Anna Finozzi

Call Me By My Name

Naming Practices as Multilingual Devices in Italian Postcolonial Children's Literature

Abstract: This article investigates naming practices in Italian postcolonial children's literature. I define naming practices as a series of verbal figures that display affirmation of one's own name. While multilingualism in children's fiction has recently gained attention, names and naming practices are understudied, especially in contexts of migration. The aim of the article is twofold. First, it investigates how characters defy the mispronunciation of their names. Secondly, it discusses naming strategies in connection to categories of difference such as race, gender, and class in contemporary Italy. Finally, the article demonstrates that naming practices in Italian children's literature disrupt the monolingual paradigm by representing a multilingual social texture; by doing this, I argue, they contribute to questioning racism and other forms of social oppression in contemporary Italy. This study sets the basis for future research on narrative strategies in multilingual literature in order to educate children in equality.

Keywords: postcolonial children's literature, Italian children's literature, naming strategies, literary multilingualism

 Citation: *Barnboken – tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Barnboken: Journal of Children's Literature Research*, Vol. 47, 2024 http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v47.919

In Italy, migrants and the second generation – the children of immigrant parents (Codini and Riniolo 11) – are often given names whose pronunciation is unfamiliar to most speakers in their linguistic community. These names are frequently mispronounced, mocked, or even replaced by names more commonly used in the dominant language. According to a 2021 survey conducted by Paolo Nitti, 92% of 400 L2 speakers of Italian reported mispronunciation of their names, which almost invariably led to their names being substituted with Italian or Italianized versions (Nitti 911). As highlighted by Italian first- and second-generation writers and activists, the mispronunciation and refusal to correctly pronounce their names are daily practices that deny them full recognition of their identities, beginning with their experiences in school (e.g., Hakuzwimana 18–28; Uyangoda).

Studies in culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Peterson et al.) suggest that multicultural and multilingual literature for children that features "linguistically diverse names" promotes curiosity and appreciation for children's diverse backgrounds (Alberton Gunn et al. 175). Similarly, children's books that represent characters that resist acts of "(re)naming" performed by teachers "can serve as tools for change" towards a justice-oriented teaching (Souto-Manning 117). Moreover, children's books depicting situations of renaming can expose readers to some possible feelings and solutions associated with this common phenomenon (Souto-Manning 117). This literature can eventually "validate cultural identities within the early childhood setting," as well as "explore the diversity of families and children's names in the classroom and from around the world" (Alberton Gunn et al. 175).

Despite this recognition, research on names and naming phenomena in multilingual children's literature remains limited. In particular, these studies do not directly address multilingualism. Nevertheless, the inclusion of "foreign" names in children's literature not only fosters multilingualism by presenting terms from various languages, thereby mirroring a linguistically diverse society, but also encourages critical reflections on the dynamics of language power and the strategies of exclusion and inclusion.

In this article, I suggest looking at *naming practices*, which I define as a series of verbal figures that display affirmation of one's own name, in Italian postcolonial children's literature.[1] With the expression "letteratura postcoloniale italiana" (Italian postcolonial literature) scholars have defined a corpus of texts published from the beginning of the 1990s to the present day by authors who have migrated to Italy and the second generation (Romeo, "Italian

Postcolonial Literature" 4). Notwithstanding the fact that works are written not only by migrants from Italian former colonies, the choice of the term "postcolonial" reinforces the need to place the colonial legacy and its epistemology at the center of critical analyses (Romeo, "Introduction" 2–3). According to this definition, Italian postcolonial children's literature is defined as a corpus of books written in Italian by migrants and the second generation for a child and young adult readership (Finozzi; Truglio). Given the nascent nature of this field, these works have not yet been thoroughly examined. Consequently, prior to undertaking the analysis, I will provide a historical contextualization.

The intent of this article is twofold. Firstly, it aims to investigate how characters resist linguistic homogeneity by defying the mispronunciation of their names. As I already pointed out, naming practices are intrinsically multilingual, as they introduce a word, the name, that is "foreign." Interest in children's books that present two or more idioms is relatively recent, despite these works being the product of a very long tradition (Kümmerling-Meibauer v). The study of naming practices should be placed in contiguity to those analyses that have investigated the relationship between the bilingual/multilingual book and the context in which it circulates, highlighting its crucial role in facilitating a deeper understanding of language as a *political tool* (Christensen). As Nicola Daly advocates, multilingual picturebooks make children aware of linguistic signs and "the relative status and importance of the different languages on the page" (296).

Secondly, this article contends that the multilingual richness provided by naming practices can positively undermine Italian "national homogeneity," to use the title of a pioneering volume on the topic by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo. In fact, as I will showcase, awareness of language differences is entangled with issues of race, gender, and class in contemporary Italy; names are socially bounded, as well as with the skin color and the economic and social position of the characters displayed in these books. While past research on names in children's literature primarily originates from translation studies scholars (Nouh and Farouk 41), focusing on rendering the surplus of meaning or wordplay contained in literary names into other languages (e.g., Bertills; Nord), this article emphasizes the importance of preserving the cultural background of names in contexts of migration.

