

Narrating the Italo-Ethiopian War in Gabriella Ghermandi's *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007) and Maaza Mengiste's *The Shadow King* (2019)

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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes fictional retellings of the 1935-36 Italo-Ethiopian War and the subsequent Italian occupation of Ethiopia by the Ethiopian Italian writer Gabriella Ghermandi and the Ethiopian American writer Maaza Mengiste. Ghermandi's 2007 novel *Regina di fiori e di perle* and Mengiste's 2019 novel *The Shadow King* both center on the agency of women soldiers during the colonial war and attempt to revise international views of a history that is often ignored or seen through a male and European gaze. I aim to read Mengiste's novel alongside Ghermandi's, focusing mainly on the theme of violence and the representation of women, in order to show how each author dialogues with the same traumatic past in her peculiar voice and style. Furthermore, this study attempts to discuss whether the common themes and subject matter of these novels contribute to the making of a diasporic Ethiopian literature.

Keywords

postcolonial studies, gender roles, agency, violence, Ethiopia, Italy

Diasporic Ethiopian literature: an introduction

"I'm really proud of being able to combine the stories of the Ethiopians and the Italians, to force questions about both of them," the Ethiopian American author Maaza Mengiste commented on her novel *The Shadow King*, released in 2019 (Mengiste in Mudge, 2019). The novel revisits the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-36 and the subsequent guerrilla warfare that raged throughout the country during the five years of Italian occupation, until 1941. With this work, Mengiste attempts to bring to light the so-called "forgotten Black women" (Mengiste 2019) of the war and to highlight the historical link between Italy and Ethiopia that has not received the attention it deserves on a national level in either country. In the field of postcolonial Italian studies, scholarship has been produced that highlights the absence of a collective national reflection on the colonial period (Del Boca 1992 and 2005; Pezzarossa and Rossini 2011; Lombardi-Diop e Romeo 2014) and Mengiste herself describes Italy's racism as "embedded" due to a lack of "postwar accountability" (Mengiste 2013a). One could argue that in Ethiopia, however, this historical period has been given more recognition, since three major national holidays are related to conflicts with the Italians: the Battle of Adwa, the Addis Ababa Massacre, and the

liberation from Italian occupation (Sandro Triulzi in Carotenuto and Mellino 2021). Despite the existence of these collective celebrations, Mengiste is firm in her belief that even in Ethiopia this violent past and historical link with Italy have not been fully addressed, due to Emperor Haile Selassie imploring Ethiopians to forgive the Italian soldiers and to attempt to move forward (Mengiste 2021a). Historians have authenticated such claims, writing that the Emperor closely regulated the way the Italian occupation was narrated (Marzagora 2018, 143). This would lead to a repressed national trauma in both countries, where the importance of this particular and recent period in history has not been properly investigated or understood.

Mengiste's intentions in writing her novel recall an earlier work by the Ethiopian Italian author Gabriella Ghermandi, *Regina di fiori e di perle*, published in 2007 and later translated into English as *Queen of Flowers and Pearls* (Ghermandi 2011 and 2015). Both Mengiste and Ghermandi consider Ethiopia to be one of the places where they feel at home, but they have also established themselves respectively in the United States and Italy, where they currently live and work. While Ghermandi's novel has been studied in academic circles (Clò 2009; Luraschi 2009; Sansalvador 2013; Marzagora 2015; Alessi 2019), it deserves rereading in light of the publication of Mengiste's work. Mengiste's novel, on the other hand, has received enthusiastic reviews and extensive coverage in critical literary circles but, given its recent publication, it has not yet been the object of deep critical readings.¹ Although on the surface the two works present many similarities, twelve years between their respective publications separate them, as well as their authors' countries of settlement, and the two different languages in which the texts are written.

My aim is to read *The Shadow King* alongside *Regina di fiori e di perle* via a thematic analysis, in order to show how Mengiste's novel both follows and breaks away from Ghermandi's when approaching certain motifs. I will focus mainly on both authors' representation of violence and of women. I believe that a comparative reading of these two novels may offer a clearer view of contemporary literature produced by the Ethiopian diaspora and ascertain if the handling of common themes is enough to establish the existence of a transnational literary culture between different Ethiopian diasporas: what I refer to as diasporic Ethiopian literature. My use of the term 'diaspora' refers to the current Ethiopian diaspora that was initially created as a result of the migration of over a million Ethiopians worldwide during the 1974-1991 military regime (Levine 2006, 215). The use of 'diasporas' in the plural is intended to indicate more specific Ethiopian diasporas based on location (i.e., the Ethiopian diaspora in Italy or in the US) rather than other uses of the term that focus on diasporas through temporal categories.²

