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Antifascist geopoetics, anticolonial dissidence and feminism: engaging with Joyce Lussu's transnational stories

Abstract: *This paper addresses matters of anticolonialist, anti-fascist and feminist geopoetics, analysing a case that is virtually unknown to Anglophone geographical readerships, namely the transnational trajectories and literary works of Italian activist, writer and translator Joyce Lussu (1912-1998). Drawing upon recent literature on geopoetics and literary geographies that commit to produce and analyse 'hybrid texts', I extend and put in communication for the first time scholarship on antifascist transnational geographies and literature on decolonial and feminist geopoetics, by discussing Lussu's exceptional biographical and literary experience, one that first shows the importance of coherence between life and texts. Lussu practiced plural, multilingual and transnational ways to construct (feminist and radical) non-elitist knowledge by taking part in anti-fascist exile and resistance in the 1930s and 1940s. Later, she supported 'Third World' anticolonial and revolutionary movements by translating and internationally circulating poems from politically committed authors, especially from Western Asia and Lusophone Africa. Finally, I contend that Lussu's nonconformist feminism, that she understood as an inclusive antiauthoritarian notion for the construction of a renewed society by deconstructing masculine institutions such as the State, the Church and the Army, can speak powerfully to current debates on scholarly and political dissidences.*

Keywords: Geopoetics; Antifascism; Hybrid texts; Decolonial translation; Feminist autobiography

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This paper addresses original ways of thinking feminist and decolonial geopoetics in connection with transnational antifascism by analysing the case of the diasporic geographies and activist poetry of Italian feminist, writer and antifascist fighter Joyce Lussu (1912-1998). Née Gioconda Salvadori and later married with socialist leader Emilio Lussu (1890-1975), Joyce expressed deep feminist, anticolonial, internationalist and anti-militarist concerns in both her life and works. Drawing upon recent literature on geopoetics and literary geographies, I provide for the first time a geographical reading of Joyce Lussu's transnational trajectories as an anti-fascist activist, a writer and a translator of anti-colonial poets.

My argument is twofold. First, Lussu's experiences can inspire current scholarly conversations through the powerful example of her multilingual, cosmopolitan and extra-academic intellectual work. Eventually, her literary production can serve to connect decoloniality and feminism, already associated in various strands of geographical literature, with antifascist and antiauthoritarian approaches, through geopoetics. To this end, it is worth considering both her ideas and her concrete biographical experience: a bold and independent woman believing in the principle of consistency between ideas and personal life, Lussu chose to work outside official educational institutions, which provides potential insights for contemporary challenges to coloniality and patriarchy in the production of geographical knowledge (Esson et al. 2017; Evans and Maddrell 2019; Radcliffe 2017). Her contributions suggest several possible intersections between feminism, antifascisms and decoloniality through anticolonial practices and grassroots transnationalism. That is, Lussu's feminism, understood as a set of thoughts and practices speaking powerfully to broader perspectives of social change, can contribute to current debates on these themes by rediscovering values of political dissidence, nonconformism and antiauthoritarianism in both theory and praxis.

Second, Lussu's literary works help extending recent claims by authors such as Eric Magrane and Tim Cresswell for geopoetics as a 'hybrid' practice 'that transcends the poetry/non-poetry divide' (Cresswell 2021, 36) and includes: 'Literary-geographic criticism, in which a combination of literary and geographic theory is used to interpret and analyse the poetics of literary texts' (Magrane 2021a, 11), enlarging notions of geopoetics across genres and disciplines. While geopoetics is contributing to the 'creative return' in geography, whose

feminist and decolonial aspects are richly highlighted by current scholarship (De Leeuw and Hawkins 2017; DeLyser and Hawkins 2014; Madge 2014), Lussu's life and work also provide further tools to connect this field with extra-academic activism (Last 2017; Ferretti 2020). Thus, Lussu's 'hybrid texts' can give new contributions to the broad field of 'geopoetic' studies, which is seeking political relevance by addressing urgent political and environmental matters (Cresswell 2022).

Since the 1990s, critical scholarship on women's writing connected feminist geographies with postcolonial literature. Authors such as Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose advocated an 'interaction of gender, class, race and sexuality' (Blunt and Rose 1994, 6) challenging essentialist views of a universal and invariable idea of 'women', and stressing instead ideas of 'situatedness of knowledge' and of the plural 'construction of gendered subjectivity' (Blunt and Rose 1994, 9). However, although not in universalistic sense, authors involved in this debate claimed that 'gender always makes a difference' (Mills 1994, 30). Concurrently, empirical works on postcolonial women's writing addressed the positionality of 'less privileged women' (Adjarian 1994, 5) beyond the mere idea of enhancing female careers by following male models. As I explain below, Lussu's literary 'invention' of the sybil as a woman carrying the memory of different dominated cultures and their anticolonial resistances can speak powerfully to these agendas.

Another aspect of Lussu's writing, that is the autobiographical character of most of her works, matches a well-researched scholarly field on both female and postcolonial writing, analysing a huge corpus of 'autobiographical novels and memoirs' (Laursen 2020, 399), and an established tradition of geographical autobiographies (Buttimer and Hägerstrand 1980; Moss 2001). Recent geographical scholarship stresses the centrality of personal writing as 'part of a wider political feminist project. Personal writing is effective at identifying, describing and contesting existing truth regimes that marginalize, oppress and exploit people' (Donovan and Moss 2017, 14). That is, life writing is traditionally a tool that subaltern and militant women used to exert agency and claim liberation, as Lussu's case well exemplifies. Further connections between feminism and postcolonialism/decoloniality are addressed in increasingly transnational terms, to understand complicated trajectories of migrant women across different languages and

cultures (Blackwell, Briggs and Chiu 2015; Conway 2017; Oza 2016).

While Lussu's life trajectory embodies transnational and multilingual ideas, the very notion of transnationalism potentially connects feminist and post/de-colonial writing to antifascism. By transnationalism, I mean the idea that theoretical concepts and political practices circulate across all kinds of boundaries and can be more easily traced beyond national frameworks than within traditional approaches such as comparative or 'crossed' history (Bantman and Altena 2015). Recent scholarship stresses the transnational and even 'global' characteristics of antifascisms, highlighting the 'abundance and complexity of anti-fascist ideas, movements and practices' (Braskén, Copsey and Featherstone 2020, 2) worldwide, which implies the impossibility of considering antifascism as a coherent 'ideology' but rather as a pluralistic set of ideas and practices, to be also studied through 'cultural practices' (Fitch, Ortiz and Underwood 2019, 2). As for Lussu, these include life narrations, literature and poetry.

