



# Postcolonial Intellectuals: Exploring Belonging Across Borders in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I Am*)

By Sandra Ponzanesi \* (Utrecht University) and Maria Auxiliadora Castillo Soto (Utrecht University)



"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."

## Article

# Postcolonial Intellectuals: Exploring Belonging Across Borders in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I Am*)

Sandra Ponzanesi \* and Maria Auxiliadora Castillo Soto 

Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, 3512 EV Utrecht, The Netherlands;  
m.a.castillosoto@uu.nl

\* Correspondence: s.ponzanesi@uu.nl

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the life writing narratives of diasporic writers in Europe, such as the Italian writer of Somali descent Igiaba Scego, who, through her writing and public role, manages to create powerful interventions on issues of belonging, diversity, and creativity, contributing to a renewed understanding of gender knowledge and cultures of equalities in localized as well as global contexts. This article focuses on her role as a writer as well as a postcolonial intellectual, as she is not just a spokesperson for her community, nor simply a promotor of universal values, but someone who straddles complex positionalities in their location in imperial–colonial orders. We align ourselves with the notion of postcolonial intellectuals as those who speak truth to power on issues of cultural integration and gender equalities). In her autobiographical work titled *La mia casa è dove sono*, published in 2010, Scego draws a subjective map of different places inhabited by her family: Somalia, Italy, and Great Britain, contributing to the understanding of unbelonging and transnationalism through topics of migration, biculturalism, gender, race, and identity.

**Keywords:** biculturalism; culture of equalities; gender knowledge; memory studies; migration; postcolonial intellectuals; transgenerational storytelling; transnational authors



Academic Editors: Suzanne Clisby  
and Mark Johnson

Received: 15 January 2025

Revised: 22 March 2025

Accepted: 25 March 2025

Published: 27 March 2025

**Citation:** Ponzanesi, Sandra, and Maria Auxiliadora Castillo Soto. 2025. Postcolonial Intellectuals: Exploring Belonging Across Borders in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (*My Home Is Where I Am*). *Social Sciences* 14: 209. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14040209>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

The scope of this article is to theorize gender knowledges and cultures of equalities in global contexts through life writing narratives by authors who are recognized as postcolonial intellectuals. This role includes the act of speaking truth to power and of finding new creative ways to preserve untold stories while negotiating their sense of unbelonging and politics of displacement. The analysis of this negotiation is fundamental because it fosters a more inclusive understanding of postcolonial societies and migratory movements. This theorization will be accomplished through a feminist close reading of the autobiography *La mia casa è dove sono*, written by Igiaba Scego. An Italian writer of Somali descent, she demonstrates that “the power of Black literature in Italy—its capacity for truth-telling, historical imagination, and political resistance—is now more necessary than ever, given the current resurgence of fascist populism across Europe and the West” (Smythe 2018).

The book presents Somalia's postcolonial history, which aggravated its political and economic circumstances, while delving into Scego's own personal story, that of her family in the diaspora, as well as their multiple belongings. This opens up questions about the role of literature in opposing cultures of inequalities and broadening gender knowledges from a postcolonial perspective. As a postcolonial intellectual, Igiaba Scego employs life writing as a strategy to denounce past and present postcolonial injustices. She acknowledges the literature's fundamental role in this matter, as expressed in a recent interview: “The

system turns us into numbers. These numbers need to be transformed into stories, faces, relationships, eyes that gaze back at you, and this transformation is only possible through literature” (Ali 2020).

According to García Peña (2022), postcolonial intellectuals “contradict”, hegemonic narratives through personal counter archives,<sup>1</sup> which challenge ethnocentrism and enhance transnationalism. They share their stories and that of their families to create a collective identity and make these stories relevant for current postcolonial and gender debates. Below, we present the concept of postcolonial intellectuals and its current state. Next, we introduce the concept of life writing and its use by postcolonial intellectuals to speak truth to power and denounce injustice from postcolonial and feminist perspectives. We also explain why we consider Igiaba Scego to be an influential postcolonial intellectual. In the final section before the conclusion, we provide a feminist close reading of Scego’s autobiographical book, focusing on the topics of belonging, biculturalism, and migration through the literary techniques of storytelling and memory recollection that the author employs.