To discuss naming practices, I analyze five books that feature the mispronunciation of characters' "foreign names." The books selected are the following: the picturebook *Questa non è una baby-sitter* (She

is no nanny,[2] 2010) written by Gabriella Kuruvilla and illustrated by Gabriella Giandelli; *Come due farfalle in volo sulla Grande Muraglia* (Like two butterflies flying over the Great Wall, 2011), a bilingual children's novel by Yang Xiaping; the YA novel *Allergica al pesce: Hakuna matata* (Allergic to fish: Hakuna matata, 2019) by Ndeye Fatou Faye; the children's novel *La tata marrone* (The brown nanny, 2020) by Edwige Guiebre; and *Il mio migliore amico è fascista* (My best friend is a fascist, 2021), which is a graphic novel by Takoua Ben Mohamed. I believe these books can give an overview of the different naming practices that can be found in the corpus of Italian postcolonial children's literature.

In the following analysis, I will draw a distinction between naming practices performed by adults and those performed by children. While all these books convey a linguistically diverse environment thanks to the presence of names, only two of them display child characters who ask teachers and peers not to mispronounce their "non-Italian" names. This practice is, as I discuss, "counter-hegemonic" and it conveys a courageous defense of their identities and their transnational belongings (Savsar). In the first part of the article, I will give a contextual overview of Italian postcolonial children's literature. In the second, I will analyze naming practices against mispronunciation, renaming and/or domestication in the books selected. I will then examine naming practices in connection to race, gender, and class issues in contemporary Italy.

Before proceeding, however, I shall begin by discussing what is referred to with the expression "Italian names," which is a problematic definition. I use "names" and "personal names" interchangeably in accordance with the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* to refer to first names and surnames altogether ("Name"). In Italian, an individual's name is composed by two elements, "nome proprio" (personal name) and "cognome" (surname), combining to form the specific "nome di persona" (person's name) (Petricola). As far as the adjective "Italian" is concerned, the meaning can be interpreted in different ways. If we consider the linguistic aspect of names, most of them come from roughly four linguistic groups: Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Semitic. We can then affirm that Italian names do not exist etymologically. For instance, civil registry's statistics reveal that the most common names in 2022 were Leonardo for boys and Sofia for girls ("Natalità"). Both Leonardo and Sofia are respectively etymologically rooted in territories other than the Italian peninsula. While Leonardo has Lombard origins, Sofia comes from the Greek word "σοφία" (sophía).

However, if we consider phonological and phonetic perspectives, names that present sounds that are not in the Italian system of sounds, then we may easily exclude names such as "Ahmed," where the glottal fricative is not recognized among the Italian forms. Until 1966,[3] Italian citizens were even forbidden to name a child with a "nome straniero" (foreign name) or names that contained letters that did not belong to the Italian alphabet, namely *j*, *y*, *x*, *w*, and *k* (Marcato 40). In this article, Italian names are defined to be those personal names perceived as Italian in a narrow sense; with "foreign name," in quotation marks, I refer to names that were forbidden. In a broader sense, in fact, names such as "Ahmed" are to be considered Italian as long as people with this name belong politically or geographically to Italy. My choice comes from the fact that the books that I consider mirror a societal issue, namely the lack of recognition of these names as Italian.

Multilingualism in Italian Postcolonial Children's Literature

The current state of the Italian linguistic panorama has been modified by the presence, on the national territory, of immigrants. While the Ten Theses (1975), "one of the first modern documents of bottom-up language policy in Italy," promulgated by the GISCEL (*Gruppo di Intervento e Studio nel Campo dell'Educazione Linguistica*) democratized language education by contrasting the monolingual pedagogical paradigm with minority languages and regional varieties of standard Italian, it was only at the turn of the 21st century that migrant communities started to be taken into consideration (Carbonara and Scibetta 1050). With "neoplurilingualism" (Villarini and Vedovelli) linguists described the phenomenon according to which languages of new immigrants intertwine with Italian. Scholarly production that investigates new paradigms of translanguaging pedagogy that emphasizes the heritage language of children has gained considerable attention (Carbonara and Scibetta 1051).