Lussu's case also extends and complements recent historiographical works on women and diasporic antifascism in the 1920s to the 1940s, such as Isabelle Richet's works on Marion Cave Rosselli (1896-1949), the English-born wife of one of the leaders of Lussu's political organisation, *Giustizia e Libertà* [Justice and Freedom], Carlo Rosselli (1899-1937). An outstanding figure of transnational scholar and activist, Marion Cave was overshadowed by the reputation of her husband (and of her brother-in-law Nello Rosselli, murdered by fascist agents with Carlo in 1937) who was far from encouraging female leadership in his organisation (Richet 2018). Yet, these works show that women, although 'neglected and minimised' (Yusta 2016, 167) in antifascist historiography, provided original contributions to antifascism in several European countries such as Italy, France and Spain, where thousands of them fought actively in both clandestine activism and armed resistance (Richet 2016). One of the matters that this scholarship raises is that, even when antifascist women were vocal and wrote autobiographical accounts, according to Richet, 'most of them chose to be gender blind' (Richet 2016, 154). Lussu is mentioned as 'the main exception' (Richet 2016, 159) to such blindness, but no specific work on her case has been developed so far by these historians. Thus, there is a lacuna to fill in this field, which is one of the aims of this work.

Constantly suspended between poetry and narrative, history and autobiography, scholarship and activism, Lussu's works chime with current understandings of geopoetics. It is first the case with scholarly challenges to the Eurocentric and 'quasi-colonial, masculine rhetoric' (Last 2015, 57) that informed the notion of geopoetics in its initial setup. Then, recent scholarship considers geopoetics as an increasingly large field of studies (Garbrakova 2010; Vallury 2019), stressing the need to avoid Manichean distinctions between 'geopoetics', 'literary geographies', 'geo-humanities', 'spatial literature' and 'place writing' (Alexander 2015; Hones 2022). In this paper, I understand these definitions as strictly connected and often-overlapping notions, focusing especially on the terms geopoetics and 'literary geography', a definition that was already used in 1905 by Virginia Woolf (Tally 2020, Jayagopalan 2020), an author whom Lussu often mentioned (Lussu 1982).

For Magrane, 'the geopoetic field ... is currently emerging as a subfield of the geohumanities' (Magrane 2021a, 8). That is, geopoetics 'blends the forms of poetry and critical geography' (Magrane 2021a, 11), encompassing a wide range of possible formal expressions such as 'performative practice, site-based installation or field research, community practice, and other forms of artistic product and/or literary essay and multigenre writing' (Magrane 2021a, 12). Assuming that: 'If the earth is a composted poem, then poems are composted earth' (Engelmann 2021, 32), geopoetical scholarship addresses relationally matters that include natural-human hybridity and 'ecopoetics' (Magrane 2018, 156). Ideas of geopoetics as a wide and inclusive field are reinforced by Cresswell arguing that the difference between prose and 'the specific form of "the poem"' (Cresswell 2021, 37) is not necessarily the criterion to define what enters or not the definition of geopoetics.

This allows considering a variety of 'hybrid' texts, in which 'ecopoetics meets feminism' (Cresswell 2021, 38). This variety exposes 'the potential of an expansive geopoetics' provided with 'decolonial and postcolonial leanings' (Magrane 2021b, 40), against rigid distinctions between academic and literary languages. Several authors discuss the decolonial and radical potential of geopoetics understood as storytelling to disrupt: 'Masterful understandings of the academic self and counter[ing] a univocal, universal narrative of the world' (Nassar 2021, 27), including the memories of slavery voiced by authors such as Robbie Shilliam and the

contributions of Caribbean authors such as Edouard Glissant, Daniel Maximin and Aimé and Suzanne Césaire (Last 2015 and 2017). Other authors consider geopoetics as part of liberation praxes ‘voicing translocal disidentifications ... through displaced storytelling’ (Adhikari-Sacré, Siahtiri and Maroga 2020, 8) amidst a variety of postcolonial diasporas and cultural shocks. Thus, geopoetics appears as a set of relational practices like those that are exposed by works that successfully brought ‘peripheral’ stories and painful memories to wider audiences (Kilomba 2008; Anzaldúa 2021), challenging notions of stable places, identities and belongings. This kind of unrest is echoed and paralleled by recent scholarship on what is defined ‘literary geographies’.

An eclectic and interdisciplinary field that lies ‘between human geography and literary studies’ (McLaughlin 2019, 2), literary geography has ‘definitional boundaries’ that are far from being ‘clear and stable’ (Tally 2020, 1). While authors such as Sheila Hones stress the difference between a ‘literary geography’ informed by geographical scholarship and the broader field of spatial literary studies (Hones 2018), Neal Alexander highlights the eclecticism of all these studies, in which different definitions can be taken as quasi-synonymous given that: ‘Literary geography is often carried on under other names: imaginative geography, literary cartography, geocriticism, geopoetics, geohumanities’ (Alexander 2015, 5). In a recent book, Hones likewise mentions these definitions, considering: ‘Literary geography as a networked collective as opposed to a sharply defined field with a set of shared aims and methods’ (Hones 2022, 44). This importantly means that the broad field that one can define as ‘geopoetic and geo-literary studies’ is generally concerned with practices and networks in addition to texts including female place writing (Jayagopalan 2020) and ideas of fiction as a way for spreading sensitivity to peace and cosmopolitanism (Gunderman 2020).

This paper is based on a full reading of Lussu’s works and recollections, of which I quote a representative sample that serves my arguments. Lussu’s texts are often repetitive, as she used to rewrite and republish her stories under different forms. It was especially the case with her autobiographical tales, to which she wanted to give the largest circulation for political aims as discussed by Italian scholarship on female writings of antifascist resistance (Ceccarini 2009). As one of her numerous publishers notes, Lussu granted permissions for free reprinting under

all pretexts as she: ‘Detested copyright and anything in the editorial system that could hinder the circulation of her texts’ (Messina 2008, 10).¹ This circulation had its geographies: in Italy, especially since the 1970s, there was a strong presence of small independent publishing houses associated with vanguard literature and radical politics. As Lussu’s bibliography shows (Langiu and Traini 2008), she worked as an author and translator with mainstream publishers such as Mondadori, Einaudi and Laterza, but also supported militant editors such as Mazzotta and literary editors such as Transeuropa/Il lavoro editoriale in Ancona, which she contributed to launch (Ballestra 2022). Her aims were both to value some local Marche setup and to diversify her publics. As I detail below, also some of Lussu’s vivid public speeches were transcribed and published, which also reveals a pedagogic intention of sociopolitical ‘conscientization’ towards young people and working-class readers and listeners.

