

Building Worlds: *Io, venditore di elefanti. Una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* by Pap Kouma and Oreste Pivetta

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Abstract In *Io, venditore di elefanti* (1990), Pap Kouma and Oreste Pivetta evoke vivid basic images that will engender complex processing and detailed representations of an existential condition: that of a black, illegal immigrant, smuggling illicit goods. It takes a few prompts for readers to create in their minds precise and iconic images, leading to a sophisticated conceptual configuration of an elaborate, abstract social phenomenon related to several domains of knowledge, experience, and pragmatic and cultural factors: migration (Langacker 2008; Gavins 2007; Iser 1980). Details or minimal elements and concepts are outlined and grouped, generating a multi-level and dynamic perceptual encounter with the *other*, which in this essay will be investigated by focusing on how readers respond, make or negotiate textual meanings, construing conceptual content evoked, elicited and *imposed* by textual or compositional building elements and devices (Langacker 2008, 43; cf. Stockwell 2009; Iser 1974 xi). The current analysis refers to Text World Theory as a methodological base (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007), opening flexibly to other cognitive models (Iser 1974, 1980; Langacker 2008; Stockwell 2009).

Keyword identity; migration; reader; experience; representation.

1. Introduction

Io, venditore di elefanti (Khouma & Pivetta 1990)¹ is narrated by a young man from Senegal, who recounts leaving his home country in search of a better future, eventually managing to obtain a permanent visa. It is among the most representative texts in Italian Migration Literature,² bearing witness to some of the most dramatic aspects related to the migration phenomenon. This article

¹ *Io venditore di elefanti* is subject to original copyright and licensing terms, any material from the book used in this article has been referred and cited with permission of Pap Kouma and Oreste Pivetta (all rights reserved). Extracts from *Io, venditore di elefanti* here included may not be reproduced, copied, reused or transmitted in any form and format without specific advance written permission of the owners.

² For the notion of Italian Migration Literature see Gnisci (1992, 1998), and Mengozzi (2013, 33-107).

scrutinizes how the text's focus on migration to Italy and the hard conditions of the *other* it reports offer the opportunity for a preliminary analysis of its effect on readers' processing from a cognitive perspective. An opportunity that relates to *building* devices or constituent elements common to First-Generation Italian Migration Literature.³ The most common device consists in the confluence of the conceptual construction of two authors, reflecting in one first-person narrator's voice, which sets up the dynamic grasp of sensorial and emotional experience enacted by an agent, eliciting specific ideas of subjectivity and subjective viewing, presumably impacting strongly on the *encounter* of readers with the *other*.⁴

Text World Theory, a "model of human language processing which is based on the notion of mental representations found in Cognitive Psychology" (Gavins 2007, 8) (Gavins 2007; Werth 1999, 85), with a strong interest in discourse participants and processing, in how writer and reader co-operate, negotiate to construe a *discourse-world*,⁵ has been selected as a reference model for this study, in conjunction with other cognitive models (Iser 1974, 1980; Langacker 2008; Stockwell 2009). Following, some principles related to Text World Theory, now considered "a canonical stylistic-analytical framework, especially under the rubrics of 'cognitive stylistics' or 'cognitive poetics'" (Lahey 2014, 284).

2. Methodology

Text World Theory was first developed by Paul Werth (1994, 1995, 1997, 1999) between the 80s and 90s, and it was welcomed by several scholars (e.g. Gavins 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2016; Hidalgo Downing 2000; Lahey 2005, 2014; Semino 2010; Stockwell 2009; Whiteley 2010).

It is based on the following principles: readers construct mental representations while processing language (Gavins 2007, 2; Werth 1999, 7); text analysis extends to its *discourse-world*, integrating context, writers, and readers as participants (see Lahey 2003, 284); the context of a text influences its

³ Examples of First-Generation Italian Migration Writers are: Mohamed Bouchane (1991), Salah Methnani (1990), Pap Khouma (1990, Tahar Ben Jelloun (1991), Nassera Chohra (1993), Saidou Moussa Ba (1994; Christina De Caldas Brito (1995), and Fernanda Farias De Albuquerque. See Gnisci (1998, 31-48; 2006), (Gnisci and Moll 2010) and Mengozzi (2013, 18-32).

⁴ At a discourse level the forementioned texts feature three participants: two co-authors, a migrant-writer and a journalist-mediator, and a reader called to build an emphatic relationship with the migrant-writer. The narrator figures as a co-participant, bearing aspects of both the authors (see Gavins 2007, 129). At a text-world level only migrant-writers figure as enactors.

⁵ The context related to reading and writing (Werth 1999, 83).

production and reception; reading is a creative activity related to various kinds of knowledge and sources, used to build mental representation of *fictional worlds* called *text-worlds*; text-worlds are cognitive spaces constructed both by *producer* and *recipient* (Werth 1999, 7, 17; Whiteley 2011, 24).

Text World Theory refers both to fictional and factual *discourses* and to three types of worlds: *discourse-worlds*, *text-worlds*, and *modal-worlds* (Gavins 2007, 9-10). Discourse-worlds relate to the content, context, and setting of communication: participants, various kinds of knowledge, and other contextual factors (Gavins 2007, 21).⁶ Participants at this level communicate converting language events into mental representations or text-worlds (Gavins 2007, 9-10), which vary according to *world-building elements*, or elements that readers use to construe mental representation of discourse at hand (Gavins 2007, 35-38), *world-switches*, or switching of spatial-temporal boundaries in a text-world (Gavins, 2007, 48-54), and to *function-advancing propositions*, which cause events, characters, time to progress (Stockwell 2002, 137).

Text World Theory accounts also for *modal-worlds*, which refer to attitudes related to *want*, *wish*, and *desire* (Gavins 2007, 94) *obligation*, or *duty* (Gavins 2007, 99), to *knowledge* and *belief* (Gavins 2007, 92-100), or to unrealized states or situations (hypothesis).

Responding to language cues, readers will imaginatively run on and set up multiple conceptual structures and spaces, reaching plausible interpretative solutions, as will be shown in this analysis of *Io, venditore di elefanti*.

The application of cognitive studies to text analysis has been expanding (not much investigated), just as the application of Text-World Theory (see Semino & Culpeper 2002; Stockwell 2002, 2009, 2016, 2019; Gavins & Steen 2003; Gibbons & Whiteley 2018; Gavins 2020),⁷ and they both could prove very useful if applied to migration writing, or to Italian Migration Literature, especially in the case of First-Generation Writers of Italian Migration Literature, whose need to report their condition as migrants leads to the adoption of a hybrid language, implicating a complex collaboration/mediation between co-authors, to elicit specific responses by readers. The language adopted then becomes a powerful tool, deviating from standard varieties in terms of

⁶ Context or contextual factors refer to “influence from the physical, linguistic, social and psychological circumstances” (Langacker 2008, 50).

⁷ See Hidalgo Downing 2000, Semino (2010); Bragina (2012), Whiteley (2011), Harbus (2012), Giovanelli (2013, 2018); Gavins & Lahey 2016. The idea of this study and its theoretical integration and structure was inspired by Marco Giovanelli’s studies and especially by “Construing the Child Reader: A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of the Opening to Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*” (2016).

formal and semantic structure: lexis, grammar, imagery, ideas, and culture-bound elements.⁸ It is captivating while eliciting readers' understanding, curiosity, support, and sympathy, engaging them in complex *discourses*.

