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Voices on Italy's Recent History: *Aulò: Roma postcoloniale* and *La quarta via*

Review of:

- Simone Brioni (ed.), *Somalitalia: Quattro Vie per Mogadiscio/Somalitalia: Four Roads to Mogadishu*. With the documentary *La quarta via: Mogadiscio*, Pavia. Roma, Kimerafilm, 2012, 37 p., ISBN: 9788890771408. € 15,00.
- Ribka Sibhatu, *Aulò!Aulò!Aulò! Poesie di nostalgia, d'esilio e d'amore. Aulò!Aulò!Aulò! Poems of Nostalgia, Exile and Love*. With the documentary by Simone Brioni (ed.) *Aulò: Roma postcoloniale*, Roma, Kimerafilm, 2012, 41 p., ISBN: 9788890771415. € 15,00.

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One project, two documentaries, several accompanying texts of various kinds – literary texts, poetry, scholarly comments, historical background information – one sound track, and two Facebook pages. This is Simone Brioni's 'progetto editoriale' (his own definition in email correspondence) in a nutshell: a hybrid work of art, in which collaborators of different cultures, backgrounds, sexes, ages, occupations and interests have worked together using various media to achieve the singular goal of making visible the traces and consequences of Italy's colonial past in the present by continuing the postcolonial dialogue. The emphasis is put on literature, and the core of the project is the two documentaries. This seems paradoxical, but can be explained by the fact that both documentaries are based on oral literature and poetry and are comprised of the texts in the booklets. They are introduced in the booklets by the initiator of the project, Brioni, 'fascinated with stories that [he] thought needed to be shared', who saw the need to bring to light some of the important issues in post-colonial Italian literature and to reach out to an audience of non-specialists, 'whilst trying to combine scientific accuracy and aesthetics'. This explains the Facebook pages as a means to reach a broader public: all news articles about, and reviews of, the project are published on the pages, together with a calendar of film screenings in Italy, the UK, France and the US.

In the beautifully shot *Aulò: Roma postcoloniale* a young Roman man listens to the life story of established poetess and scholar Ribka Subhatu (Asmara, 1962). Ribka goes back centuries to tell the life stories of her ancestors, adding to her story a broader historical perspective and exhibiting faithfulness to the tradition of Ethiopian culture, in

which one identifies oneself referring to the family history. Imprisoned in 1979 for refusing to marry an Ethiopian occupier of her country, she fled away and eventually ended up in Rome in 1996, where she has lived with her daughter ever since. Through her life story the viewer gains insight in Italy's history with Eritrea; it symbolizes the story of other Eritreans who were forced to leave their country due to the state in which their former colonizer left Eritrea after World War II, many of whom now live in Italy. Ribka points out to numerous monumental references to Italy's colonial enterprises in the *città eterna*. Reciting her uncle's aulò – an oral poem that in Ethiopia was performed to comment on personal or public issues – she seeks to stimulate Italians to recognise the colonial history and multi-cultural reality of the peninsula.

In the second documentary, *La quarta via: Mogadiscio, Pavia*, writer, performer and economist Kaha Mohamed Aden (Mogadischu, 1966) explains the four different historical phases Mogadishu has gone through in the past century and a half, remembering her former city by drawing four separate lines in different colours on a piece of paper, and hoping on a fifth, peaceful phase. The documentary is based on her oral story, in which she reconstructs her birth city by using her memory and her imagination – since 1987 she lives in Pavia, having left her birth country in a state of civil war. Kaha's story is illustrated by Italian propaganda images dating from the fascist era, and an Italian documentary from 1960 in which the 'friendly separation' between the Italians and Somali is shown, a lively reference to the myth of *italiani brava gente* and the lack of a proper dealing with Italy's colonial past. The destiny of Somalia seems to have been defined to a large extent by Italy's colonial enterprises, and many Somali refugees now live in Italy, as is shown in the Somali visitors of the church in Pavia. Like Ribka, Kaha finds in Pavia places that bring her closer to her birth city and, like Ribka, she finds strength and hope in her knowledge of history. She, too, performs a poem of the culture of her birth nation, a Burambur. As an extra on the DVD one can find presentations during the congress 'OLTREilMARGinE', held in Brescia in 2010, in which different scholars and writers explain the importance of an acknowledgement of Italy's colonial past, the specificities of this chapter of Italian and African history, and questions of identity are raised.

In the booklet *Aulò!Aulò!Aulò!*, Ribka continues to propagate her message in a poetic Italian, Tigrinya, and French in her 'Poems of Nostalgia, Exile and Love', introduced by Graziella Parati, who places this project in historical, methodological and literary perspective. A link to the downloadable sound track is also added. In the booklet *Somalitalia*, Ali Mumin Ahad, Antonio Maria Morone and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel put the story in literary and historical perspective.

The identities of the two women are not defined by one specific national culture, but rather, they have absorbed several aspects of the cultures they have lived in to create their own identities, thus illustrating the shared history of the two former colonized countries and Italy. The young Roman boy who listens to Ribka's story has the same symbolic function as Kaha's fifth phase: his figure underlines the importance of learning from the past in order to have a proper understanding of the present. In their works the two women open a dialogue with each other, with their former compatriots, and with the Italians.

In the past years, several films have been made and literature has been written about Italy's colonial past and neocolonial present. However, Brioni's project forms a unique artistic genre. Oral tradition is videotaped, respecting this specific and traditional Eritrean and Somalian form of poetry, and in the same time making it

accessible for a large group of people. Moreover, by mixing several media, languages and stories, but nevertheless succeeding into making the project into one larger story, Brioni manages to add to the existing scholarly postcolonial debate in Italy an art work of the most hybrid kind, crossing boundaries of culture, language, medium, storytelling, and, hopefully, reaching a wide audience.

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