This paper is organised in a chronological order which aims to highlight three main phases in Lussu’s life and career, each one associated with one of her main axes of intellectual and political action. That is, in the same order of the three main sections: 1-Early transnational antifascism; 2-Post-war geopoetic anticolonialism; 3-Late engagement with feminist subaltern histories and geographies of Central Italy and Sardinia. In the first part, I discuss Lussu’s transnational trajectories as an exiled activist across ‘fronts and frontiers’ drawing upon current geographies of transnational antifascism. In the second part, I address her practices as a decolonial translator and supporter of anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements, drawing upon the ideas on geopoetics and literary geography discussed above. In the third part, I discuss Lussu’s nonconformist class-struggle feminism expressed by her literary invention of the ‘sybil’, drawing upon works of Italian feminist writers who took inspiration from her. I finally stress how Lussu’s ideas on political dissidence and on consistency between public writing and personal life can powerfully connect feminist, antifascist and decolonial approaches informed by an antiauthoritarian ethics.

1.Fronts and frontiers: a transnational and antifascist biography

In the last few years, geographical literature has increasingly addressed the spatial features of fascisms, populisms and aggressive sovereigntist and xenophobic movements (Featherstone

¹ All quotes from texts originally in Italian or French have been translated by the author.

and Karaliotas 2019; Merrill and Pries 2019). While scholarship on the spatialities of fascist movements recognises ‘the need of moving beyond the nation-centred, institutional and descriptive approaches that characterize the literature on Far-Right politics’ (Santamarina 2021, 891), linear demarcations of sovereign space and ‘defence’ of national, local or ethnic boundaries stand as the conceptual foundations for past and present fascisms (Ince, 2011).

Conversely, there is growing interest for geographies of antifascism and/or antifascist geographies (Ferretti 2022; Ince 2019), which parallels the aforementioned ‘global’ and ‘transnational’ turn in historical studies on antifascism, of which biographies of Italian activists exiled under Mussolini’s regime constitute some of the most emblematic cases (Ferretti 2019). While fascisms tend to claim and harden all kinds of exclusive boundaries and barriers, most anti-fascisms tend to cross and question these (material and metaphorical) boundaries, even inspiring the theoretical frameworks of anti-territorial critical geopolitics and post-statist geographies (Ferretti and Garcia-Alvarez 2018; Ince and Barrera de la Torre 2016).

As recently discussed by authors such as Johan Pries, critical geographies have the ethical and political responsibility to provide intellectual tools to address such issues. Eventually, it is urgent to connect past and present resistances by ‘critically dismantle the spatial foundations and implications of resurgent fascist politics’, even ‘highlighting the translocal connections of European antifascism’ (Pries 2019). Importantly, recent studies highlight how the categories of fascism and antifascism, still used in political confrontations in numerous countries and situations, were abundantly mobilised in the political communication of African antiracist and anticolonial movements in the second half of the twentieth century.

This included the anticolonialists of Lusophone Africa whom Lussu strongly supported as discussed by recent literature on critical geopolitics (Ferretti 2021). Hyslop, Braskén and Roos address rich transborder and transnational connections within which: ‘During the liberation struggles in southern Africa of the 1960s to 1990s, the apartheid government in Pretoria, the Portuguese colonial government in Mozambique and Angola, and the Smith regime in Rhodesia were often called “fascist” by both their internal opponents and international

solidarity movements' (Hyslop, Braskén and Roos 2021). As I explain in this section, antifascism and transnationalism were two main Lussu's points since her early life.

Born in Florence to Guglielmo Salvadori and Giacinta Galletti, a couple of antifascist intellectuals coming from Marche families with English origins, Joyce experienced transnationalism and antifascism since her childhood, due both to these family connections and to her early experience as an exile. As for the first matter, she told the story of her paternal grandmother in a book titled *Le Inglesi in Italia* [The Englishwomen in Italy]. This ancestress was the daughter of an eccentric English gentleman who decided to settle in the Marche region in the nineteenth century, a quite unusual venue for international travellers at that time. This story was characterised by cultural shocks that Lussu treated with remarkable humour in several texts (Lussu 1981 and 1982a). As for the second, Lussu did not only experience very soon exile and political persecution: she even personally enacted antifascism as a child.

In 1921, when she was 9, Lussu was beaten up by a (male and adult) 'Black Shirt' because she was pencilling sentences against Mussolini on Florence's walls (Ballestra 2012). In 1924, Lussu's family fled from Italy after that her father was repeatedly beaten and threatened with death by the fascist squads. Once in Switzerland, Lussu first attended the progressive and 'pacifist experiment' (Trenti 2009, 41) of the Geneva *Fellowship School* that she accessed thanks to her mother's English cousins.

Few years later, Lussu was deceived by 'bourgeois pacifism' after her student experience at Heidelberg University in 1932, when both prestigious professors and young leftist activists, whom she had deeply admired until that moment, gave up any effective resistance against the invasion of the city by Hitler's supporters. That is, a clear example of the fascist strategies for controlling space mentioned above (Merrill and Pries 2019). Observing the behaviour of Nazi squads in Heidelberg's streets, Lussu had the sense of a 'masculine crowd' from which one perceived: 'The violence of an earthquake, the stampede of an elephants' herd that went crazy, an explosion of belligerent bestiality' (Lussu 2012, 53). Such experiences definitively informed her feminism, antiauthoritarianism and antimilitarism.

From that moment, Lussu served as a clandestine activist in the aforementioned antifascist movement *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL) founded in 1929 by Gaetano Salvemini, Carlo Rosselli and her future husband Emilio Lussu. GL members intransigently refused any alignment with Fascist or Stalinist totalitarianisms between the two world wars and lived adventurous experiences across Europe, including fighting in 1936-39 Spain, where they allied with the anarchists to put together the first column of Italian volunteers (Venza 2009). Joyce Lussu first recounted her exile peripeties in *Fronti e Frontiere* [Fronts and Frontiers] the only book of hers that was translated into English (Lussu 1969). In this book, Lussu exposed the violence of (physical and metaphorical) borders, armies and states in segregating and repelling unwanted people, themes that are well represented in feminist and decolonial geographies likewise using spatialized storytelling (Anzaldúa 2021).

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, like most antifascist exiles, Lussu circulated with false documents and identities between classical places of refuge such as Geneva and Paris and any other eccentric location that allowed escaping persecution. She even specialized in falsifying ‘stamps and seals’ (Lussu 1967, 31) of which people politically or racially persecuted by the Nazi-Fascists had always a desperate need. Lussu and her husband had to change address so frequently that ‘all our goods entered in only a suitcase’ (Lussu 1967, 14), but did not renounce to some elegance that they justified with the classical irony of conspirators towards authority. ‘We always tried to dress correctly ... not only for taste, but as a good rule of revolutionary life: the policemen of all countries think that a “subversive” is someone going with shabby shoes, uncombed and messy. Some refined posture and polished language generally trigger their intrinsic servility’ (Lussu 1967, 15). While this humour could serve to temporarily exorcise the deep sadness and irreversible nature of diasporic displacements that are highlighted by postcolonial literature (Hall 2017; Said 2000), exile remained a very harsh experience, especially when the war began.

