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## Creative Marginal Voices as a Resource to Translate Non-Standard Linguistic Varieties – an Italian Translation of Maxine Beneba Clarke’s *David*

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*David* is the first short story in the book *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke (2014). This collection of short stories was awarded the Victorian Premier’s Unpublished Manuscript Award in 2013 and was published the following year by Hachette Australia. This was the first prose work by the Afro-Caribbean Australian writer and slam poet to be published after two collections of poems. *Foreign Soil* narrates the stories of a series of disenfranchised people of colour spanning across time and space, from Jamaica to the United Kingdom and Australia. *David* is the story of a seven-year-old Sudanese boy in love with his patchwork bike and of the encounter of two Sudanese women in the suburb of Footscray, in western Melbourne: a young Sudanese-Australian single mother (Little Sister), and an older refugee mother (Asha) who lost her husband and son David during the war in Darfur. The two women connect over the bicycle that Little Sister has just bought for herself, which reminds Asha of her dead son’s passion for riding.

Two main voices, Little Sister’s and Asha’s, alternate in the source text (ST), narrating the encounter from their own perspectives and recounting stories about their past. A third voice, which is rendered graphically with the use of italics, is also present in the ST. The first time it appears, this voice is introduced by Little Sister uttering: “Hadn’t seen Ahmed’s mum since forever [...] I knew what she would have been saying about me, though. I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me [...]” (2). From this and other contextual clues, we infer that this is the voice of the mother of Little Sister’s former boyfriend Ahmed, as imagined by Little Sister. More broadly, the mother-in-law’s voice represents the perspective of the Sudanese adults in the community.

All three voices show non-standard uses of English. Specifically, Little Sister uses a variety of English that we can define as Australian urban youth vernacular, characterized by a highly colloquial register, with lexical choices and syntactic constructions typical of youth language, such as phrases with implicit pronouns “felt like I was hovering above the wet tar” (Clarke 15); slang expressions “going mental” (Clarke 2) and profanities “she was fuck-off beautiful” (Clarke 1), “jealous shit” (Clarke 3) and “sure fucken thing” (Clarke 3). Asha’s and the mother-in-law’s language, on the other hand, marks them as non-native English speakers. Their language is recognizable by the non-standard use of grammar with the frequent lack of the “s” in the third person singular of verbs “she remind me” (Clarke 4), the occasional lack of the same suffix to form the plural of nouns “two year ago” (6), as well as the use of ungrammatical verb forms “I don’t even knowing” (Clarke 4) and superlatives “better more good” (Clarke 4). The English spoken by Asha and Ahmed’s mother also mirrors some characteristics of the Arabic language, the official language of Sudan since its independence in 1956 and the main language of the education system in the country since the 1960s (Musgrave and Hajek). Among these, the absence of the verb “to be” in the present tense “they so disrespectful” (Clarke 5), “where your little ones?” (Clarke 7), “you so funny” (Clarke 9) and the repetition of the subject pronoun after the grammatical subject “this young woman, she walking down Barkly Street” (Clarke 4).

Clarke's use of non-standard language represented the main challenge for the translation of this short story into Italian. In recent decades, the difficulties linked to the rendition of non-standard linguistic varieties have attracted increasing consideration in the field of translation studies (see for example Perteghella 2002, Wu and Chang 2008, Cavagnoli 2010, Federici 2011, Toury 2012, Di Biase 2015). Many studies have identified the tendency of translated texts (TTs) to standardise the language featured in the STs. Toury refers to this tendency as the "law of growing standardisation" (303). According to his model, "textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored in favour of [more] habitual options offered by a target repertoire" (Toury 304). In translating this story, I was careful to avoid the tendency towards standardization and to resist "fluency" (Venuti 1995) with translation strategies aimed at preserving Clarke's creative use of non-standard language rather than making the TT smooth and unproblematic for the Italian target audience.

