



THE CARTOGRAPHY OF SELF: LOCATION CATEGORIES IN AFRICAN-ITALIAN POST-MIGRANT NARRATIVES

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Theoretical Framework

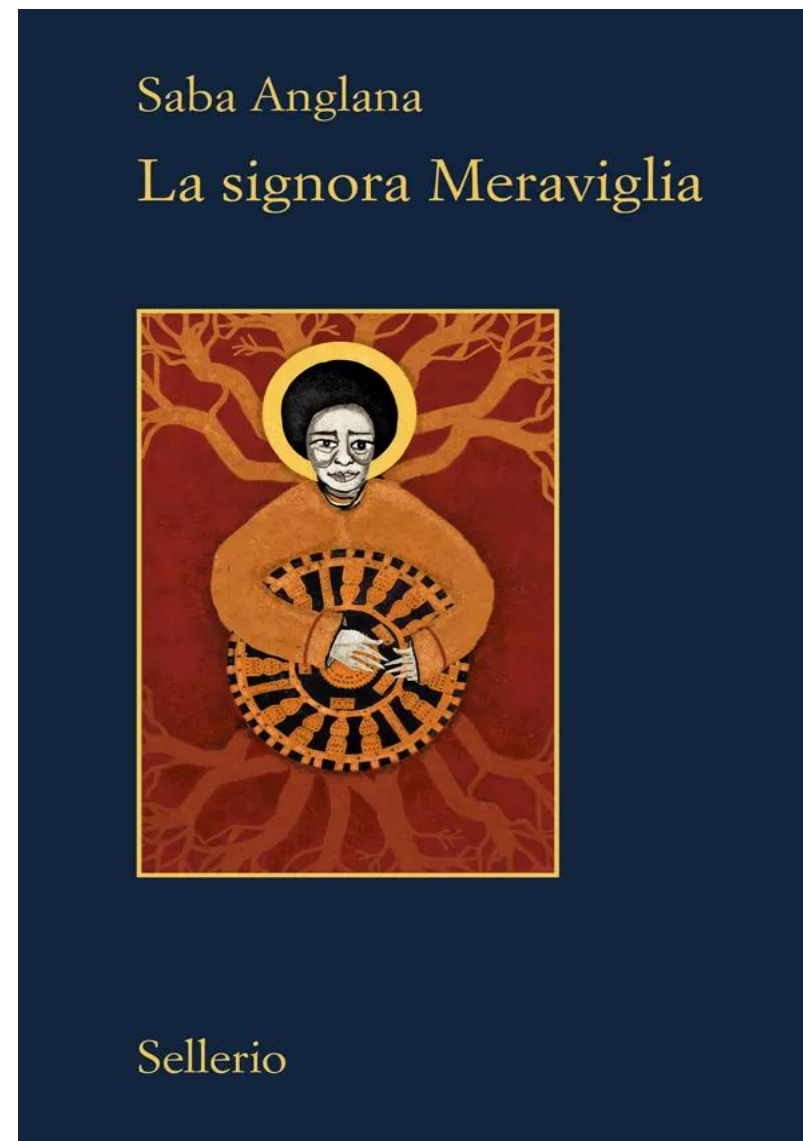
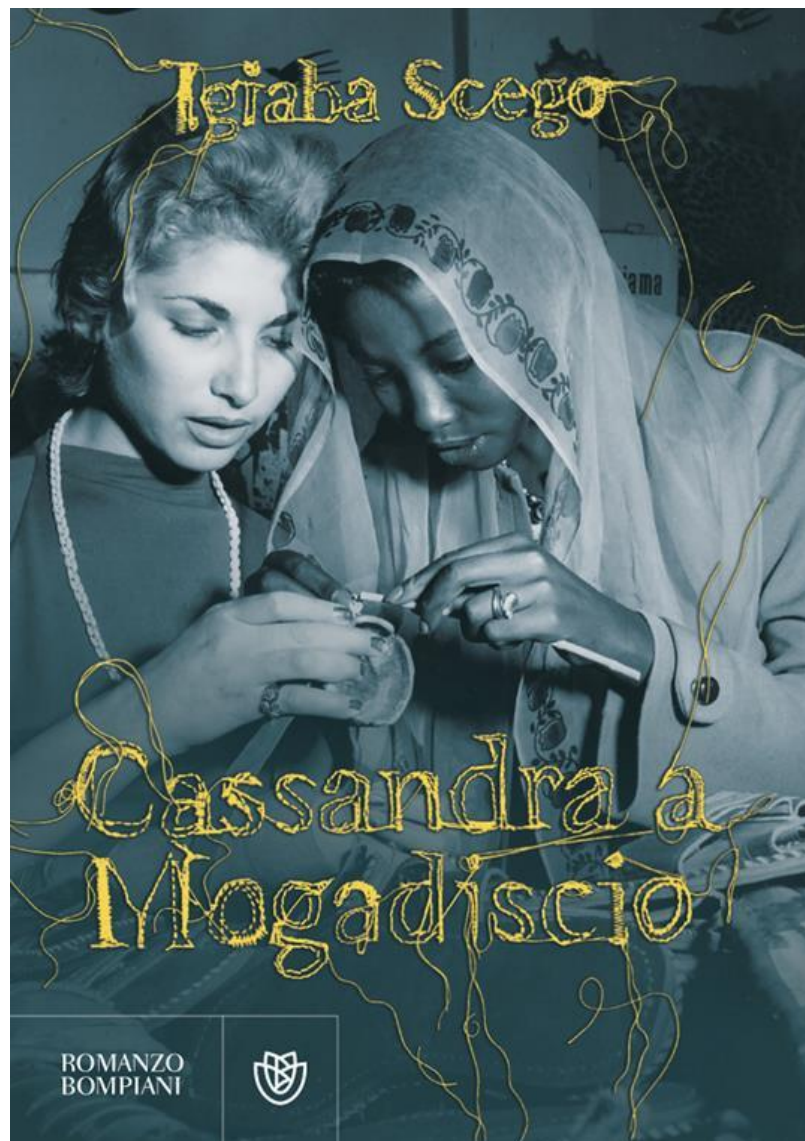
- **ETHNOMETHODOLOGY:** «SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL THAT STUDIES RESOURCES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES OF COMMON SENSE THROUGH WHICH MEMBERS OF A CULTURE PRODUCE AND RECOGNIZE OBJECTS, EVENTS, AND COURSES OF ACTION IN A MUTUALLY INTELLIGIBLE WAY» (HERITAGE,1992: 588)
- **MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:** «CLASSIFICATIONS OR SOCIAL TYPES THAT CAN BE USED TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE» (HESTER AND EGLIN 1997: 3).
- **THEY SERVE AS A BACKGROUND** «THROUGH WHICH MEMBERS DEVELOP HIGHLY SPECIFIC PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE COURSE OF ORDINARY ACTIVITIES» (KLEIN AND PAOLETTI 2002:179).