From the end of the 1980s, the arrival of Italian literature written by migrants has resulted in the emergence of new linguistic influences in Italian texts, a widely observed phenomenon (Contarini; Groppaldi; Ricci). Nonetheless, multilingualism in Italian postcolonial fiction written for a child readership has been largely ignored by scholars in the field, consistent with its customary marginalization in academic teaching and research. In the first study of this corpus, published in 2010 by Lorenzo Luatti, it is acknowledged that in 1990, Sinnos, a Roman publishing house for children, was founded in the

Rebibbia prison by a group of volunteers and foreign convicts. The first result of this project is the historical series of bilingual books, "I Mappamondi" (Mappamundi), curated by Vinicio Ongini, and introduced by Tullio De Mauro, who is considered the father of the already mentioned Ten Theses. Intentionally created to broaden the publishing landscape to migrants in Italy, it was a first attempt at educating children with regards to the new (at that time) multiculturalism in Italian schools. These books were pioneering in those years in which Italy's social fabric was starting to change; already in 1998, recognizing the importance of Sinnos, Sandra Ponzanesi wrote that it "attempts to introduce Italian children to the idea of a multicultural Italy by presenting them with the life stories and the languages of immigrants in Italy" (106).

After "I Mappamondi," Sinnos introduced "Zefiro" (Zephyr), a bilingual series for 13-year-old children, and "Fiabilandia" (Storyland), a collection of picturebooks, mostly bilingual. Sinnos has provided a space for the languages of migrants and refugees, and for the languages of former European and Italian colonies (such as Somali). Bilingualism in these books is not only the decision to display two languages, but that of reflecting on the power relations between them, openly opting for a multilingual education. In general, books of this corpus appear hybridized through different languages: Spanish, Somali, Arabic, and more.

Despite being born in the literary "outskirts," Italian postcolonial literature for children is now sold by major publishers, such as Mondadori and Rizzoli, and it is detached from the multicultural sector (Finozzi 20–21). This means that this literature has diversified its themes and topics beyond the previously preponderant focus on migration and integration. Even though bilingual books, because of their being tied to the multicultural sector, have decreased in number, most of the books published today display multilingualism and metaliterary reflections on the use of one or more languages. As I will outline in the next section, while most of the books have lexical borrowings from other languages, other types of multilingualism are also present, such as "non-Italian" names.

Naming Practices against Linguistic Homogeneity

In this section, I explore three books in which adult women perform naming practices against mispronunciation of their names. In the picturebook *Questa non è una baby-sitter* written by Gabriella Kuruvilla and illustrated by Gabriella Giandelli, the child protagonist Mattia

is the son of a white man and a nonwhite woman. The book deals with the uneasiness felt by Mattia when having to tell his friends that the Black woman outside the school is his mother. Mattia pretends that she is his babysitter. One day, a friend of Mattia asks the mother her name:

> "E tu, come ti chiami?", chiede una bambina alla mamma.
> "Ashima."
> "Come? AH-SÍ-MA?"
> "No, mi chiamo Ashima. È un nome indiano."
> "Ah, sì, ma... sei la sua baby-sitter?"
> "No, sono la sua mamma."
> "Mmh... non mi convinci mica..."
> "Perchè?"
> "Perchè tu sei nera e lui è bianco!"
> (Kuruvilla)[4]

> ("And you, what is your name?" a girl asks the mother. "Ashima." "How? AH-SÍ-MA?" "No, my name is Ashima. It is an Indian name." "Ah, yes, but… are you his babysitter?" "No, I am his mum." "Mmh… I don't believe you…" "Why's that?" "Because you are Black[5] and he is white!")

As we have seen here, the child attempts to pronounce the name but gets it wrong. The mother repeats the name and explains its Indian origin, emphasizing the importance of correct pronunciation and understanding its roots. This insistence promotes the necessary effort to learn the name accurately, rather than perpetuating mispronunciation. Additionally, the name is directly connected to phenotypical differences, such as skin color, as depicted in the illustrations: the mother is darker than the son, who is darker than his classmates. In this context, language serves as a marker of alterity or "otherness." Ginko and Salvatore, friends of Mattia, are from China and Southern Italy, respectively, and both speak "una lingua strana" (a strange language). Just as skin color can lead to exclusion by the dominant group, so can the use of different languages or speech patterns, even when the individual, such as Salvatore, does not have a different skin color. This book thus portrays a multilingual environment without necessarily using multilingual lexicon or syntax. Naming practices in postcolonial children's literature introduce "foreign words," exposing readers to a multilingual setting which *per se* invokes children's cultural identities and educate them in shaping a more equal society (Alberton Gunn et al.).

The shame felt by the son stems from the fact that his mother Ashima is a nonwhite woman. In Italy, the association of Black women with the role of domestic worker remains strong; since the 1980s, domestic work in Italy has increasingly been performed by immigrant women (see Colombo). This trend has reinforced a racialized stereotype: immigrant women in Italy are often confined to roles such as housekeepers, caregivers, or servants. Fiore, analyzing *Questa non è una baby-sitter*, notes that "a dark-skinned woman is categorized as a babysitter before being conceptualized as a mother" (135). Thus, Ashima exists at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression: gender, race, and class. Her resistance against mispronunciation can be read as a form of rebellion against this stereotype; the immediate association between nonwhite women and domestic workers prevents the recognition of diverse stories, people, and experiences. As I will show in the next section, Blackness remains a constant homogenizing factor.

