

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Postcolonial female identity in comparative transnational literature

SUPERVISORS

	First name	LAST NAME	University	Research Unit
Supervisor	Cristina	Vignali	Université Savoie Mont Blanc	LLSETI
Co-Supervisor	Carmelina	Concilio	UNITO	

Fields of study

Literature

Requirements (academic background, languages...) needed to apply for this research topic

Degree in humanities, good knowledge of Italian and French, preferably a postgraduate master's degree or academic background demonstrating an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature.

5 main KEYWORDS

Postcolonial, gender, comparative literature, intersectionality, identity

ABSTRACT (250 words max.)

This research project proposes a comparative analysis of the novels by Igiaba Scego, Maaza Mengiste, and Alice Zeniter, respectively an italophone, an anglophone and a francophone author. The goal is to explore postcolonial literature from a transnational perspective by highlighting the convergences and divergences in their literary approaches. The project examines Igiaba Scego's *Oltre Babilonia* (2008), *Adua* (2015), *La linea del colore* (2020) and *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* (2023), Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010) and *The Shadow King* (2019), and Alice Zeniter's *L'art de perdre* (2017). Drawing on postcolonial theories, this project examines key concepts such as the agency of colonized and postcolonial characters, the influence of colonial and patriarchal violence, as well as power relations related to gender, race, and

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social class. The analysis also focuses on how these authors redefine colonial history by deconstructing dominant narratives and giving voice to the often ignored “small voices of history” (Guha 2009). The study also explores the use of colonial languages by these writers, who, after a process of reappropriation, employ them as means of expression to build a complex and multifaceted postcolonial feminine identity.

Research aims and methodology

The project consists of a comparative reading of the novels of the three authors based mainly on subaltern studies and postcolonial studies.

The aim is to study postcolonial female literature from a transnational point of view, focusing on different kinds of approaches and perspectives.

Considering the gap, in the past decades, in the study of colonialism (particularly Italian colonialism) from a historical perspective first and then from a literary perspective, it is important to study the impact of postcolonial literature on contemporary society from a sociological and educational point of view. The goal of clarifying these issues and fully understanding this impact is particularly innovative thanks to an interdisciplinary and comparative approach.

Specifically, the aim of the research will be to identify the fundamental characteristics of the female characters presented by the authors studied, showing the possible trajectories of postcolonial Afro-European female identity with the aim of proposing a postcolonial female counter-canon.

From a methodological point of view, the research will be based on black feminist theories and the intersectional approach, on postcolonial studies and subaltern studies and, finally, on sociological and anthropological studies on colonies.

Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

The goal for this project is to fill the empty space left by current state of knowledge in the comparative analysis of female postcolonial writing. At present, there are studies on various female authors of postcolonial literature, but not with a comparative approach. There is a lack of comprehensive studies in the literary field that consider postcolonial and gender studies from a comparative perspective.

The comparative study of the works examined aims to capture the influences and relationships between Italian, English-speaking and French postcolonial literature, analysing the various forms that the postcolonial approach takes in different contexts of study. The objective is to study postcolonial female identity by highlighting its characteristics of agency, dynamism and changeability. From this point of view, new and polyphonic narratives emerge that can be considered true counter-narratives, from which interesting reflections emerge to further the debate on the method of postcolonial studies and its destabilising role in literature. The novelty lies in the comparative approach to these texts, which allows for the proposal of a female postcolonial counter-canon. In fact, the study of diasporic identity from an intersectional perspective (considering the axes of gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, etc.) reveals innovative and counter-canonical literary models that can broaden and enrich the national literary landscape in the three contexts.

The effects of this research may also be reflected in the world of education, especially in view of the new inclusive direction taken by many educational publishers. A revision of textbooks should go hand in hand with teacher training so that, in addition to having comprehensive and up-to-date tools at their disposal, teachers can make the best use of them.

Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

The candidate's research will be carried out under the supervision of two expert professors: in Chambéry, Cristina Vignali, who is experienced in (Italian) women's literature, and in Turin, Professor Carmelina Concilio, who is an expert in English-language postcolonial literature.

The approach to be adopted is interdisciplinary: literary study will be combined with categories from anthropology, sociology and history of colonial and postcolonial societies. This focus stems from the desire to provide a comprehensive and analytical perspective capable of capturing the different levels of discourse.

For this reason, it is important that candidates have an interdisciplinary background and are familiar with the fundamental categories of the disciplines mentioned, in relation to their connection with the colonial and postcolonial context.

Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

Books and articles will emerge from the thesis.

Outreach activities are planned in cultural centres, schools, libraries, bookshops and associations.

For this reason, the ideal candidate has experience in dissemination, e.g. reading groups, literary workshops, book presentations, etc.

In addition, material for teacher training will be developed, i.e. tools available to secondary school teachers to address the topics covered by the project.

Estimated schedule

First year (Chambéry) → reading of literary works, study of critical texts.

Second year (Turin) → writing of the introductory chapter of the thesis; participation in a conference and publication of an article.

Third year (Chambéry) → thesis writing; dissemination activities.