In those years, the life of the Lussus resembled an adventure novel, which included a tormented journey to Lisbon to help some comrades there. This implied crossing Spain, then subject to Franco’s dictatorship, with the aid of local smugglers, risking arrestation at each step (Lussu 1967). Trespassing clandestinely borders by playing different characters and speaking different

languages became one of their specialties. After a stay in Lisbon, the Lussus went to London where Joyce took military training to participate in Resistance actions such as a projected landing in Sardinia. It was on that occasion that Lussu reflected on how there was in principle no reason to consider a woman as inferior to a man as for physical or technical fitness to that job. Yet, most female fighters accepted the idea that they could only serve in auxiliary units, while Lussu pretended to receive full training for real combat (Lussu 1998).

Yet, action was reported and the Lussus re-joined clandestinely Southern France after a sea journey through Gibraltar, hoping to reconstitute clandestine antifascist networks by serving as a liaison between individuals based in France and Switzerland. In some humorous pages, Joyce recounted how she was arrested after having led an operation allowing an elderly couple of antifascists, the Modiglianis, to cross the Annemasse border, as they were in danger in France due to their Jewish origins. Once saved the Modiglianis, Lussu was arrested by the Italian fascist militias who presided the border. With them, she played the role of the eccentric French lady completely unaware of politics, only wanting to help friends, being released after few days of detention. This was the typical kind of funny stories through which Lussu loved to expose the silliness of certain people representing armed powers, that time a young *Carabinieri* officer who even tried to flirt with her during an interrogatory without suspecting that she was an Italian antifascist, concluding that: 'I admire ladies' courage: I will present a favourable report to the General' (Lussu 1967, 100).

Then, in July 1943, Mussolini's government fell, and in September the Armistice was signed. Lussu's pages detail her difficult journey to come back to Italy through the Ventimiglia border, on trains overloaded with disbanded Italian soldiers amidst generalized panic. This experience inspired some Lussu's sharp antimilitarist remarks on how ridiculous some formerly arrogant officers looked like, once their uniform was ripped up and their effective power had vanished (Lussu 1967). Once in Nazi-occupied Rome, where she joined Emilio and the clandestine *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale*, Lussu committed to a new transborder mission on the grounds of the already-experimented principle that: 'A woman can pass where a man cannot' (Lussu and Lussu 1991, 193). It was nothing less than crossing by feet the battlefield in Southern Italy to reach the territory already controlled by the Allies for an exchange of

instructions between the CLN and the provisional government. Without any weapons, papers or recognizable sights on herself, Lussu succeeded in crossing twice the battlefield, passing the Nazi checkpoints thanks to the good knowledge of German that she had acquired in Heidelberg. It was crossing bombarded fields that Lussu reflected on the always criminal nature of wars and on the intrinsic coloniality of all armies, including the Allies in Southern Italy, who: ‘Well dressed, well fed and armed, looked like colonialist occupiers; I was uncomfortable with them’ (Lussu 1967, 130). She would challenge these institutions from a feminist standpoint until her late days, as I discuss in the next sections.

2. Hybrid texts: Lussu’s anticolonial geopoetics and literary geography

After 1945, Lussu experienced new approaches to spaces and literatures. While she continued her travels and transnational engagement, this time in favour of ‘Third World’ anticolonial activists, she discovered new forms of rootedness in a couple of Italian regions: Sardinia and Marche. While she had grown up in Tuscany, in the afterwar she went to live in the small Sardinian village where her husband Emilio was born, and for which he served as a Senator. Then, in her late years, Lussu went to live in the Marche region, where her ancestors came and where she rediscovered local traditions of female culture and agency as I discuss below. All these experiences corresponded to Lussu’s twofold relation with space. On the one hand, she expressed the cosmopolitan and transnational attitudes of the multilingual political exile. On the other, she sought local roots by studying the ancient tradition of the sybils, community-leading women whose presence in Marche (and in Sardinia as well), reinforced Lussu’s attachment to her land. This double relation characterised both her biography and her writings, consistently with Lussu’s feminist ethics seeking coherence between intellectual production and personal life.

Although she proudly used her marital name all her life long as a symbol of intransigent antifascism as she discussed humorously in the short text ‘What is a husband’ (Lussu and Lussu 1991), it was for avoiding the role of ‘wife of His Excellency’ (Lussu 2018, 141) that Lussu refused a candidature to the Parliament, where she would have remained under Emilio’s shadow. Instead, she started to explore Sardinia, travelling alone across the island to talk with local peasants and shepherds. There, Lussu found inspiration for her book *L’olivastro e*

l'innesto [The Oleaster and the Graft], where she claimed that 'there are not only roots, there are also grafts' (Lussu 2018, 10), to explain how she assimilated language and culture of a complex land like Sardinia, that became part of her own identity. An effect that Sardinia made on Lussu was pushing her to question her own 'Eurocentric and subtly colonialist' (Trenti 2009, 111) education after living 'among Sardinia's colonised proletarians' (Lussu 2012a, 55), a definition in which she acknowledged implicitly the Gramscian notion of an 'internal colonialism' applied by the Italian state. Most importantly, this inspired Lussu's later career as a nonconformist translator of anticolonial poetry.

The connection between geopoetics, literary geography and geo-humanities discussed above allows understanding why I use the definition of 'hybrid texts' to broadly identify Lussu's literary production, always suspended between autobiographical narration, poetry, translation and connection with concrete places and political practices. Lussu explained her post-war commitment to translate poetry from anti-colonial fighters through an autobiographical anecdote chiming with postcolonial literature on women traveling in imperial contexts (Blunt 1994; Domosh 1991). That anecdote was related to some peculiar colonial cultures that Lussu had in her family background. Her English grandmother mentioned above, an independent woman, dreamed to travel alone to Africa and wrote to nobody less than: 'Stanley, who had politely responded advising her to wait' (Lussu 1988, 16). While she first listened to these stories as a child, it was as an adult that Lussu could seize their irony, given the widely and classically studied racist, colonialist and patriarchal setup of Stanley-like explorers (Driver 1991). Lussu replied to this irony by sarcastically claiming that, finally, she had somehow realised her grandmother's dream by walking in the African forests, although it was no longer: 'With the bearers who accompanied the explorers ... But with the ranks of Amílcar Cabral's and Agostinho Neto's [anticolonial] guerrilla fighters' (Lussu 1988, 17). This namely occurred in the period of African political decolonisation which is increasingly interesting geographers (Craggs and Neate 2020).

