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The Location of Literature: Authorship and Co-Authorship in Abdelmalek Smari's *Fiamme in paradiso*

Martino Lovato

The transnational nature of globalization and migration across the global North and South has opened new research directions and forms of questioning in the field of Italian Studies. The recent academic debates on migration literature and postcolonial studies reveal the critical challenges brought to traditional understandings of “Italian literature” by new forms of writing, relating Italian to other languages and cultural codes, especially those coming from the Global South. As Orton points out:

Just as the physical presence and social position of migrants in Italy's national space has prompted re-evaluations of how national identity is formulated, migration literature calls into question the criteria according to which a text qualifies as national literature and interrogates many of the discourses and meta-narratives of national literatures and national identity. (Orton 2013, 22)

The use of “migrant literature” as a literary category has been controversial, in Italian as well as in other European literatures, because it is primarily defined by the ethnic origins of the author and employs a classification that is more judiciary than literary, as Christiane Albert points out (15). As Ugo Fracassa reminds, the recognition and support of Italy's “migrant literature” was initially enthusiastic among critics, but was accompanied by a simultaneous “suspension of judgment” on the “literariness” of these works (Fracassa 2011, 140–149). Gnisci's distinction between “migrants who write” and “writers who migrate” has been symptomatic of the inaugural problems of recognition not only of these works as “Italian,” but also as part of “Italian literature” itself (Gnisci 2002 & 2006, 31; Sinopoli, 97; Fracassa, 173).

The prevalence of readings focusing on the sociological aspects of these works, or else dedicated to the taxonomic problems that “migrant literature” raised, has often led to a disregard for the complex reading practices they require. Situated in the “in-between” space across cultures, societies and literatures, outlined by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, the ethical nature of the problems raised by these works resembles the question raised in post-colonial studies, in that it cannot be separated from considerations that are literary or aesthetic (Ponzanesi, 151).¹ While the intellectual debate on this subject is far from concluded, in this essay my goal is not that of providing conclusive answers to questions such as “what is literature?,” “what are literary genres?” or “what is literariness?” Claudio Guillén warns against attempting to provide strict definitions in response to them, arguing that the answers can only be approached circumstantially, “from the vantage point of or in relation to other questions or queries that make up the historical environment of the time” (109). Recognizing the inseparability of the intertwined ethical and aesthetic questions as constituent elements of the critical challenges raised by these works, my study of Abdelmalek Smari's *Fiamme in Paradiso* (Flames in Paradise) aims at reconstructing the circumstances in which this novel came to light,

¹ On the relationships between migration, literature, and postcolonial studies in Italy, see also (Ponzanesi and Polizzi, 145; Andall and Duncan, 16; Quaquarelli, 60–62; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 11-13; Di Maio, 126–139).

pointing out the different elements that inform the novel's aesthetics, and that might contribute to a broader recognition of it, and of "migrant literature," as part of the Italian literary tradition.

A "Late-Early" Migrant Novel

By "migrant literature" I refer to a limited group of works defined by Comberati as a "hybrid genre" between testimonial and fiction, that were published in the early 1990s by authors who themselves experienced the hardships of the migratory experience to Italy from their countries of origin (Comberati, 34; Mengozzi, 34). The similarities shared between these works are not only thematic and "judiciary"; another feature of the works that appeared between 1990 and 1995 is that of having been published by large or mid-size presses, in response to the readers' desire to know more about the life of immigrants, after the brutal murder of Jerry Masslo.² Pap Khouma and Mario Fortunato's *Io, Venditore di elefanti* (1990, *I Was an Elephant Salesman*), Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato* (1990, *Immigrant*), and Mohamed Bouchane's *Chiamatemi Ali* (1991, *Call me Ali*) can be considered "classics," as they were the first to be published and their titles recur in anthologies and dedicated encyclopedic entries.³ A final common feature shared between these works is that their authors were in most cases making their literary debut. They were in the process of learning the Italian language, and their works emerged from the collaboration with an Italian "co-author": usually a journalist, anthropologist or "facilitator" who helped them in writing their stories, and whose name appeared on the covers or frontispiece either as a co-author or editor (*curatore*) (Romeo, 406–407).

Critics have studied the modalities of these collaborations, paying attention to the power relations established between the authors and their Italian partners. The case of Methnani and Mario Fortunato, and that of Nasser Chohra and Alessandra Atti di Sarro show that, in some cases, these collaborations were not unproblematic for the authors, who felt challenged by the editorial approach of their Italian "co-authors" (Mengozzi, 110–112; Parati 1997a, 121–124).⁴ Negotiated between author and co-author or editor, the questions of authorship raised by these collaborations reflect the condition of the authors, characterized by a split between the author's self as an authentic witness, entitled to a first-hand experience of migration, and a narrator who finds inspiration from his or her own experience but must negotiate with the Italian co-author the outcome of the linguistic—and thus of the literary—craft. In most cases, the standardized Italian of these works has raised the suspicion, among critics, that in these exchanges the authors' potential for linguistic innovation was lost in the process (Portelli, 477; Comberati, 54–62; Parati 1995b; Gnisci 2002). These factors helped in framing these initial collaborations as a "contended ground," as Chiara Mengozzi describes it, on which the life of the authors as migrants was packaged to meet the expectations of the public (113).

The novel I discuss, Abdelmalek Smari's *Fiamme in Paradiso*, can be considered as a "late-early" novel in this group, as it shares similar stylistic features and modalities of production with

² Many point out the relevance of Jerry Masslo's murder in the plantations of Rosarno as the first tragic event involving an immigrant in the country, and the first to raise a wave of indignation in the Italian public debate (Bond, Bonsaver, and Faloppa, 5–21).

³ For a reconstruction of the critical debate over the early developments of Italian "migrant literature" see (Romeo, 386–389; Mengozzi, 20–21; Comberati, 54–57).

⁴ Other studies on these early collaborations are devoted to those between Mohamed Bouchane with Daniele Miccione and Carla De Girolamo (Parati 1997b, 173), Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta (Comberati, 36–39; Colace, 87–89), Salwa Salem and Laura Maritano (Mengozzi, 25–26), Alessandro Micheletti e Saidou Moussa Ba (Comberati, 55–56).