To ascertain if these texts signify the existence of a diasporic Ethiopian literature, it is essential to first acknowledge each author's link to Ethiopia as well as to the countries where they have established themselves. Both Ghermandi and Mengiste were born and raised

(though in Mengiste's case only for a short time) in Ethiopia. Ghermandi moved to Italy in her teens and has lived there ever since. She comes from a mixed Italian and Ethiopian family and defines herself as a "product of Italian colonialism" (Clò 2009, 143). Mengiste left Ethiopia at the age of four and spent time in Kenya and Nigeria before moving to the US at age seven. Her first novel, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, was published in 2010 and focuses on Ethiopia's military dictatorship during the Red Terror (Mengiste 2011). Both authors are therefore deeply linked to Ethiopia and this aspect is obvious in the subject matter of their literary production. However, their different countries of settlement must be acknowledged. Mengiste considers herself as much an American as she is an Ethiopian, stating that it is impossible for her to separate herself from either of these countries (Mengiste 2013b). Ghermandi speaks not only Italian but she is fluent in the Bolognese dialect (Clò 2009, 143); however, she is adamant that these Italian traits do not cancel out her Ethiopianness (Marzagora 2015, 221), further demonstrating that she is Italian as well as Ethiopian. Therefore, it is perhaps best to refer to Gabriella Ghermandi as an Ethiopian Italian author and to Maaza Mengiste as an Ethiopian American author, since they are the result of a diasporic culture that is both hybrid and transatlantic. Both writers insist on recognizing their Ethiopianness, as well as their Italianness and Americanness, respectively. Therefore, I aim to ascertain the extent to which the specific articulations of their Ethiopian identities impinge on their works, and if the thematic similarities of these two novels may point to the existence of a diasporic Ethiopian literature.

Of course, this brief intervention has its limitations: a comprehensive study would be needed in order to take into account other authors from Ethiopian backgrounds dealing with the Italo-Ethiopian War. In fact, since the Italian occupation ended in 1941, literary works have appeared in both Amharic and English by Ethiopian writers who discuss the colonial conflict.³ The following analysis should therefore be considered as pertaining specifically to two recent texts about the Italo-Ethiopian War, in Italian and English respectively, and is not intended to be all-encompassing.

Violence and women in the Italo-Ethiopian War

The theoretical framework offered by Sarah Cole's 2009 essay on violence in WWI poetry can be helpful for my analysis. Cole delineates two juxtaposed modes of representing violence in war stories: enchantment refers to "violent death" as having a sort of sublime transformative power, whereas disenchantment depicts such violence as having no spiritual significance since it only brings destruction (Cole 2009, 1632-33). Ghermandi's novel, though in my opinion less focused on violence than Mengiste's, does not shy away from violent scenes. In her novel, violence always marks a significant moment in the lives of the characters, whether perpetrated by Italian soldiers, *ascari*, or Ethiopian patriots, allowing them to make essential decisions about who they are as people and their relationship to their respective homelands. For

example, when Yacob recounts the violent murder of his younger sister and her Italian partner, the brutality of the violence is striking: “They killed Daniel in the fort [...] a shot to the head [...] they hanged Amarech [...] they left her body dangling for the whole day with a sign attached to her back: ‘this is how rebels end up’” (Ghermandi 2011, 64). The violence and the desecration of dead bodies is supposed to strike the reader, but it also has a transformative power because it is only upon the death of his sister that Yacob decides to fully leave his rebel life behind and submit to Italian rule in order to care for his infant niece, the newly born daughter of the now dead Amarech and Daniel. Therefore, Ghermandi does not report their deaths in vain, but uses them as a narrative strategy to allow the main character of this particular story to fashion his future out of a quasi-paternal love, and not out of bloodshed.

