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Migrant Stories and Italian Colonialism: A Report on Two Documentaries

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Migrant Stories and Italian Colonialism: The Documentaries *La quarta via: Mogadiscio, Italia* (Directed by Simone Brioni, Graziano Chiscuzzu and Ermanno Guida, 2012, 37', English Subtitles) and *Aulò: Roma Postcoloniale* (Directed by Simone Brioni, Graziano Chiscuzzu and Ermanno Guida, 2012, 48', English Subtitles)

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Poster for *Aulò: Roma postcoloniale*

This documentary project on Italian colonialism began in 2009, with the goal of developing 'La quarta via', an oral tale by the Italian writer of Somali origins Kaha Mohamed Aden, into a film. This tale narrates the story of Kaha's birthplace, Mogadishu, which has been destroyed by an ongoing civil war. Kaha chose to use oral narration to build a space of dialogue that could be collectively discussed and re-elaborated. As this story contributes powerfully to the telling of Italian colonialism from the perspective of colonised subjects, I asked Kaha to collaborate in developing her work into a documentary.

Three documentary makers – Ermanno Guida, Graziano Chiscuzzu, and Isacco Chiaf – offered their technical knowledge and means to the independent project. A preliminary version of the documentary was assembled after three days of shooting, in order to evaluate its reception. Due to the scarcity of movies on Italian colonialism, the documentary *La quarta via* gathered unexpected interest. Teachers at primary and secondary schools, including those who watched its first screening at a regional teachers' training course on racism and colonialism organised in Trento on 6 November 2009, expressed their wish to use *La quarta via* as a didactic tool in their classes. Moreover, university departments, including the Italian Department at Università La Sapienza in Rome and the Department of War Studies at King's College in London, asked to incorporate it into course material. On 7 December 2010, in San Benedetto del Tronto (Ascoli Piceno), the film was awarded the 'Libero Bizzarri' first prize in the category 'Media ed educazione' in the 17th edition of this

festival which specialises in documentaries (<http://www.fondazionebizzarri.org/>). In 2011, *La quarta via* was selected for the 6th edition of 'A Film for Peace', an international festival held in Medea (Gorizia), which awards the best international films on the theme of peace, wartime conflict, civil war, human rights or justice (<http://www.unfilmperlapace.it/>). The positive feedback on the potential of the movie persuaded us to finalise *La quarta via* for distribution. The documentary was re-edited entirely, including only the additional material which we possessed the rights to use, and new footage and photographs provided by some of those who attended the screenings and liked the work. Giovanni Ferliga, a member of the Italian dubstep group Aucan, wrote the original soundtrack.



Kaha Mohamed Aden at the Università di Pavia. Still from *La quarta via: Mogadiscio Pavia*.

Our team started working on another documentary in 2010, *Aulò: Roma Postcoloniale*, which I wrote together with the writer of Eritrean origins Ribka Sibhatu. Ermanno Guida's production company, Redigital, contributed to the making of this documentary, both on an economic and organisational level. *Aulò* was shot in seven days and involved the participation of a broader film crew of twelve people who volunteered their time and creativity. Our second documentary constructs an intertextual dialogue with *La quarta via*, presenting a similar structure and themes, and maintaining a strong connection with African oral narration. As Kaha interrogates her audience about the connection between territory and belonging by narrating the history of Mogadishu in Pavia, Ribka aims to 'populate Rome with the colours and the scents of Eritrea'. In 2013, *Aulò* was selected for the Medea Festival 'A Film for Peace', and for 'Docucity – Documentare la città', a festival organized by the University of Milan which awards documentaries that provide alternative representation of contemporary cities (<http://www.docucity.unimi.it/>).

The last step of our work concerns distribution. The project aims to reach the broadest audience possible, including the Somali and Eritrean diaspora, scholars, students and the general public who are interested in post-colonial and migration studies in Italy and abroad. So far, the documentary has been screened at universities

and cultural institutions including Oxford University (UK, 4 March 2011), ICI Berlin (Germany, 7 June 2012), Saint Joseph University in Philadelphia (US, 6 September 2012), Cambridge University (UK, 15 October 2012), Le TARMAC in Paris (France, 12 January 2013), and the Italian Cultural Institute in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia, 7 February 2013). Each documentary offers English subtitles and a bilingual booklet that connects scientific research to artistic practice: the *Aulò* volume, *Aulo! Aulò! Aulò! Poems of Nostalgia, Exile and Love* (ISBN 978-88-907714-1-5), contains Ribka Sibhatu's poems introduced by Graziella Parati and translated by André Naffis-Sahely, and the original soundtrack of the movie by Edoardo Chiaf and Gabriele Mitelli; *La quarta via* is packaged together with the booklet *Somalitalia: Five Roads to Mogadishu* (ISBN 978-88-907714-0-8), which has contributions from both Italian migrant writers and academic scholars, and a 52-minute video of extra content called *Per un discorso postcoloniale italiano: parole chiave*, which includes a selection of interventions recorded at the festival 'OltreILmarGINE' on writings about migration from the Horn of Africa (Brescia, 11-14 November 2010). A small and independent publisher based in Rome, Kimerafilm, welcomed the editorial proposal with enthusiasm, and published it on 16 September 2012, the anniversary of the date when the Libyan partisan Omar Mukhtar was executed by Italian colonialists in 1931. This date was chosen to protest the construction of a monument for the Italian war criminal Rodolfo Graziani in Affile, near Rome, who ordered Mukhtar's hanging. In conclusion, these two documentaries are the result of a unique encounter between different cultures, experiences, and professional skills, which were joined by the common purpose of developing new communicative forms that could counter the amnesia of the Italian colonial past and the negative representation of immigrants in the Italian media.