While I will not delve deeper in Lussu's anticolonial engagement with Lusophone Africa's decolonisation and her acquaintance with its leaders such as Amílcar Cabral, Marcelino dos Santos and Agostinho Neto, including her translation of some of their poems, as this subject

has been addressed by recent literature (Ferretti 2021; Sermini 2018), it is worth recalling the anticolonial beginning of *Fronti e Frontiere*. This narration started in 1938 when, coming back from a poorly-documented sojourn in Kenya where she was disgusted by the racist and colonialist behaviour of white settlers (Trenti 2009), Lussu made a short scale in Yemen, where she: ‘Stared with hatred at the awful port of Aden, where the English colonialists in khaki shorts called “George” all the “indigenous” as they were all their servants’ (Lussu 1967, 10). This definitively helps understanding Lussu’s anticolonialism as intrinsically connected with her antifascism and antiauthoritarianism

Some international attention to Lussu’s work is being paid in the field of feminist and postcolonial translation studies. Scholars note that Lussu’s method disrupts positivistic canons in translation from an anticolonial and feminist standpoint (Taronna 2017), exactly because she did not consider translation as an exercise in linguistic proficiency. Lussu’s translations were based on direct interaction with authors, being: ‘A collaborative mediation in which communication is more important than authorship’ (Capancioni 2012, 250). As Claudia Capancioni notes, Lussu served as a ‘cultural mediator’ translating works of poets from Angola, Mozambique, Guiné-Bissau, Cape Verde, Portugal, Albania, Poland, Denmark, Turkey, Kurdistan and Vietnam, including Inuit and Afro-American poems. Among others, the authors’ list included: ‘Agostinho Neto, José Craveirinha, Nazim Hikmet and Ho Chi Minh ... Kaoberdiano Dambarà, Marcelino dos Santos, Alexander O’Neill, Virgilio de Lemos, and Rui Nogar’ (Capancioni 2012, 245). Crucially, Lussu was not interested in these poems for stylistic reasons, but because they represented anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles.

Indeed, for Lussu, poetry was not a hobby, but a weapon, that is: ‘Lively, real and necessary poetry ... inserted in liberation or resistance movements’ (Lussu 1999, 5), a tool that should be ‘useful to all humankind’ (Lussu 1998, 52). For Lussu, this job was also a way to build her own career without any direct help from her husband. As she jokingly wrote: ‘Zimbabwe guerrillas or Iraqi communists had never heard about Emilio Lussu, so it was me, I was nobody’s wife’ (Lussu 2018, 144). Lussu’s first friend and collaborator in matters of translating poetry was Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963), a political dissident who lived in Moscow when Lussu met him, having been banished by the Kemalist regime as a communist. It is worth

noting that, in those years, although opposing Stalinism, GL and other left/libertarian activists could collaborate individually with communists on the common grounds of antifascism and/or anti-imperialism. In 1958, Lussu started to experiment her translation method with Hikmet.

This was actually a sort of co-authorship, based on the principle that, between the author and the translator, there should be affinity ‘beyond philology’ (Lussu 1999, 8) and: ‘Love for the world and commitment to struggle for modifying it’ (Lussu 1999, 5). This meant using poetry to sensitise both proletarian publics in regions under colonial oppression and the public opinion of other countries to render culture an effective instrument for social transformation. Amazingly, Lussu’s translation method did not even imply that the translator was familiar with the original language of the texts. To translate Hikmet from Turkish into Italian, Lussu sat with him and, using French as a lingua franca, they discussed until they agreed Italian formulas that recalled the sense and the sonority of the original text. They came to engage in detail with authorial intentionality, as Hikmet recommended Lussu to: ‘Only use concrete terms ... that also a peasant can understand’ (Lussu 1999, 8). Thus, poetry should not serve enjoyment, but people’s conscientization.

Finally, Lussu translated Hikmet’s poems without knowing Turkish language, and declared afterwards that she could translate from all languages, ‘provided that I could meet personally the authors, work directly with them and find some common language’ (Lussu 1999, 136). This also explains the disregard that Lussu’s works often encountered in academic milieus, that remained quite disdainful of such unorthodox methodologies (Messina 2008). Lussu challenged sardonically her (male) detractors, placing the original text aside her translation in Hikmet’s Italian editions: ‘To make these gentlemen know the way in which I translated ... to allow professors making their critiques better. Well, after publication, there was no objection. Nobody found anything to criticize’ (Lussu 2008, 13). As noted above, Lussu’s translations are being reassessed today as a feminist and anti-positivistic method, bringing awareness that there is no ‘true’ translation and that the act of translating always implies a reinvention. They implicitly recall the ‘theory of sense’ in translation studies, arguing that grasping the deep sense of a translated text is often more effective than philological rigour (Lederer and Seleskovitch 1993). They can also be considered as an anti-elitist practice inspired by non-European

cultures, not so far from current decolonial concerns for valuing what comes from indigenous ways of thinking beyond academic practices (De la Cadena and Blaser 2018).

Lussu had started to question her Euro-centric studies in literature while working with Hikmet and with his wife Munevver, whom Lussu had adventurously helped to flee from Turkey as an act of feminist solidarity—without even consulting Hikmet, and who remained her close friend and collaborator also after Nazim's death (Lussu 1965). Formerly, Lussu was familiar with models such as: 'Homer's poems, or the Divine Comedy, that is what had been proposed to me as the highest outcomes of the West, which now seemed to me insufficient' (Lussu 1965, 12). She parallelly questioned Western ideas of separation between ideas and praxes, between texts and acts. 'In the West, people always believed that politics and poetry are two opposite things, no attempt had been done to reconcile them. [Finally] I united what could be thought as united' (Lussu 1965, 12). Political engagement was her way to connect texts and practices, chiming with current decolonial concerns for broader inclusion outside 'ivory towers'. Lussu claimed that, dealing with Hikmet and other anti-colonial and anti-imperialist poets, she was often impressed by their capacity of: 'Talking to people ... It is necessary to speak the same language as your interlocutor. You cannot go there and make them learn strange or eccentric languages by force' (Lussu 1965, 15).

Drawing upon the aforementioned idea of spatial-based literary criticism by Magrane, I would contend that Lussu's translation method was also geopoetic, as she paid special attention to the experiences of places that she, and Hikmet, had in their respective exile wanderings. In Rome, Hikmet was disappointed by Lussu's attempts to explain the story of all monuments while walking him, as he sought a direct approach to places and people before developing preconceived ideas. Something similar occurred with Lussu, who after translating Hikmet did not feel the need to study Turkish language, but 'to directly know Turkey' (Lussu 1999, 23) travelling physically to the country. There, she got a geopoetic sense of the places she visited that was mediated by her previous experience with Hikmet's poems, as she recounted in her preface of Hikmet's *Human Landscapes* (Lussu 1965).