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIZATION AND ITALIAN LITERATURE OF MIGRATION

- Io, venditore di elefanti (Pap, 1990);
- Chiamatemi Ali (Bouchane, 1991);
- Immigrato (Fortunato/Methnani, 1991);
- Noi italiani neri: storie di ordinario razzismo (Pap, 1990);
- Staniera (Tawfik, 1990);
- Princesa (Farias de Albuquerque/Janneli, 1995)
- Il mio nome è regina, (Reine Toe, 2010)
- Memorie di una principessa etope (Nasibu, 2006)

LOCATION CATEGORIES & MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIZATION ANALYSIS

- BASED ON EMANUEL SCHEGLOFF AND HARVEY SACKS
- LOCATION CATEGORIES = CONTEXT-DEPENDENT WAYS OF REFERRING TO PLACE
- EXAMPLES: *HOME, HERE, THERE, MOGADISCIO, ROME*
- PLACES GENERATE INFERENCES AND RELATIONAL MEANINGS
- SPATIAL REFERENCES AS TOOLS FOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION



CASSANDRA A MOGADISCIO – IGIABA SCEGO

- BOMPIANI, 2023
- **AUTOFICTION:** PERSONAL MEMORY COMBINED WITH NOVELISTIC NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES
- **DIASPORIC FAMILY:** SOMALIA–ITALY, SHAPED BY DICTATORSHIP, MIGRATION, AND LOSS
- **CENTRAL THEME: JIRRO (ILLNESS/TRAUMA)** → A METAPHOR FOR DIASPORA AND COLONIAL WOUNDS
- **FEMALE AND COLLECTIVE VOICE:** A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE GRANDDAUGHTER SORAYA, AS A MEANS OF TRANSMITTING MEMORY
- **INTERWEAVING OF GENRES AND PERSPECTIVES:** AUTOBIOGRAPHY, POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE, AND INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM
- **CIVIC AND PEDAGOGICAL VALUE:** INVITES REFLECTION ON COLONIALISM, CITIZENSHIP, AND JUSTICE