This decision to maintain the visibility of non-standard language was made necessary considering the author's explicit statement about her language choices, contained in the book's epigraph: "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard of things with it" (Achebe 50). By choosing to quote these famous words by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, Clarke highlights her intention to reclaim the English language, to take this language and its colonial history and subvert it from within, thus metonymically doing the same to the power structures it represents. In the stories contained in *Foreign Soil*, Clarke bends the grammatical and phonetical rules of English in order to make it suitable to express the voice of those who are traditionally excluded or marginalised. The non-standard use of grammar in *David* exposes the readers to the voice of a refugee who speaks English as a second language, while another short story in the collection, *Harlem Jones*, brings to life the voice of a Jamaican woman living in England by representing the phonetics of Jamaican patois on the page: "No chile-a mine gwan threaten a woman! Ye nat readin de news? Ye wan end up like dat udda black boy dem kill?" (Clarke 20). Clarke's language allows these characters and their way of communicating to be visible and not to be conformed to the dominant standards. It was therefore necessary to find a translation strategy that could maintain a similar effect in the TT, and standardization was decidedly not an adequate one. Indeed, "the homogenous language of the TT would undermine the ST's ability to give voice to minority groups [and] to subvert linguistically the institutional imposition of common language" (Di Biase 46-47).

Italian literary translator Franca Cavagnoli's work (2010) on the translation into Italian of the hybrid languages of postcolonial literature, creole, and pidgin constituted a useful starting point to reflect on the strategy to adopt for the translation of *David*. I implemented her suggestion to deviate from the norms of written Italian by using markers of orality, such as employing the verb tense *indicativo imperfetto* to replace *congiuntivo*. For instance, I translated the sentence "I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me" (Clarke 2), where the ST also avoids the subjunctive mood, as "Sentivo la sua voce come se stava proprio lì di fianco". I also employed syntactic dislocations typical of oral Italian, placing the predicate in thematic position like in the following example: "Erano assurdi, alcuni degli aggeggi che Ahmed e gli altri costruivano" ("They were crazy, some of the contraptions Ahmed and them built" [Clarke 1-2]).

This translation strategy alone, however, did not allow me to differentiate between the various non-standard varieties used in the ST, which was in fact necessary

because it is precisely through these differences that readers can identify the shift between the voices who alternate in Clarke's short story. Taking this into consideration, I decided to adopt a "replacement" strategy, where "geographically, socioeconomically, culturally, stereotypically, or emotionally" (Epstein 203) related non-standard varieties of the target language are used to translate the non-standard varieties in the ST (Smalley 195). This translation strategy is close to the "parallel dialect translation" identified by Perteghella as one of the five strategies for the transposition of dialect and slang (in Perteghella's case in the context of theatre translation). Perteghella defines this strategy as the translation of "a dialect or a slang into that of another specific target language, usually one that has similar connotations and occupies an analogous position in the target linguistic system" (50). Although choosing different "replacement" varieties made possible to distinguish the different voices in the ST, this strategy was still problematic, in that, as Berman pointed out,

[...] a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating into another vernacular. *Translation can only occur between 'cultivated' languages.* An exoticization that turns the foreign from abroad into the foreign at home winds up merely ridiculing the original.

(Berman 250, italics in original)

The challenge was complex because, on the one hand, I needed to find distinct non-standard varieties to give voice to the different characters in *David*, to recreate their "voice-print" (Federici 8). On the other hand, I had to be cautious not to localise them within an Italian or regional context, and not to ridicule them. This was made even more problematic by the fact that, until recently, Italian dialects – linguistic varieties highly attached to specific localities – "played both the role of everyday language and local slang(s) for most people", and they continue to influence contemporary Italian slang (Gobetti iv).

Discussing her translation into Italian of Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem*, Adele D'Arcangelo defines Pung's English as a "language 'on the move', able to permeate and capture other tongues' influences" (95). D'Arcangelo also identifies an element of "creative estrangement" (96) in Pung's writing. The code-switching between different varieties of English introduces a conspicuous element of foreignness in Pung's work, but this effect is intended, and it is in fact in this "estrangement" that lies the creative nature of the text. These characteristics, I argue, can also be found in Clarke's *Foreign Soil*. The need to maintain the element of "creative estrangement" persuaded me to move away from everyday orality and to look for Italian literary and artistic texts (literature and song lyrics) with similar traits, that is where marginal voices permeates the Italian language with foreign influences. These texts were to be used as a source of lexical and grammatical inspiration to prevent the characters in *David* from being standardised once they adopted Italian voices. The idea was not to produce a smooth translation ready for publication, rather to conduct an experiment to see whether non-standard languages can indeed resist standardization in Italian TTs.