Lussu's work extends notions of 'hybrid texts' because distinctions between literary genres

such as poetry and prose were constantly questioned by both Lussu and Hikmet. In the anthologies of Hikmet's poems that she translated and edited, Lussu alternated pages filled with verses and pages filled with prose to give the idea of a flowing narration. There, she followed the framework of *Human Landscapes*, an eight-volume summa of Hikmet's poems that was mostly destroyed, having been written during his prison years in Turkey. For Lussu, *Human Landscapes* was: 'An harmonic fusion of popular epics, oral rhapsody and daily discursive language' (Lussu 1965, 67). With the pretext of telling the story of a prisoner, Hikmet told his own histories and geographies of Turkey, to ground claims for a more just and egalitarian society.

In the 1960s, Lussu was one of the earliest Western activists who took an interest in the Kurdish matter, which she considered 'Hikmet's moral heritage', as it was Hikmet who told her of those 'unlucky people' (Lussu 1999, 150) for whom he declared to have esteem and admiration. Thus, challenging 'the politicians, even leftists, who avoided taking side on the Kurdish question' (Lussu 1999, 151), Lussu organized another of her adventurous journeys, this time to Northern Iraq, to meet the leaders of the different Kurdish parties in the area, from the more 'radical' Jalal Talabani to the more 'moderate' Mustafa Barzani. Lussu had mixed feelings about her meetings with politicians. For instance, she had the impression that 'Barzani did not appreciate emancipated women who arrive barefoot in a military headquarter in the middle of the night' (Lussu 1999, 157). Conversely, she was impressed by Kurdish women, who 'are emancipated and always refused to wear the veil' (Lussu 1999, 151), a matter that is abundantly dealt by contemporary literature on cases such as Rojava (Knapp, Flach and Ayboga 2016).

In a later occasion, Lussu could meet 'elderly Gegherxhuin [Blessed Hearth]' a Kurdish poet whom Lussu visited 'in a poor house' in Northern Syria to translate some of his works after they had made: 'Lively attempts for mutual understanding on the problems of the universe in a mix of Levantine-English, classical German, dialect of Marche and Kurdish' (Lussu 1988, 105). Another point that caught Lussu's attention was the secular attitude of most Kurdish people. 'Originally, their religion was Zoroastrianism, then ... Islam was imposed to them, but they never accepted it' (Lussu 1999, 161). As I discuss below, Lussu's anticlericalism was not more indulgent with Christianity. Finally, for Lussu, the Kurds: 'Struggle for their own

freedom without oppressing anybody' (Lussu 1999, 162). In such cases, poetry: 'Brings in itself a world that does not exist – but that could and should be better' (Lussu 1999, 162).

Through her commitment to Turkish and Kurdish dissident poetry, Lussu showed to have an original idea of anticolonialism, which included culture, anticipating some of the notions that Said will popularise in the following years (Said 2000). This occurred through her appraisal of non-European cultures and support for communities who claimed autonomy from both traditional empires and new postcolonial nation-states, like in the example of the 'internal colonialism' operated by the states that still have formal territorial sovereignty on Kurdistan. This section has shown how Lussu's poetry and prose were informed by her transnational and nonconformist framework in geopoetic and anticolonial terms, producing a remarkable corpus of 'hybrid texts' including 'active' translations. In the next section, I discuss how further literary texts expressed her nonconformist and antiauthoritarian feminism, always permeated by anti-fascist ethics and memories.

3.The unorthodox feminism of the sybil

In Italy, feminist literature on Lussu's works mainly focuses on her exceptional biography, whose potential impact is well expressed by the interviews that she gave to novelist Silvia Ballestra. Ballestra is one of the first authors who overtly claimed to have been inspired by Lussu's works, after being impressed, when she was at primary school, by Lussu's 'Scarpette Rosse' [Little Red Shoes], a poem dedicated to a child victim of the Holocaust (Ballestra 2012). In that poem, Lussu provides a circular narration around the immobility of a visual image: 'There is a pair of little red shoes, almost new, size twenty-four', lying on the top of a pile of children's shoes. This pile is located in a precise place: Buchenwald. The age of the child was three and a half and: 'We do not know the color of their eyes as they burnt in the oven, but we can imagine their crying. One knows how children cry'. The poem repeats the sentence 'there is a pair of little red shoes' at the beginning of each stanza like a refrain, like a warning. These shoes will remain forever the same size, forever 'almost new' because: 'The little feet of dead children do not grow ... the little feet of dead children do not wear out the soles'.² This eternalization of such terrible images expresses an astonished calm before the depth of evil

² Full text: <https://www.classicult.it/c-e-un-paio-di-scarpette-rosse/>

which recalls works of a classical poet from Lussu's region, Giacomo Leopardi. Yet, emphasis was put on the civil value of memory: metaphorically placed at the entry of all sites like Buchenwald, these shoes are a visual warning to future generations.

Alongside Ballestra, other Italian intellectuals and feminists rediscovered the radicality of Lussu's message at the time of Berlusconi's Italy, denouncing how the public role assigned to women seemed to be limited to that of bodies to display for masculine enjoyment (Cretella 2012). Chiara Cretella notes how some characteristics of Lussu's feminism, such as her intransigent antimilitarism, remain compelling in an environment where militarist propaganda still contributes to maintain questionable gender roles in children's education. For Cretella (and Lussu), female emancipation cannot be limited to: 'Women entering structures of power—from politics to magistrature, from clergy to the armed forces, without contesting their masculinist and hierarchic models' (Cretella 2012, 16). Indeed, Lussu criticised all masculinist and colonial institutions including states, armies and churches.

Ballestra and Cretella had both contacts with Lussu in her late years, during which Lussu stopped her adventurous travels and focused on deepening her historical research on an ancient female figure who represented at the same time her renewed rootedness in the Marche region, where she resided, and her antiauthoritarian model of feminism. This figure was the 'sybil', whom Lussu considered to represent a popular communitarian wisdom preceding the advent of societies directed by states, churches and armies. Since her writings of the 1970s, Lussu identified this wisdom with the tradition of the *Comunanze* (Commons) of the Marche countryside, that were rediscovered through the post-Unity social enquiries in the regions of the former Papal State in the late nineteenth century, when still 176 of these communities were recorded in the area around the *Monti Sibillini*, the ancient legendary siege of the Apenninian Sybil (Lussu 1976). This meant further merging literary genres, because Lussu's discussions of these themes never matched the formal standards of 'scholarship', remaining halfway between the essay and the literary piece of writing. As Trenti notes: 'Essays without notes ... poems without titles and dates are a characteristic of Lussu's writing' (Trenti 2009, 15). Yet, the 'sybil' as a literary character inspired by Lussu's own studies and experiences was a powerful way to explain and popularize her nonconformist feminism and proudly non-

academic scholarship.