## 2. Postcolonial Intellectuals

Postcolonial intellectuals are public figures who challenge traditional paradigms by addressing issues of colonial history, power dynamics, and cultural representation. The role of the public intellectual involves engaging with marginalized voices and critiquing dominant narratives to foster a more inclusive understanding of society. However, the definition of a public intellectual is contested and encompasses a range of positions, from upholding universal values to engaging in specific political or cultural critiques (Ponzanesi and Habed 2018). At first, the debates around the concept of public intellectuals contested the intellectual itself. Who is considered an intellectual in the first place? Simply put, the intellectual was defined as “a public figure with considerable cultural capital who sides with oppressed people” (Ponzanesi 2021).<sup>2</sup> The result of these debates culminated in a broader definition of the public intellectual to include people from different backgrounds and varying levels of public recognition but also to move away from the iconic and traditional idea of the intellectual as male, universal, and Western. It proposes instead a revision, democratization, and decolonization of the term by also foregrounding writers, artists, and activists (artivists) as people who mobilize public opinion and shape the public sphere in more creative and often collective ways. Think, for example, of societal changes brought about not by solitary intellectual figures but by collective, diffused, and multi-sited actors, as represented by social movements, protests, and activism (Blaagaard et al. 2023). It is within this constellation that we want to reconfigure the notion of the intellectual to accommodate authors and writers who are, as Hall (2002) so effectively put it, “in Europe but not of Europe”, describing his own sense of belonging as an intellectual of Caribbean descent.

In particular, we want to focus on Italian women writers of postcolonial descent who have found themselves straddling a double position as intellectuals, representing both their community of origin and their new multicultural affiliations within Postcolonial Italy. The debates on Postcolonial Italy, the notion of the Black Mediterranean, and the issues of race and blackness have received a great deal of attention in recent years, both in public debates and across interdisciplinary scholarship. Though it is not the main focus of this intervention, we want to acknowledge the nuanced debates around Postcolonial Italy, which have helped to reframe both the discussion around postcolonial identities and the questions of representation and belonging in Italy (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012; Proglia et al. 2021; Brioni 2022; Hawthorne 2022; Pesarini 2023). A postcolonial perspective “can thus create a vital sense of both temporal and spatial continuity regarding the ongoing afterlives of colonization” (Smythe 2018).

It is often said that the Italian colonial experience in the Horn of Africa has not been sufficiently acknowledged, or sufficiently processed, documented, or reckoned with. The so-called Italian postcolonial unconscious is part of the study of “*rimosso*”, the removed traces and memories of Italian colonialism (Ponzanesi 2004). However, through the work of postcolonial writers, the gaze of colonial has been reversed, and notions of memory and re-memory (Marianne Hirsch 2012) have emerged, which trace new paths for alternative storytelling through life writing, a literary genre that intersects with the personal while referencing the collective.

Due to the scope of this special issue, we choose to focus on Igiaba Scego’s work, though other postcolonial intellectuals such as Gabriella Ghermandi, Cristina Ali Farah, Kaha Mohamed Aden, Laila Wadia, and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, to mention but a few, are part of this important discussion. Igiaba Scego is particularly prominent as an intellectual because of her engagement in the public debate both through her writing and through columns in newspapers such as *La Stampa* and *Internazionale*, as well as her social media presence and active participation in book fairs and public debates. The work of the postcolonial intellectual is hardly ever an individualized one precisely because it denounces segregation (Spivak 1988). There is a greater assemblage that these intellectuals are part of, where their contributions nurture each other. Therefore, contemplating Scego’s work as a unique perspective within this broader group is key to understanding its location and participation in the debates. Benedicty-Kokken (2017) suggests that Scego’s “novels reflect an awareness of the realities incurred by the nation-state paradigm, whose political mechanisms determine harsh power relations among the communities who have and continue to circulate across national border”. For this reason, Igiaba Scego’s literary oeuvre is of great importance to the postcolonial field as she deals with issues of colonialism, power dynamics, and cultural representation.

Scego’s singularity in her working through her positionality as a postcolonial intellectual, who actively decolonizes, as per the argument of this present article, braces the role of postcolonial intellectuals through her intervention and public impact, with the aim to rethink Europe otherwise. Through her intellectual work and public engagement, she crosses boundaries and challenges the divides between public and private, inclusion and exclusion, and citizen and migrant, creating counter-publics where sexual, ethnic, religious, and other minoritized groups stake their claims and play out their actions.

In this light, this article has chosen to focus on Igiaba Scego as someone going beyond the traditional notion of the intellectual, embracing her life’s work as symbolizing how the personal becomes political. Her personal accounts and autobiographical writing come to stand for wider constituencies and interests. She therefore might be considered a postcolonial intellectual in the Saidian sense:

*So in the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters—someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers. My argument of the intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television. And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publicly recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability [. . .].* (Said 1993)

In particular, we want to zoom in on one particular work by Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*, which appropriately incorporates the principle of the intellectual as rooted but also “out of place”, someone who is at the same time, to paraphrase Said once more, “unsettled and unsettling other” (Said 1993), uncompromising, as well as offering double insights into realities that would not otherwise emerge. This text is particularly illustrative for the choice of the genre of life writing and the implications for gender knowledges and cultures

of equalities as it embodies the continued commitment and engagement with the question of racial identities and multiple belonging in Postcolonial Italy, narrated through everyday events that become echo chambers for a larger political and postcolonial awareness.