In order to translate Little Sister's urban youth vernacular, I drew on the language of Italian rap lyrics as my "replacement" vernacular. This choice was informed by studies on Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop Language (HHL) proving that Hip Hop a) is rooted in African American linguistic practices but it "is adapted and transformed by various racial and ethnic groups inside and outside the United States" (Alim 3); b) "plays a decisive role in the creation and formation of multiethnolectal

urban speech styles” (Cutler and Røyneland 140); c) “has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations” (Mitchell 2). The language of Australian urban youth of migrant background like Little Sister and that of Italian rappers (most of whom can also be categorized as urban youth) is connected through their shared marginal position within society, and their will to resist hegemonic standardization. Cutler and Røyneland argue that “youth from immigrant backgrounds as well as native-born youth [...] are drawn to hip hop’s oppositional symbolism and use language in ways that challenge hegemonic language ideologies. These ideologies include bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous standard language” (140), which is also challenged in Clarke’s collection of stories.

The language of rap lyrics represents an incredibly useful lexical reservoir from which we can tap for the translation of urban youth vernacular in literature. Examples of terminology retrieved from Italian rap lyrics to translate youth vernacular in the ST are: *le popolari*<sup>7</sup> (short for *le case popolari*, used for “commission tower”; “flats”; and “[Fitzroy] Estate”); *beccarsi*<sup>8</sup> (used for “to hang with”); *i raga* (used for “the boys”)<sup>9</sup>; *flippare di brutto*<sup>10</sup> (used for “to go mental”), *tipo* (used for “boyfriend” and “man”; and with the separate meaning of “kind of” and “like”), *spaccare*<sup>11</sup> (used for “to be awesome”); *andare a manetta*<sup>12</sup> (used for “to shoot and shine”), *fare strano*<sup>13</sup> (used for “to feel awkward”), and *da paura*<sup>14</sup> (used for “killer [suspension]”). In selecting the lyrics, I was careful to choose rappers from different Italian regions (e.g. Ensi from Turin; Sfera Ebbasta and Lazza from Milan; Joe Cassano from Bologna; TruceKlan and Flaminio Maphia from Rome; Capo Plaza from Salerno; Stokka and Madbuddy from Palermo) in order not to tie Little Sister’s language in the TT to a specific geographic location.

Before translating Asha’s voice, I strived to identify the languages that could have influenced her way of speaking English, in the attempt to replicate some of the characteristics of these languages in the TT. As discussed above, Arabic was identified as one of these languages. I therefore decided to take Italian literary texts featuring Arabic-speaking characters as reference. I found works by writers of migrant origin to be an especially valuable resource for this task because of their propensity to give voice to people with different linguistic backgrounds. In particular, I took as a model a dialogue from Amara Lakhous’s 2010 novel *Divorzio all’Islamica a Viale Marconi* (81-82), from which I borrowed the following grammatical elements used by Arabic speakers in Italian: lack of verb “to be” in the present tense; lack of auxiliary verbs in

<sup>7</sup> “Mi chiamo Jari, vengo dalle *popolari*”, Ensi, “Non Rifarlo a Casa” (2015); “Siam partiti dalle *popolari*”, Sfera Ebbasta, “XNX” (2018).

<sup>8</sup> “Ci vediamo qui, *ci becchiamo* lì”, Achille Lauro, “A Casa De Sandro” (2017); “Fra’ ci *becchiamo* allora”, Capo Plaza, “Nisida” (2016)

<sup>9</sup> “Perché *i raga* in giro come nelle Banlieue, ooh / Fumano juen come se fosse uno sport”, Vale pain, “Banlieue” (2019). “Raga” also appears in lyrics in the alternative pronunciation “rega”: “Jonny Jab sonda l’onda della jam / E con *i rega* fionda rime quinto dan”, Joe Cassano, “Dio Lodato Per Sta Chance” (1999).

<sup>10</sup> “Hai toppato se pensi che sto mc sia *flippato*”, Joe Cassano, “Dio Lodato Per Sta Chance” (1999); “Ci siamo già fatti sì, fatti *di brutto*”, Madman, “Il Momento” (2016).

<sup>11</sup> “Pompa su il volume di ogni suono che ti *spacca*”, Stokka & Madbuddy, “Ghettoblaster” (2004).

