often-unrecognised colonial legacy that is still visible in Rome (and Somalia). For instance, in the chapter entitled "La stele di Axum" [The Obelisk of Axum], the narrator reminds us of this stele, which used to be in a now empty square in Rome. Subsequently, she tells us about its history, from its first mythical proprietor, the Queen of Sheba, to its transfer to Roma by Mussolini and its return

to Ethiopia in 2005. Scego emphasises the shared history of Italy and Somalia (and the Horn of Africa), illustrating it with many examples. Accordingly, Simone Brioni has called the book "a memoir that powerfully challenges misconceptions about Italian colonialism" (Brioni 2015, 41).

In the book, the traces of history/stories (both official and personal) are characterised by multilingualism: Scego is a multilingual author who, although writing mainly in Italian, introduces the other languages she knows into her texts, including Somali, Arabic, and English. Hence, the protagonists in *La mia casa è dove sono* are also multilingual, a trait that is visible in the text itself in the form of manifest and latent multilingualism.

The text begins with a short phrase in Somali that is immediately translated into Italian: "*Sheeko sheeko sheeko xariir…* Storia storia oh storia di seta… Così cominciano tutte le fiabe somale. Tutte quelle che mia madre mi raccontava da piccolo" (Scego 2010, 9) [*Sheeko sheeko sheeko xariir…* Story story oh story of silk… This is how all Somali fairy tales begin. All those that my mother used to tell me when I was small]. The narrator's own story also begins in this archaic way, with the Somali equivalent of "Once upon a time". Thus, in the very first sentence of the book, Somali is identified as the language of narration but also as the language of personal memory, namely the memory of intimate moments with her mother and her mother's own storytelling. These stories were told in Somali, but the narrator remembers this moment in Italian – the two languages overlap and are both present.

The same is true of place names in Mogadishu and in Rome. In the first chapters, family members meet at the narrator's brother's home in Manchester. This scene underscores the transnational character of the family: while the narrator lives in Rome, her brother lives in the United Kingdom, and her cousin in Finland. As the narrator states, they are all part of the same family, but they all have different passports (Scego 2010, 13). When they start to collaboratively draw a map of Mogadishu, of the city how they remember it, the narrator notices that Italy is still present in the names of many streets. At the same time, she thinks about how Africa is present in Roman street names (Scego 2010, 27), for instance *viale Libia*, *viale Somalia*, and *viale Eritrea*. Still, she notes that no one in Italy reflects on this and that, at the same time, Italy is not aware of its presence in Mogadishu. This is where the narrator's quest begins: she wants to find out more about the presence of Africa, of Somalia, in Italy and at the same time to uncover Italian traces in Somalia.

Furthermore, the overlaps she sees in the common history of the two countries reflect the intersections that characterise her personal life. When her mother looks at the drawn map of Mogadishu, she tells the narrator that this is only partly her (the narrator's) city. A map of the narrator's hometown would have to include both Mogadishu and Rome. Thus, the narrator sets off to sketch, i.e. to tell, her personal map, in which stories from Somalia and Italy overlap. These intersections are expressed linguistically, as Scego herself shows in an Italian text that is interspersed with Somali, Arabic, English, Portuguese, etc. (although the latter two are not used explicitly very often), thus becoming hybridised – part *sheeko*, part *storia*, part fairy tale, and more.

The narrator calls herself a "crocevia" (Scego 2010, 31), a crossroads. This can be interpreted as a meeting point, where Somalia and Italy come together, but it can also be read as a point where one can choose a new direction, where one can come to a halt and reflect before setting out again. Scego's text is intended as just such a space of reflection, a starting point for rewriting a common Italian-Somalian history in order to arrive at a more inclusive collective memory of Italian colonialism in Africa. This is likely to have an effect on Italy's (and Europe's) present and future, as it implies a new definition of its role and responsibility with regard to its Black citizens and to contemporary migration movements.

Conclusion

In the three texts analysed here, Katja Petrowskaja, Tomer Gardi and Igiaba Scego use literary multilingualism to develop innovative ways of telling postmemory narratives. They do so for different reasons and by applying different approaches that, while diverse, can be subsumed under the category of multilingual poetics. In so doing, the three authors succeed in offering different perspectives on official memory discourse: Katja Petrowskaja appropriates German, the language of the perpetrators, to tell the story of her Jewish family members who were chased and killed by the Nazis. Tomer Gardi, on the other hand, uses an incorrect version of German that is full of wordplay to make visible the traces that history has left in the language. At the same time, he observes the continuities of this history, the exclusiveness of which continues to be felt by immigrants today. Igiaba Scego, in a multilingual personal and collective autobiography, attempts to retell an Italian-Somali common history in order to arrive at a history that includes lives like hers so that she no longer feels like an "equilibrista" (Scego 2010, 31), a tightrope artist, and can instead properly *belong* to the places to which she feels attached.

Postmemory narratives such as those presented here attempt to rewrite collective memory. Most importantly, through their innovative multilingual poetics, we gain a much more comprehensive understanding of traumatic events in the past and the present. Finally, they succeed in connecting the past with the present, revealing the links between our history and the challenges of contemporary society.

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