### 3. Life Writing as a Tool for Postcolonial Intellectuals

Life writing<sup>3</sup> is being used by postcolonial intellectuals to bring forth topics that mainly affect nations where colonialism has left a devastating aftermath. As postcolonial and literary scholars, we acknowledge that the life writing field is a vast one, and it keeps evolving as new theories emerge. For instance, some of the most significant contributions to the field have shed light on the different conceptualizations of the narrating “I”. Although the autobiographical field has been severely criticized for the exclusion of different types of narratives, the practice itself has adapted to become more inclusive (Smith and Watson 2024). One of the many examples of this turn is Igiaba Scego’s autobiographical book,<sup>4</sup> which “presents the personal as also political and [...] denounces or implies a denunciation of a group’s marginality” (Sommer 1988), connecting back to the definition of the public intellectual. Through the use of the narrating “I”, the author gives center stage to a knowledgeable narrative voice represented as herself: a second-generation Black Somali Italian woman.

In *La mia casa è dove sono*, the narrative voice introduces the family’s various migratory experiences while presenting Somalia’s political and economic history, transforming the autobiographical narrative into a historical and educational one, where the personal and the collective, as well as the colonial and postcolonial, interlace to contribute to a renewed understanding of gender knowledges and cultures of equalities. From this complex positionality, Scego adopts a political stance through the literature, which is a phenomenon referred to by Jay (2021) as the “‘politicization’ of the humanities in general, and of literary studies in particular”. He continues, “literature has always been engaged with political, cultural, and social issues”. This politicization allows for broader postcolonial discussions and invites different perspectives and stories into the debate.

The consideration of this alternative experience is a step forward towards a more inclusive Europe. Postcolonial intellectuals have taken the power of words through life writing literature to share their own experiences and those of their families, friends, and communities. “In taking the power of words, of representation, into their own hands, women [writers] project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and the unique” (Friedman 1988). This complex position merges both experiences, the individual and the collective, to acknowledge differences and commonalities that diasporic stories might share. Furthermore, Scego (2023) also refers to this power of words and narrates how, when she was in school, she “understood for the first time the power of words. I understood that who speaks or writes is hardly ever alone” (124). She acknowledges her position as a writer and public intellectual and the privileges that come with it to help disseminate those stories buried in a forgetful colonial past. Following Smythe (2018), we consider Igiaba Scego an influential postcolonial intellectual because her work “opens the reader to broader possibilities and conditions for Black belonging beyond the framework of legal citizenship [...] those [like Scego] who have obtained citizenship or are eligible for it, are perhaps best suited to making this violence inherent in citizenship painstakingly clear”.

Although postcolonial intellectuals do not speak for or represent a whole community, through the act of writing, they “interrupt coloniality and refocus history from the perspective of colonized, minoritized, racialized subjects to contradict its violence” (García Peña 2022). They share their unique and partial perspectives to contribute to more situated knowledges. Concerning this, a common critique in the analysis of life writing narratives



is the universalization of the collective (Renders and de Haan 2014). However, our intention is not to blindly support this notion. Instead, by acknowledging situated and partial knowledges as a point of departure, we recognize how interlaced human experiences are. By reading Scego's autobiographical account as a "contradiction", in other words, "against dominant versions of history and accepted hegemonic 'truths'" (García Peña 2022), we recognize its contribution to renewed gender knowledges and cultures of equalities through the impact that this "contradiction" has in understanding postcolonial societies and migratory movements.

#### 4. *La mia casa è dove sono (My Home Is Where I Am)* by Igiaba Scego

Igiaba Scego is an Italian writer of Somali descent who deals with topics of Italian colonialism and blackness in her writing. Scego was born in Rome in 1974 after her parents left Somalia and could not return because of Siad Barre's coup d'état in 1969. Scego's oeuvre deals with topics of migration, racism, identity, women's movements, and first- and second-generation migrants, among other relevant issues today. Her autobiographical book *La mia casa è dove sono* won Italy's prestigious Mondello Prize in 2011. In 2023, it was translated into Spanish, becoming Scego's first work translated into this language. The book consists of eight chapters, six of which are named after well-known places in Rome: *Teatro Sistina*, *Piazza Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, *La stele di Axum*, *Stazione Termini*, *Trastevere*, and *Stadio Olimpico*. Although this naming choice might deceive the reader into thinking that the book is about Rome, in each chapter, the narrative voice briefly refers to the emblematic Roman places to later introduce a member of the Scego family and interlace their unique story with that of Italy/Rome and Somalia/Mogadishu.