Something similar happens in *La tata marrone* by Edwige Guiebre. In this short autobiographical novel, the narrator Edwige describes her work as a kindergarten teacher, denouncing that

> Il mio sogno è […] un mondo dove si chiamano le persone per i loro nomi di battesimo, non tata marrone, tata cioccolata, tata di colore, tata africana. Ma solo per nome: il mio ad esempio è tata Edwige. (Guiebre 32)
>
> (My dream is […] a world where people are called by their names of baptism, not brown nanny, chocolate nanny, Black nanny, African nanny. But by name only: mine for example is nanny Edwige.)

In this case Edwige is never called by her name: identity is solely linked to the color of her skin through metaphor, analogy to food (chocolate), and to stereotypes (African). Even though "nanny Edwige" still entails a problematic reference to her role, language awareness is raised through reflections on naming and renaming. This example can be connected to the previous one: both Ashima and Edwige use their names to fight misrepresentation and homogenization.

Another example of a naming practice is to be found in *Come due farfalle in volo sulla Grande Muraglia* by Yang Xiaping, a bilingual children's novel in Mandarin and Italian. Bilingual picturebooks that feature indigenous languages, languages spoken by immigrant communities, or languages from countries with more than one official

language, display both the dominant and the minority language, treating them as equals without assigning greater prestige to either one (Hadaway and Young). Although Chinese Italian literature is still understudied compared to that produced by other migrant communities, it has recently established itself in the academic field (e.g., Pedone; Zhang; C. Giuliani) and in the book market, where there have already been cases of editorial success, such as that of Bamboo Hirst's books.

The protagonist of *Come due farfalle* is Jasmine, a third-generation Chinese Italian woman. In the first half of the volume, she consistently asks her husband Dalin, a Chinese man who has migrated to Italy, to call her Jasmine and not Lili, which is the name she was given when born. She explains that she decided to be called Jasmine when she was 8 years old. After having travelled to Beijing, Jasmine starts to appreciate her ancestors' culture more, and eventually, she asks Dalin to call her Lili:

> "Ora a me piace di più Lili, perché è più semplice, più bello e più originale, è anche più musicale e tintinnante, mi suona bene alle orecchie e così il Muro dell'Eco lo può trasmettere a tanti metri di distanza!" (Xiaping 42)
>
> ("Now I like Lili more, because it is simpler, more beautiful and more original, it is also more musical and tinkling, it sounds good to my ears and so the Echo Wall can transmit it many meters away!")
>
> "Chiamami pure Lili, sono una cinese come te. Quando torneremo in Italia, mi devi chiamare solo Lili." (Xiaping 78)
>
> ("Call me Lili, I am Chinese like you. When we return to Italy, you must only call me Lili.")

The case of Jasmine-Lili does not only reflect the renaming phenomenon, but it can also be considered a form of *self-renaming*. As pointed out previously, assigning a domesticized name to a migrant child is "motivated by dominant discourses which frame immigrants and differences in terms of deficits" (Souto-Manning 112). The same process can be said to happen when the person, imbued in a social framework where their name is considered somehow less prestigious, opts for another, "domesticized" name. Nitti's survey, which I mentioned in the introduction to this article, reveals that most of the names of L2 speakers in Italy that undergo a radical substitution in favor of Italian names are Chinese (908). Moreover, most often it is

the persons themselves, or the family, in the case of children at school (Cacia and Papa 480), that initiate the renaming process and choose an Italian name. When it comes to Jasmine-Lili, it is worth noticing that Jasmine is also a foreign name, etymologically Arabic, but being one of the most popular names in the United States and Italy (Caffarelli), it has a higher degree of linguistic prestige in Italy (Nitti).

Multilingual literature often includes metalinguistic reflections. Jasmine-Lili's decision to reclaim her Chinese name represents an act of defiance against cultural assimilation and a means of reconnecting with her Chinese heritage. In the book, the young couple extensively discusses language issues from a transgenerational perspective: from the struggles faced by Lili's grandparents after migrating to Italy at the end of World War II to the isolation experienced by Lili's Chinese classmates who lacked proficiency in Italian. To this regard, Ala-Risku writes that this procedure, which she defines as "metalanguage," is used specifically by "Writers [who] […] are not linguists, but they work with the language, they work *the* language and use it to describe society and people through their own way of expressing themselves" (216, emphasis in the original). Postcolonial writers, like Xiaping, effectively highlight the isolation and stereotypes stemming from the absence of a shared language.

Child Characters and Naming Practices: Towards New Italian Names

The final two examples illustrate how child or young adult characters claim their own names. These naming practices, because they are performed in defiance of adults, convey a stronger message than the previous examples. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, these characters use naming practices to challenge both adult authority and broader Italian societal norms.