Focusing on these specific texts from a cognitive perspective, and from the specific "world theory" selected, "committed to close reading analysis of the way the text influences readers' mental representation" (Whiteley 211, 25), and sensitive to contextual factors (Gavins 2007, 8), it could offer support to the study of literary discourses related to migration, and to the investigation of conceptual structures effects, originating from ideas and strategies of social control, exclusion, authority, race and resentment. In addition, it could provide better insight into how Italian migration authors co-build meaning with their readers, prompting ideological and cognitive perspectives, eliciting engagement in complex dynamic discourses related to precise notions of migration and on what the implications and implicatures ascribed to being a migrant in Italy could be.

These notions are built on textual prompts and on the experience of migration, on context, on expectations, "motivation, believes, hopes" feelings and on the backward knowledge of each single reader, (see Whiteley 2011, 25), and of groups of readers in general, according to common views and cognitive capabilities (see Stockwell 2009, 3).

Italian Migration Literary *corpus* then emerges as a site of processing or co-construction related to a *specific* conception of migration. Stimuli selected by authors, postulating an *intended reader* (Iser 1980, 32-34), strategies, events, linguistic choices, patterns, aims, or ethical concerns, elicit *specific* readers' responses (Iser 1974, 37; Langacker 2008, 55), or co-building of a, more or less, elaborate conceptual representations, or text-worlds (Gavins 2007, 2) extending sometimes wide beyond denotative meanings (Stockwell 2016, 150).

The following overall analysis of *Io, venditore di elefanti*, considered as the precursor and the prototypical example of First-Generation Italian Migration Literature, will focus on how conceptualization and mental representation of real readers may have been oriented by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta towards ethical and emotional implications and effects related to understanding, integration, and sympathy (see Lahey 2005; Gavins 2007, 59;

⁸ In the chapter titled "Il mercato di Abidjan" the protagonist tells of "stregoni", "guaritori", "amuleti", "spiriti" activating notions of far fetching traditions for Europeans, especially when along the narrative they are integrated with lexical items such as "toubab" (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 11), "ceddo" (18), "gri-gri" (21), "set-kat" (23) and "tabasaki" all evoking a set of conceptual *domains* such as *language, race, class, caste, religion, diversity, myths, values* etc. which relate to the conceptual *matrix* of migration as a complex multi-level phenomenon.

Stockwell 2009, 2016, Whiteley 2011), affecting potentially even their real life (see Lahey 2005, 285-288), “creating a tone and an atmosphere in their mind” a *resonance* or “a textured prolonged feeling” to be “revivified” in time (Stockwell 2009, 25).

3. *Io, venditore di elefanti*: Plot, Context and Aims

Io, venditore di elefanti is a biography written in Italian by Pap Khouma and journalist Oreste Pivetta. It was first published in Milan in 1990 by Garzanti, and it is the first autobiographical novel in Italian Migration Literature.⁹ Six Italian editions of it were printed, it was translated into English by Rebecca Hopkins under the title *I was an Elephant Salesman: Adventures Between Dakar, Paris and Milan* (2010), published by Indiana University Press, and although no longer available, a new reprint is on its way. It has been extremely popular, highly *resonant* (see Stockwell 2009), especially in educational contexts, where it has been discussed extensively to stimulate integration, intercultural dialogue, and cultural awareness.

As anticipated by the title and subtitle: *Io, venditore di elefanti: Una vita per forza tra Dakar, Parigi e Milano*, and by the picture on the cover of its first edition, showing a young African man in his twenties wearing traditional clothing, the book tells of the migration experience and of the clandestine existence of someone, who is none other than Pap Khouma's alter-ego. Through the use of simple, direct language and typical plot devices, related to the structure of a *bildungsroman* or of a *picaresque novel*, readers are called to share and follow an adventurous journey, articulated in various trials and misfortunes, that affect the character's development towards the acquisition of personal self-realization. If they enact imaginatively the role of the addressee in the text, projecting maybe on other roles in text-worlds, adopting the protagonist's views and perspectives, they may respond positively to it (see Whiteley 2011, 26-27; cf. Lahey 2005, 285-288; Stockwell 2009).

The protagonist leaves his hometown, Dakar, and starts a tragic pilgrimage punctuated by various locations. The first stop is Côte d'Ivoire, then Italy. He reaches France, Germany, and Italy again. Because of his clandestine and critical financial status, he is forced to experience an exhausting transmigration from one place to another and to go through many unforeseen lucky escapes from the police. He constantly readjusts to a precarious and promiscuous

⁹ 1990 is the year used to mark the beginning of Italian Migration Literature. See Raffaele Taddeo (2006).

coexistence, with an ever-increasing number of people (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 33), forced to drag around loads of wares, always looking for new selling spots. The alternative would be returning to Africa, to Dakar, meaning endless misery in a place “che ha perso anche la voglia di sognare” (18).¹⁰

The tone of the narrative is optimistic, sometimes comic, although most of the events that follow seem tragic: escapes and clashes with the police, raids, thefts, struggles among migrant communities, the constant risk of having to resort to drug peddling, exposure to derision, humiliation and frustration, which, at times, seems to annihilate any glimmer of positivity. Ultimately, illness follows, putting an end to any effort by the protagonist to soldier on through his difficult path, pursued with determination, generosity, and good fortune. Persisting is obligatory, as defending his own right to life, grasping at any opportunity for a better future against a tragic destiny.

An opportunity that arises unexpectedly in 1987, when the protagonist obtains a permanent visa, discovering that the rights formally granted, still required unexpected efforts. Contrasting the bitter condition of *the other* seems to him more impellent than ever, and so the acquisition of the right to a house and to a regular job. Personal determination, willpower, and a network of caring relations, that he has forged along the way, come to his support while struggling for the acquisition of knowledge, defending the right to identity for himself and for all those marginalized immigrants considered of no value for society and whose voice is never heard. It is a struggle that eventually sees the protagonist's personal commitment in the organization of self-help and support, and in associations operating in the promotion of the cultural and social value of *another* world (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 122).

3.1 Italy in the 80s

Io, venditore di elefanti was set in the mid-80s,¹¹ in a period of positive anticipation, when the Craxian¹² phenomenon was gaining ground, and Italy was proclaimed the fifth or sixth industrial power in the world. These were the years of *individualism*, success, decisionism and football, of smart clothing, of

¹⁰ Laddove venga indicato solo il numero di pagina, si veda il riferimento alla citazione precedente.

¹¹ Information on the genesis of *Io, venditore di elefanti* and on its socio-cultural context has been provided by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta in two long interviews in Milan on the 29th of February and on the 2nd of March 2020, and by Pap Khouma on several occasions.

¹² Bettino Craxi (1934-2000) was an Italian politician, secretary of the Italian Socialist Party from 1976 to 1993, and Prime Minister from 1983 to 1987, in a period of modernization for the country, whose economy showed unprecedented dizzying trends.

unrestrained enthusiasm, of free radio and TV quiz shows, of *Cin Cin girls*,¹³ of video games and *Timberland shoes*,¹⁴ of pinball machines and yuppies with *Levis* and designer clothes. These were the years of popular television shows as *Drive in*,¹⁵ of the fashionable *Milanese* dialect, of “Milano da bere”¹⁶ and of popular clubs and bars such as *Nephenta*, *Santa Tecla*, *Vogue Club* and *Terrazza Martini*,¹⁷ of *Burghy* in San Babila.¹⁸ Shortly, Italian people would witness the investigation on *tangentopoli*,¹⁹ which shattered old enthusiasms.