The book presents the life of the Scego family in exile, mainly in Italy, while referencing the political and colonial history of Somalia. On a global scale, Igiaba Scego draws attention to the press and governments who are negligent about informing people of the real side of the exile and migration stories; and she is critical of how these same institutions turn a blind eye to important issues in Africa for their own economic benefit. On a more local scale, the author deals with how these topics have affected her and her family, mainly both her parents. For instance, the narrative voice expresses how she suffered from bulimia when her mother went back to Somalia and could not return to Italy because of the war. Those months without her mother were challenging, and this episode exemplifies an important issue that many children undergo today. During these difficult times, the narrative voice adds racist encounters in her school and neighborhood due to her Somali descent and the color of her skin. She adds experiences of people close to her, such as her uncle's friend who suffered a racist attack in Finland, where a group of people carved a swastika on his forehead. Through experiences like these ones, Igiaba Scego brings the readers' attention to those cultural differences in which she herself has experienced unbelonging but also to those similarities that remind her of a community that is not purely defined by the country of origin or physical appearances.

Interestingly, the narrative voice, named after Igiaba Scego herself, uses a singular first-person narration to refer to her own experience, and a plural first-person narration to refer to her family's experiences and that of the African diaspora. For example, the narrative voice expresses how "every migration movement entails the loss of a part of ourselves" (Scego 2023, p. 53). This back and forth of inclusion/participant and exclusion/witness presents the reader with different voices and an opportunity to relate to one or the other, depending on their background. Although Scego is not a migrant herself, she uses her position as a postcolonial intellectual to expand and articulate cultures of knowledge in regard to migration based on her family's experiences. In addition, this shows the different position of expertise from which the author speaks, "taking [herself] as both subject and

object” (Smith and Watson 2024). Furthermore, the title *My Home is Where I Am*,<sup>5</sup> as translated into English, can be seen as a denationalization statement, referencing the idea that regardless of the place of birth, nationality, or other identity markers, “home” becomes a subjective endeavor experienced differently by everyone.

The book’s first chapter introduces a family dinner where the narrative voice, her brother, nephew, and cousin start drawing a map of Mogadishu and remembering those places, which physically do not exist anymore but evoke great memories and a sense of belonging and community. They all present different migratory experiences themselves, and although the drawing of the map happens in the city of Manchester, the narrative voice references how the scene looks like a joke in which an English man, his son, a Finnish man, and an Italian woman sit together to try and reconstruct a part of themselves (Scego 2023, p. 6). Because of the creation of the imaginary and subjective map, Scego’s autobiographical narrative has caught scholars’ attention, and it has been analyzed from different cartographic perspectives (Benini 2014; Carroli and Gerrand 2011; Ferrari 2022; Mengozzi 2016; Paynter 2017). However, our focus here is on the themes of biculturalism and migration exposed through the transgenerational storytelling and memory recollection that the author uses to advocate against a culture of inequality and to broaden gender knowledge in local and global contexts.

#### 4.1. Memory Recollection and Intergenerational Storytelling

Memory recollection and storytelling are tools commonly used by postcolonial intellectuals to honor knowledge creations that have been undermined. The access to these alternative methods allows for the formation and establishment of a lifeline that accounts for disregarded and untold past stories, especially of African communities. For decades now, feminist scholars have condemned the hegemonic one-sided history, which is mainly male and white-centered; this condemnation has allowed for previously ignored knowledges to emerge. In this regard, Nestle (1987) argues that to have women’s writing “is to have a memory not just of our own lives but of the lives of others, people we have never met but whose voices and action connect us to our collective selves”. In doing this, Igiaba Scego connects the memory of her family and its members to the collectivity and individuality of the Italian/Roman and Somali/Mogadishu people. The author uses these two techniques to expand postcolonial and gender knowledge to advocate against cultures of inequality through the remembrance of the past and present Somali diaspora in Italy.

The debate around memory recollection in life writing has raised questions about the validity and reliability of this device in rebuilding truthful stories. However, “autobiography also asks of its readers that they be open to the complexities of truth. These include the work of memory and the gaps produced by forgetting” (Marcus 2018). In Scego’s case, the author has the aforementioned power of words and uses “fictional techniques such as dialogue, characterization, and metaphor [...] to problematize the factual, thematize indeterminacy, or project self-fracturing and the failure of memory” (Smith and Watson 2024). In the analysis of life writing, scholars have proposed the fragmentation and failure of memory as an undeniable component in the creation of these narratives. Authors decide what and how to write, so regardless of whether it is a result of a memory deficiency or a conscious decision, their stories present the author’s interpretation of the events. Therefore, it is fundamental to acknowledge both the partial and located perspectives of these works, as well as any other work for that matter. By integrating this recognition in the analysis, we avoid the universalization of both collective and individual experiences.