<sup>12</sup> “Ma ora faranno il giro, *a manetta*”, TruceKlan, “Già Vecchi” (2008); “Lazzino parte *a manetta* come i vecchi tempi”, Lazza, “Fresh Freestyle” (2012).

<sup>13</sup> “Pure se *fa strano* / Sorrido so perché so che oggi non ti chiamerò”, Neffa, “Aspettando il Sole” (1996); “Mi *fa strano* il marcio dentro l’uomo”, Raige, “Intro” (2006).

<sup>14</sup> “Oggi si presume che è *da paura*”, Flaminio Maphia, “Da Paura” (2005); “Sto sempre *da paura* e non mi butti giù”, Duke Montana, “A Modo Mio” (2016).



the indicative present perfect (*passato prossimo*); genitive constructions expressed through construct state with no prepositions.

The same dialogue from Lakhous's *Divorzio* was also used as a model to translate the passages in italics, where readers hear Little Sister imagining her former boyfriend's mother complaining about young people's disrespect for traditional customs and lack of family values. In order to distinguish Asha's voice from the mother-in-law's voice, I adopted a phonetic substitution that roughly mimics the Arabic accent, also inspired by the dialogue from Lakhous's *Divorzio*. In this dialogue, the Italian-Algerian author provides an example of how to transcribe the accent of Arabic speakers (Egyptians, in his case) in Italian. Lakhous replaces the letter "p" with "b", the letter "o" with "u", the letter "e" with "i" and sometimes the letter "i" with "e" (for example, the suffix "ri-" becomes "re-").

There are also instances of anaptyxis (the word *preghiera* becomes *bereghiera* with the addition of a vowel sound), and other graphic alterations to show, for example, the difficulties of non-native speakers of Italian to pronounce the consonant cluster "gl-". While orthographic representation of non-standard language is "a way of showing readers how words are pronounced, which will allow them to hear the dialect in their heads as they read" (Epstein 206), it also carries the risk of ridiculing the characters, particularly when dealing with the representation of ethnic minorities whose use of language has been racialized. For this reason, I limited phonetic substitution to the passages where Little Sister imagines Ahmed's mother speaking, and mocks her "whingeing and nagging" (5). Much like the short dialogue in *Divorzio*, these passages have a caricaturing intent, which is reinforced by the orthographic representation of the way Little Sisters imagines the woman to speak. No phonetic substitution was used for the translation of Asha's voice, where readers are exposed to Asha's traumatic memories and thoughts. This choice aimed to preserve the personal and dramatic tone of these sections.

It was difficult to determine with certainty which languages other than Arabic might have influenced the language spoken by these two characters. Ethnologue lists 134 different languages spoken in Sudan (12 modern languages are spoken in the Darfur region alone) and "the linguistic diversity of Sudan is reflected, at least in part, in the emigrant community in Melbourne" (Musgrave and Hajek 2). Borland and Mphande (2006) identified Fur, one of the languages of Darfur, among the fifteen Sudanese languages present in Melbourne. However, the linguistic situation of refugees from Darfur living in Melbourne is still to be investigated (Musgrave and Hajek). In personal communication, Sudanese Arabic specialist and principal owner of Arabic Communication Experts, Sam Berner, indicated that it is improbable that the author would have carried out in-depth research into the linguistic background of Darfur refugees in Australia before writing this short story. Some expressions she attributes to the Sudanese characters do not in fact sound plausible: 'to walk *down* the street' (4) is too idiomatic (in Arabic, one would say 'to walk *in* the street'); Ahmed's mother complains that young people "[d]o not look us in the eye" (5), but to look somebody in the eye is considered disrespectful in Sudanese culture. Ahmed's mother would have rather lamented that children no longer bow their heads in front of elders. Likewise, what Clarke (9) calls "fiori tree" (*Grewia tenax* (Forssk.) Fiori is commonly referred to as "gudeim" in Sudanese Arabic (Gebauer et al; Sati and Ahmed)<sup>15</sup>. Faced with the

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<sup>15</sup> I decided to translate "fiori tree" as "pianta di gudeim" to avoid confusion since the word 'fiori' means 'flowers' in Italian (the direct translation would have sounded like "flower tree"). The use of the

impossibility of determining exactly which other linguistic influences penetrated Asha's and Ahmed's mother's English, I decided to limit myself to characterise their voices as influenced by the Arabic language and as non-native; that is, with some of the typical errors of someone who learnt the language in their adult years. In Italian, this equates, for example, to the avoidance of more complex verb tenses (indicative replaces subjunctive and conditional); ungrammatical use of prepositions; and issues with adjective-noun agreement (for example, "qualche" is often used with plural nouns instead of singular nouns).