These were also the years of profound cultural and socio-political transformation and of hidden contrasts. Industry was declining, the unions were collecting major defeats, and new emerging technologies and computers were being successfully commercialized (see Gervasoni 2020, 80-85).²⁰ At that time, immigration in Italy was at its initial stages. It did not show xenophobic attitudes (Pivetta 1990, 8). The first clashes with the immigrants took place in 1986 on the coast of Romagna, where the locals referred to the impact on economic interests (8). Nevertheless, Italy for a Senegalese in his twenties was a dream perceived through filtered images from *westerns* with Giuliano Gemma, Zeudi Araya and *La figlia dalla pelle di Luna*,²¹ through Italian erotic comics from the 70s, and through the beautiful shoes and elegant clothes that people back from Italy brought *home*. Even Italian politics was admired, and Craxi was widely supported by the International Socialists of the Senegalese Government, while France, from Senegal, was viewed with bitterness and resentment. Italy was a different thing. Pap Khouma arrived in Riccione on July the 21st, 1984. For him, everything was there: fancy cars, pretty girls, and all sorts of beautiful things.

¹³ Sexy dancers in the Italian TV game show *Colpo Grosso*.

¹⁴ Or the *Eye Flex Oxford* shoe-model produced by *Timberland* very popular among teenagers in those years.

¹⁵ It was a popular and innovative variety show broadcasted in the 80s.

¹⁶ The expression refers to a marketing operation related to social aspects of the life in Milan in the 80s, promoting success, optimism and determination.

¹⁷ The most celebrated clubs and cocktail bars in Milan in those years.

¹⁸ Piazza San Babila has been famous as a popular meeting point for the affluent *Milanese*.

¹⁹ It is a political and administrative system based on the exchange of bribes. It was discovered, thanks to a judicial investigation into political corruption affecting Italy called *mani pulite* (cleaned hands) in the 1990s. It resulted in the demise and disappearance of many politicians and political parties.

²⁰ For an overview of Italian economic, social and cultural history in the 80s, see Marco Gervasoni (2010). For the impact of new communication technologies and the centrality of television in those years, see Ciofalo (2011).

²¹ Known as *Sex of Their Bodies*, *Moon Skin* and *The Sinner* (1973), it is an Italian erotic film written and directed by Luigi Scattini.

3.2 Writing to Give Voice

“Pensai a questo libro come prova tangibile di solidarietà, con le scarse armi che possedevo: la curiosità, la voglia di ascoltare, la scrittura, armi da giornalista come sono sempre stato.” (Pivetta 2010, 8).

Io, venditore di elefanti originated from a deceptive dream and the collaboration between Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta. The result was first a story recorded on tape and then a written text produced thanks to the prolific and complex collaboration between two co-authors. Oreste Pivetta tells how the title was suggested by the publisher, Livio Garzanti, and how the entire work resulted from a concoction of elements, intents, perspectives, communicative objectives and aims, and mostly from a journalist's curiosity and his need to attend to a call of solidarity from many, whose stories are still constantly and irremediably lost, and from the need of those who want to share a story about their existence, to be perceived (Pivetta 1990, 8-9). *Non-fiction novel, diary, reportage, récit de vie*,²² *(auto)biography or hétérobiographie à la première personne* (Mengozi 2015, 111-112), the text bears testimony of a life story told thanks to the cooperation of two authors and the confluence between writing and the spoken word. Oreste Pivetta has carried out a sensitive mediation endeavour, concocting a simple and unadorned prose, direct as in face-to-face conversation, characterized by a lively rhythm that captures, in an instant, readers' attention, and in which dissonant notes emerge that are reminiscent of African music, “of the rhythms of Youssou N'dour and Manu Dibango” as he often says (see Pivetta 2010, 8).

Critics and poets such as Goffredo Fofi, Giovanni Giudici, and Renzo Cialfoni welcomed *Io, venditore di elefanti* with enthusiasm. It was examined by Remo Cacciatori and Carla Ghezzi,²³ and it attracted the attention of Armando Gnisci (1992, 1998, 2006, 2010), Graziella Parati (1995, 2010), and Alessandro Portelli (2004). From an initial positive reception, further discussions related to its context, content, and form have developed ever since, and it has also been mentioned in seminal contributions related to “Italian migration literature”.²⁴ Other authors, co-authors, critics, and translators

²² This genre bears strong resemblances with First-Generation Italian Migration Writings. In both cases the language is simple, clear and easy to understand.

²³ See Cacciatori (1991) and Ghezzi (1992).

²⁴ See Daniele Comberiati e Chiara Mengozzi (2023); Dora Moll (2015); Chiara Mengozzi (2013); Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2012); Daniele Comberiati (2011); Pezzarossa e Rossini (2011); Raffaele Taddeo (2006), Franca Sinopoli (2001) and William Boelhower (2001), etc.

followed the text model, and the phenomenon of migration permeated Italian narratives (Comberiati 2010, 20-27; Mengozzi 2013, 18-19).²⁵ In a few years, Italian society would change, and the presence of migrants would increase. The phenomenon of migration would be marked by dynamics of fast-packaged information and social alarm, and hasty compromises would be reached, leaving conflicts unresolved, crystallizing under a surface of superficial democratization. They would explode (see Pivetta 2010, 8-9). The literary voice of migration, on the other hand, would survive, always risking disappearing, lost in the composite, asphyxiated context of the Italian publishing industry.

3.3. Thirty-five years later

After thirty-five years, *Io, venditore di elefanti* is now read mainly by scholars, who try to trace the span of transnational literary production, but it still evokes images of a restless, contradictory, poor, marginal, undervalued, but alive and vivid world.

Today, thirty-five years after the publication of *Io, venditore di elefanti*, Pap Khouma is actively involved in promoting African history, African and transnational literature, exploring topics relevant to the history of migration in Italy and abroad. In the past few decades, he has been writing about Italian immigration. In 2003 he co-founded and directed *El Ghibli*, an online magazine dedicated to writings produced by migrants, he has published two more novels: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* (Khouma 2005) and *Noi, italiani neri* (Khouma 2010), and he has worked on a graphic novel: *Ventimila viventi sotto il mar Mediterraneo* (Khouma 2021). He has recently published the translation of *Canto I* by Dante Alighieri into Wolof (Khouma 2023) and has founded a publishing company, Kanaga Edizioni, together with the Senegalese poet and writer Cheikh Tidiane Gaye. Oreste Pivetta has been a long-standing collaborator with *L'Unità*,²⁶ a journalist, reporter, news editor, correspondent, and chief editor of the literary section. He has also collaborated with *L'Indice*²⁷ and *Linee d'ombra*.²⁸ Among his works published after *Io, venditore di elefanti* are: *Candido Nord: agi e disagi di una provincia perbene* (Pivetta 1993), *Tre per*

²⁵ See *Il polacco lavatore di vetri* by Edoardo Albinati (1989); *Un'ignota compagnia* by Giulio Angioni (1992) or *La tempesta* by Emilio Tadini (1993); *Colpa di nessuno* di Sandro Onofri (1995); *Il ragazzo di Tirana* di Giorgio Saponaro (1996) e *Clandestino* di Erasmo D'Angelis (1996), *La via del pepe* (2014) by Massimo Carlotto; *L'altro capo del filo* by Andrea Camilleri (2016) etc.

²⁶ An Italian political newspaper founded in 1924 by Antonio Gramsci.

²⁷ An Italian cultural information magazine. Founded in 1984.