Nonetheless, the one-sided perspective of stories is not a reason to disregard their cultural and social importance. These perspectives are needed to juxtapose with traditional hegemonic stories that have been categorized as universal, leaving out divergent experi-

ences. Throughout Igiaba Scego's story, the narrative voice is conscious of the challenges presented by memory recollection, and she refers to its tricks: "I have tried to tell here the fragments of my life, of my itinerary. Fragments because memory is selective" (Scego 2023, p. 127). By acknowledging this, the narrative voice externalizes the story's partial and located perspective, and she positions herself against a universalizing positionality. Furthermore, memory recollection is used to bring forward overlooked topics concerning marginalized groups to present-day debates. Smith and Watson (2024) refer to this use of memory as "a means of 'passing on,' of sharing a social past that may have been obscured, thereby activating its potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects. In sum, however personal, acts of remembering are fundamentally social and collective". Scego's (2023) story expresses this desire for transformation via women's voices in general, as well as those of Black women and women of color specifically, such as her mother through storytelling and herself through writing:

*The story of that organ always reminds me of the memory of those women, which has also been burned, silenced, and perverted. Regardless of the horrors committed against our bodies, we have found the strength to overcome the infamous betrayal of silence. Our tongue is the codex of our latent heart. Thus, I draw a collar of hearts on the map for all those women who have raised their voice despite uncountable difficulties. For my mother, who knew when to raise it when it was necessary. For my writing today, which owes a lot to all those brave voices. (pp. 40–41)*

Memory recollection finds its output through storytelling, and in Igiaba Scego's book, it is intergenerational storytelling which guides her autobiographical work. The narrative voice attaches great importance to the Somali tradition of storytelling as it was an essential part of her childhood. During the times she visited Somalia, what impressed her the most was that "the word had a place of honor, and everyone would practice its use, full of wisdom" (Scego 2023, p. 119). Intergenerational storytelling is a way to keep memory and tradition alive, especially in Scego's family since her mother belongs to a nomad culture characterized by the extolling of their orality. However, even her father, who had a career as a diplomat, transmitted to her valuable information through storytelling in the Chimwiini, Bravanese, and Somali languages. "For me, to talk with him has always been as to look through a three-dimensional history book" (Scego 2023, p. 36). Furthermore, the narrative voice references how these stories serve as an outlet to escape the difficult realities that people who migrate face, such as racism, feelings of unbelonging, and separation from loved ones.

Additionally, these intergenerational stories function as a means to keep a collective memory alive far away from what used to be "home". Smith and Watson (2024) refer to intergenerational life writing as "ways in which generations carry different histories and explore[] those histories of everyday trauma that are embodied in the next generations [...] The traumas [from both victims and survivors] of everyday life are thus remembered as collective and systemic". In this sense, the narrative voice realizes that her mother's stories "had an objective: to help me understand that we had not come from nowhere. That behind us was a country, traditions, and a story [...] She wanted me to be proud of my black skin and of the land that we had left behind due to *force majeure*" (Scego 2023, p. 122). These intergenerational stories enhance in the narrative voice, namely a feeling of collectivity when racist acts are used against her as a way to weaken her sense of belonging and isolate her. By using these two mediums, storytelling and memory recollection, Igiaba Scego addresses important themes to expand gender knowledge and cultures of equality in relation to the African diaspora in Italy: biculturalism and migration.



#### 4.2. Biculturalism and Migration

The emphasis placed by Igiaba Scego on migration stories and feelings of unbelonging advocates against nationalist sentiments that justify exclusion and discrimination. The use of storytelling and memory recollection to address these topics contributes, on the one hand, to renewed gender knowledge, as orality is a practice traditionally attributed to women, and, on the other hand, to cultures of equality, as these stories foster an understanding of postcolonial societies. We refer to biculturalism to denote the narrative voice's constant references to living in between spaces, where "the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (Bhabha 2004). It is important to mention that the term falls short as a description of the complex positionality of a person who migrates. However, in Igiaba Scego's story, the references fluctuate between Rome/Italy and Mogadishu/Somalia, two specific cities/countries which, according to the author, have "many points in common" (Scego 2023, p. 4). Therefore, the term biculturalism broadly refers to living in between these two cultures, acknowledging that these cultures and places hold differences within them as well. Scego is aware of the different roles she plays in society, and she is continuously questioning her own identity and sense of unbelonging. "What am I? Who am I? I am black and Italian, but I am also Somali and black. So, am I Afroitalian? Italiafrican? Second generation? Of an uncertain generation?" (Scego 2023, p. 21). At times, this uncertainty is not satisfactory, and there is an innate need for a definition. Nonetheless, this in-betweenness is eventually recognized, and it becomes a bicultural positionality. "I am Italian, at the same time, I am not. I am Somali, at the same time, I am not" (Scego 2023, p. 126). This identification echoes what scholar Moraga (2021) asserts as a Chicana scholar: "I am woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue". In addition, in Scego's case, she does not experience this in-betweenness alone, as the Scego family, although in different ways, experiences it communally.