In the autobiographical YA novel *Allergica al pesce: Hakuna matata* by Ndeye Fatou Faye, there is another case of mispronunciation. The protagonist, Ndeye Fatou Faye, a girl from Veneto with Senegalese origins, denounces the tendency of Italians to change the order of the two parts of her name:

> […] il mio nome è un nome composto, come Anna Chiara, e non va quindi invertito, cosa che non sopporto mai quando la gente lo dice per scherzare, come fa uno dei miei capi, Alessio, che mi chiama Fatou Ndeye, orribile da sentire. (Fatou Faye)[6]

> (My name consists of two names, such as Anna Chiara, therefore it cannot be reversed, a fact that I cannot stand, especially when people do it to joke, as one of my bosses Alessio does, naming me Fatou Ndeye, horrible to hear.)

Allergica al pesce presents an extremely sophisticated linguistic texture as it mixes standard Italian with mostly Venetian dialect and Wolof. In the novel, Ndeye Fatou Faye travels to Senegal to reconnect with her roots since part of her family still lives there; the geographical movements across the country also function as a linguistic journey towards her own identity. She constantly shows a certain disappointment towards the fact that wherever she is, she is perceived as a foreigner, in Senegal for having an Italian accent when speaking Wolof, in Italy for being Italian but Black: "Ma esiste un posto al mondo dove nessuno mai si sconvolge se comincio a parlare?" (But is there a place in the world where no one is shocked if I start talking?). Her Blackness, as well as Ashima's and Edwige's, is a mark of alterity in Italy, stereotyped and criminalized through media discourses (G. Giuliani).

The migrant's body looked at through the Western gaze is often anonymized and exploited, belonging to those who look at it and circumscribe it, for its Blackness, in a homogeneous space without geographical or historical specification, as if it was a nameless body. An example of this is, according to Duncan, the recovery of the names of migrants drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. This act reclaims their identities by using proper names in opposition to the "spectacularization of the abject African body familiar from standard media representations" (Duncan 81). Listing the names of those bodies is "a potent strategy for countering the anonymity of numbers" (81): precisely that *a-nonymity*, that "being without name," that renders Black bodies unrecognizable. While naming practices have been used to commemorate and retrieve people from silence, they also function as forms of resistance against the domestication and stereotypization of immigrants, Black people, and other minorities. To demand the right pronunciation of names is a way to recognize individuality within a discriminated group or community imposed by the dominant culture to the minorities' one.

My last example is an autobiographical graphic novel for children, *Il mio migliore amico è fascista* by Takoua Ben Mohamed. The narration follows the adventures of the young Takoua, an Italian Tunisian girl. Takoua recalls having been named "Ben" by teachers, who did not make any effort to pronounce her full name in the right order,

enumerating only one of the three parts, the one that is easier to pronounce: "è come se un Mario De Rossi venisse chiamato solo 'De'… vi sembra normale?" (it is as if a Mario De Rossi were only called "De"... does it seem normal to you?; Ben Mohamed 69). Renaming is then both the refusal of Takoua's name, underlining its inadequacy, and the bestowal of a name (in this case, only a part of the original one) that is an "Italianized" name.

Later in the book, she accuses her teacher of not truly knowing her and of only treating her based on prejudices: that she is obligated to wear a veil, that she is lazy, and that she is only seen as "la straniera" (the foreigner). When one of the teachers asks her what they could do to help her feel understood, Takoua responds:

> "Per il momento basterebbe che non mi chiamaste più Ben. Usate il mio nome, o almeno il mio cognome intero. Sarebbe già qualcosa." (Ben Mohamed 173)
>
> (For the moment, it would be enough if you stopped calling me Ben. Use my name, or at least my full surname. It would already be something.)

Furthermore, she is frequently subjected to derogatory labels such as "terrorista" (terrorist) and "talebana" (Taliban).

Horn has titled a study on the topic with a sentence from Geneviève Makaping's book *Traiettorie di sguardi: E se gli altri foste voi?* (*Reversing the Gaze: What If the Other Were You?*) from 2001: "voglio dire io come mi chiamo […] non devi dirmi tu" (I want to say myself what my name is, you shouldn't tell me; Makaping 53–54). Horn observes how phenomena of stereotyping and stigmatizing migrants by the use of offensive expressions such as "vu cumprà" (a mocking imitation of the immigrants' speech, which literally means "wanna buy?") and "marocchino" (literally meaning "Moroccan," but commonly used to address Black people in Italy) are frequently found in literature written by migrants.[7]

Just as Takoua insists on being called by her name, she also bravely defends her choice to wear the hijab. This decision leads her to endure instances of bullying from both her classmates and her teacher. By defending her name and resisting assimilation, she shows her determination to shape her identity as a Muslim Italian Tunisian girl. Illustrative of this quest for self-definition is the comparison between two words, "migrante" (migrant) and "bambina" (child):