While translating, great attention was devoted to maintaining the rhythm and the alliterations that are present in the ST, an aspect that I imagine would be very important for Clarke as a slam poet, who is used to reciting her compositions. For example, for "bright red roar" (13), the repetition of the "r" sound is maintained in the translation "ruggito rosso brillante". Where it was not possible to maintain the same sound, like in "alloy Harley handlebars" (Clarke 1), I chose to repeat another sound ("manubrio curvo cromato"), even when this meant a slight change in the meaning: "cromato" is not the exact translation of "alloy", which would be "in lega", however it is more idiomatic and it maintains the alliteration. The choice of the historical present tense to translate the simple past used by Little Sister in the narration is also motivated by the need to maintain a concise rhythm in the TT. As a compound tense, *passato prossimo* slows down the narrative rhythm, especially in sentences with multiple verbs, on the other hand, *passato remoto* is not suitable for the colloquial register used by Little Sister.

The presence of local references in the text (both from Sudan and Australia) also posed challenges during the translation process. My choice was to leave the local references unaltered and unexplained. For example, I do not explain that Coles is an Australian supermarket chain nor do I describe what kind of dish "aseeda" is, although I am aware that an Italian audience will probably not be familiar with these references. This choice is aligned with my decision to avoid assimilation. My translation choices, although they may appear conspicuous and make the translator's hand "visible", aim not to domesticate the text for the reader.

The translation of Clarke's short story *David* provides the opportunity to reflect on the ongoing challenges to translate non-standard linguistic varieties into Italian. No single solution exists as each variety, and each character's idiolect, has its own peculiarities that need to be considered during the translation process. The difficulties linked to the rendition of these varieties should not lead towards standardization, as this would eliminate important differences and nuances included in the ST, resulting in a "flattened" TT (Bonaffini 279). Despite the risks that come with the replacement strategy, some studies (Wekker and Wekker; Smalley) demonstrate that "when the conditions are right, using replacement can produce TT effects comparable to those in the ST" (Smalley 195). In the case of *David*, I believe that replacing non-standard varieties of English, such as the vernacular spoken by urban youth of migrant background and the accented variety of African refugees, with non-standard varieties of Italian spoken by similarly marginalised groups allowed me to at least get closer to recreating the overall effect of the ST.

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Sudanese Arabic term avoids the risk of domestication, allowing to situate the flora in the story within an African context.

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**David**  
**By**  
**Maxine Beneba Clarke**

**David**  
**Maxine Beneba Clarke**  
**Traduzione di**  
**Margherita Angelucci**

SHE HAD A SHINY CHERRY-RED FRAME, SCOOPED ALLOY HARLEY handlebars and sleek metal pedals. Her wire basket-carrier was fitted with a double-handled cane lift-out. If I'd learned anything from Ahmed before we split (and Lord knew there wasn't much I'd got from him over the few years we were together), it was how to spot a good set of wheels. And this pushbike, she was fuck-off beautiful. The jumble of wheels, frames, spokes and assorted handlebars crowded around her in the window display at Ted's Cycles made me think of the bike dump round back of the Fitzy commission tower.

Before we had Nile, Ahmed and I used to hang at the bike dump with the boys. I'd watch them all piecing together patchwork bikes from throw-outs we'd scabbed off kerbs or pulled out of skips. They were crazy, some of those contraptions Ahmed and them built: tiny little frames attached to oversized backward-mounted handlebars and gigantic heavy-tread wheels. Insanity in motion. Ahmed's mum was always going mental about him getting chain grease over his school clothes.