other works that appeared between 1990 and 1995 though, due to its long gestation, it was published only in 2000. Narrated in the third person like Moussa Ba and Micheletti's *La Promessa di Hamadi* (1994, Hamadi's Promise), the novel recounts the arrival in Italy of the protagonist Karim who, like the author, leaves Constantine in November 1992, in the early stages of the Algerian civil war (1991–2002). He joins his friend Mahdi, who encourages him to leave Algeria and promises to host him in his red villa. As opposed to Methnani and Fortunato's *Immigrato*, in which the protagonist travels across the Italian peninsula, Karim's adventures take place mostly in Milan, where he soon joins the diasporic community of undocumented individuals: primarily Muslim young men like him who come from Algeria or other parts of the Maghreb, and share with him his precarious life. Of the two "classic" Italian "migrant novels" from the Maghreb, Smari's narration more closely resembles Bouchane's *Chiamatemi Ali* than Methnani's *Immigrato*. *Immigrato* originated from a sociological investigation of the life of migrants in Italy, and was inspired by the realist poetics of the Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukry.⁵ In contrast, both Bouchane's autobiographical protagonist and Smari's Karim are the outcome of a language-learning process in which the authors wrote their own experience in the Italian language. Both characters get acquainted with Milan's charity institutions, such as the dormitory in Via Sammartini, where Karim sleeps during the first 15 nights, while he realizes that Mahdi's "red villa" is nothing but an old abandoned car. *Fiamme in paradiso* is divided in fifteen chapters: the first six are devoted to Karim's first four days in Italy, when he still can sleep at the dormitory and gets used to the city and to his new life. The remaining chapters are devoted to the period following the expiration of his visa, while he is undocumented and homeless, mostly intent on finding stable housing and a job.

As Norma Bouchard reminds us, these thematic and stylistic similarities shared with other novels should also be read transnationally between Italy and the author's native country, culture and literature (110), a direction of studies in which the volume *Nuovo Planetario Italiano* (New Italian Planetarium) has played a seminal role, particularly by recognizing the cultural origins of "migrant" authors who came to Italy from elsewhere.⁶ An analysis of differing depictions of religion, for example, reveals cultural traits that, in turn, carry an intellectual value related to the novel's stylistics. Whereas religion helps Bouchane's protagonist face his dire conditions, it plays a central role in the crisis between Smari's protagonist and other Muslims he encounters in Milan. Karim's conflicts with the Egyptian radical Muslims in charge of the Istituto Islamico in Viale Jenner—one of the few reference points for the growing Muslim population in the city—are a distinct element of this novel, whose tragic ending differs from the open ending of most early "migrant" novels.⁷ This fictional death of the protagonist in a sudden car explosion is congruent with the somber tones of the novel. Together with other novels coming from Algerian-born authors, the religious tension of *Fiamme in paradiso* can be read as voicing, in the Italian

⁵ In the introduction to the Bompiani edition of the novel, in 2006, Fortunato makes reference to Choukry as example of great Moroccan writer that is unknown to the Italian public (Fortunato, I).

⁶ In the section of *Nuovo Planetario Italiano* devoted to the authors from the Maghreb, Lakhous underscores the theme of "ghurba" as central to their works. This notion, which he translates as nostalgia and compares to the Portuguese *saudade*, should also be related with the sense of estrangement due by the fact of living in a foreign land, and is also central in *Fiamme in paradiso* (Lakhous, 2006: 157).

⁷ The Islamic Cultural Institute in Viale Jenner has been, for good or for worse, central to the Milanese chronicle of Islam in the last decades. Often associated with the most radical forms of Islam and anti-Western political orientations, the center includes a regular mosque, a halal butchery and a small restaurant, and has been for decades led by its president Abdelhamid Shaari. For a reconstruction of its history in the early 1990s see (Banfi, 156–158; Saint-Blancat, 284–288).

language, the trauma and pain expressed by the “literature of urgency” emerged in Algeria during the civil strife of the 1990s (Guardi, 80). Although later works by authors such as Amara Lakhous’ *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (2006, *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*) and Amor Dekhis’ *I Lupi della notte* (2004, *The Wolves of the Night*) have been less ambiguous than Smari’s in their denunciation of Islamism, no other novel written in Italian by Algerian-born writers in those years shows a deeper intellectual engagement against radical Islam than *Fiamme in paradiso*.⁸ The posture Karim assumes in these confrontations with the radical Muslims at the mosque in Viale Jenner, once inscribed within the Arabic literary tradition of the *mustaghrabīn* (which comprises 19th and 20th century Arab authors who attempted to mediate and translate between East and West) explains the references made in the novel to the works of Taha Hussein, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti, Jurjy Zaydan, and Mahmoud Taymour (El-Enany, 1–14; Hilali Bacar, 79–92). Karim’s lengthy debates with the radical Muslims, who strongly reject the West and its values, allow the protagonist to assume a dignified posture as a “mediator of modernity,” and inform the fictional trajectory of the narrative. The increasingly exasperated tones assumed in these confrontations constitute the prelude to the final explosion, the novel’s climax in which Karim dies. The recognition of these references to classic authors and themes in the Arabic literature as part of Italian literature relates to the way in which these themes and stylistic variations are approached and recognized, at the crossroad between different literary traditions.

The similarities between Smari’s and other “early” Italian novels are also related to their circumstances of production, and call into question the author’s agency in these works. Smari’s is not, properly speaking, a case of co-authorship, as none of the author’s collaborators intended to share the authorship of his novel. However, in his essay *La Ferita di Ulisse* (Ulysses’ Wound), Raffaele Taddeo first brought attention to the distortion (*stravolgimento*) of the original version of the novel, which had been drastically shortened in its transposition from a manuscript to a book (26). Thanks to the help I received from Smari, from Taddeo himself, and from Luca Formenton, owner of the established mid-size press Il Saggiatore, through a series of interviews I could reconstruct the circumstances in which *Fiamme in Paradiso* came to light. After leaving Constantine, Smari arrived in Italy in late 1992. Upon settling in Milan, he started to attend Italian classes organized by the cultural association La Tenda, and to participate in its cultural activities.⁹ Raffaele Taddeo, then a professor of Italian in high schools, was an inspiring figure for the association, and an active participant in the critical debate over this “new-born” literature.¹⁰ In this favorable context Smari met Taddeo, who became his Italian teacher. With his

⁸ The Civil War was in its initial stages when the author left Algeria (the assassination of president Boudiaf occurred on August 26, 1992, while Smari left in November. Only in 1993, when the author was already in Italy, the Algerian people understood that the violence between Islamists and the State was going to be a lasting phenomenon in their lives (Belkaid-Ellyas & Peyroulou, 22)). In *Fiamme in paradiso*, the challenge with Islamism is recurrent but somehow dissociated from the civil war itself, and rather related to the radical Muslims Karim meets at the Centro Culturale Islamico. The Algerian civil war *per se* is not central in the novel, which is mostly devoted to Karim’s struggle to normalize his life in Italy. Two non-negative references are made to radical or jihadist Islam, the first on Brahim’s funeral, in Chapter 5, the second in reference to Khaled, a young Algerian “mujahid” transiting to Italy after his participation to the wars in Afghanistan and Bosnia (Chapter 10).

⁹ Founded in 1990, La Tenda has been among the first non-profit associations to teach the Italian language to migrants newly arrived in the city, and to provide assistance and counsel to those living in distress. The association played and still plays a significant role in the development of the national literature devoted to migration, organizing courses of creative writing and hosting the El Ghibli website, a central platform for the critical debate in the field.