Even though there is a bond that connects the Scego family, various situations separate them physically from one another. Nowadays, the different migratory movements around the world have resulted in families growing apart, and individuals having to constantly reconfigure their identities and positionalities. "We were part of the same family, but we all had traveled different itineraries. We each had in our pocket a different occidental nationality" (Scego 2023, p. 6). In these circumstances, holding onto the communal serves as a foundation to navigate the in-betweenness. For this family, navigating biculturalism allows them to survive in a white-centered European country, more specifically Italy. Through this negotiation, Scego supports Anzaldúa's (1990) statement that "[r]acial purity, like language purity, is a fallacy". For Scego (2023), "[n]o one is pure in this world. We are never just blacks or whites, but the fruit of an encounter or a disagreement. We are crossroads, places of passage, bridges" (p. 60). Furthermore, Scego highlights this topic's importance by appealing to the reader's solidarity. The narrative voice explains how the family's coming together to draw the map "is the center and the periphery as well. It is Rome and it is Mogadishu. It is Igiaba, but it is also you" (Scego 2023, p. 127). She explicitly refers to the topic of migration as a communal concern that also applies to the reader, regardless of whether they have migratory experience or not.

Although Igiaba Scego is not a migrant herself, she creates different voices and stories to represent varied familial migrating situations, with her mother's and father's stories being the plot's backbone. Her mother, for instance, "had to 'remap' her own life. Yes, remap. Not rebuild, not renovate, but remap. She had to trace a new and a personal geography. To trace new lines, new margins, other parables. The space around her had changed once again" (Scego 2023, p. 44). As a nomad, her mother had already changed her lifestyle when she got married, not knowing that in the future she would have to resettle in a different continent altogether. On a similar note, her father "was also forced to leave the

country. He had to choose between collaboration with Siad Barre's military dictatorship or being murdered, so he opted for exile and, with it, a new land: Italy" (Scego 2023, p. 35). These two migratory journeys greatly influence Igiaba Scego's experiences as a Black Italian of Somali descent. She acknowledges her privileges as an Italian, such as having an identity card and escaping war in Somalia. Nonetheless, she also shares the added difficulties of moving between these two positionalities due to Italy's denied colonial past.

Scholars in the Italian context have spoken up against the dismissal and deliberate forgetfulness of Italy's colonial past (García Peña 2022; Ponzanesi 2004; Paynter 2017; Virga 2019). This forgetfulness has proved detrimental to those who are considered outsiders, regardless of whether they were born and raised in the country or not. For instance, Scego recounts the various racist episodes that she and her family endured since she was a little girl. She remembers people making fun of the color of her skin and her religion. Also, people calling her derogatory names too cruel for a child to understand and explicit enough to leave a deep wound. With this autobiographical text, Igiaba Scego raises her voice to denounce the unfair treatment that she and her family have received from an Italian society that "had forgotten its colonial past. It had forgotten that the Somalis, Eritreans, Libyans and Ethiopians had lived through hell in that past. It had wiped that history out with a stroke of the pen with astonishing ease" (Scego 2023, p. 9). Igiaba Scego's autobiographical work is important because it fights this amnesia and accentuates themes of biculturalism and migration in the Italian literature through storytelling and memory recollection. As a postcolonial intellectual, she "speak[s] back to the violence of Italy's (and by extension Europe's) contemporary immigration policies and attendant xenophobic sentiments, and how they respond to histories of colonialism and occupation" (Smythe 2018). Scego transforms numbers into real people, and through literature, she invites the reader to take part in such important postcolonial debates.

## 5. Conclusions

In the contemporary era, characterized by the pre-eminence of social media, the role of public intellectuals has undergone a significant transformation. Historically, intellectuals were regarded as iconic figures, operating in a highly individualized and solitary capacity. However, in the current paradigm, their role has evolved into that of collective, diffused, and multi-sited actors. Despite the fact that postcolonial intellectuals generally adopt a critical stance towards Europe, they seldom repudiate their engagement with the continent (Ponzanesi and Habed 2018). This is primarily because they seek to expose the imperialist nature of European modernity. Postcoloniality denotes not only the condition of the object or subject of inquiry but also, and above all, a perspective that the subject adopts in articulating its claim to knowledge. Consequently, it is not the empirical fact of a given location that characterizes postcolonial intellectuals, but their politics of location (Rich 1986; Isin 2018). Similarly, a postcolonial investigation of postcolonial intellectuals in Europe, as redundant as this may sound, should not reproduce (epistemologically) the Eurocentrism that many postcolonial intellectuals have been—and still are—committed to countering.