²⁸ A monthly magazine on culture and politics founded in Milan in 1983 by Goffredo Fofi.

due (Pivetta 1994) and *Franco Basaglia, Il dottore dei matti* (Pivetta 2012). He has also edited *La vocazione minoritaria: intervista sulle minoranze* by Goffredo Fofi (2004).

4. Processing Language

A title: *Io, venditore di elefanti: Una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano*. Two names, Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta, following an *incipit*: “Vengo dal Senegal. Ho fatto il venditore e vi racconterò che cosa mi è successo” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 11). Few words and in the mind of Italian readers expectations would inevitably evoke a specific existential condition, that of an illegal black African immigrant (see Gavins 2007, 1-2; cf. Iser 1980, 36). They would instinctively help build the image of someone everyone recognizes, bearing familiar features, maybe drawn from television images of recent migrant landings or embarking. Readers would recall migration policy promotion through slogans. Moreover, for those who live in Milan, those words might as well conjure up images of the Stazione Centrale, of Parco Sempione full of such people, playing percussion instruments, or of via Settala, via Lecco, via Panfilo Castaldi, via Tadino, viale Padova, viale Monza, of the Bastioni di Porta Venezia, of the Giardini di Indro Montanelli.²⁹

The narrative transforms into a space of encounter between the fictional world represented and its *analogue* construing by readers in their minds (see Gavins 2007, 4-5, 10).

Few words and mental images relating to a specific physiognomy, a distinctive human condition, and a form of existence are set up. These images are *unique* and imbued with personal, immediate sensory, emotive experience, idiosyncratic associations, and cultural or background knowledge, and are interrelated. They refer both to established and conventional *domains* and to elaborate conceptions or various levels of conceptual organization (Langacker 2008, 45).

After the creation of first text-worlds, readers continue processing the text, construing other mental representations (world switches or modal worlds), set up on details provided by the text (Gavins 2007, 23), incorporating conceptual content progressively.

²⁹ For a description of textual processing see Gavins (2007, 28-29) and Iser (1974, xiv). Readers' responses in this article are based on a plausible reading of the text (see Stockwell 2016, 154), by an *implied reader* (Iser 1974, 1980 34-38).

5. Themes, Symbols, and World-switches

What proves to be the intent of Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta—informing readers about the situation of a first-generation of migrants, reporting their condition of pain and precariousness, through the inevitable acquisition of their right to identity, dignity and integration (see Pivetta 1990, 8-9; cf. Pivetta 2010, 7)—is evident from several stylistic choices in the text, or “cunning stratagems” (Iser 1974, xiv), orienting textual interpretation in that specific direction, while engaging readers in sophisticated and imaginative multi-level conceptual construing (see Langacker 2008, 41, 45), or discourse processing. The selection of themes, symbols, and deictic elements has a strong persuasive effect (Gavins 2007, 74), activating prolific inference and implications.

A first inference relates to the condition of precariousness or instability, experienced by the protagonist, activated mainly by forwarding the mobility theme, and prompting the perception of a constant change of location involving the protagonist from the very incipit, where he tells of leaving Senegal to move towards new destinations: “Dal Senegal alla Costa D’Avorio, poi in Italia. Dall’Italia sono andato in Francia, mirando alla Germania [...] Sono tornato in Francia [...] Sono rientrato in Italia...” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 14).

This constant *motion* is recalled in every chapter of the book, to its very *epilogue*, marked by a complex series of world-switches, —occurring when high frequency deictic motion verbs, such as *venire*, *partire*, *andare*, *arrivare*, recur— and by spatial-deictic elements, such as adverbs of place, demonstratives adjectives and pronouns, and space deictic phrases, conveying a strong sense of dynamism. A relevant world-switch occurs at the end of chapter two, projecting readers back to Senegal: “Ma per capirci meglio dobbiamo tornare a Dakar.” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 15). Deictic world-switches play a significant role in the text, orienting readers to new special or temporal parameters related to *motion* or *shifting*. Moreover, they cause readers’ construing new text-worlds through the perspective vantage point of the protagonist, *profiled* as a *mover*. The protagonist who, on his turn, invokes progressively higher-level conceptions at every new step, related to the mechanisms, intents, and necessities of migration seen as a macro-phenomenon from the inside (through the perception and *viewing* or construing of Pap Khouma) and from the outside (reflecting Oreste Pivetta’s organization of *viewing arrangement*).³⁰

³⁰ For the concept of “viewing arrangement” see Ronald W. Langacker (2008, 73).

The entire text contains multiple world-switches, especially relating to *flashbacks* and *flashforwards*, projecting to different time zones and locations, which contribute to a deep sense of disorientation, causing a continual reassessment of the action. See “Il mercato di Abidjan” where the focus of the narrative shifts from Senegal to Abidjan, and back to Senegal, and from present to past and back to present several times (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 19-24). The chapter titled “Da Parigi a Riccione” (56-59) offers another significant example of intense occurrence of deictic world-switches.

The spatial environment changes continuously. The protagonist and his friends travel from Paris to Aix-en-Provence, to Toulon, Cannes, and Menton, back to Nice, reaching Ventimiglia, and heading to Genova, while dreaming of Dakar and Riccione (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 57-59), and so readers.

Even when the spatial and temporal dimensions are unaltered, the sensation of a disorienting mobility is maintained, highlighted by many function-advancing propositions referring to action or to material intention *processes* (deliberate actions) and *material supervention processes* (accidents) (Gavins 2007, 56). The text presents numerous shifts in special and temporal deixis, just as it seems to contain countless switches from one momentary static reflection or description of states to one of intense, dynamic physical movement, in which the protagonist is either the actor or the Goal of the action, remaining the focus of the narrative. Even when new characters or *actors/enactors* are introduced, as in the case of unexpected clashes with the police in the chapter “Neri da Spiaggia” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 29-32). See also the following passage from “Una corsa da spiaggia”:

Nella spiaggia di Marina di Montemarciano non ci sono quasi ombrelloni. La prima volta mi ha portato fortuna [...] Ma ecco che compare una macchina dei carabinieri. Percorre a lieve andatura la strada, a pochi metri dalla sabbia. I carabinieri sono due. Sono di pattuglia. Non so cosa mi prende. So purtroppo che mi metto a correre come un disperato, con le collane attorno alle braccia, i calzoncini che danzano, i miei lunghi piedi che perdono presto i sandali. Le collane volano a terra. Non ho speranze: da una parte c'è il mare, dall'altra l'auto dei carabinieri, alle spalle un carabiniere che mi insegue a piedi, davanti un canale, che è poi una fogna a cielo aperto, a sbarrarmi la corsa e a togliermi ogni possibilità. Mi arrendo, mi fermo. Il carabiniere mi è addosso, rosso, eccitato, sbuffa e bestemmia [...]. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 99).

Expressions profiling actions seem to acquire centrality in the narrative, which develops depending on processes expanding, altering, or complicating any

preexistent text-world configuration (cf. Gavins 2007, 57), conveying a growing sense of instability, precarity, and unpredictability:

Mi afferra per il collo e mi trascina verso la macchina. Sospiro. «Lasciami camminare» [...] Mi sbatte contro la macchina e mi stringe le manette ai polsi. Comincia a picchiarmi. Scende anche il suo socio e volano ancora pugni, calci insulti. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 99).

Action relates to excessive dynamism in the narrative, also highlighted by the replacement of *homes*, —as symbol of stable, secure affective, protective, *intimate* and *emotional* space (Bachelard 1957, 31)— with temporary unsafe accommodations, inhabited by an unspecified number of people, from which it is necessary to escape, due to police raids and other situations of danger. In “Soldi italiani” there are fifteen people in somebody’s rented place (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 33).