¹⁰ Taddeo’s *La Ferita di Ulisse* is an interesting study on the theme of “return” in Italian “migration literature,” where he first pointed out the critical aspects of Smari’s *Fiamme in paradiso* (26–30). His interventions appear

help, he began to draft a novelistic form to his diary, originally written in Arabic, first by translating it into Italian with the help of Taddeo, and then writing it himself directly in Italian. Between 1993 and 1995, Taddeo and Smari worked together on a text that was not originally intended for publication, although this opportunity was not unforeseen. Between 1992 and 1993, La Tenda organized meetings and public readings by “migrant writers” such as Pap Khouma, Saidou Moussa Ba, and Mohammed Bouchane, among others. Smari could relate to the experiences and works of other “migrant writers” while writing his own novel. His authorial position allows us to look at *Fiamme in Paradiso* not only as an autobiographical document from 1990s Italy, but also as the work of an author at his literary debut, intent on consciously inscribing his own work within the emerging Italian “migrant literature.” Smari and Taddeo were aware of the problems of authorship raised by previous collaborations. As Taddeo points out in the interview, he respected Smari’s authorship and he tried as much as possible not to interfere with the stylistics of the text, limiting his contribution to ensure the soundness of the Italian language. The outcome of this collaboration is the manuscript deposited in March 1995 at the Dergano-Bovisa library, in Milan, where the association La Tenda held its activities.

In 1995 Smari’s manuscript reached Luca Formenton who, as he stated in the interview, immediately described the text “as a news story (*caso di cronaca*), but told in a narrative fashion.” In 1997, when Smari signed the publishing contract with the press, he was aware of the type of modifications that would be made to the manuscript, particularly of the drastic reduction of Part One, set in Algeria and covering the initial third of the manuscript.¹¹ Talking about his first reaction to the proposed modifications of the original, in the interview Smari said that he felt “psychologically destroyed,” as if “someone else” was writing the novel. Formenton later appointed Luca Fontana, a recognized translator and art critic, as editor of the novel.¹² It is only after he started collaborating with Fontana in editing the manuscript, Smari added, that he started accepting the modifications made to the original text. In referring to Fontana’s editing, which he personally supervised, Formenton mentions that Fontana’s main preoccupation was “not to superimpose his own personality and way of writing on that of the author, but rather to give to the text a form compatible with a writing style (*scrittura*), and to making it understandable for the Italian reader.” Smari himself recognizes that he felt reassured by working with Fontana, because he explained to him the rationale employed for the editing, and he approved of the way in which these principles were put into place. Moreover, the author was asked to contribute by writing some of the additions made to the original. However, Smari was not entirely aware of what the final text would look like. After years of hesitation, he now reconciled with the published version of the text.

Smari’s is among the very few works in Italy’s “migrant literature,” of which an original manuscript has been preserved and made available to the public.¹³ As I undertook this research,

regularly on El-Ghibli’s website. As part of the broad debate on the “naming” of the literature emerged from migration, he prefers to employ the term “letteratura nascente” (Taddeo, 2006; “nascent literature”).

¹¹ Thanks to the encouragement and mediation of the anthropologist and journalist Valentina Agostinis, who collaborated with Smari during these years. In *Periferie dell’anima* (Il Saggiatore, 1996), the chapter “I Giardini di Tawfik” is devoted to Smari.

¹² Formenton’s long-time friend and collaborator, Luca Fontana translated essays and poetry from the English language. He is also the author of a translation manual, *Shakespeare come vi piace: manuale di traduzione* (Il Saggiatore, 2009), and active in theatrical productions in Venice and Parma. He holds a rubric (“La Signorina Cuori Infranti”) on the cultural online magazine “ifioridelmale.it”

¹³ Born in the Algerian town of Constantine, Smari and started writing in Italian soon after settling in Milan, where he still lives. In addition to *Fiamme in paradiso*, he wrote short stories, poetry, a theatrical rendition of *Fiamme in*

my primary aim was to respond to the questions raised by other case studies in early “migrant literature”: has the author’s authorship been respected? How was the text “packaged” to meet the expectations of the public? How did the collaborative processes affect the author’s linguistic and artistic creation? Was the author’s potential for linguistic innovation preserved? Thanks to the guidance I received in the interviews, both the manuscript and the published version of the text immediately appeared as the result of two collaborative processes; the record of an exchange, of a variety of interventions in which I had to distinguish Smari’s authorship from that of his two collaborators. I found in John Farrell’s author-centered literary approach a useful point of departure for distinguishing between Smari’s multiple roles as a speaker, a learner of Italian, and an author. Farrell’s definition of “artistic intentions” as “the authors’ attempts to provide a valuable reading experience by creating literary effects—to move, amuse, perplex, inspire, instruct, or infuriate the reader, using all means at hand—verbal skill, mastery of structure, imagery, metaphor, narrative forms and genres, or the flouting of any of these” (39), reminded me of the common expectations for “literary” works and their writers. Without attempting to reduce the “literariness” of this work to a pure matter of the author’s intentions, the “exceptionality” of this case required that I distinguish not only what the author was in the conditions to express from what was simply out of reach for his linguistic abilities, but also that I understand the way in which his collaborators contributed in the making of the text.

A Poetics of Transcription: The Language of the Dergano – Bovisa Manuscript

The Dergano–Bovisa Manuscript is entitled “Fiamme nel Paradiso” and was authored by Smari under the name Tawfik Sam, the pseudonym that he chose in the early 1990s.¹⁴ Initially, Smari dictated his version of the text to Taddeo, who wrote down the sentences in correct Italian while discussing with him the reasons for his corrections, so that he could learn. At page 105 it is possible to discern the moment in which the author, by then more confident in expressing himself in the Italian language, started writing at the keyboard. Theirs was both a language-learning practice and an artistic collaboration, whose most immediate concern was to ensure accurate communication, first of all among themselves.

In many instances the text reflects the author’s Algerian bilingualism as well as his recourse to French as a resource for learning Italian. The name Constantine, for example, has been preserved with the French spelling as “Constantine,” in the way in which the author probably employed it. French words appear regularly in the text; they can be words for which Smari and Taddeo could not probably immediately reach a translation, such as “derapage” (54) and “lapin” (65), false friends between French and Italian such as “mantello” for *cappotto* (73) or “bravo” for *coraggioso* (91), but also creative uses of words with broader semantic acceptations in French than in Italian, such as “metamorfosato” for *trasformato* (67). In a few cases a word is missing, as in the following sentence: “Al contrario egli aveva comprato un ... dove aveva inserito il quaderno, la penna e un pacco di buste” (74), where the missing word is probably the French “cartable.” Here it is possible to conjecture the conversation between Smari and Taddeo on two possible alternatives, “cartella” and “zaino,” the first a potential false friend in Italian, the other

paradiso and several plays such as *Il Poeta si diverte* (The Poet is Having Fun) and *L’Asino sulla terrazza* (The Donkey on the Terrace). He also wrote *L’Occidentalista* (Libri Bianchi, 2009) and *La Trottola* (Edizioni Selecta, 2019). He regularly writes on El-Ghibli website. In his blog “Berbaricus” (<http://www.malikamin.net/>) he comments the social and political actuality of Algeria with entries in Arabic, French, and Italian.