It was in a very direct way that Lussu introduced this character to her readers. That is, she put in scene a dialogue between herself and an authentic sybil at the beginning of *Il libro perogno* [The Forever Book], one of her numerous collections of tales on sybils and other female rebels. Met by the narrator during a mountain walk in an isolated village close to the *Monti Sibillini*, the sybil was an apparently ordinary woman who was spending a mountain holiday, having a regular job and a family in Florence. Only, she conserved the pluri-millennial memory that sybils transmitted from generation to generation. Confided to Lussu, her memories showed: ‘An alternative choice of civilisation and cohabitation, the tenacious posterity of a society without wars and without servants dominated through terror, [one that opposed] the violence of arms and the terrorism of religious symbols, the creation of the patriarchal state and of military institutions’ (Lussu 1982b, 9). In her periodisation, Lussu referred to an epoch that preceded the construction of pyramids and colosseums ‘by whip and blood for the benefit of few people’ (Lussu 1982b, 10).

According to Lussu, in these ancient civilisations the sybil was the person who knew ‘the agricultural techniques, breeding and manufacture’ (Lussu 1982b, 23) better than anybody else and chaired community meetings. Then, after ‘the armed occupation by the new states led by ruling classes of warriors-proprietors’ (Lussu 1982b, 21), such as the Romans and other bellicose peoples of the Iron Age, sibylline knowledge could only be transmitted clandestinely. For Lussu, the sybil represents ‘the antecedent and the opposite of constituted powers’, showing that ‘a civilisation of peace is possible and is even part of our cultural heritage’ (Lussu 1982b, 13). While the political inspiration of these narrations looks quite clear, Lussu’s historical sources remained often implicit and uneasy to trace.

As for the existence of pristine peaceful and non-hierarchic civilisations, Lussu broadly referred to works of Gordon Childe (1957) on the Danubians, while she probably ignored Marshall Sahlins’ (1972) works on the Palaeolithic, as she wrote that: ‘After the Neolithic revolution, every settlement had its sybil’ (Lussu 1982b, 25). Thus, Lussu referred to sedentary settlements practicing agriculture. Yet, she often quoted Greek, Roman and Biblical sources in

which some sybil is mentioned to show that: ‘All hegemonic cultures had to come to term with [the sybil] by deforming her’ (Lussu 1982b, 13). She also referred to Middle Age legends surrounding the Apenninian Sybil who, following encyclicals and documents of the Inquisition, was equated with witches by the Popes. While this fear of women laid the grounds for Christian witch-hunts, Lussu guessed that the sibylline tradition might have periodically resurfaced across time, leading to the suggestive hypothesis of a subterranean transmission of female knowledge across the millennia (Soleti 2015).

It is worth noting that the *Monti Sibillini* area belonged to the Papal State until the unification of Italy, so that, in the region, it is not unusual to hear anticlerical stories such as a witches’ sabbath imagined by Lussu in one of her tales. ‘At the sabbath, we also invited the men who had escaped from prison and were against the government and against the priests, and we discussed all the night on how we could frighten cops and tax agents, through weapons or through magic’ (Lussu 1982, 39). That is, little metaphysics and a lot of social subversion. Interestingly, Lussu observed that the popular memory of these wretched traditions survived in marginal regions, including the interior of Sardinia, where she had met a real woman whom she called the ‘Barbagia Sybil’. This spontaneously-recognised community leader practiced traditional healing and community work to resolve conflicts, that is the thousand-year old job of sybils according to Lussu. After her death, this woman was forgotten: ‘Not only by the priest’s friends, but also by our Marxist-Leninist comrades’ (Lussu 1982b, 64). This chimes with anarchist scholarship by James C. Scott on non-hierarchic organizations surviving in mountain areas, tracing relations between marginal spaces, resistance and cultural survivals (Scott 2009).

Indeed, some anarchist vein of Lussu started to emerge in the 1970s, in a book that is key to understand the nonconformist position of her feminism in Italian debates: *Padre padrone padreterno* [Father, Master, God the Father]. Written in the years in which Lussu sought a dialogue with feminists of younger generations whom she considered as too focused on sectorial (today one would say single-axis) struggles, this book exposed Lussu’s idea of feminism, based on the transformation of the whole society and the refuse of any aprioristic opposition to ‘men’. She did not accept the notion of quotas, refusing sarcastically the idea that

female (or Black) emancipation could be expressed in terms of: ‘Statistics and accountancy ... only serving to modernize and consolidate the bourgeois-capitalistic society’ (Lussu 1976, 93). Instead, she pleaded for class struggle and for the abolition of all oppressive institutions invented by men.

It is worth noting that, in Italy, women’s movements were strongly associated with class struggle since their early times until the post-68 contestation years (Bracke 2019). It was this historical specificity that Lussu tried to revive by placing, among her historical references, great female figures of the workers’ movement, including what Sara Sermini defines ‘socialist humanism’ (Sermini 2018, 844) in opposition to feminisms limited to mere claims for female careers. ‘To Emmeline Pankhurst and Queen Victoria, one may oppose Louise Michel and Anna Kuliscioff, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg, who did not want only the suffrage or the exercise of power, but the transformation of the entire society’ (Lussu 2012a, 106). In Italy, Lussu especially referred to the local traditions of anarchism and internationalist socialism, that carried out a ‘frontal attack to patriarchy ... with a clarity that later reformism, from Turati to Berlinguer, never dared to confirm’ (Lussu 1976, 80). Lussu especially admired famous anarchist exponent Louise Michel as a pioneering figure of anticolonialism and anti-racism since she was deported to New Caledonia following her participation in the 1871 Paris Commune.

In Lussu’s narration, Michel was vividly portrayed in novel-like terms as the first Western activist who, in New Caledonia, supported the anticolonial cause of the Kanaks, at that time among the most despised ‘primitives’, who: ‘Always fled in the forest when they saw a white man. She approached these people, she wanted to know them, talked with them and discovered that they were like her. While Frenchmen did not even consider them as true human beings, but rather close to animals, she established that contact, which became cultural, social and political’ (Lussu 2012b, 156). Again, we find examples of ‘hybrid texts’ where Lussu merged personal memories, historical narration and imaginative literary writing.

Conversely, Lussu was deceived by the institutional Left with which she worked for a while in the afterwar for its leaders’ lack of sensitivity to feminist challenges to patriarchate, as these

men refused to question traditional family and gender roles in their bid to capture votes from Catholic masses. Being one of the few women who were available to give public speeches in the circuits of *Fronte Popolare*, an ephemeral post-war alliance between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, Lussu vividly recounted how she was sent for electoral assemblies across Italy. There, when she found herself before male-only floors, she pretended as a condition to speak that they also brought their wives there, often going personally to the activists' houses to involve local women (Lussu 2012b). She recollected humorously that often, the day after, the Party: 'Had to send a national leader on the spot to repair the damages that I had done'. This man had to convince other men that Leftist parties: 'Did not want to destroy families' (Lussu 1976, 22).