The sheltering functions of *houses* are usually performed by city congregation or commercial sites: squares, stations (Khouma & Pivetta 1990 116, 119), bars (92), expensive decrepit hotels (116), and especially by *cars*, as emerges from the chapter titled “La casa-auto” (60). The same title elicits the conceptualization of two *objects* as associated in a conceptual blending, integrating elements from different domains, and related to *stability* and *mobility*, into a new complex hybrid mental construct representing the life of migrants as a condition of *stable fluidity*.³¹

La casa è il sogno irrealizzabile del senegalese clandestino e di qualsiasi clandestino in ogni parte del mondo, che non ha il permesso di soggiorno e, in aggiunta, si presenta al locatore con la pelle tendente al nero, i capelli sempre troppo lisci o troppo crespi, il portafogli vuoto o semivuoto [...] Un nuovo indirizzo ci porta a Cesenatico, in un vecchio edificio abitato — Così almeno si diceva— da cinque o sei fratelli. Ne troviamo qualcuno in più. Ma un letto no. Di un caro e sospirato letto non se ne parla [...] Sono già in troppi. Così unico nostro letto diventa la macchina che parcheggiamo in un luogo buio e riparato. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 60-61).

At the same time, cars do not supply security, comfort, and reliability. They break continuously (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 66-75) and could prove fatal, as in the case of Laman, who dies “schiacciato fra due machine” (77).

³¹ For the phenomenology of the house and the opposition between public and private space in this article see Gaston Bachelard (1957/1984).

In the whole text the protagonist spends his time at no fixed address, homeless, and even when he starts living permanently in Milan, he still cannot acquire the right to a stable house: “Perché non riesco ad avere una casa se mi presento con le carte in regola, un posto di lavoro fisso, i soldi in mano? Perché non ho una casa, anche se leggo scritto «Affittasi?»” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 143). The acquisition of a home in the text refers to the development of an individual’s status or personal, civil, and social identity beyond the urge of basic necessity and needs. The fact that this process of growth is denied to the protagonist, has a strong resonance in readers, especially on those experiencing their integration process, who empathize with him, identifying with the events described, implicating with the story, projecting into his mental world and mapping (maybe personal) his mind, in a process that Peter Stockwell describes as a “bidirectional trans-world mapping between the discourse-world reader and the character” (2009, 93).

The *street*, on the other hand, as anticipated, acquires preponderance and complexity. It is *foregrounded* and designated as dangerous, and through a shift in profile, it is also referred to as a space of encounter or congregation, generating contacts and opportunities. It is the street that often provides shelter, while some of its negative connotations are transferred to the *house*: danger, promiscuity, porosity, and unpredictability. Moreover, the lack of a permanent abiding place reflects on the plot structure in terms of *permanent* action. Lacking a home, the protagonist is represented as shifting from one *world* to another, and in the mind of the reader, this constant mobility, becoming ever more prominent, impacts strongly connoting the existence of a *clandestine* in terms of vagrancy.

The considerations above can be extended to Dakar as a *homeland*. Homes are ephemeral or absent in the novel, and so is Dakar, represented either as an instantaneous backward nostalgic vision (Khouma & Pivetta 1990 58, 83) or as a location characterized by instability, lack of perspective, and occupation. It cannot guarantee shelter, safety, or a dignified life, as expressed in “Africa”, the second chapter:

In Senegal di gente che se ne sta in giro senza combinare niente ce n'è tanta. Camminare lungo le strade bianche di Dakar è l'occupazione nazionale. Il mio paese diviso in caste è povero. Sempre più povero, perché dopo dieci anni di siccità la coltivazione delle arachidi è andata in crisi [...] Il Senegal è povero e la gente protesta, ma sa che non otterrà mai nulla. [...] L'Africa è governata male. Troppi profittatori. Puoi anche studiare e lavorare, ma non cambia, perché chi comanda non è disposto a concederti

un po' del suo spazio. Così la gente se ne deve andare. Ha speranze solo se fugge, se riesce a raggiungere l'Europa. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 17).

In “Africa” readers are prompted to a view of Senegal and Dakar as consistent examples of fragile environments, characterized by corruption, unemployment, poverty, empty protests and promises that lead to hopelessness, that not only affect the individual, but the entire population, denying any personal development. Dakar is reduced to a necessary point of departure for those who were born there. Nevertheless, both Dakar and Senegal are still viewed with a nostalgic eye, reflecting warmth and beauty, and these feelings are conveyed to readers through chromatic perceptions:

Nei suoi tramonti mi rivedo ancora. Tramonti sull'oceano, lungo le spiagge, tramonti che spargono all'infinito I nostri colori, il blu, il rosso, il giallo, i colori dei nostri vestiti. E intorno a Dakar la campagna verde, nel silenzio. A noi piacciono i colori vivaci. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 18).

Although spatiotemporally distant, readers acquire the vantage point of the protagonist, empathizing increasingly with him because of his personal situation, characterized by constant wandering, roaming, and alarm, while preferential, probable, and accessible domains are activated (see Langacker 2008, 49).

5.1 The right to personal identity

Gradually *Io, venditore di elefanti* turns into what could be viewed as a narrative focusing on self-determination and on a dynamic process of acquisition of individual's right to personal identity, as anticipated from the very title, starting with the *foregrounding* of the first personal pronoun “Io”, referring to the homodiegetic narrator, (fixed/internal) *focalizer* and protagonist, who addressing readers directly: “vi racconterò” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 11), involves them in the fictional world as *text-world enactors* (Gavins 2007, 41) in the addressee or narratee role.³² Readers, responding to prompts from the text, assume the vantage point of the protagonist, —who is constantly onstage, — adopting his first-person narrator's perspective through which the story-world is built.³³ Projecting to his *origo*, they encounter his friends and connections

³² “Enactors are simply different version of the same person or character which exists at different conceptual level of a discourse” (Gavins 2007, 42, 64). See Emmott (1992).

³³ The protagonist/narrator is the narrating enactor in the readers text-world.

—often presented as actual story-world instances, as enactors, or as grammatical subjects— who, although playing a participatory role, are only incidentally functional to plot progressing. Paolo il Nero, Silla, Double Malow, Ma, never acquire any viewing or building role, overlapping with one another into a collective whole. They are soon neglected (see Stockwell 2009, 22), disappearing into a unitary entity.³⁴ Almost all mental processes from the narrative relate to the protagonist, functioning as a sensor, when not as an *actor*. All along the text, only the narrator/protagonist, or his *enactor*, incorporates the functions of a spokesperson, and of a subjective viewer of the collective whole mentioned, as marked by the use of *Noi* and *Tutti*, allowing readers a comprehensive and deeper apprehension of the phenomenon of migration extending from Africa to Italy, and at the same time the construal of a perceptive individual experience, engaged or struggling in the process of being *seen* from within a relational and cultural whole.³⁵ Nobody else in the narrative is given prominence as the subject of conception and viewer (see Langacker 2008, 77-78) or addresses readers directly, even when granted the benefit of first-person direct discourse. It is only through the perspective of the protagonist, his epistemic-worlds (see Gavins 2007, 133), his knowledge (*logos*) and his emotion (*pathos*) (see Lahey 2016, 35), while treating him as a real person, inferring feelings, goals, expectations sustaining, supporting them, etc. (Stockwell 2009; Whiteley 2016, 173), identifying with him, that readers get emotionally involved with the narrative and construe how a migrant feels while struggling to exist. And it is through his energy and worlds that discourse on migration in Italy may be or might have been stimulated and affected, and so the discourse-world related to the text (cf. Lahey 2016, 34, 46-49; Iser 1974, xi).³⁶

The struggle for the acquisition of a personal identity set up in the narrative is progressively evoked using a specific and *definite* language (see Stockwell 2009), implying complex choices, negotiation, and compromises by the two authors, to convey how the *other*, profiled both collectively and individually, perceives the world and is perceived, through personal life experiences, emotions and strategies developed to handle them. As already noticed, the language selected is simple, direct, conventional, sometimes crude, and has a

³⁴ They are quickly foregrounded and backgrounded.