¹⁴ See also footnote n. 11.

closer to the standard translation. As the space has been left free to be probably filled in later, these cases show how this collaborative process was meant to render the story the author had to tell in a viable Italian, and not a final version of the novel.

The Dergano-Bovisa manuscript was written without using italics, and French and Arabic words sometimes appear in quotation marks, as in the case of “watan” (54), “Iscia” (60), or “dohr” (58), “khol” (81), “halal” (55), “haram” (65), “takbira” (27), “bidaa” (27), “rizk” (108) or “zagarid” (146). In writing down unfamiliar foreign words or expressions, Taddeo employed a simple phonetic transcription, as is shown by the occurrence of “Barak allaho fic” (76), without recurring to a codified transcription of the Arabic alphabet. Other expressions from either French or Arabic have been instead creatively transposed or translated into Italian: for example, in “invece loro hanno esaurito tutti i loro voti” (50) it is possible to discern a transposition of the French expression *exaucer les vœux*, while “piccola morte” (53) translates the Arabic *mawt ṣaghīr*, and “i giorni di Dio” (80) translates *yawm al-dīn*. Transliterated or not, some of these cases are still noticeable in the published version of novel, and explain what Jennifer Burns refers to while pointing out the peculiarity of *Fiamme in Paradiso*, in which the Italian language is “foreignized” by the insertion of terms in Arabic (644). Conversely, not all the Arabic words have been inserted in quotation marks, as is the case of “jihād” (98) or “Ramadan” (67), which were probably familiar to Taddeo, or that of names of food like “zalabia” (46) or “sciorba” (76).

In addition to their common use in dialogues and for the insertion of foreign words, quotation marks are also employed to emphasize a special use or semantic acceptance of a word. This the case of “poliziotto” (95), used ironically in reference to one of the radical Muslims at the mosque in Viale Jenner (who Karim considers as “policemen” of the conscience), or the word “Marocchino” (83), alluding to the Italians’ habit of referring to immigrants as “Moroccans” regardless of their real nationality. Whereas irony is easily understandable to the reader from the context, the insertion of foreign words within quotation marks shows that Smari’s linguistic choices have been preserved when the author was referring to culturally specific terms in Arabic, particularly in the case of doctrinal or practical aspects of Islam.¹⁵ These words often appear without an explanation of their meaning, on the assumption that the insertion of explanatory notes would also be written at a later stage.

These cases show how the text is a record of the linguistic exchange between Smari and Taddeo, and underline how it was impossible, for someone in Taddeo’s position, not to interfere with the language and thus with the aesthetics of the text. I refer to theirs as a “poetics of transcription,” as this was a relational process in which communication went both ways between Smari and Taddeo. For example, one of the outcomes of their collaboration is that the text records Taddeo’s decision to not influence the aesthetics of the text. In some instances the text expresses the distance that Taddeo consciously assumed in preserving the author’s original language, to the expense of elegance and variety of expression. In one of Karim’s arguments with one of the “moralists” at the mosque of Viale Jenner, who wants to punish him for having shaved his beard and thus transgressed what he considers as a religious imperative, the protagonist is forced to take back the books he kept there:

-Mi stai prendendo in giro? Vieni prendi la tua roba!

¹⁵ The studies of Samia Mehrez, Jean-Marc Moura, Charles Bonn, and Abdelkebir Khatibi, among others, on the stylistics and narrative strategies of including cultural referents “foreign” to European readership in Francophone Maghrebi literature, can help in further contextualizing Smari’s choices within a broader post-colonial perspective (Mehrez, 122).

Karim entrò con Abu Ali nel suo ufficio, prese i suoi libri. Lo ringraziò nonostante provasse rabbia. “Non c’è dubbio che è la mia barba la causa dell’ira di questo responsabile.” (79)

The word “responsabile” expresses the position of the “bearded” radical Muslims of being managers of the Islamic Institute. In context, it also expresses the position of authority they have over other Muslims like Karim, recently arrived in Italy and in need of assistance. They are called invariably “responsabili,” or else ironically defined as “poliziotti.” This common appellation reflects the uniform mentality expressed by all the “responsabili” encountered there by the author-protagonist, but its use may seem repetitive from the point of view of a reader with “literary” expectations from the novel. Another example of this distant attitude appears in the use of the word “stupefacenti” employed to describe the “ghabbara” (drug dealers) lurking nearby Milan’s central train station: “Quelli che vendono la polvere di droghe, gli stupefacenti” (58). In line with the role he assumed, in these cases Taddeo did not embellish the text, for example by inserting synonyms or by adopting a “realist” use of the language, as this would have transgressed the working principle of not interfering with the novel’s aesthetics.

The syntax similarly reflects the communicative challenges that author and transcriber had to face in this learning and creative process. The text reflects the immediate goal of reaching a correct form of Italian, and sentences appear sometimes convoluted despite their grammatical correctness. This is the case of the previously quoted “Non c’è dubbio che è la mia barba la causa dell’ira di questo responsabile,” but also of “quanti stranieri hanno ricevuto i fogli di via ma essi non hanno dato alcun seguito a ciò” (58), or “ha detto parolacce basse della stessa bassezza della persona che le ha pronunciate” (94). In the following passage, a further aspect can be noticed:

- Permettete a noi di andare?
- Fate il giro dell’istituto e di quello che gli è attorno. Perché non lo porti al giardino? (57)

Taddeo’s position as Smari’s first interlocutor, and his familiarity with the places in Milan he was describing, probably affected the way in which space is constructed in the text. Here the reader is informed that there is another building around the one in which the protagonist finds himself, but this information is not previously anticipated. Here my impression is that space is traced through the city in the consciousness of the writer, sometimes more intent on telling his own experience to Taddeo, than in presenting it to the future readers. These combined elements make of the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript a complete authorial work at an incomplete editorial stage. Through the collaboration with Taddeo, the author’s language was granted truthfulness though it was not yet ready to meet the expectations of a “literary” work.