LA SIGNORA MERAVIGLIA – SABA ANGLANA

- **SELLERIO, 2024**
- **GENRE:** MEMOIR, FAMILY SAGA, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL
- **MAIN THEMES:** IDENTITY, BELONGING, MEMORY, MIGRATION
- **SETTINGS:** ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA, ITALY (1938–2015)
- **MAIN PLOT:** ABEBECH IS KIDNAPPED AT A YOUNG AGE AND LATER BUILDS HER FAMILY LIFE IN SOMALIA, SABA ASSISTS HER AUNT DIGHEI IN OBTAINING ITALIAN CITIZENSHIP
- **STYLE:** LYRICAL, IRONIC, PICARESQUE; CHARACTERIZED BY AN ALTERNATION BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT
- **CULTURAL ELEMENTS:** SOMALI TERMS AND REFERENCES TO ITALIAN COLONIAL HISTORY
- **CORE IDEA:** IDENTITY DOES NOT NECESSARILY COINCIDE WITH CITIZENSHIP; RESILIENCE AND MEMORY FUNCTION AS THE ROOTS OF THE SELF



- AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVELS WRITTEN BY WOMEN
- REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SOMALI DIASPORA IN ITALY
- THE SEARCH FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING
- HISTORICAL MEMORY CONNECTED TO ITALIAN COLONIALISM IN AFRICA
- THE CENTRAL ROLE OF FEMALE FIGURES AS CUSTODIANS OF MEMORY
- THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP IN ITALY
- NARRATIVE AS A MEANS OF CULTURAL AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE
- INCLUDED IN THE LONGLIST OF THE PREMIO STREGA

A two-tier system of location categories



National / Abstract Tier

ITALIA · SOMALIA

Colonial history, citizenship law, media discourse. Categories the narrator inherits and argues with intellectually.



Urban / Embodied Tier

ROMA · MOGADISCIO

Sensory memory, kinship, body metaphor. Categories the narrator and her mother live inside, not just refer to.



Mogadiscio is the only category operating in both tiers at once

Simultaneously a geopolitical object (colonized, administered, destroyed) and an intimate body-category (skin, near-womb, initiation site) – which is likely what lets it carry the novel's mythic Cassandra/Troy weight.

LOCATION CATEGORY 1

Roma



Inhabited, intimate space

Named neighborhoods and streets track lived, daily geography — not abstraction.

Site of exile and bureaucratic arrival

Termini station, the questura on via Genova — Roma as threshold for the parents' generation.

Eternal / monumental city

Aqueducts, Trinità dei Monti — timeless register, contrasted with Somalia's historical rupture.

Popular / local culture

AS Roma fandom, romanesco dialect — ordinary, unmarked belonging.

LOCATION CATEGORY 2

Italia



Colonial administrator

1889–1928 territorial seizure, 1935 invasion,

Idealized, unreachable homeland

The embedded Gashan narrative: a school-built “Italia ideale” that collapses on arrival.

Legal category overriding kinship

Evacuation flight: narrator boards as “italiana,” her sister barred as “cittadina somala.”

Contested linguistic inheritance

Italiano as both “lingua della frusta” and the language the narrator writes and loves in.

LOCATION CATEGORY 3

Somalia



War and loss, media-mediated

Enters via Italian TV broadcasts, reduced to slogans such as “stato fallito.”

Ancestral, pre-war history

Father's ministerial career, the 1960 Rome Olympics delegation, independence (1960).

Embodied, linguistic intimacy

Somali language tied to mother and grandmother, food vocabulary, lullabies.



Mogadiscio — the most internally differentiated category



Lost paradise / Eden

Pre-1991 golden-age framing: archival footage, family photographs — the parents' generation's memory.



Dead city / corpse

Personified through burial vocabulary — unburied, without a funeral. Mourned like kin.



Body / second skin

“Seconda pelle” vs. Roma's “grembo” (womb) — earned belonging vs. given belonging.



Palimpsest / layered city

Portuguese, Omani, Italian colonial strata — explicitly “una matrioska.”