> All'epoca non sapevo di essere una "MIGRANTE", non sapevo nemmeno cosa significa la parola "immigrata", ed è per questo che non mi sono mai definita così. Ero solo una BAMBINA che pensava a giocare, come tutte le bambine. Ma a differenza delle altre ero cresciuta senza un papà, e ora mi ritrovavo molto lontana dalla terra dove ero nata, una terra che avrei iniziato a dimenticare. (Ben Mohamed 24)
>
> (At the time, I didn't know I was a "MIGRANT," I didn't even know what the word "immigrant" meant, and it is for this reason that I have never defined myself in this way. I was only a CHILD who was thinking about playing, as all children do. But, differently from other children, I grew up without a father, and I was very far away from the land where I was born, a land that I had started to forget.)

In this sentence, the emphasis is placed on the words "MIGRANTE" and "BAMBINA," which are contraposed: Takoua does not want to be "the migrant," she just wants to be a little girl like all the others, without bearing the weight of her family's journey. However, as signaled by the adversative "ma" (but), she was born in another land, so she realizes that she is a girl and a migrant all together. This brings to the table a double form of oppression; in fact, both the migrant and the child are stereotypically infantilized, needing to be guided. By the end of the volume, Takoua's self-awareness matures into political engagement as she starts participating in students' manifestations. Eventually, she describes her identity:

> Non sono né nera né bianca.
> Non sono né tunisina né italiana.
> Non sono né africana né europea.
> Né araba né occidentale.
> Non sono niente, perché sono tutto.
> Ma, cosa più importante, sono CIÒ CHE IO STESSA DECIDO DI ESSERE. (Ben Mohamed 246)
>
> (I am neither Black nor white. I am neither Tunisian nor Italian. I am neither African nor European. Neither Arab nor Western. I am nothing because I am everything. But, more importantly, I am WHAT I MYSELF DECIDE TO BE.)

As Leyla Savsar has highlighted, when young characters represented in children's books are children of a diaspora and, therefore, "navigate the transnational spaces of biculturalism," their "representations [...] can act as counter-hegemonic subjects" (396). Italy is

a "society that has historically constructed itself as white and Catholic" (Romeo, "Introduction" 4); the story of Takoua and the defense of her name and her identity expose readers to feelings of resistance to a monolingual yet also monocultural homogenization.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed examples of naming practices. The analyses have demonstrated that characters use naming practices to counter mispronunciation, reclaiming the correct pronunciation of their names. In this way, they make these names enter a language, Italian, thus disrupting the linguistic homogeneity of the texts. Moreover, the analyses have shown that these names are not neutral; rather, they are entangled with racial, gender, and class discrimination in these books. The names of Ashima, Edwige and Faye are directly connected to their Blackness and, thus, associated with a social group, Black Italians, that still struggle, often also juridically, to be recognized in society. Recognition is also asked by other nonwhite subjects, such as Lili and Takoua. While the former reclaims her own Chinese given name, the latter revendicates her name in connection to her choice to be Muslim.

As I have shown, naming practices in Italian children's literature can have a positive impact for at least two reasons. First, they disrupt the monolingual paradigm by representing a multilingual social texture; this can reflect the complexity of Italian people with migrant background, praising identity, heritage, and heterogeneity, empowering child characters to take action and to defend their own origins through language and names. Second, they fight racism and other forms of social oppression, such a class, religion, and gender. As for Italian Blackness, not only is literature written by Black authors one of the "key components in pro-Black pedagogy" (Muller et al. 48), postcolonial children's fiction is also part of a bigger picture able to capture contemporary Italy, where "Black spaces also involved anti-Afrophobia, working against damaging mis-representations and situated ignorance" (Merrill 173).

From this perspective, names epitomize identities and naming practices counteract anonymity, domestication, and stereotypization. Research in this direction should be continued, especially in the fields of intercultural pedagogy and sociolinguistics, in order to place postcolonial children's literature among the pedagogical tools to enhance an understanding of language power dynamics. If it is true, as Ponzanesi wrote, that at the beginning of the 1990s the future

was "left open" as a "space for children who should grow up accustomed to diversity" (106), I believe that children's literature written by migrants is still a great source for this purpose.

Biographical information: Anna Finozzi, PhD, works at the University of Stockholm. Her main area of research is Italian Postcolonial Studies. Under this broader theoretical umbrella, she has explored children's literature, multilingualism, podcasts, and knowledge-production in Italian Studies as a field of research. Her monograph La letteratura postcoloniale italiana per l'infanzia (2010–2022). Lingua, spazio, colore *(2023) analyses a corpus of children's books written by migrants uncovering how they de-establish Italian collective memory of colonialism and migration. Recently published: "Podcasting the Italian Postcolonial" (2023,* The Italianist*) and* Italian Studies across Disciplines *(2022, with Marco Ceravolo).*

Notes

1 For a comprehensive study of postcolonial Italian children's literature, see my monograph *La letteratura postcoloniale italiana per l'infanzia 2010–2022* (Finozzi). Some of the literary examples in this article are mentioned briefly in the monograph, but not analyzed in terms of naming practices and literary multilingualism.