The Editorial Process

Reduction and Narrative Structural Modifications: The shortening of the manuscript is perhaps the most noticeable result of the editing. Since the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript consists of 146 pages of 21x50 cm in size, the ratio between the manuscript and book’s page-size is close to 1:2.5. By an approximate estimate, the whole text has been reduced by more than half its original length. In contrast to the novel, which consists of 15 chapters numbered with Arabic

numerals, the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript is divided in two parts, both numbered with Roman numerals: Part One is set in Algeria and consists of 14 chapters covering 56 of the total 146 pages, while Part Two is set in Italy and consists of 17 chapters (See Figure 1). Chapter XVI is repeated twice, and I thus refer to the first as XVI(a), and to the second as XVI(b). About 50% of the shortening of the original text involves Part One, while the remaining 50% is unevenly distributed between the chapters of Part Two. The contents of Part One have been mostly excluded from the book, with the relevant exception of some of the contents of chapters I and III, merged into the book chapter 1, and of V and VI, that are included into the book chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

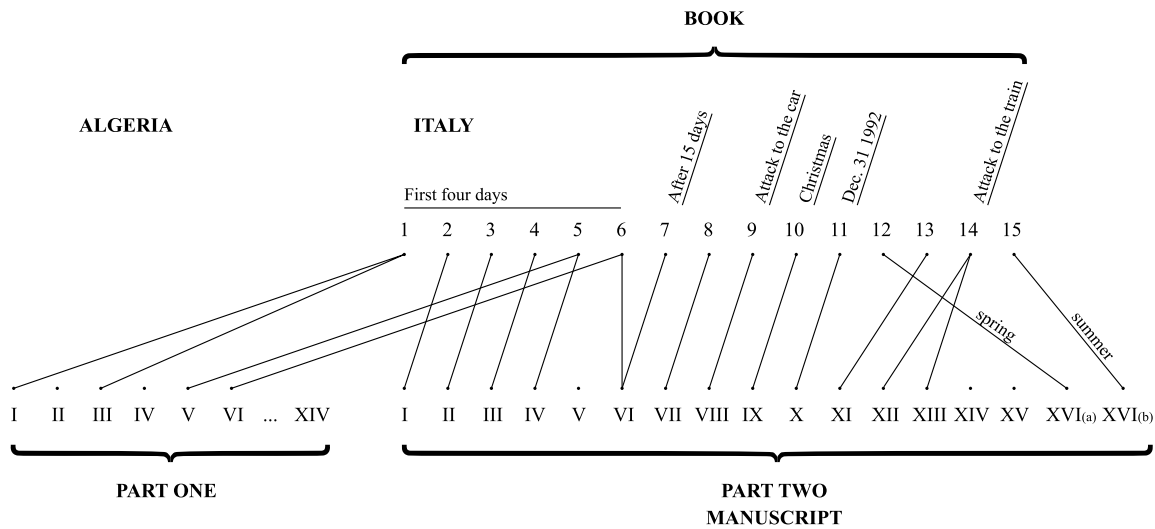


Figure 1: This chart illustrates the narrative development of the novel and the transfer of contents from the manuscript (below) into the book (above).

The initial group of chapters 2, 3, 4 covering the first days of Karim’s arrival in Italy, are slightly shortened versions of the corresponding chapters I, II, and III of the manuscript Part Two. Positioned towards the end of Karim’s four initial days in Italy, chapter 5 and 6 merge the contents of two chapters from both parts of the manuscript.¹⁶ The regular narrative sequence of the original continues with the series of chapters 7–11, although the shortening is more pronounced in this second group.¹⁷

The shortening of chapter IX into 10 is illustrative of two methodologies of shortening and extraction applied in the remaining chapters. The chapter’s second half is cut away, and the remaining contents inform the book chapter, not as mildly shortened versions of the original—as

¹⁶ By introducing Karim’s drowsy reminiscences of his visit to his friend Hascim in Constantine, Chapter 5 is a shortened versions of chapter IV of the manuscript Part Two with chapter V of Part One. Chapter 6 expands the episode of Karim’s visit to a cemetery, included in chapter VI of Part Two, with the memory of Brahim’s funeral in the Constantine neighborhood where the protagonist grew up, originally included in chapter VI of Part One.

¹⁷ Whereas chapters 7 and 9 are mildly shortened versions of chapters VI —whose contents are split between the book chapters 6 and 7—and VIII, chapters 8 and 10 include only half of chapters VII and IX, whose remaining half is excluded from the novel.

in the initial part of the novel,—but rather as excerpts; a selection of several passages distributed according to the original sequence of events and omitting the intermediary passages between one selection and the following one. These passages inform the chapter contents as strings extracted from the original text, according to a process of careful selection and extraction.¹⁸ Whether in whole chunks or by excerpts, the abridgement of the novel is conducted mostly by taking whole pieces of the original text (sentences, groups of sentences or whole paragraphs) and transposing them into the book. The editorial interventions on the syntactic flow of the original prose of the manuscript are, therefore, minimal. Though altered, the original sequence of events is not entirely disrupted and the essential narrative sequence is mostly preserved, with the singular exception of Chapter 12, that anticipates the coming of spring.

The parts that were excluded in the passage from the original to the book greatly vary in length and typology. Most relevant is the exclusion of most of Part One, which significantly changes the dramatic structure of the novel. In the manuscript, a lengthy portion of the narrative takes place in Algeria. There the author allows the reader to get to know Karim and understand the conditions that make him decide to leave his country for Italy. More numerous are the episodes describing how the competition between the Algerian state and what eventually became known as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) progressively reduces the freedoms of Algerians by parallel impositions of prohibitions. The protagonist also gives insight into his family life, especially details of father, who believes that all necessary medical knowledge is included in the book of the fifteenth-century scholar Al-Suyuti.¹⁹ These themes are organically tied to those narrated in the second part of the manuscript, and thus in the novel. They fully inform the effect of Karim’s impression of finding, at the Islamic Institute in Viale Jenner, what he left in Algeria. Such is the case of women’s freedom, for example, a theme that Karim discusses with the radical Muslims in Milan, and which is similarly anticipated in the Algerian episode of the burning of a prostitute and of her daughter in their house by Muslim fundamentalists. The text also includes a character such as “Geha the fool,” whose proverbial masculinity (*rajla*) introduces the Italian reader to an Algerian folkloristic and literary subject.²⁰

The most relevant singular deviation from the original is perhaps the last episode of Part One, charged with a strong dramatic function as it establishes Karim’s determination to succeed in Italy. In this episode, Karim walks alongside the river under the moonlight; he moves silently, to avoid disturbing the singing birds and the nightingale. Observing the moon, he anticipates, “non vedrò la prossima luna che in Italia,” and then decides:

Ma innanzitutto devo riuscire a passare le frontiere e a stabilirmi in Italia. Perciò sono pronto a trattare, persino col diavolo, berrei il vino, dormirei con le prostitute, se ciò occorresse, smetterei di pregare anche, mangerei carne di maiale, sopporterei fame, freddo e fatica. Sarei pronto ad accettare diverse umiliazioni,

¹⁸ The contents of Chapter 12 were included in chapter XVI(a) of the manuscript’s Part Two. Chapter 13 includes excerpts of chapter XI, while chapter 14 merges contents from chapters XII and XIII, reducing their length to lesser than a half. Finally, chapter 15 includes the contents of chapter XVI(b), shortened to a half of its original size.