³⁵ A complex relational and cultural organic whole consisting in a multiple-component entity introduced in a first-person narrative as events occur.

³⁶ Wolfgang Iser highlights how the novel as a genre is strictly related to social, historical norms and problems, calling readers to the formulation of solutions and to a deeper understanding of their own world (1974, xi).

strong impact, inviting and facilitating constant incrementation of existing knowledge frames and redefinition of key concepts, disrupting readers' knowledge of the world, leading to a reconsideration of many stereotyped images, including that of the black-African seller from the *incipit*. The sentences are short, their syntactic structure is linear, paratactic, and accumulative, with few puns, no virtuosity. It includes no or very few allusions, many lexical associations, and parallelisms, but no excessive interlinear referencing is detectable. The text is rich, but never so dense³⁷ as to make readers feel it as "overloading" (Stockwell 2009, 66). It is captivating and emotionally involving in its simplicity. The rhythm is sustained, light, fast-pressing, and marked by repetitions in the use of direct speech (cf. Pivetta 2010, 7-8). At times, it conveys a sense of ironic cheerfulness that captures readers, putting them in a frame of mind that encourages optimism and sympathy towards the efforts sustained by the protagonist. The use of simple language is also evocative of the necessity of the *other* to find expression through simplification in a vehicular language, avoiding complex syntactic and grammatical structures and markers, while favouring the immediacy of frequent lexis. See the scene of the protagonist setting foot in Italy for the first time and the language used:

Stavo camminando verso il posteggio dei taxi, quando incontro un altro senegalese. Mi chiede se in aereo c'era una donna senegalese. Aspetta la moglie.

«Nessuna donna. Solo maschi».

«Sicuro?»

«Sicuro, solo maschi.» Aggiungo: «Vado a Riccione e sto cercando un taxi». Lui sbarra gli occhi: «È da anni che vivo qua e non ho mai sentito parlare di questa Riccione. Significa che è lontana. Andiamo a informarci. Prendiamo il pullman e andiamo alla stazione. Lì potremo sapere». Questo mi fa perdere tempo. «Andiamo a informarci, andiamo a informarci, mai sentita Riccione», insiste. Alla fine, mi convince.

(Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 26-7).

All those linguistic characteristics help build a precise and progressive *resonant* and intuitive image of the protagonist, providing the reader with those textual cues necessary to make inferences and to respond emotionally to his personal state, and through him, to the general situation of migrants.

³⁷ There are many dense passages in the text, but they are functional to the selection on specific elements blurring others, orienting readers to preferred responses, and never generating total attentional saturation.

The relevance of the protagonist is oriented through specific features, sedimenting gradually in the texture of the narrative, and denoting his personal prototypical path to self-determination and personal-identity acquisition. His development through text-worlds is associated with elements related to “newness” and “agency” (related to new states, processes, entity, objects): “topicality,” “empathic recognisability,” “definiteness,” “activeness,” “brightness,” “aesthetic distance”, all attracting powerfully the attention of readers (Stockwell 2009, 25). Nevertheless, his name is never mentioned in the whole text, and readers, depending on their disposition, may come to the gradual realization that, although a specific person is singled out from the rest, a full *status of individuality* is not being granted to him, who is referred and referenced mostly to his social collective status: that of a migrant. Moreover, readers, learning directly from the protagonist, that he uses the name Pascal — “quando mi devo mimetizzare” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 26-7)— to protect himself, as do animals in the jungle, establish a stronger compassionate connection with him.³⁸

5.2 Being a Migrant

The status related to being a “migrant” in the text recalls a notion build in the mind of Italian readers on expectations based on experiences of migration in Italy. The authors are well aware of some of them when immersing in the discourse-world, trying to elicit a precise conception of the phenomenon through textual building components, and orienting readers’ perception to a *preferred reading* (meaning) or meaning-making (Stockwell 2009; cf. Iser 1974, xiv) of a well-known phenomenon.³⁹

The opening of any narrative is usually highly attractive for readers, occupying a *privileged position* (Rabinowitz 2002, 300 in Giovanelli 2018, 186), framing its events, foregrounding specific elements, providing a setting and a description of the protagonist, an introduction of the textual world and usually setting its tone and stirring expectations and knowledge. In the crafting of the

³⁸ Names, especially traditional ones, are often seen with prejudice, as they could lead to stigmatization, derision, humiliation, and are omitted or go through processes of re-normalization, emphasizing refusal of all those processes that support the acquisition of a sense of individuality and of identity in favor of prejudice and preconceived ideas (Mengozi 190, 149-159). Often nouns in *Wolof* are adopted as means of protection or concealment as expressed by the protagonist (84).

³⁹ A preferred response is this analysis is the answer wished by the authors to originate in the mind of the reader and elicited through textual cues (cf. Stockwell 2013; Giovanelli 2018, 185).

incipit of *Io, venditore di elefanti* specific time or place have not been clearly established. Only farther on, in chapter one, “Vendere”, after several world-switchings, readers learn that the protagonist eventually arrives in Milan. The narrator does not inform about when it happened, nor if the entire action related will take place there, or if it all will start from there. This indeterminacy or irrelevance of a clear setting, construed through a sequence of generic time markers such as *now*, *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, *before* and *after*, or referring to places and spatial areas which are never described in detail, if not in a few instances, contributes to a general dislocating effect and to a timeless quality of the atmosphere in the setting introduced, expanding *processing time*, and prompting the construing of text-worlds characterized by an overall spatial and temporal configuration, giving emphasis on *indeterminacy* (see Langacker 2008, 79-81). Indeterminacy which equates with the preconceived idea of migration related to vagrancy already referred to:

C'è voluto un po' di tempo e di avventure prima che io arrivassi a Milano, dove sono stato un inventore, perché i primi mercati nella stazione della metropolitana li ho messi su io con tre compagni. Adesso, come vedete, i senegalesi sono in tutti i magazzini della metropolitana e non c'è verso di cacciarli fuori. Sanno far valere le loro ragioni. Ma allora avevamo cominciato in quattro [...] Ne abbiamo passate di tutti i colori, Ma continuando sempre a vendere. Vendendo abbiamo guadagnato i soldi per mangiare e dormire al coperto. Non sempre, ma spesso. Vendendo ho anche imparato l'italiano. Qualcuno prova a cambiare mestiere, nella speranza di una vita tranquilla, di trovare una casa, di rimettere insieme una famiglia. E fa bene. Ma vendere è un gran mestiere. Non c'è da vergognarsene. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 12-3).

