

Home, Memory and Belonging in Italian Postcolonial Literature

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Written by Chiara Giuliani (University College Cork), *Home, Memory, and Belonging in Italian Postcolonial Literature* opens with the story of the request for inhabitants of contemporary Italy to stay at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, what could be done with individuals who don't have a traditional home? How would it be possible for those people to protect themselves? Further, what would it mean to belong to a home for these individuals? Giuliani uses this story to question the concept of home, and whether it is possible to experience feeling at home in different forms besides the common conception of a fixed location that provides security and stability. From this perspective, migrants represent cases in which the notion of belonging to a home

can be reconfigured: on leaving their home countries, these individuals find themselves in new place, able to develop a new home in different locations.

Giuliani adopts a sense of home permeated by the possibilities of developing a sense of belonging in different spaces, going beyond the borders of nation-states. Therefore, the idea of home is instead situated in the field of experience, associating feelings, memories, and an idea of connection between a subject and a place. For this reason, an individual can develop a sensation of being in a home in multiple locations and at different times, creating various home spaces. The book uses these notions to discuss how different spaces can be considered home by migrants living in Italy. To achieve this, Giuliani

applies this specific form to understand home in the post-colonial literature produced by migrants in contemporary Italy and as well as newspaper articles.

In her analysis, the author starts with the development of home spaces situated in the public sphere, moves on to those categorized as semi-private, and finally to private environments. This book's structure is clear and adequately organized, which helps the reader to understand the debates proposed by the author.

Through literary works, for instance *La Mia Casa è Dove Sono*, by Igiaba Scego, and journalistic texts, Chapters 2 and 3 focus on public spaces by analysing Termini Train Station and phone centres. Giuliani discusses the meaning of the station for migrants, arguing that it is a place which serves as a socializing space for them. Meanwhile, the phone centre, discussed in works such as *Divorzio all'Islamica a Viale Marconi*, by Amara Lakhous, enables migrants to make international calls at lower prices in Italy.

Therefore, the train station and phone centres represent a space related to feelings of belonging for the migrant population in Italy.

Then, in Chapter 4, the author discusses the semi-private spaces portrayed by two housing estates inhabited by migrants in two literary works: *Scontro di Civiltà per un Ascensore a Piazza Vittorio*, another book by Amara Lakhous, and *Amiche per la Pelle*, by Laila Wadia. According to Giuliani's analysis, in the first work, the condominium is not seen as a home space for the characters, while the opposite happens in the second book. The author addresses precisely this contrast in this section of her argument. According to Giuliani, the place in Wadia's novel is considered as a home as a result of the effort of the novel's characters to create this feeling. This case is an example of how migrants' agency is an important aspect to elaborate home spaces.

Chapter 5 of the book deals with the development of home in private spaces: a

bathroom and a bedroom. Lakhous's book, discussed in Chapter 4, considers a character who sees the bathroom as a space of privacy where it is possible to revisit memories of the period before living in Italy. The bedroom as a home space, on the other hand, is analysed by Giuliani in the book *Rhoda*, by Igiaba Scego, through a character who can access memories and feel the presence of her sister, even though she is not there, in that room. The discussion demonstrates two cases of developing the home sensation by the characters in a personal context. In the other chapters, the community aspect is important to construct, or not, the sense of belonging. Therefore, by adding a section about private spaces, Giuliani includes a new layer in her examination.

In chapter 6, the last of the book, Giuliani concludes her argument and presents reflections on the meanings surrounding migrants' suitcases. The author explores, in dialogue with the short story *Dismatria*, also by Igiaba Scego, how such

objects carry not only the migrants' clothes or personal items, but also bring memories, desires, and connections to their place of origin. The suitcase further represents the desire to return. This is the case regarding the character in the story, who is in Italy but wants to go back to Somalia. In this sense, the suitcase weaves a connection between home spaces that are developed over different periods.

Giuliani's work explores, through the concept of home space, the ability to develop a sense of belonging in spaces that would initially have no such meaning. An interesting aspect is that, by addressing the formation of new spaces of belonging in locations already predominantly associated with migrants, the book highlights how the contemporary Italian context does not provide a welcoming environment on its own. Migrants need to access a sense of belonging among themselves and also through links with their homeland, even when they are living in a different country. This opens up an opportunity to debate,

broadly, the conditions that these migrants face when living in Italy.

Furthermore, the need to build new home spaces responds to situations in which migrants find themselves dispossessed of their homes. Giuliani points out the attempt to re-signify spaces to feel a sense of belonging in a place that is not their original home, indicating a certain agency on the part of these individuals. Another author who has debated the subject, Edward Said discusses the hard feelings associated with exile, defining the loss of one's homeland as a situation surrounded by sadness and instability (2013: 95). However, Said also points out that "while it perhaps seems peculiar to speak of the pleasures of exile, there are some positive things to be said for a few of its conditions" (2013: 100). For instance, the exiled has a vision that

combines plural perspectives from at least two places, which results in an original perspective in a foreign land. In a certain way, Said's argument is in dialogue with Giuliani's perception that the act of developing new home spaces is a result of connecting past experiences with new places of residence. Thereby, Giuliani's work is an important analysis not only of the home sensations produced by migrants, but also of how their agency is closely associated with the loss and uncertainty experienced by these individuals.

Works Cited:

Said, Edward. 2013. *Reflections on Exile: and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta). Epub edition.