¹⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505), eminent Muslim jurist and polymath, was author of a famous treatise of popular medicine.

²⁰ See, for example, Mammeri’s *La colline oubliée* or, more recently Lakhous’ *Le cimici e il pirata*, originally written in Arabic and recently published in Algeria by Barzakh.

purché non torni con le mani vuote, purché non fallisca. La disavventura della Francia non deve ripetersi, neppure le beffe della gente. (I, 50)²¹

The “pact with the devil” which Karim makes before leaving for Italy establishes the character’s idiosyncratic reactions once he is confronted, in Milan, by two opposite sides: by the Italian society who sees in him only an “immigrant,” and by the radical Muslims at the mosque who see in him a traitor to Islam’s religious values. This literary episode has the relevant dramatic function, in the original, of emphasizing Karim’s heroic determination to leave for Italy.

As compared to the manuscript, the drastic reduction of Part One in the novel makes Karim’s story start as if *in media res*. Whereas the manuscript traces the protagonist’s gradual decision to leave Algeria, informing the reader about the ordinary aspects of his life, his hesitations and uncertainties before becoming a “migrant,” the book version captures the protagonist in the moment of departure and arrival, when he becomes an “immigrant” in Italy. The insertion of contents from Part One into book chapters 1, 5, and 6, partially compensates for the absence of most of the episodes set in Algeria. These passages are chosen among the most significant ones, and allow the reader to briefly become familiar with Karim’s family, friends, and neighborhood. Similarly to the episodes excluded from Part One of the manuscript, the portions of Part Two included in the novel were selected from the narrative’s essential episodes, and simply reduced Karim to his essential traits.

The excluded parts are prevalently conversations or singular episodes that further elaborate, for example, the protagonist’s comparison between Egyptians and Algerians. They can be also episodes and entire storylines related to Karim’s daily life: Karim’s process of getting acquainted with Milan’s public transportation, interspersed across the initial chapters; Karim’s conversations with a character such as Amri, absent in the novel, or encounters with other characters known only by name. One must consider the *tempo* that Smari gave to his own narration. The result of the general shortening of the text is that the narrative lost its original pace and the new one it acquired gave it a different economy and a new proportion between its parts. The original sequence of events was prevalently kept, the language remained close to the original, particularly in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 12, in which lengthy portions of the book reflect the unchanged language of the manuscript. The action, on the contrary, was amplified as a result of the general reduction of the text, and the faster pace of the narrated events turned the narrative into an “action novel.”

In the final part of the novel, the simultaneous insertion of the contents of XVI(a) into book chapter 12, and the elimination of chapters XIV and XV, accelerates the original unfolding of events. The anticipation of the contents of XVI(a) of four chapters into book chapter 12, anticipates Karim’s encounter in Spring with Loredana, the Italian journalist interested in the Middle East. In the manuscript, the two police attacks on the protagonist are separated—both from each other and from the final explosion—and Karim is able to get his first salary before the final explosion.²² In the book, instead, the second attack precedes the final explosion by only one chapter, and these two final episodes constitute a sort of joint double-traumatic event. In the book, Karim’s phase of adaptation to Italy is shortened and the order of events inverted. Karim meets Loredana only once and has not yet received his first salary, when the attack on the train

²¹ I hereto denote in quotations from the manuscript with “I,” and those from the book with “II.”

²² Two additional chapters anticipate Karim’s hopeful encounter with Loredana, in which the protagonist has another argument with the men at the mosque on women’s freedom (XIV), and meets an older woman, Maria, at the park (XV).

and the explosion take place.²³ The narrative effect of these modifications is that of elevating the importance Karim's economic independence over his romantic reveries, creating suspense around his first salary he never gets, while strengthening the dramatic function of the final explosion. From a purely comparative perspective, the narrative structure of the original cannot be said to have been respected. The reduction of the Algerian part is a diminishment of both contents and plot-related episodes with a structural function. If respect for the authenticity of the original has not been the main inspiring principle of these variations, it is clear, however, by the way in which the contents from both parts of the manuscript have been included into the novel, that these variations aimed at valorizing the narrative elements of the original.

Additions and Linguistic Variation: The additions and modifications made by Fontana to the remaining part of the text are revealing of how the editor balanced respect for the original and his and Formenton's idea of what the Italian readers expected from a "migrant novel." They also show Fontana's sense of what the Italian readership knew and needed to know about the author's culture of origins and, to a certain extent, of how this very public should be addressed. The quantitative majority of the novel is constituted by parts of the manuscript that, chosen through the process I discussed in the previous section, were included in the novel without significant variations. The modifications made to the remaining portion of the text included in the novel vary from simple linguistic changes to elaborate additions of brief passages that affect the novel's structure, such as the brief paragraphs inserted at the beginning or at the ending of some chapters to facilitate transitions.

A concise addition introducing the reader to the contents of the chapter, for example, is the first paragraph of chapter 5. This is one of interventions made to introduce the readers to Algerian multilingualism which was preserved in the manuscript through the use of French or Arabic words. This subject is approached in the first paragraph of the chapter, before the protagonist "remembers" his conversation on this subject with his friend Hascim, contents that originally appeared in chapter V of the manuscript's Part One:

Aveva scritto una cartolina "in francese." Nel dormiveglia, verso mattina, Karim cominciò a porsi una domanda: qual'era la sua lingua? In che lingua pensava, sognava, faceva l'amore? In arabo classico, in arabo dialettale algerino, in francese? Gli tornò in mente una conversazione che aveva avuto un paio di giorni prima di partire con Hascim. (II, 57)

Similar additions appear at the beginning of chapter 7, which includes an original authorial poem in Italian that is absent in the manuscript, and at the beginning of chapter 8, which again concisely summarizes for the reader the importance of learning Italian for Karim: "La lingua, la lingua! Non la capisco e non so parlarla, come posso trovare un lavoro?" (II, 87). This passage similarly functions as a transition orienting the reader towards the contents of the chapter. Another strategy employed to introduce the Italian reader to Algerian bilingualism is the insertion of passages in French that were absent in the original—for example, by transforming

²³ It also reverses the sequence of events informing the relative normalization of Karim's life in Italy, preceding the tragic ending. In the manuscript, XVI(a) comes after the attack on the train and precedes the final explosion. This is the last of a sequence of four chapters that describe Karim's progressive adaptation in Italy and re-introduce Loredana, whom he already briefly met before, as a romantic conclusion to this sequence, before the final catastrophe.

the manuscript's allusive reference to De Gaulle on the worsening of the political equilibrium in Algeria, "E' l'inizio del caos previsto da De Gaulle" (I, 57), with an original quotation in French: "l'Algérie après la France c'est le chaos" (II, 29).