There are objects mentioned in the narrative, *foregrounded* as exotic, they instantly attract the readers attention: “farfalle sottovetro o avvoltoi di osso” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 13),⁴⁰ “Famiglie di elefanti, zanne d'elefante intarsiate di finto avorio, maschere d'ebano, bracciali d'argento, orecchini d'argento, anelli d'argento, denti di drago, cinture di cuoio, fermacarte di pietra e soprattutto fruste lunghissime che usano i nostri contadini.” (11). Readers, scanning through all those prototypical nouns, —with later additions of “maschere” (61) “anfore di ottone” (112) and traditional clothing— and especially the whips, which are referenced with “I nostri contadini”, resort to their previous knowledge of Senegal, of Africa and then of the *other*. The text-

⁴⁰ Schemas, experiences attached to those items help readers build a mental representation of the scene.

worlds created from the title and introduction are reaccessed, reconceptualized, and expanded, building up a progressively detailed conception of the existential condition of migrants and of a migrant, through the accessing of new items perceived, prompted, and referenced to it.

Function-advancing elements (actions, events, processes) make space to further descriptive building components related to the activity conducted by the protagonist. And being a migrant is integrated with being a seller:

È un mestiere difficile, per gente che ha costanza e una gran forza d'animo, perché bisogna usare le gambe e insistere, insistere anche se tutte le porte ti vengono sbattute in faccia. [...] Un mestiere difficile quello del venditore. Faticoso, triste, pieno di umiliazioni. Si girava fino a notte e poi ci si doveva alzare presto per ricominciare da capo e scoprire nuove piazze. [...] Vendere per noi è obbligatorio. C'erano i giorni in cui mi faceva più schifo del solito. [...] Ma la nausea che provavo la dovevo ricacciare dentro. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 11-12).

There is a connection between this activity and *le gambe*, symbol or metonymy designating human mobility, change, and that in the text function as building components extending to notions of *resilience* and *determination*, which interacting with clusters of other conceptual elements, represent the essence of migration through the mega-metaphor LIFE IS A STRUGGLE, extending to all aspects of human life (see Werth 1994). *Le gambe* relate to walking, which is essential to selling, that is hard and requires obstinacy and perseverance, evoked using words like *costanza*, *forza d'animo*, *insistere*, *difficile*, *triste*, *pieno di umiliazione*, *obbligatorio*, and *resistere*. The practice of selling progressively acquires further connotations too. It is referred to as a proper job, a *mestiere*, which involves specific skills: “è un'arte” (12). Among those skills is the ability to observe: “Ero un buon osservatore” (12). It is a job that involves risks related to physical and psychological resistance against self-destruction: “Non ti lavi più, non mangi più, vuoi solo piangere, finisci ubriaco.” (13). Self-destruction is represented directly through the character of Silla (87-99). Selling is also linked to danger and illegality, especially when associated with words like *polizia* and *carabinieri*. It is connected to *illegal immigration*, marginalization, prostitution and to the exploitation of Africa and its people: “Vendiamo tutto: gli elefanti, le collane, I braccialetti, la nostra dignità il nostro lavoro la nostra giovinezza, i nostri sogni (37), to young Senegalise girls who “vendevano tutto, tutto” (65). The whole continent then becomes the embodiment of selling in Italy: “La nostra Africa in vendita” (61). Selling, that in Senegal is related to

family and traditional activities as “il mestiere che si eredita” (14), in Italy becomes synonymous with terms of abuse as in the derogatory neologism “Vu cumprà, vu cumprà” (65), unveiling conceptions eradicated in the *hosting* country.

Selling opens to the perception of a deep incongruity between clashing worlds too, affecting strongly the existence and integration of migrants, cueing dark affective states and negative dispositions predictable in readers, especially when relating to escapes and fights with the police, associating with emotional displeasure towards what is perceived as unjustified violence and injustice towards the *other* as underlined shortly.

The condition of a migrant, anticipated in chapter one, is fully expressed in chapter two, “Clandestino”, in terms of social and political rights and of self-denial:

Un immigrato deve subire, tacere e subire, perché non ha diritti. Deve reprimere dentro di sé ogni reazione, svuotarsi di ogni personalità. Subire con la consapevolezza che questa è l'unica possibilità [...] deve abbassare il capo. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 14).

The use of the modal verb *dovere* elicits the creation of a *deontic modal-world* associated with submission and ideas of control and authority,⁴¹ through which filter the *attitudes* of the authors towards the phenomenon delineated (see Gavins 2007, 90). See also the following passage where the narrator creates a *hypothetical epistemic modal text-world*, reinforcing the idea of submission expressed above, opening reflection on something which may never be actualised in the life of many readers:

Mettiamo il caso che io mi trovi davanti a un poliziotto. La prima regola è dire sempre: «Sì, capo. Hai ragione, capo. Scusa capo». La seconda regola è abbassare gli occhi. È il segno che il clandestino è pieno di riguardo davanti alla divisa. Ha capito bene chi comanda. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 14)

Both the scenes, amplified through many function advancing and world building details, by *repetition* and *parallelism*, prompt specific, humiliating notions of duty, permission, and obligation, referred only to migrants and relating to authority and control, having probably a high emotional impact on readers sensations.

⁴¹ See Gavins (2006, 98-99).

It has already been mentioned that the protagonist's name is never specified throughout the text, signifying identity denial or personal protection, and how the art of selling has been referred to with the abusive collective term "Vu cumprà." Readers then learn that the protagonist's clients also address him with other adjectives related to national identity: "mi chiamavano marocchino" (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 12, 12). The authors' use of these specific acts of denomination or nominalization clearly illustrates how an individual's life is backgrounded in relation to a particular human collective condition: that of African, clandestine, illegal street sellers, who are also migrants (cf. 103). National identity thus dramatically connects to depersonalization, abuse, and mockery. Selling becomes the primary focus, attracting ingrained hostile preconceptions that overshadow individuals and reduce them to an indistinct mass of "puttane and pezzenti" (38). Later, readers witness the protagonist being abused and assaulted by a carabinieri, who addresses him as "maledetto negro" (99). They realize that immigrants are collectively referred to as "marocchini" (103), not just the protagonist, leading to conceptual sensations being perceived as physical pain at this point (see Stockwell 2009, 56).

So far, this analysis has focused on *world-building*, *world-building elements*, and *proposition-advancing components*, eliciting the association of *migration* to feelings of fear, danger, instability, abuse, resistance, anxiety, and pain, while bringing to the surface collective structures *viewing* or conceptualizing and processing the *other as a non-individual entity*.⁴² Now, the focus of the present analysis will shift to expressions relating to dreams and future perspectives, which orient readers to build a different picture, less worrying, but more sorrowful, eliciting feelings of sympathy and solidarity.

5.3. Negation and Boulomaic Modal-Worlds

The dramatic condition of being a migrant delineated, extends now to the *foregrounding* of an opposition between dreams/expectations and reality, usually expressed through various forms of *negation* (see Gavins 2007, 102).⁴³ In the narrative there are many *negation world-switches* introduced by negative syntactic forms such as *niente/nessuno, alcuno, niente, senza*, etc. They relate to

⁴² For the "selection of conceptual content for linguistic presentation" see Langacker (2008, 62–3).

⁴³ As Marco Giovanelli states, in cognitive linguistics negation refers to a comparison between an imaginary and a real situation where one or more elements are lacking (Lawler, 2010) (Giovanelli 2018, 189) and it "evokes as background the positive conception of what is being denied" (Langacker 2008, 59).

readers expectations, repositioning them, defeating them, generating a sense of deprivation, denial, and frustration, stressing prohibition, defying assumptions (Hidalgo Downing 2000):

Ed ora siamo di nuovo senza casa e senza soldi. Riusciremo a racimolare quarantamila lire in tutto per la benzina. La benzina è il nostro oro, il nostro investimento. Senza la benzina non ci potremmo più muovere e non potremmo più vendere [...] Vendere è sempre più duro. Non è come d'estate in spiaggia, tra i turisti rilassati... (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 71).