The violence of this war, however, takes different forms in each author’s representation, as shown by an episode in *The Shadow King* that recalls the previously mentioned scene in Ghermandi’s book. After taunting a captured Ethiopian spy, Tariku, the Italian colonel Fucelli orders him hanged. Following Tariku’s death there is this description: “The prisoner’s bloated face is slack. The neck strains against the unnatural angle. Blood has dried from the fresh stab wounds in his chest” (Mengiste 2020b, 209), and later on: “[t]he prisoner hangs there all afternoon” (Mengiste 2020b, 214). This incident offers a more in-depth description of the hanging scene, which lasts several chapters when compared to the similar episode in *Regina di fiori e di perle*. Although violent and descriptive, here Mengiste avoids sensationalizing “the emotional and physical agonies depicted,” and rather keeps the reader “morally engaged” (Gagiano 2018, 132). In this specific instance, the scene also seems to represent a combination of enchanted and disenchanting violence. After the death of their son, Tariku’s parents do not heed the warning represented by his dead body left hanging – a warning that any insurrection will be retaliated against – nor do they collapse into an overwhelming grief that prevents them from taking action; rather, they allow Tariku’s death to motivate them to attack the Italians. However, until that time comes, they must mourn his dead body, “as they’ve had to do with all the other corpses: they will have to bury him without ceremony, in the dark, on nondescript land” (Mengiste 2020b, 227). This also shows the uselessness of violent death, and how war counteracts religion, leaving dead bodies in unmarked graves, their sacrifice almost futile. Mengiste therefore goes beyond Cole’s polarizing description of representations of violence in war literature: Tariku’s parents are motivated to fight, but they also grieve the loss of their son, showing that enchanted and disenchanting meanings of violence can coexist. In doing so, Mengiste calls on her readers to truly engage with the complexity of her work, expanding upon what Ghermandi had established twelve years prior.

Violence is also essential in both novels’ portrayal of women,⁴ and both authors spent months or years doing historical and archival research in order to unearth stories of female Ethiopian fighters who contributed to the rebellion against the Italian occupation. In fact, as

Moira Luraschi notes, Ghermandi “compiles a true work of historical philology, based on stories of Italian colonization provided to her by her own family and others” (Luraschi 2009, 188), and the same can be said about Mengiste. Melissa Schindler offers the following insight on Black women intellectuals writing from the African diaspora at large, which I believe pertains to the two authors in question: “They do not depict women simply as victims needing rescue or as saints deserving worship. Rather, the point is to represent women: to insert them into national narratives that have largely excised non-idealized quotidian experiences” (Schindler 2014, 75). Moreover, Ghermandi and Mengiste concentrate on a particular historical time period, in which Ethiopia succeeded in resisting the European invader, highlighting Ethiopia as one of only two African countries to have not submitted to colonialism, while still showing the extreme violence and subjugation that characterizes colonial enterprises. As both authors single out Ethiopia and its historical uniqueness, they also both narrow down their lens even further to concentrate on class, gender, and race differences among Ethiopians and Italians as well.

In *Regina di fiori e di perle*, references to women’s importance in the rebellion are scattered throughout the book, from recovering weapons to defending a village, and finally culminate in the “almost mythical” warrior, Kebedech Seyoum (Lombardi-Diop in Ghermandi 2011, 311). This is the first description Ghermandi gives of Seyoum:

they say that she’s a better leader than the men. A fighter without equals [...] Each one of her army’s ambushes ends in victory. [...] The Italians are looking for her, they’re looking for her, but they still haven’t been able to capture her. [...] They say that her husband’s soul and the protector saint of the Kassa family are at her army’s side. (Ghermandi 2011, 215-16)

This description certainly gives weight to the adjective ‘mythical’ used to describe Seyoum, but it is even more striking that, while the words are tinged with narrative romance, what they recount is historical fact, according to the archives examined by the author in Addis Ababa (Lombardi-Diop 2021). Ghermandi, with this description and with an entire chapter dedicated to Kebedech Seyoum, therefore succeeds in combining a fictitious story with factual elements, in order to raise Seyoum to the level of exemplary representative of the many Ethiopian women who fought in this conflict, whom history does not remember.

Mengiste has stated, in the book’s afterword and in various interviews, that her writing was guided by this same objective: that of bringing to light the forgotten Ethiopian women who fought in the war. The novel follows Hirut’s journey during the invasion and subsequent rebellion, and Mengiste uses Hirut’s decisions and the women she comes across to highlight the essential function women played during the war. Mengiste’s novel therefore puts the experience of women warriors at the forefront and allows readers to see the complexity of each female character. In this way, as Nick Tembo writes in relation to *Beneath the Lion’s Gaze*, Mengiste’s female characters use political violence to claim national agency (Tembo 2020, 3). There are two precise moments that depict women as fighters, which leave a lasting

impression on the reader. The first is when Aster, the wife of Kidane, for whom Hirut works as a maid, goes out on a horseback ride to encourage women to join the war effort as soldiers:

Aster is a glorious figure astride her horse, Buna. [...] Women! she shouts. Sisters, are you listening to me? [...] Ethiopia's gifted *azmari* will sing of this day for years: of how the women drop their baskets and their jugs. How they push away their looms and piles of wool. [...] The singers will use the women's gasps and exclamations as signs of their growing strength [...] that first battle cry was already forming in the women's throats. (Mengiste 2020b, 111)

The second moment is when Hirut rides into battle against the Italians who had previously captured her and Aster: "She feels the spirits of the dead seep into her bones and steady her like steel. [...] Here is Hirut: wondrous soldier in the great Ethiopian army" (Mengiste 2020b, 395). As with Ghermandi's description of Kebedech Seyoum, both Aster and Hirut have almost mythical qualities associated with their soldierliness. References to future songs sung by Ethiopian storytellers and to the spirits of the dead move the story into the terrain of myth. As in Ghermandi's description of Kebedech Seyoum, Mengiste also focuses on word of mouth and how it inflates the stories of these women, dousing them with a legendary status. Such an aspect — the fact that these women's stories are and will be passed on by word of mouth — subtly references their silences in official documents and in the national imagination, as well as in the memory of Italian people, who have forgotten their colonial era. By painting pictures of fierce women warriors and already imagining their names and stories being passed down through generations, both Mengiste and Ghermandi urge Ethiopians and Italians to remember their history, to discuss it, and above all, to give space to women's voices and stories. The works of both authors are an attempt at opening an international postcolonial dialogue, using the stories of Ethiopian women as a starting point.

The relationship that these women have with Italian men in these works also merits consideration. In *Regina di fiori e di perle*, the interactions between Ethiopian women and Italian men are in some cases hate-filled, but are also shown to be compassionate and even romantic. In the above-mentioned case of Daniel and Amarech, both of them attempt to convince Yacob that they are in love and that Daniel is a good man. Daniel deserts the colonial army and joins the Ethiopian resistance as an act of love for Amarech, before the two are caught and executed. In a later chapter, the relationship between the Ethiopian housekeeper, Woizero Bekelech, and the old Italian soldier, signor Antonio, begins as a simple meeting because both speak Amharic. Bekelech initially distrusts Antonio, but after he proves to be reliable, the two develop a friendship whose sincerity brings Antonio to admit his deepest secret: his sense of shame about what Italy did to Ethiopia. These two relationships complicate the interactions between Italian men and Ethiopian women, because neither can be simply categorized by dislike or hatred, and Ghermandi in fact shows that in some cases love can bring together the most different people in the most trying times.

The Shadow King, like Ghermandi's novel, presents relationships between Italian men and Ethiopian women, although any sign of affection or love is absent between these two opposed groups. In fact, the relationship of Italian soldier Ettore Navarra with Hirut is characterized by an intense hate. Hirut only interacts with Ettore when she is captured and kept as a prisoner and he is tasked with photographing her. During her capture, Hirut grows to loathe him not only because he represents the invader, but also because she perceives him as a coward who hides behind his camera and torments her. When her compatriots help her escape, she even specifically requests that they leave Ettore to her so that she can kill him, though she ultimately decides not to. Even in the novel's final moments – a sort of reconciliation between these two characters set forty years after the main events – Hirut is unable to feel any sympathy for Ettore, or any desire to close the gap between them. It is Ettore who begs her for forgiveness, in a switch of the power dynamic that existed between them during the war. With this relationship, Mengiste further humanizes both characters, by showing the inner turmoil that destroys Ettore during and after the war and by refusing to allow Hirut to become a ruthless killer. Here Mengiste also flips the classic hierarchy of colonial power, going from the indigenous Hirut being the invading Italian's prisoner to Hirut being the only one who can grant Ettore forgiveness and therefore freedom from his life of remorse. Mengiste is consistent in maintaining her complex characterizations, but the relationship between these two characters also remains somewhat static, because they are always separated, always distant, and eventually unable to reconcile their differences and overcome the atrocities of the war. I do not mean to say that bridging this gap is necessary for the novel to succeed, but I am trying to call attention to the fact that this gap exists and seems to be only worsened by time: Italian men and Ethiopian women are shown to have a fraught relationship that will always be defined by power, guilt, and violence.