This is not the only way in which, by means of simple additions, signifiers were shifted to address the Italian readership. For example, the names of *Le Monde* and *Le Monde Diplomatique* appear among the foreign newspapers banned in Algeria before Karim's departure, probably because they were more recognizable to the Italian readers (I, 54; II, 16). The translation of a noun such as "kerba," which Karim and his companions use to refer to squatted houses inhabited by the newly arrived immigrants, is provided immediately after the word: "kerba, il buco" (I, 66; II, 51). Another example of simple addition is the inclusion of names of Arab poets such al-Mutanabbi and al-Shabbi, as authors of the verses quoted by the author (I, 95; II, 107), or of a brief description of the contents of Mahmud Taymur's novel *Cleopatra in Khan al-Khalili*, mentioned by the protagonist (I, 15; II, 57–58).

The presentation of devotional and everyday aspects of Islam constitutes a unique type of addition, as in the manuscript these contents were included without further explanation and within quotation marks. Fontana had a limited number of options and chose not to use footnotes, endnotes, or a glossary at the end of the text. Instead, he transposed some of the contents about the author's culture of origins within the narration itself, explaining to the reader what could have otherwise remained not clearly understood, or simply obscure. The first occurrence of the word "halal," when Karim eats his first meal on the airplane from Algiers to Rome, is emblematic of this type of problem:

Ah! Ecco il pranzo..

Ho finito di mangiare. Ho assaporato tutto il cibo. Ma il menù era scritto in italiano. Ho letto qualcosa di ciò che era scritto sulle scatole. Ho capito alcune parole. Mi è piaciuto quello che ho mangiato. L'ho trovato buono, perché è "halal" o almeno perché sono costretto a mangiarlo. Per questo non ho rimpianti. (I, 55)

To explain the nature of the protagonist's concern about food, the editor—in this helped by the author—not only explained the meaning of the term "halal," but also introduced the exception for travelers on this precept and, consequently, the author's use of the term "forced." A long detour into the Quranic text has been thus inserted to explain the protagonist's concerns about the ritual purity of the food:

Ecco il pranzo Sarà *halal*? Potrò mangiarlo? Mi ridico a mente un passo della *Sura delle Greggi*: "Io non trovo niente in quello che mi è stato rivelato che proibisca agli uomini di mangiare alcun cibo, eccetto le carogne, il sangue versato o carne di porco—poiché questi sono immondi—e ogni carne che sia stata profanamente consacrata ad altro nome che non sia quello di Dio. *Ma se vi sei costretto, senza intenzione alcuna di peccare o trasgredire, il tuo signore avrà perdono e misericordia*".

Ho mangiato tutto. E mi è anche piaciuto. E chissà cosa ho mangiato? Il menù era scritto in italiano. Leggendo le scritte sulle scatole, ho capito alcune parole. Non mi sembra d'aver visto *porco* o qualcosa del genere. L'ho trovato buono, perché sono "costretto", e quindi è per forza halal. Per questo non ho rimorsi. (II, 19–20)

Through these additions, the author as witness of his own religion and culture became its presenter for the Italian public, so that “dohr” (I, 58) became “dohr, la preghiera del mezzogiorno” (II, 31), and “iscia” (I, 60) “la preghiera della sera” (II, 35), “takbira” is explained in practical terms with “faceva la *takbira*—*Allah u akbar*” (II, 73) and “bidaa” (I, 27) explained as “*bidaa*, un’aggiunta eretica” (II, 74). In the same vein, the protagonist’s reading of the Russian dancer Nijinskiy’s biography occasions an explanation on the traditional absence of mimetic arts in the Islamic tradition (II, 54–55), and the word “jihad” receives an additional lengthy explanation on its meaning (I, 91; II, 109–112).

Descriptions of the spaces visited by Karim appear more commonly in the novel, and they allow the reader to become familiar with the places where the protagonist lives. These spatial descriptions are mostly beneficial to readers unfamiliar with them, such as the description of the Istituto Islamico in Viale Jenner (II, 30–31), where the addition is aimed at introducing the space of the mosque and the practice of Muslim devotion. Sometimes these descriptions create an atmosphere of danger not always present in the original. This is the case of the “bar Tropical” that Karim visits with Mahdi on his first winter morning in Milan, and that stirs in him the hope for a warm and comfortable place. Here one can already see Fontana’s own orientation toward a “migrant realism” that is visible also in other parts of his intervention. The café is described in the novel as “un budello stretto di bar buio, con quattro sedie di plastica. Nessun sogno di tropico. Abbassarono il tono” (II, 28). In the original, the café is simply the “bar vicino alla fermata” (I, 57), and the lowering of voices once they enter the bar a simple “avevano smesso di parlare ad alta voce” (I, 58).

One of the guiding principles for the interventions made to the manuscript’s language has been to simplify the convolutedness of certain syntactical constructions. Here Fontana modified the sentence structure of the original and provided the literary editing that the text was still missing. For example, the original “Ha detto parolacce basse della stessa bassezza della persona che le ha pronunciate” (I, 94) turns into “Ha detto parolacce basse, basse come lui” (II, 103). Similarly, the aforementioned:

- Permettete a noi di andare?
- Fate il giro dell’istituto e di quello che gli è attorno. Perché non lo porti al giardino? (I, 57)

becomes:

- “Noi, se permettete, ce ne andiamo” dissero gli altri tre.
- “Voi” disse Beshir “intanto che aspettate che apra l’Istituto, fate un giro qui intorno. . . Perché non lo porti al giardino?” (II, 28)

and:

- “quanti stranieri hanno ricevuto i fogli di via ma essi non hanno dato alcun seguito a ciò” (I, 58)

which is rendered with:

Un mucchio di stranieri—a proposito, qui ci chiamano “extracomunitari”, per loro siamo extra-tutto, anche extraterrestri—hanno ricevuto il foglio di via, ma se ne sono fregati. (II, 32)

In this process of articulation, the original authorial language is simplified and made more fluent. In these passages, the lexical variations to the original are usually discrete and aim at clarifying for the reader the author’s intended meaning. The last example mentioned above, however, in which “stranieri” is turned into “extracomunitari” and emphatically associated with “extraterrestri,” is one of the cases in which signifiers are turned to address the Italian reader not as simple translations or clarifications, but as insertions of a special lexicon of “migration” known by Italians themselves. These additions are revealing of Fontana’s conception of how this “migrant novel” had to address the Italian readers, winking at them in the recognizable mirror of both their prejudices and common knowledge. Taddeo ensured the authenticity of Smari’s language by abstaining from imposing his own “Italianness” on the text. Fontana, on the contrary, intervened on the original language of the text to make the novel more recognizably “Italian” and “migrant” for the audience. Mahdi, Karim’s closest friend in Italy, plays a key role in introducing Karim to the Italian language. As Karim arrives in Italy, he explains to him that some migrants sell drugs near Milan’s train station, and that Italians call drugs “la roba,” so that the previously mentioned “ghabbara” turn from “quelli che vendono la polvere di droghe, gli stupefacenti” into “ma sì, i polverai, i venditori di droga, qui la chiamano ‘la roba’” (I, 57; II, 33). Later, he also informs him that Northern Italians call Southern Italians “terroni” (II, 53), and that controllers on the bus know that “extra” do not have money (II, 38). Similarly, when Karim starts to work and meets Rafik, in chapter 13, the original “Ecco Rafic! E’ il tuo collega. Andiamo. Non dimenticate domani la fotocopia” becomes in the novel “Si chiama Franco; è marocchino come te!” / “Mi chiamo Rafik’ disse in arabo il ragazzo, in un orecchio a Karim ‘e sono egiziano, ma qui, lo sai già, siamo tutti marocchini’” (I, 115; II, 142).

