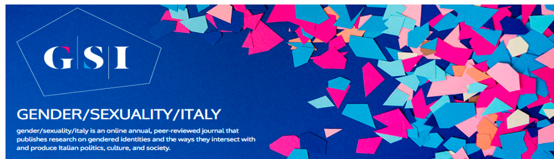

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Romeo, Caterina. *Riscrivere la nazione. La letteratura italiana postcoloniale*. Milano: Mondadori Education, 2018. Pp. 181. ISBN 978-88-00-74849-0. €16.00 (paperback).

Riscrivere la nazione is a book of resistance dedicated to the first- and second-generation immigrant authors who, in the last thirty years, have 1) *re*written Italy with their work, 2) sketched a culture in flux, 3) presented a geography colored with new meaning, and 4) filled a society with faces and talents that have not yet entered into the publishing, film, television, or academic canons. And all of this is happening under the obstinately nostalgic eyes of those who refuse to look forward, preferring to imagine an Italy that no longer exists, and that most likely never existed. It is very easy to realize that the cultural production of these authors "promotes new imaginaries, aesthetic practices, and individual and collective…identities […] that radically transform the idea of national culture" (2; 6). *Riscrivere la nazione* is an impressive study that showcases within it a dense mosaic of voices and texts that confront complex themes such as legislation on immigration and citizenship, the racialization process in Italy, and the country's colonial legacy, and migratory movements. The works taken into consideration in this volume number more than one hundred, and they include literary and cinematic works, television series, graphic novels, and music lyrics, too many to be mentioned here due to space constraints.

The first chapter, subdivided into chronological phases, considers works of first-and second-generation immigrant authors from the 1990s to today. Alongside the traditional classifications (Italophone, migrant, post migrant, multicultural, diasporic), Romeo defines the first phase (1990-1994) and second phase (1995-2000) as "literature of migration" because the authors' lands of origin are relevant to the stories narrated, and their narratives of memory and affection are so strong. In the third phase (2001-2018), the literary production is called "postcolonial" and is further divided into subcategories. Romeo strategically adopts the term "postcolonial" because these works establish a dialogue that develops on a temporal and spatial axis, in which the present is read through the lens of the past, and through the lens of both *inter-* and *intra*-national Italian migration. The proposed comparison of postcolonial works reveals the dynamics of dominance, the relationships of oppressions, and the politics of discrimination that affect first- and second-generation immigrants in Italy, and ironically, used to affect Italians abroad.

In chapters two, three, and four, Romeo analyzes the works of second-generation postcolonial authors in the individual context of their production, in light of the "positioning" both of the authors and of their characters, and in dialogue with each other (5). Romeo adopts an intersectional approach to her analysis of gender and race, seeking to emphasize the dynamics of oppression and of privilege. To validate the extent to which intersectionality is not an abstract concept but rather an enacted one, within the dynamics of privilege in everyday life, in chapter two Romeo discusses Bruno Vespa's and Lucia Annunziata's interviews with two political officials, Maria Elena Boschi and Cécile Kyenge. In the literary context, Romeo, instead, aptly examines the figure of the black Venus in order to demonstrate how intersectional readings can reveal the discrimination of both race and gender. The black Venus, the beautiful woman of Italy's African colonies, is represented as a docile creature, sexually available to the Italian man. She continues to appear in new postcolonial incarnations. In literature, black women are depicted in the roles of prostitute or domestic worker; in advertising, the black female body satisfies the erotic exotic imagination of the Italian consumer. This imagery is, in turn, rejected by a counter narrative which, in the context of colonial past, revisits the black Venus and allows her to rewrite her own story. In the postcolonial context, therefore, this counter narration presents black female authors and characters that reclaim control of their own representation.

In chapter three Romeo draws on David Theo Goldberg's expression "evaporation" in order to explain forms of racism in present-day Italy, which derive from the country's colonial past. When "one thinks of race and the process of racialization," in Italy, explains Romeo, one remembers the Shoah and the extermination of Jewish people, but forgets the racism of "color" that induced racial crimes in the colonies (79). Because these racial crimes happened outside the territory of the nation, this is a forgotten history. The territorial distance allows for the erasure of these disturbing chapters from Italy's historical memory. Ignoring racism of color means to resolve the question of race and the process of racialization in an overly simplistic way, interpreting race only as biological, and as a phenomenon tied to the past and the Second World War. An intersectional approach brings to the surface that which had been hidden, because by keeping the categories of race and color separate, you can hinder the way that "evaporation" operates. This "evaporation" would like to unify race and color, rendering racism of color invisible, and calling it by another name (ignorance, anxiety, competition over jobs). Looking racism in the eye means seeing contemporary era as "post racial"—not in the sense of a period in which the racism of color is no more, but as a period that carries within it the seeds of a past that must be confronted honestly.

Within the same section, Romeo adopts the definition of "somatic norms" presented by Nirmal Puwar and Sarah Ahmed to explain both the dynamics that impede second-generation black Italians from becoming part of the physical and symbolic Italian space, and also the roles that allow non-white bodies to remain in this space, provided that the difference between white and non-white remains distinct. The space of the nation is therefore constructed as a "white" space, both because of the physical presence of white bodies, and because of the constant reiteration of whiteness proclaimed by an assumed racial homogeneity of the Italian population. Romeo underlines the irony that those who are *hyper* visible, by means of their phenotypical characteristics like skin color, are rendered *in*visible because they are "out of place" in a space self-constructed as white (88). But the greatest irony is that black Italians are forced into two torturous roles: the hyper visible subject condemned to live in invisibility, or an object of suspicion *because* their fluent Italian, and their familiarity with the culture in which they were born and raised, brings them in "dangerous proximity" to those who are considered legitimately Italian, and who fear for the stripping of their privilege (91).

In chapter three, then, intersectionality is not only the lens through which to understand the mechanics of oppression, but also the ideal hermeneutic for understanding the dynamics of privilege. Citizenship legislation privileges children of Italian blood, who may not know how to speak Italian or have any familiarity with Italian culture, while penalizing second-generation Italians, though Italy is the only country they know. The theme of citizenship is examined through the intersection between blackness and Italian-ness in the work of second-generation authors. What does it mean to be Italian? Can a black person be Italian? And what are the conditions that give or restrict access to citizenship?

In the last chapter, Romeo discuss the "remapping" of the urban Italian space in the works of second-generation authors. The map of Italian cities is engraved with symbols of Italian-ness that, with its architecture, streets, and monuments, forces people of color to feel "out of place," keeping them at the margins. In these works, the map is rewritten to take on new meanings.

In each chapter, *Riscrivere la nazione* presents the reader with the same question (who can call themselves Italian and based on what criteria) in order to reveal the contradictions, the denials, and the excuses to the answer to this question. Romeo transitions from one argument to another with dense, rich, passionate, and elegant writing. Even when the terminology could be out of reach to a non-academic reader, the work never loses sight of the real context of the authors (who they are in real life, how they make a living) and Romeo is committed to calling things by their name. This volume is particularly relevant to the fields of Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Global Studies,

Diaspora Studies, Migration Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies, Italian Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Comparative Studies.

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