As Appadurai (2019) has stated, it is essential to construct new archives for the narratives of migrants and postcolonial intellectuals in Europe in order to loosen the strictures of citizenship and nation-building presently asphyxiating Europe. This is highly relevant in a (Western European) society where conceptions of a neutral public sphere and civic institutions are challenged by (subdued or denied) ethnocentrism, rising populism, transnational opinion networks, and new media. García Peña (2022) reminds us that

*Second Generation Italian writers, artists, and activists of color are leading the political struggle through cultural interventions that shatter the silenced history of Italian colonization and translate the struggle of Black Italians to a large global audience through*

*a recognizable language of racial equality, immigrant struggle, African diaspora, and human rights. This dual intervention is creating alternative, contradictory, and complementary archives through the inclusion of past and present nontraditional materials (oral narratives, fiction, songs, and even hearsay).*

Igiaba Scego's writing has become a platform for the denunciation of oppressive actions targeting the African diaspora in Italy. More specifically, the author proposes social and gender justice through her stories, granting great importance to Black women's voices. Scego's autobiographical novel and her oeuvre "contradict" the hegemonic discourses and create personal counter archives that present alternative stories that greatly influence historical development.

We can conclude that postcolonial autobiographies such as Igiaba Scego's novel contribute to a new understanding of the memories of Europe and not only rewrite the colonial past but also infuse the postcolonial present with powerful interventions on issues of belonging, diversity, and creativity. *La mia casa è dove sono* describes what it means to belong to multiple frontiers and to connect to vast diasporic networks, which are as powerful as they are precarious in their ability to keep together the fragments of a nation such as war-torn Somalia. Migration is the vantage point from which biculturalism is cherished, and women's orality and lived experiences become of great importance as they manage to patch together the thread of memories and communities that would otherwise be lost. Postcolonial intellectuals, such as Scego, hold power through their own lived experiences, and it is by the means of storytelling and memory recollection that these varied experiences advocate renewed gender knowledges and cultures of equalities in localized as well as global contexts.

**Author Contributions:** Writing—original draft, S.P. and M.A.C.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was supported by the 101073012 EUTERPE HORIZON-MSCA-2021-DN-01 Project.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author(s).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Smith and Watson (2024) argue that although "archives may seem to be objective sites of authoritative evidence, they are qualified by the historical formations of colonialism and imperialism in which they arose; therefore, such 'evidence' can be questioned and subjective sites of knowledge validated as aspects of personal archives". Following this idea, we consider Igiaba Scego's life writing narrative to be a personal counter archive that makes migration and diasporic stories visible from a subjective site of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> See Ponzanesi (2021) for a more detailed account on the evolution of the concept of the postcolonial intellectual.

<sup>3</sup> The life writing theoretical field has expanded as more scholars acknowledge its meaningful contributions to academia and society. Although the spotlight has been historically taken by biographical and autobiographical works, life writing was created as an umbrella term to consider different types of texts and narratives, especially those more commonly written by people in marginal situations, such as letters, diaries, travelogs, and even social media. In this sense, "building on the democratic ideal that all lives and modes of life documentation are of interest and deserve recognition, life writing studies aims to be more inclusive across subject and genres" (Boter and Rensen 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Following Smith and Watson (2024), we prefer the term autobiography over autofiction because "categorizing their interventions in autobiographical norms and conventions as autofiction is politically undermining; it effectively erases the realities of violence

and neocolonial afterlife". However, we also acknowledge that a stark definition of constantly evolving life writing concepts and concepts whose definitions interlace is problematic.

5 The book has not yet been translated into English; therefore, we offer our own translations of the text in the analysis.