Negation world-switches in the text operate in opposition to *boulomaic modal-worlds* (Gavins 2007, 98),⁴⁴ opening to a wide antithesis between reality and dreams. Dreams are profiled as fantasies linked to elegant clothes, marvellous cities, beautiful houses, streets and shops, parties and fulfilling employments, as expressed by the protagonist: “Sogno soprattutto bei vestiti e belle scarpe” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 19), functioning as “*virtual* (or *fictive*) instances... invoked for the purpose of specifying the circumstance that is being negated” (Langacker 2008, 36). The protagonist’s dream is a simple one, but powerful for a destitute young man of twenty. Readers are aware of his being denied the opportunity for a life of ease that the objects above symbolize. This awareness results from their immersive experience, toggling along different text-worlds unfolding along the narrative, allowing them a comprehensive *viewing* from which they can predict and assume forthcoming disillusionment, defeat, regret, empathizing strongly with the protagonist, which now could be conceptualized as the victim of an unelidable fate.

Constantly moving across *boulomaic modal-worlds* and *negation-worlds*, reconceptualizing previous notions, participating in the creation of supplementary worlds, readers participate emotionally in the meaning-making of the narrative, predicting disillusion, danger, or regret, contributing building what appears to be the full picture of the personal frustration related to the human condition of migrants.

5.4. Inferring Future

Almost through the entire work, *Io, venditore di elefanti* involves a series of *worlds* and building elements that helped readers conceptualize key concepts such as *integration*, *self-determination*, and *migration*, foregrounding mainly

⁴⁴ Those worlds relate to desires, ideals, intentions and hopes (Gavins, 2007, 94-95).

drawbacks related to them. The conclusion of the text opens to further implications and various inferences. It might be assumed that *others* will go through similar experiences as those related by the protagonist and that even for him, there will be more challenges to come. After he copes with fights, escapes, poverty, and various dramatic accidents involving him and his friends, his living conditions go through progressive change. Thanks to his ability to establish positive human contact, the protagonist stops peddling goods. He moves away from the street, working as an electrician (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 141), ready to inhabit a new existence earned through humiliation and suffering. He rents houses with friends and does not sleep in cars anymore. He is far from the initial condition of vagrancy. He decides to live in Milan permanently, but he is still far from the acquisition of a fixed sheltering intimate space, and much remains undetermined. Problems with the authorities remain and integration problems too:

Mi dispiace dirlo, ma dopo l'arrivo dei permessi di soggiorno, non tocchiamo il cielo con un dito [...] Anzi, grazie ai diritti che abbiamo conquistato, i guai si moltiplicano. Sia il poliziotto sia il vigile sono diventati molto suscettibili. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 129).

The protagonist will continue suffering, negotiating, and undergoing seizure of goods, detention, clashes with the police or “insulti e spinte” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 141-142) to the very end of the narrative. The change occurred is associated with more stress, exhaustion, and further resistance: “Non c'è limite alla resistenza” (129). It is still related to injustice and uncertainty:

Se si presenta la possibilità di un lavoro, ci tocca ancora subire e tacere. Il meccanismo è semplice. Uno viene assunto, secondo il contratto. Poi lo costringono agli straordinari, a lavorare anche il sabato e la domenica e il padrone non paga. Alle proteste, risponde: «Gli straordinari te li pagherò fra due anni. Adesso fai il bravo. » (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 139).

In the end, the same protagonist, always represented or construed in terms of energy and involved in constant action, experiences a sudden physical and emotional breakdown that puts readers in direct contact with the strength, strain, and cost of integration. He is brought to the hospital. Doctors said he was bleeding and that he could have died (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 135). Nevertheless, the last world-switch to the present, marked by the acquisition of citizenships, leads towards further future hopeful prospects and perspectives, capturing the whole span of the process of *integration* under a whole new light,

conducting readers, after many world-switches, to survey the events in the text progressively through a hopeful future.

Migration and integration then, far from having met with any form of resolution, settlement, or reconciliation, suddenly, seem to be both inevitable processes, *projecting* a vibrant *resonance* favourably towards years to come, from a present factual dimension where “I bambini nascono”, conjuring up new scenarios by inference in the prolific mind of readers. Scenarios that are still unrealised, but that are developing in a “here and now” through *epistemic modal-worlds*⁴⁵ from experience, from “la vita che conosco da un tempo, che mi pare lunghissimo” (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 143), *implying* a firm belief or *epistemic commitment* to an imminent actualization in a future time zone (see Gavins 2007, 111-115) (cf. Pivetta 2010, 7-9), opening surely to new *wish-worlds*:

Molti restano, lavorano, vendono, diventano operai, anche se sfruttati più degli altri. Molti restano e conoscono delle ragazze italiane. Si innamorano. Ci sono matrimoni, e poi anche separazioni e divorzi. E poi ancora altri matrimoni e nascono bambini. (Khouma & Pivetta 1990, 143).

6. Conclusion

In this article, the novel *Io, venditore di elefanti* by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta (1990) has been analyzed adopting a cognitive stylistic perspective. Key concepts such as *mobility*, *instability*, *integration*, *identity*, have been referred to structures of form and meaning and to narrative devices orienting readers in text-world building and integration, and have been explored, considering processing of fictional events as a dynamic, elaborate, multidimensional, simultaneous, interactive and heuristic networking, related to experience and context (see Langacker 2008, 10-11, 28; Gavins 2007, 8-9). This study has mainly been concerned with demonstrating how the text analysed, a prototype narrative of migration literature, and especially of First-Generation Italian Migration Literature, provides interesting evidence on specific world-building elements eliciting processing of migration, or the extracting of a conception of migration as a dramatic, but inevitable phenomenon, while offering direct perception on how authors call their readers to possible moral, social and

⁴⁵ See how the last chapter, “Il bambino” presents many epistemic markers: “mi sembra”, “credo”, “ho saputo”, “abbiamo conosciuto” and “la vita che conosco” (140-143).

ideological stance or discussion (cf. Iser 1974, 56; Gavins 2007, 59).⁴⁶ Considering the foregoing analysis, and the interest of Text World Theory in discourse participants and textual processing, it has been argued how the model could offer a theoretical and empirical support in the literary discourse study related to migration and migration voices, especially focusing on conceptual structures associated to ideas and strategies of social control, exclusion, power and authority, race and resentment, without reducing them either to the analysis of socio-political and cultural aspects, or to the investigation of formal aspects. Moreover, it could offer a valuable tool for the analysis of the impact of narrative constructions in migration literature on their effect on discourses that have generated them and on the perception of their authors (cf. Lahey 2016; Stockwell 2016).

While Text World Theory has mainly been employed for insights on readers' conceptual representation and meaning making of the narrative, this essay has also drawn from other cognitive approaches, while focusing on how text's structure reflects on interpretation, response, experience, conceptualization and construing (Iser 1974; Langacker 2008; Stockwell 2009), borrowing flexibly on varied analytical terminology and devices.

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⁴⁶ Walfganf Iser refers to social and historical norms and values being questioned and challenged, and to readers being "forced to take an active part in the composition of... meaning", discovering new perspectives and "escaping from the restrictions of his own social life... towards a conception of human nature and of reality" though cognitive and emotional faculties (1974, xiii).

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