These additions add a rhetorical color that was absent in the original text. This is the case of the increased realism given to language in Chapter 9, where one of the policemen says “e adesso questo stronzo dirà che lo abbiamo picchiato noi!” (II, 104), absent in the manuscript, or in chapter 14, where the change to the language employed by the policemen (Guardia di Finanza) during the assault to the group of “immigrants” who sleep in the railroad car, similarly aims at producing a stronger realistic effect:

Tolse via una coperta e si riadagiò per riaddormentarsi. Bruscamente udì un rumore e delle voci strane. Era come se la gente fosse in panico. Aprì gli occhi e la bocca per capire, Si sentirono grida, gemiti e la gente che correva sbandata e spaventata. Si alzò come anche i suoi amici. Cercarono di uscire, avevano una gran paura. Non avevano avuto il tempo di vestirsi che già gli uomini dell’ordine erano dentro il vagone. Era la guardia di finanza. Erano armati e pronti a sparare. Quando si accorsero che i tre ragazzi non erano armati, cominciarono a picchiarli col calcio del fucile. (I, 120)

Scostò la coperta e si risistemò per riaddormentarsi... “Che cazzo ci fate qui, marocchini di’ mmerda? Urlavano delle voci da fuori “via di qua bastardi!” Colpi battuti sulle fiancate del vagone, scalpiccii di piedi in fuga. Aprì gli occhi, la bocca, per capire. Fredda sulle labbra, la canna del fucile, e una faccia offuscata

che gli stava sopra: “Che cazzo ci fai qua, marocchino di’ mmerda!”. Cercò di scostarsi, ricevette un pugno in piena faccia; cercò di alzarsi, un calcio di fucile lo colpì sui reni. Tre uomini, vestiti di grigio, finanzieri? Gli stavano addosso. (II, 149)

The use of derogatory terms produces a significant change from the manuscript to the novel, and tunes the narration to the expectations of a “migrant” realism that is not present in the original. This single intervention, however, is unique, and occurs not by chance to the most dramatic episode of the text.

Conclusion

Similarly to other early “migrant” novels, *Fiamme in paradiso* was conceived by the owner of Il Saggiatore press primarily as a narrative rendition of the events discussed in the news and in the Italian public debate in the early 1990s. The shortening of the text, and the exclusion of most of its Algerian episodes, captured the protagonist not in the process of becoming a “migrant” as in the original version of the novel, i.e. simultaneously emigrating from Algeria and immigrating to Italy, but in that of becoming an “immigrant” in Italy. Framed in the moment of arrival in Italy, Karim’s subjectivity was disconnected from his Algerian original context, and was reduced to its essential traits to resemble that of most migrants in Italy in those years: one that is little known by the public. In this way, Karim has been “made Italian” for the Italian public, at the expense of being originally Algerian. This major deviation from the original text explains Taddeo’s comment, in the interview, that the text was “preyed upon” (*predato*) by the press.

As the outcome of the collaboration undertaken by Smari and Taddeo, the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript makes evident how the author’s disappointment with the shortening of the “Algerian” Part One of the manuscript is at once that of the migrant-witness who sees a part of his own personal experience amputated, and that of the author who sees his own narrative shortened in those literary and cultural contents he chose to be an integral part of his own novel. Drawing on the respect for Smari’s authorship, the “poetics of transcription” adopted by Smari and Taddeo allowed the author to fully express his own creativity, and records the collaborative language-learning and artistic process from which the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript emerged. The text shows the linguistic challenges the author-learner was facing, and allows to question some of the critical assumptions and expectations on the creativity that authors in Smari’s position were in the condition to express. Is the author’s “original language” Smari’s native Algerian bilingualism? Or is it the mediated result of the collaboration with Taddeo, who helped him in translating it into Italian? The quest for an “original” language, in this work, leads inevitably to the author, and to “another” language in which the author’s own language is inscribed, here blended with Taddeo’s as part of a collaborative process of translation and exchange. Judgments on the literariness of this “migrant literature” should consider the peculiar circumstances of production from which they came to light. Produced in the intermediary space between languages, the original version of the text proposes intact to the reader the same questions of its final version: would the reader appreciate its contents in their original form, or should the text be “embellished” to meet some “literary” expectations? The modification brought by Fontana to the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript merge idiosyncratically an external appropriation of the text, complying with a “new logic” by which it had to meet some assumed expectations of the Italian public, and a working method in which a form of respect for the original was not entirely absent.

Whereas the shortening of the original text shows the most problematic aspects of how the editorial interventions were made, many portions of the novel report the manuscript's original language. The analysis of the additions and lexical variations shows that the author's role as the presenter, and not only as the witness of his own experience and culture of origins, was strengthened, thus completing in a way the work initiated with the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript. Yet, these additions also reveal Formenton and Fontana's understanding of how *Fiamme in paradiso* had to be as a "migrant novel." How should one judge the increased sense of danger in the environmental descriptions, or the inclusion of derogatory terms recognizable to Italian readers, the acceleration of narrated events, the inversion of episodes in the final part of the novel, and the dramatic emphasis given to the tragic ending? These modifications reflect a conception of the Italian public as one interested in an abridged, reduced version of Karim's "migrant" experience. One that conforms more to stereotyped expectations on racism and the "dangers" of the migrant condition in Italy than, say, in learning about Karim's life in Algeria as presented by the author himself in the first part of the manuscript. The author's conflictual relationship with the final form assumed by the manuscript in the book, neither entirely similar nor entirely dissimilar to the original, here embellished and there severely amputated, can be explained by the sum of these contrasting factors at work in the editing of the text.

Smari's authorship emerges from this study untouched, as he is the only author of *Fiamme in paradiso*. My study of the traces left on the text by Taddeo and Fontana, visible only thanks to the Dergano-Bovisa manuscript, points out the intertwined linguistic, aesthetic and ethical choices taken by the different participants of these collaborations, and the way in which they differently affected the text. The complex nature of these interactions warns against any simple sociological readings of this novel, and reminds the necessity of applying a "literary" form of reading to this and other works emerged in similar circumstances: one that considers the multiple interactions between the different voices at work in the text, while recognizing the thematic and cultural references made to other literary traditions as belonging to Italian literature, and not only to the Italian society as expression of a social fact.

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