2 All translations from Italian are mine.

3 The Law 935 promulgated on 31st October 1966.

4 This picturebook does not have page numbers.

5 I use "Black" with the capital "B" to emphasize the systemic oppression experienced by racialized individuals. In translating from Italian, where the words "nero/nera" do not have the capital "N", I have also chosen to retain the capitalized form.

6 Pages are not indicated as I used the Kindle version.

7 In this study, Horn discusses books written by the authors Amara Lakhous, Mohamed Bouchane, Fitahianamalala Rakotobe Andriamaro, Tahar Lamri, and Yousef Wakkas.

Works Cited

Ala-Risku, Riikka Ulla Katariina. "Sociolinguistica letteraria: Cosa ci insegna la metalingua della narrativa?" *Edito, inedito, riedito: Atti del XI Congresso degli italianisti scandinavi (Falun, 9–11 giugno 2016)*, edited by Vera Nigrisoli Wärnhjelm, Pisa University Press, 2017, pp. 223–234.

Alberton Gunn, AnnMarie, Alejandro E. Brice, and Barbara J. Peterson. "Ideas for the Classroom: Culturally Responsive Teaching: Exploring Children's Names and Cultural Identities." *Childhood Education*, vol. 90, no. 2, 2014, pp. 174–176, doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2014.894836.

Ben Mohamed, Takoua. *Il mio migliore amico è fascista*. Rizzoli, 2021.

Bertills, Yvonne. *Beyond Identification: Proper Names in Children's Literature*. Åbo Akademi University Press, 2003.

Cacia, Daniela, and Elena Papa. "Erika ha gli occhi a mandorla: L'integrazione attraverso i nomi." *Name and Naming: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Onomastics: Onomastics in Contemporary Public Space*, edited by Oliviu Felecan, Editura Mega/Editura Argonaut, 2013, pp. 469–483.

Caffarelli, Enzo. "Nomi stranieri per gli italiani: Nessuna invasione." *Treccani magazine*, 27 July 2023.

Carbonara, Valentina, and Andrea Scibetta. "Integrating Translanguaging Pedagogy into Italian Primary Schools: Implications for Language Practices and Children' Empowerment." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2022, pp. 1049–1069, doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1742648.

Christensen, Linda. "Finding Voice: Learning about Language and Power." *Voices from the Middle*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 9–17.

Codini, Ennio, and Veronica Riniolo. "L'attivismo delle seconde generazioni e la riforma della legge sulla cittadinanza in Italia." *Visioni LatinoAmericane*, vol. 10, no. 18, 2018, pp. 9–25.

Colombo, Asher. "Razza, genere, classe: Le tre dimensioni del lavoro domestico in Italia." *Polis*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 317–344.

Contarini, Silvia. "Lingue, dialetti, identità: Letteratura dell'immigrazione." *Particularismes et identités régionales dans la littérature italienne contemporaine*, vol. 4, no. 11, 2011, shs.hal.science/halshs-00753851.

Daly, Nicola. "The Linguistic Landscape of English–Spanish Dual Language Picturebooks." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 39, no. 6, 2018, pp. 556–566.

Duncan, Derek. "'Il clandestino è l'ebreo di oggi': Imprints of the Shoah on Migration to Italy." *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, vol. 10, 2016, pp. 60–88.

Fatou Faye, Ndeye. *Allergica al pesce: Hakuna matata*. S4M, 2019.

Finozzi, Anna. *La letteratura postcoloniale italiana per l'infanzia 2010–2022: Lingua, spazio, colore*. Cesati, 2023.

Fiore, Teresa. *Pre-Occupied Spaces: Remapping Italy's Transnational Migrations and Colonial Legacies*. Fordham University Press, 2017.

Giuliani, Chiara. "Chinaman d'Italia: La nascita della comunità italo-cinese in due graphic novels." *Viaggi minimi e luoghi qualsiasi: In cammino tra cinema, letteratura e arti visive nell'Italia contemporanea*, edited by Monica Jansen, Inge Lanslots, and Marina Spunta, Cesati, 2021, pp. 37–46.

Giuliani, Gaia. *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Groppaldi, Andrea. "'Italia mia, benché…': La dismatria linguistica nella narrativa di Igiaba Scego." *Lingue migranti e nuovi paesaggi*, edited by Maria Vittoria Calvi, Irina Matilde Bajini, and Milin Bonomi, LED, 2014, pp. 67–82.

Guiebre, Edwige. *La tata marrone*. Europa, 2020.

Hadaway, Nancy L., and Terrell A. Young. "Multilingual Picturebooks." *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks*, edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, Routledge, 2017, pp. 260–269.