Mogadiscio



Colonial admin. space

, the Casa d'Italia club — stages who counts as italiano / somalo.



Mythic / literary space

The Cassandra–Troy parallel structuring the title — the heaviest symbolic load in the novel.



Relational / contrastive

El Bur defined by negation; Hargeysa compared and found to share nothing but surface detail.



War / media, granular

Radio Mogadiscio, the airport siege, precise dating to January 1991.



The Roma–Mogadiscio dyad: competing homes

The grandmother's question collapses both cities into the same indexical slot — “here” in Roma or “there” in Mogadiscio — within a single utterance: Schegloff's “home” paradigm in its clearest form.



A different balance from Cassandra a Mogadiscio

Roma

~20 occurrences. Stays functional and bureaucratic – the citizenship office, the Ostia-Roma commuter line. Rarely becomes embodied space the way it does in Scego.

Mogadiscio

~125 occurrences. Carries nearly all the embodied, sensory, and affective weight – the dominant category by a wide margin.



A new category: “Africa”

Generic, flattening Western abstraction – baobabs, savanna, charity-poster imagery – explicitly resisted by the narrator. Not used this way in Scego, where places stay specific.

Sets up a clean generic vs. specific location-term contrast (Schegloff).



Roma — functional, not embodied

Functional / bureaucratic site

Patronato office, Comune di Roma archives, the Ostia–Roma commuter line structure the present-day frame.

Occasional intimate breakthrough

Fountains, parks, a hopeful wish that “Roma ridesse” at a key moment — brief, non-structuring.



Italia — legal category and inherited identity

Legal / bureaucratic category

The decades-long fight for the aunt's citizenship; the novel's title names the residency document itself.

Inherited, unquestioned identity

The narrator's own italianità is never interrogated — Italian father, lighter features.

Historical / colonial agent

the 1948 anti-Italian massacre, present-day “Prima gli italiani!” graffiti.



Somalia — political backdrop, bureaucratic obstacle

National / political backdrop

1960 independence, the Siad Barre coup, the Ogaden dispute with Ethiopia.

Documentary / bureaucratic obstacle

The civil registry destroyed by war blocks proof of the aunt's origin — a category failure caused by historical rupture.



Mogadiscio — the dominant category



Multiethnic crossroads

Somali, Ethiopian, Yemeni, Arab, and Italian communities interwoven in the same streets.



Name-multiplication site

One person, several names per community: Zighei / Elisabetta / Elizabeth / Dighei.



Contested ethnic purity

Who counts as “completamente somalo”; the slur “amhar”; a sisters' dispute over belonging.



Site of origin trauma

The grandmother's divination-guided arrival, fleeing Italian-occupied Ethiopia.

Mogadiscio — continued



Mourned / personified

"Mogadiscio dei natali... morta... scomparsa... che ha tramandato il suo canto" – city as deceased kin.



Bureaucratic obstacle, present frame

The absent civil registry blocks documentation, linking memory-Mogadiscio to administrative Italia.



Sensual / erotic register

The Xalima romance staged through heat, light, and the city's cinema culture.



1948 massacre

Anti-Italian killings after the AFIS announcement, narrated with graphic immediacy.



Mogadiscio–Roma: an unequal pair

Unlike Scego's symmetric Roma/Mogadiscio dyad, here Mogadiscio dominates and Roma is where memory gets interrupted — "Roma che scappava via" during a moment of crisis.



“Africa” as flattening abstraction

Generic vs. specific location terms

“Africa” surfaces as a stock Western category — baobabs, savanna, charity-poster imagery of “bambini africani coperti di mosche” — that the narrator explicitly resists, rejecting the “Africa contro il resto del mondo” framing.

This sets “Africa” structurally opposite to Mogadiscio and Addis Abeba: one is a flattening category imposed from outside, the other is specific, contested, and lived. A clean instance of Schegloff's generic-vs-specific location term distinction — and a category Scego's novel doesn't deploy this way.

CONCLUSION



Location as architecture, not inventory

Scego

A symmetric dyad: Roma and Mogadiscio as two equally valid, competing homes. Italia and Somalia stay at arm's length — inherited, argued-with abstractions.



Anglana

An unequal architecture: Mogadiscio absorbs nearly all the embodied weight, Roma stays administrative, and “Africa” enters as a generic imposition to resist.



THANK YOU!

GRAZIE!

БЛАГОДАРАМ!