## References

- Ali, Ashna. 2020. Activist by Default: An Interview with Igiaba Scego. *Minnesota Review* 94: 157–66. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1990. En Rapport, in Opposition: Cobrando Cuentas a las Nuestras. In *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, pp. 142–47.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2019. Traumatic Exit, Identity Narratives, and the Ethics of Hospitality. *Television and New Media* 20: 558–65. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Benedicty-Kokken, Alessandra. 2017. *A Polyvalent Mediterranean, or the Trope of Nomadism in the Literary Oeuvre of Igiaba Scego and Abdourahman A. Waberi*. New York: City College of New York. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Benini, Stefani. 2014. Tra Mogadiscio e Roma: Le mappe emotive di Igiaba Scego. *Forum Italicum* 48: 477–94. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bhabha, Homi. 2004. Introduction: Narrating the Nation. In *Nation and Narration*. Edited by Homi Bhabha. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 1–7.
- Blaagaard, Bolette B., Sabrina Marchetti, Sandra Ponzanesi, and Shaul Bassi, eds. 2023. *Postcolonial Publics: Art and Citizen Media in Europe*. Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari/Venice University Press.
- Boter, Babs, and Marleen Rensen. 2020. Introduction. In *Unhinging the National Framework: Perspectives on Transnational Life Writing*. Edited by Babs Boter, Marleen Rensen and Giles Scott-Smith. Leiden: Sidestone Press, pp. 7–16.
- Brioni, Simone. 2022. *L'Italia, l'altrove. Luoghi, spazi e attraversamenti nel cinema e nella letteratura sulla migrazione*. Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari/Venice University Press.
- Carroli, Piera, and Vivian Gerrand. 2011. La mia casa è dove sono: Subjects and narratives beyond national borders. *Scritture Migranti* 5: 81–104.
- Ferrari, Jacopo. 2022. Parole migranti. I migratismi di Igiaba Scego. *Italiano LinguaDue* 1: 879–928. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Friedman, Susan. 1988. Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice. In *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Edited by Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, pp. 34–62.
- García Peña, Lorgia. 2022. *Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective*. London: Duke University Press.
- Giuliani, Gaia, and Cristina Lombardi-Diop. 2013. *Bianco e nero. Storie dell'identità razziale degli Italiani*. Firenze-Milano: Le Monnier-Mondadori.
- Hall, Stuart. 2002. 'In, but Not of Europe.' Europe and its Myths. *Soundings* 22: 57–69.
- Hawthorne, Camilla. 2022. *Contesting Race and Citizenship. Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Isin, Engin. 2018. Postcolonial Intellectuals: Universal, Specific or Transversal. In *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe. Critics, Artists, Movements, and Their Publics*. Edited by Sandra Ponzanesi and Adriano José Habed. London: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. xi–xiv.
- Jay, Paul. 2021. *Transnational Literature: The Basics*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Lombardi-Diop, Cristina, and Caterina Romeo, eds. 2012. *Postcolonial Italy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marcus, Laura. 2018. *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mengozi, Chiara. 2016. Scrivere la storia significa incasinare la geografia: Mappe postcoloniali. *Etudes Romanes de Brno* 37: 31–44. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Moraga, Cherríe. 2021. La Güera. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Saline: State University of New York Press, pp. 22–29.
- Nestle, Joan. 1987. A Restricted Country, quoted in Brightwell, Laura, and Allison Taylor. 2019. Why Femme Stories Matter: Constructing Femme Theory through Historical Femme Life Writing. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 25: 18–35. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Paynter, Eleanor. 2017. The Spaces of Citizenship: Mapping Personal and colonial Histories in Contemporary Italy in Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (My Home Is Where I Am). *The European Journal of Life Writing* 6: 135–53. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Pesarini, Angelica. 2023. Biopolitiche di razza, genere e cittadinanza nel discorso politico italiano. *The European South* 12: 39–58.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. 2004. *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture. Contemporary Women's Writing of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. 2021. Postcolonial Intellectuals: New Paradigms. *Postcolonial Studies* 24: 433–47. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ponzanesi, Sandra, and Adriano José Habed, eds. 2018. *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe. Critics, Artists, Movements, and Their Publics*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Proglio, Gabriele, Camilla Hawthorne, Ida Danewid, P. Khalil Saucier, Giuseppe Grimaldi, Angelica Pesarini, Timothy Raymaekers, Giulia Grechi, and Vivian Gerrand, eds. 2021. *The Black Mediterranean. Bodies, Borders and Citizenship*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Renders, Hans, and Binne de Haan, eds. 2014. *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*. Leiden: Brill.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1986. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. London: Norton & Company Ltd.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Representation of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reich Lectures*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Scego, Igiaba. 2023. *Mi casa está donde estoy yo*. Translated by Blanca Gago. Madrid: Nordicalibros.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2024. *Reading Autobiography Now: An Updated Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 3rd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smythe, SA. 2018. Black Italianità: Citizenship and Belonging in the Black Mediterranean. *California Italian Studies* 9: 1–19. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Sommer, Doris. 1988. "Not Just a Personal Story:" Women's Testimonies and the Plural Self. In *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck. London: Cornell University Press, pp. 107–30.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1988. Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313.
- Virga, Anita. 2019. African "Ghosts" and the Myth of "Italianness": The Presence of Migrant Writers in Italian Literature. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 56: 102–12. [[CrossRef](#)]

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.