Hakuzwimana, Espérance. *Tra i banchi di scuola*. Einaudi, 2024.

Horn, Vera. "Voglio essere io a dire come mi chiamo: Nome e paradigma identitario nella letteratura italiana della migrazione." *Revista de Italianística*, vol. 15, 2008, pp. 147–160.

Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina. "Multilingualism and Children's Literature." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2013, pp. iv–x.

Kuruvilla, Gabriella. *Questa non è una baby-sitter*. Illustrated by Gabriella Giandelli, Terre di mezzo, 2010.

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina, and Caterina Romeo, editors. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Luatti, Lorenzo. *E noi? Il "posto" degli scrittori migranti nella narrativa per ragazzi*. Sinnos, 2010.

Makaping, Geneviève. *Traiettorie di sguardi: E se gli altri foste voi?* Rubbettino, 2001.

Marcato, Carla. *Nomi di persona, nomi di luogo: Introduzione all'onomastica italiana*. Carocci, 2009.

Merrill, Heather. "Being Italian: The Peculiar Journey of Blackness." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 105, no. 2, 2023, pp. 165–178, doi.org/10.1080/04353684.2023.2184709.

Muller, Mei, Eliza G. Braden, Susi Long, Gloria Swindler Boutte, and Kamania Wynter-Hoyte. "Toward Pro-Black Early Childhood Teacher Education." *YC Young Children*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2022, pp. 44–51.

"Name." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/name. Accessed 25 June 2024.

"Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente 2021." *Istat*, 2022, www.istat.it/it/files//2022/12/report-natalita-2021.pdf.

Nitti, Paolo. "'Mi chiamo Ana, cioè Anna.': Un'indagine sugli effetti del prestigio linguistico rispetto ai nomi dei migranti stranieri in Italia." *Forum Italicum*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2021, pp. 898–914.

Nord, Christiane. "Proper Names in Translations for Children: *Alice in Wonderland* as a Case in Point." *Meta*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2003, pp. 182–196.

Nouh, Amal Ahmed, and Jehan Farouk. "The Power of Names: Name Translation in Young Adult Fiction." *International Journal of Childhood and Women's Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2022, pp. 34–62.

Pedone, Valentina. "La nascita della letteratura sinoitaliana: Osservazioni preliminari." *Atti del XIII convegno dell'Associazione Italiana Studi Cinesi (Milano, 22–24 settembre 2011)*, edited by Clara Bulfoni and Silvia Pozzi, FrancoAngeli, 2014, pp. 310–321.

Peterson, Barbara, AnnMarie Gunn, Alejandro Brice, and Kathleen Alley. "Exploring Names and Identity through Multicultural Literature in K–8 Classrooms." *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39–45, doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2015.994434.

Petricola, Patrizia. "Nomi propri [prontuario]." *Enciclopedia dell'italiano*, 2011, www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/nomi-propri-prontuario_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano).

Ponzanesi, Sandra. "Post-Colonial Women's Writing in Italian: A Case Study of the Eritrean Ribka Sibhatu." *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1998, pp. 97–115.

Ricci, Laura. "Neoislamismi e altri migratismi nei romanzi di Amara Lakhous." *Carte di viaggio*, vol. 8, 2015, pp. 115–142.

Romeo, Caterina. "Introduction: Decolonizing Italian Literature." *Interrupted Narratives and Intersectional Representations in Italian Postcolonial Literature*, by Caterina Romeo, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 1–22.

---. "Italian Postcolonial Literature." *California Italian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1–43.

Savsar, Leyla. "'Mother Tells Me to Forget': Nostalgic Representations, Re-membering, and Re-telling the Child Migrant's Identity and Agency in Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2018, pp. 395–411.

Souto-Manning, Mariana. "Challenging the Text and Context of (Re)naming Immigrant Children: Children's Literature as Tools for Change." *Promoting Social Justice for Young Children*, edited by Beatrice S. Fennimore and A. Lin Goodwin, Springer, 2011, pp. 111–124.

Truglio, Maria Rosa. "As Close as from Here to There: The Ethics of Haunting in Geda and Akbari's *Nel mare ci sono i coccodrilli*." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2023, pp. 143–166.

Uyangoda, Nadeesha. "È assurdo che i nostri nomi stranieri vengano percepiti come un problema." *Vice*, 12 July 2019.

Villarini, Andrea, and Massimo Vedovelli. "Lingue straniere immigrate in Italia." *Caritas: Immigrazione, Dossier Statistico*, 2001, pp. 222–229.

Xiaping, Yang. *Come due farfalle in volo sulla Grande Muraglia*. Illustrated by Marta Lorenzon, Idest, 2011.

Zhang, Gaoheng. *Migration and the Media: Debating Chinese Migration to Italy, 1992–2012*. University of Toronto Press, 2019.