The differences between the two authors' depictions of these relationships could also be influenced by their individual biographies. Mengiste comes from an Ethiopian family who had relatives, mostly men, as well as a great-grandmother, who fought in the war against the Italians, and these are the stories she grew up with (Mengiste 2020b, 425). Ghermandi, on the other hand, like Daniel and Amarech's baby in her book, is a product of Italian colonialism. Since she is Italian, as well as Ethiopian, it seems relevant that she wanted to add nuance to the relationships between Italian men and Ethiopian women, in order to show that a simple boundary cannot be drawn between good patriots and evil invaders and that not all mixed-race children were abandoned or the products of rape. This of course is not to say that either author's representation of these relationships is necessarily more realistic or successful, but rather that the authors' desire to show certain types of interactions between people of different genders and races hinges on the kind of story they want to tell and may be influenced by their lived experiences.

There remains an important aspect to discuss when taking into consideration the centrality of women in these works. While in Ghermandi's novel almost all of the female characters, however small, are endowed with agency and are not passive in the face of oppression, Mengiste paints a more complex picture of her two main female characters and does not allow the reader to be comfortable in a simple appraisal or rejection of their complicated actions. For example, readers cannot fully idolize Aster as a great female warrior, because she also brutally beats Hirut and later threatens to kill her. This could be attributed to how Mengiste wants to overturn Ethiopian (as well as Italian) propaganda regarding the conflict, to show that not everyone was a brave warrior and patriot (Mudge 2019). Although Aster is in fact a brave soldier, she has complex motivations and inner turmoil, showing that most times the reality of these events is multidimensional and defies simple understandings. The character of Aster is the reader's first warning not to trust first impressions and to second-guess every character's motives, as Mengiste implores her readers to move away from simple equivalencies. This aspect concerns the eventual introduction of the Italian characters, too, who initially could be viewed solely as violent invaders, but are soon shown to have their own web of rationalizations and intricate relationships regarding their own sense of identity and belonging. Furthermore, the relationship between Hirut and Aster also highlights Ethiopia's history of feudalism, of different ethnicities and languages, and even of slavery (see Zewde 2001 for a historical analysis of these topics), showing the multi-ethnic and far-from-perfect reality of the country that the author wants to depict as fierce and patriotic despite, or rather because of, its uneven history and multifaceted people. Indeed, despite the multiplicity of varying, complex, and interesting characters, it could be said that, similar to Mengiste's first novel, here the central character is "Ethiopia itself" (Balashova 2013, 351), as a historical nation and as a sociopolitical entity.

Conclusion

Before concluding, it seems necessary to note that *The Shadow King* has more international appeal when compared to *Regina di fiori e di perle*, despite the latter's translation into English. For example, Mengiste's text is currently being produced into a movie (Fleming Jr. 2019); was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2020, as stated on the book's cover; and was translated into Italian almost immediately (Mengiste 2021b). The apparent wider attention given to Mengiste's novel hints at the danger of the English language having a hegemonic clutch over the postcolonial environment and discourse (Ponzanesi 2014, 51). This is not to diminish the importance of Ghermandi's novel, but rather to highlight the palatability of English language books in an international context. However, it must be mentioned that despite writing in English, Mengiste herself is part of a literary minority in the United States, as evidenced by a recent study done by the *New York Times*, which found that the vast majority of authors

published by major companies are “overwhelmingly white” (So and Wezerk 2020). There is no simple solution to the prominence – and possible dominance – of the English language literary market in a global setting, but this must be recognized in order to avoid accepting English language hegemony.

Despite their differences in marketable appeal, the comparison between these two works, while in no way exhaustive, points to the existence of common literary themes and culture amongst Ethiopian authors writing across the diaspora. Ghermandi’s and Mengiste’s novels first and foremost concentrate on the historical war between Ethiopia and Italy, and in so doing confirm their active engagement in political and cultural processes within the confines of both countries’ national borders. Both writers also recognize the twofold importance of recovering this past: they revisit it in order to create a link between colonial attitudes and current immigration politics in Italy,⁵ and because the people who lived through this time period are dying or have died in recent years. Reviving and recording these histories is hence necessary in order to reconfigure an inter-generational collective memory (Sansalvadore 2013, 64-65). Furthermore, Ghermandi and Mengiste seek to recover and amplify women’s voices, specifically those of Black women, and to open up a space for them in a prevalently male national dialogue. In fact, as Caterina Romeo has noted, the legacy of the anticolonial struggle was based on the systematic cancellation of women’s contributions (Romeo 2021, 13). Both authors give a narrative voice to these women, but Mengiste develops more deeply some of the themes introduced by Ghermandi, such as the signification of violence and the agency of Ethiopian women based on their class status, concentrating to a greater extent on the intimate sphere of gender and familial relations as much as on the colonial war, thus allowing the ‘subaltern’ to take center stage. Despite the authors’ different languages and countries of settlement, their Ethiopian focus remains potent and their texts engage in a thematic inter-diasporic literary dialogue, demonstrating an intense attachment to an Ethiopian past and culture amongst diasporan individuals. The works by Ghermandi and Mengiste therefore constitute two recent entries in the quickly growing literary subgenre that has emerged from the Ethiopian diaspora.⁶