Thus, for Lussu, it was on the grounds of electoral opportunism that the Italian Left shied away from gender matters despite the steps toward emancipation that had been done during the 1943-45 antifascist Resistance. Indeed, she linked her feminism to her antifascism as she did with anticolonialism. Still marked by these deceptions in the institutional Left, Lussu resumed links with more radical milieus in her late years, when she became a regular guest of the *Anticlerical Meeting*,³ a national happening that the anarchist movement organised each summer in Fano, in the Marche region. Together with the meeting's organisers, including a group of anarchist feminists running an Observatory of Anarchist Women on [Religious] Fanaticisms, Lussu discussed several themes, including her studies on the Apennine sybils, in a series of conferences that were recorded and later published in a volume.

In these speeches of the 1990s, Lussu especially focused on some of the masculine institutions that she wanted to disrupt conceptually and practically. In line with the theme of the Meeting, the first was the Church. Lussu was an intransigent adversary of all institutional religions, which she considered as male inventions to be lambasted with sharp sentences such as: 'Why, from the Pope to the last priest, all the managers of divinity must be provided with balls?' (Lussu 1976, 9). In Fano, she started to tell the history of women's persecutions by religions to

³ Some videos, including Joyce's conferences, are available at: http://www.bibliotecaliberopensiero.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=147&Itemid=114

build her argument through the oral production of some of her latest 'hybrid texts' that, now in printed form, appear consistent with and complementary to her former literary production.

According to Lussu, while anti-women books like the 1487 *Malleus Maleficarum* were references for all sides of Christianity during early modernity, 'all Churches' and all major religions in the world had towards women: 'A constant posture of contempt, subjugation, even lack of acknowledgement of their human dignity. Therefore, the problem is in their origins rather than only in their applications ... The problem is in the invention of a God Father ... justifying the principle of the absolute paternal authority and the absolute filial obedience, that all religions pass off as a virtue' (Lussu 2012b, 26). For Lussu, the very principles of obedience and of the 'human sacrifice' (Lussu 2012b, 26) grounded on the 'original sin', were only good to justify wars and massacres.

Lussu's anticlericalism was also associated with her anticolonial critique, which she expressed analysing the complicity of the Church in the *Conquista* and in the indigenous genocide, that she considered to be the basis of all successive colonial crimes. This happened in 1992, when several Italian radical movements were contesting the official celebrations for the anniversary of the 1492 Columbus's 'discovery'. For Lussu: 'In the sixteenth century, we conquered the world because we had committed our intelligence and our techniques to refining weapons. We were simply the strongest in organised violence' (Lussu 2012b, 67). Conversely, in the ancient Apennine commons, 'a sybil or a Chaman did not have any power' (Lussu 2012b, 23), because their wisdom was spontaneously recognized by people, without the imposition of armed institutions. A model from which, according to Lussu, the contemporary world would have a lot to learn.

Another shared theme between Lussu and the Meeting organisers was the refusal of all wars and all armies. Significantly, Lussu exposed her idea of feminist antimilitarism starting from a personal experience that she had while crossing the Southern Italy front in 1943, with which she opened her book *L'uomo che voleva nascere donna* [The man who wished to be born a woman]. The macabre spectacle of the burnt corpse of an American aviator led Lussu to make a whole critique of war and its gendered aspects. She imagined that, while dying, this young

man: ‘Saw his mother, his sister and his fiancée, on the door of his house in Minnesota, with hats and gloves, heading to a Methodist church. “I wished to be born a woman” were his last words ... The day was sunny, the sky was blue, and nobody came to collect him’ (Lussu 2012a, 23). What Lussu wanted to contend is that, while war has been traditionally a masculine affair, women should take active responsibility in countering it. For Lussu, this means that they should not aspire to make careers in the army, as war is always ‘a limitless barbarity’ (Lussu 2012b, 43), but must be active anti-war agents, conceptually and practically.

Lussu concluded denouncing the great power that was still held, in Italy, by two institutions that are ‘based on absolute authority and absolute obedience ... contradicting all civil development’ (Lussu 2012b, 53), that is the Army and the Church. ‘How can we talk of democracy while our life is determined by these two institutions that it is impossible to democratise? Obviously, they are all directed by males’ (Lussu 2012b, 66). Finally, the late Lussu declared to be delighted that a group of young anarchists from Naples had entitled their association to Louise Michel, and relieved by the fact that critiques to exploitation and neo-colonial development were advancing thanks to some (in Lussu’s wording) ‘sybils of today’ such as Vandana Shiva. Finally, it is worth noting that Lussu’s feminism was far from generalisations about any biologically-assigned differences or gender roles. Today, it can inspire several kinds of intersectional approaches as discussed above.

As for antifascism, the exceptionality of her figure emerges in relation to the aforementioned historiography on antifascist women. Yet, she clearly represented one of those exceptions that serve to change the rules and can still demonstrate the value of dissident and nonconformist trajectories inside and outside scholarly circuits.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Lussu’s works can provide original examples for performing geopoetics and mixing genres while practicing transnationalism and transculturation in both material and textual senses. They can extend current debates on geopoetics and literary geography understood as plural fields which include hybrid texts, literary criticism and extra-textual places, both lived and imagined. In particular, Lussu’s case shows the possibility of

connecting the field of geopoetics, already variously associated with feminism and decoloniality, to literature on geography and antifascism. As discussed above, ideas of antiauthoritarianism and political dissidence are key in Lussu's intersecting feminism, antifascism and grassroots transnationalism, being especially substantiated by the consistency between Lussu's writing and her cosmopolitan and transnational biography.

Then, reading Lussu's autobiographical and anticolonial writings through geopoetic lenses allows extending the existing connections between geopoetics and decoloniality through the notion of 'hybrid texts', eventually associated with her biographical example. Indeed, Lussu's idea that poetry should contribute to liberation practices and to non-academic and non-elitist approaches by including different people and cultures in intellectual conversations chimes with current decolonial and 'pluriversal' scholarship (De la Cadena and Blaser 2018). Based on her deeply spatial experiences, Lussu's feminism appears as one of those formerly ignored or overlooked contributions that can provide openings to present-day debates, in the spirit of understanding feminism as a politically and epistemologically plural field.

Whereas nonconformism and antiauthoritarianism were the key features of Lussu's exceptionality, this should not be taken as a mere anecdote but as a way to engage with current challenges in society, especially addressing the matter of 'less privileged' people in intersectional approaches. To this end, Lussu's ethics of coherence between life and writing appears as a key point of her own understanding of feminism, that was geopoetically explained by the sybil as a metaphor of what might be broadly called today total liberation. For Lussu, the main task was getting rid of violent and masculine institutions such as the army and the church. In this context, the subterranean history of the sybils and their ancestral female wisdom surviving in remote places can be read as a clever geopoetic invention to popularise these ideas through histories and cultures of Central Italy and beyond. Still neglected even in Italy, Lussu's contribution is definitively worthy of a full rediscovery.

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