encompassing approach, Ferrari includes linguistic and musical elements in his analysis, and places each cantautore’s production within its specific set of literary connections.

After a general introduction to each singer, Ferrari examines a selection of each singer’s songs that are representative of certain thematic concerns, which can, by and large, be described as ‘love songs’, ‘engaged songs’ and ‘existentialist songs’. The second chapter deals with Luigi Tenco and Sergio Endrigo. Tenco’s modern or against-the-grain attitude informs his entire production and can account for his difficulty in establishing a gratifying relationship with the public. His unconventional approach to topics such as love and sexuality, and his criticism of society and power, divided audiences. While he managed to give voice to the existential unease that the younger generation experienced during the 1960s, he also made himself unwelcome among more traditional listeners. Social criticism also characterises Endrigo’s production. But Ferrari argues that a Marcusian rather than an existentialist reading of society is at the core of Endrigo’s music. As far as literary references are concerned, Endrigo’s production stands out for the singer’s collaboration with Gianni Rodari and his setting to music of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Soldato di Napoleone.

The third chapter is entirely devoted to the discussion of Fabrizio De Andrè’s work. This choice is indicative of the importance Ferrari recognises in De Andrè within the canzone d’autore scene. Not only did De Andrè critically engage with his social background, but the complexity of his production and its richness in intertextual and literary references also contributed to the cultural legitimisation of the canzone d’autore.

The fourth chapter addresses the production of four cantautori whom Ferrari identifies as ‘less engaged’ and more influenced by lyricism and existentialism: Gino Paoli, Umberto Bindi, Bruno Lauzi and Piero Ciampi. With their different personalities, experiences and takes on the canzone d’autore these singer-songwriters individually developed the intimist, existential approach to the sentimental song that is characteristic of the first generation of cantautori.

Ferrari delivers a comprehensive account of the socio-cultural context in which the first generation of cantautori acted. Although the selection of songs analysed for each singer is obviously limited, their reading in their proper context manages to show their contribution to the transformation of the Italian musical tradition. The first cantautori provided a new reading of the traditional sentimental theme by highlighting the solitude, the dark side of love and the anguishing search for the unattainable that became the trademark signs of the early canzone d’autore (p. 152).

Guendalina Carbonelli
Monash University
Email: guendalina.carbonelli@monash.edu
© 2012, Guendalina Carbonelli


‘If you want to know me fully, you need only observe the way I live, my letters, my speeches, my past action, which are all recorded in the archives of the vilayet’ (p. 7). Mohamed Fekini, the Arab leader who fought the Italian occupation of Libya from 1911 until the Second World War, wrote these words in 1923. Nearly 90 years later, his life,
letters, speeches and actions have become in Angelo Del Boca’s new book a way and an opportunity to see the Italian occupation in a more complete and complex perspective. Fekini was a leading figure in Libya throughout his adult life. He was the mutasarrif (prefect) of the Rojeban tribe during Ottoman rule, the kaymakam (subprefect) of Fassatu during the early years of the Italian occupation, the mutasarrif in Fezzan during the Tripolitanian Republic, 1918–1922, and in the 1930s he was chosen by the Libyan exiles in Tunisia as the general secretary of the alliance of mujahideen of North Africa.

Del Boca’s study, written at the request of Fekini’s grandson, utilises the Arab leader’s memoirs as well as a collection of photos and 335 letters written by Fekini over a 20-year period to the Turkish and Italian authorities and to other Libyan leaders. Del Boca connects these new sources to those already used for his volumes on Italian colonialism from liberalism to Fascism. The resulting work is a tribute to Fekini’s memory and that of his sons, as emphasised by the last chapter entitled ‘Let us restore their dignity’, and suggested by the author’s decision to close the chapter with a poem written by Fekini’s son about jihad, comparable to a chanson de geste. Furthermore, in recounting the military and political efforts of the Fekini family and of their ‘exodus’ through Tripolitania, Fezzan, Algeria and Tunisia, Del Boca not only provides a complete historical reconstruction of one of the most important lives in the history of modern Libya, but he also presents the views of the colonised, integrating them with the reconstruction of Italy’s brutal occupation of the country.

Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya begins in the last period of Ottoman rule. It then follows the Italian occupation and the relationship between the Italian authorities and resistance fighters from the bloodshed of Shara Shat through the ‘Great Arab Revolt’ of 1915 and the birth of the Tripolitanian Republic (a formative experience in the development of Libyan nationalism although one neglected by Western historiography) to the issue of the Libyan Statute in 1918 and the temporary suspension of the armed struggle, before the return to bloody confrontation in the 1920s. The last two chapters focus on the old warrior in exile after 1930, the political and moral role played by mujahideen during the Second World War to help the Allies, and the later actions of Fekini’s sons in independent Libya. The book also reconstructs the internal dynamics of and divisions within the Libyan front, characterised by different personalities with different goals and by contrasting interests and regional and tribal conflicts.

Mohamed Fekini died in exile at the age of 92, a few months before his country achieved independence. His sons Ali Nouredine and Mohieddine continued his efforts to build a new Libya, serving under King Idris al-Senussi, one as an ambassador and the other as a minister, until they were both removed because of their opposition to the excessively conservative policies of the monarch. Ali Nouredine and Mohieddine did not fare any better under Gaddafi, however, even though he used the anti-Italian jihad, purged of any reference to monarchy and Senussi, as a foundation for Libyan national identity. As Del Boca says, although Gaddafi met them repeatedly, he always maintained a suspicious attitude towards the brothers because of the respect in which the Libyan people held them.

The book offers a long view on Italian colonialism and underlines the continuities from liberal to Fascist colonialism, notwithstanding the fact that, with the advent of Mussolini’s regime, the style and the mentality of Italian colonialists changed. At the same time, Del Boca’s volume rejects the Western historical approach that situates the occupation of Libya only as part of Italian history. On the one hand, the book looks at the Italian colonial experience from the perspective of the colonised; on the other, it ties jihad to the birth and development of an independent Libya, and of its national identity.
Today, on the eve of a new chapter in Libyan history, there is cause to reflect on this connection. In October 2011, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, the head of the National Transitional Council of Libya, said that ‘The Libyan people know perfectly that the period of Italian colonialism went together with an era of great infrastructure building and development... All the errors notwithstanding, colonialism can never be compared to Gaddafi’. Even after the Gaddafi dictatorship, the memory of colonial rule continues to play an important role in the construction of public discourse in Libya.

Valeria Deplano
University of Cagliari
Email: deplanova@gmail.com
© 2012, Valeria Deplano


Demetrio Volcic was for many years a reporter for RAI television in Eastern Europe, witnessing first hand its tumultuous passage from Soviet-led communism to post-Cold War democracy. His intense, at times amused, reportage of these crucial events embraced both significant facts and apparently less relevant episodes, which, on closer inspection, revealed new insights into the undercurrents of history. The same mood permeates 1968. L’autunno di Praga, a fascinating account of the Prague spring (January–August 1968), its political and social background, and the ensuing autumn after the August invasion of Czechoslovakia by 500,000 Warsaw Pact troops.

‘Some regions of the world produce more history than others’ (p. 21). With this statement, Volcic introduces the reader to a hectic series of events played out in Eastern Europe in general, and Czechoslovakia in particular: the post-war defeat of the anti-fascist Masaryk government; the Soviet pressure to reject Marshall Aid; the surge of anti-Semitism as a result of the USSR’s diplomatic clash with Israel in the late 1940s; the annihilation of any opposition groups and the relentless persecution of supposedly unfaithful members of the Czechoslovakian Communist party; the subsequent rehabilitation of some dissidents, notably after Khrushchev’s strategic condemnation of Stalin’s purges.

Volcic’s metaphor of history as the result of a production process can be extended to the consideration that this process necessarily implies undesired by-products and unexpected reactions that need to be taken into consideration. As Volcic points out, this risk–benefit assessment of history did not really take place on either side of the ‘assembly line’ in 1968. For his part, Brezhnev underestimated the dissident groups in Czechoslovakia, defined by Pravda as a bunch of ‘right wing opportunists’ (p. 30), and the Czechoslovakian people’s determination not to forget its democratic past. The Soviet Union’s intention to erase the memory of the former liberal president Tomáš Masaryk and of his son, Jan, had been thwarted by a strong, symbolic act, orchestrated by Czechoslovakian students in February 1968: a gathering at the cemetery where the two politicians had been buried. The country’s rediscovery of its past became one of the main reasons for resentment towards Russian coercion, as well as a justification for the Prague Spring.

If Brezhnev miscalculated, so too did the Slovak reformist leader Alexander Dubcek. Volcic describes Dubcek as a law-abiding, irreproachable politician whose background was, oddly enough, conservative. Indeed, he did not intend his reformist project as a