Notes

¹ Some authors have attempted to engage the text prior to its publication (Pili 2014; Bond 2017) due to Mengiste’s anticipations about her novel before its eventual release.

² In the field of Italian studies, Donna R. Gabaccia has used the term ‘diaspora’ to refer to Italian diasporas throughout time (Gabaccia 2003, v-vi). My use of the term differs slightly from Gabaccia’s and is indebted to the framework laid out in the field of African studies by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza who writes that not all dispersals result in the formation of diasporas and all diasporas do not live forever (Zeleza 2005, 39). Although diasporas are conceived at both multiple temporal and spatial scales (Zeleza 2005, 42), and although there have been historic Ethiopian diasporas through time, such as the Ethiopian diaspora in India from medieval times to the end of the 18th century (Zeleza 2005, 46), the temporal aspect of diaspora is not strictly relevant to my discussion of contemporary diasporic Ethiopian writing.

I will rather focus on the 'location' of contemporary Ethiopian diasporas, born out of what Zeleza terms "the era of structural adjustment" in Ethiopia and other African nation states (Zeleza 2005, 55).

³ For example, Girmachaw Takla Hawaryat's 1949 novel *Araya* in Amharic (Marzagora 2018, 156-57); Senedu Gebru's 1949 play in Amharic, *The Grief of the Ethiopian People* (Balashova 2013, 350); Makonnen Endalkachew's Amharic play, *The Voice of Blood*, translated into English in 1955 (Beer 1975, 49); Daniachew Worku's 1968 short story in English, *Mammite* (Beer 1975, 48); and Abe Gubegna's 1975 novel in English, *Defiance* (Azeze 1985, 41). For questions of essay length, difficulty in recovering these works, and linguistic incompetence (for those in Amharic), these texts will not be addressed.

⁴ Many studies of Italian postcolonial literature have highlighted the role that women writers have in this field. Among others, Serena Alessi observes that "the perspective of women writers is particularly efficient at analyzing colonialism and its effects," due to power structures such as racism and sexism that especially affect women (Alessi 2019, 366).

⁵ The legacy of this historical period is more relevant than ever in the current political climate since it is directly connected to the current immigration that Italy is experiencing. Emma Bond writes that Mengiste attempts to link Italian colonialism to present-day racist attitudes towards immigrants and Black Italians (Bond 2017, 5). Moreover, Italy and its citizens are still paying for the war in Ethiopia to this day through the so called *accise*, which are taxes on gasoline that were first instated in order to pay for the extraordinary cost of waging the war on Ethiopia (Milone 2019). When Italy fails to denounce racism and acknowledge its colonial past, it actively contributes to the erasure of this past and to the escalation of racist, fascist, and pro-colonial attitudes. It is important to note that while the novels and the time period under analysis are linked to fascism, colonialism in Italy began almost forty years before Mussolini's coming to power, and it would be incorrect to equate all colonial crimes and rhetoric in an Italian context to the fascists. As Vincenza Perilli points out, this false equivalence would allow Italians to blame fascism for colonialism, therefore absolving themselves of responsibility and letting them believe, erroneously, that because the regime has fallen, colonialism has no effect on racial, political, and migratory situations in current day Italy (Perilli 2015, 146).

⁶ There are many authors of Ethiopian descent writing from Italy, the US, and around the world, such as Rebecca Haile, Carla Macoggi, Dinaw Mengestu, Nega Mezlekia, Nafkote Tamirat, Maria Abbebù Viarengo, and others. The new collection of short stories, *Addis Ababa Noir* (Mengiste 2020a), is a great starting point for reading the works of emerging and established Ethiopian authors who write in a variety of languages.

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