Hadn't seen Ahmed's mum since forever. Not since I fucked off with Nile and got my own council place. I knew what she would have been saying about me, though. I could hear her voice like she was standing right next to me outside the bike-shop window. *These children, born in this country, they think they can behave like the Australian children. They have no idea about the tradition and respect. In Sudan, a good wife knew how to keep her husband, and a good mother would not leave. My son and my*

ERA ROSSO CILIEGIA FIAMMANTE, CON UN MANUBRIO CURVO CROMATO COME UN'HARLEY e pedali di metallo lucidi. Aveva un cestino con i manici in vimini che si tirava fuori da un porta-cestino in ferro. Se Ahmed mi aveva insegnato qualcosa prima di mollarci (e Dio sa che non c'ho guadagnato un granché dagli anni in cui siamo stati insieme) era stato come riconoscere una bella bici. E questa bicicletta, cazzo se era bella. L'accozzaglia di ruote, telai, raggi e manubri vari ammassata intorno a lei nella vetrina di Ted's Cycles mi faceva venire in mente la discarica di biciclette dietro alle popolari di Fitzy.

Prima di avere Nile, io e Ahmed ci beccavamo sempre con i raga alla discarica di biciclette. Li guardavo mettere insieme bici improvvisate dai pezzi che raccattavamo sui marciapiedi o tiravamo fuori dai cassoni dei rifiuti. Erano assurdi, alcuni degli aggeggi che Ahmed e gli altri costruivano: telai minuscoli attaccati a mega manubri montati al contrario e ruote giganti da fuoristrada. Follia su due ruote. La mamma di Ahmed flippava sempre di brutto per il grasso della catena sulla divisa di scuola.

Era da un secolo che non vedevo la mamma di Ahmed. Da quando mi ero levata dalle palle con Nile e mi ero beccata una casa popolare tutta mia. Però immaginavo quello che diceva su di me. Sentivo la sua voce come se stava proprio lì di fianco davanti alla vetrina del negozio di biciclette. *Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, binsano che loro bossano cumbortare come ragazzi australiani. Non hanno idia cosa vuole dire tradizione e risbitto. In Sudan, brava molie sapeva come tenere suo marito e brava madre*

*grandson's mother – did you know they did not even get marry? Not even marry!*

I shifted my backpack on my shoulders, leaned in for a closer look. *Barkly Star*, read the shiny bronze sticker across her body. Strapped to the bike's back rack was an orange and blue baby seat: reality, barging right on fucking in.

Black clouds were on the move as I wheeled her out of the shop and onto Barkly Street – the fuck-awful Melbourne rain about to come through. I pulled up the hood of my jumper, the one I nicked from Footscray Coles after they fired me, the winter before Nile was due. Snot-coloured, Ahmed had reckoned when I got back to the flats with it. Jealous shit. I was always better at swiping stuff than him.

I'd had no car ever since Ahmed and me split, and Nile rode too fast on his trike for me to keep up walking beside him. I'd end up running along behind, yelling at him to wait up. Community Services were on my back then too, about weekly check-ins. Those wheels were gonna change my life, I knew it. Sure fucken thing. I spent most of my dole money buying that beauty, but the rent was already way behind. It was gonna be a fortnight of porridge and potatoes, but half the time I cooked other stuff Nile wouldn't look at it anyway.

*These children, born in this country, do you think they feed their babies the aseeda for breakfast? Do they drop it on the little one's tongue to show them where is it they come from? Do you think they have learned to cook shorba soup? I tell you: no! They feeding them all kinds of rubbish. McDonald's, even. They spit on their grandmothers' ways. They spit in our bowls, in our kitchens.*

*non andava via. Mio filio e madre mio nibote... sabite che non si hanno nimmemo sbusati? Nimmemo sbusati!*

Mi sistemo lo zaino sulle spalle e mi avvicino per vedere meglio. Sulla canna della bici c'è un adesivo luccicante color bronzo con scritto *Barkly Star*. Montato sul portapacchi, un seggiolino blu e arancione: la realtà, che fa il cazzo di capolino.

Nuvoloni neri si avvicinano mentre spingo la bicicletta fuori dal negozio e su per Barkly Street – la solita pioggia di merda di Melbourne sta per arrivare. Mi tiro su il cappuccio della felpa, quella che avevo fregato da Coles a Footscray quando mi avevano licenziata l'inverno prima che era nato Nile. Color moccio, aveva detto Ahmed quando ero tornata alle popolari. Invidioso di merda. Ero sempre stata meglio di lui a fottere la roba.

Da quando io e Ahmed ci eravamo mollati, non avevo più avuto una macchina e Nile pedalava troppo in fretta sul triciclo per riuscire a stargli dietro a piedi. Finivo per corrergli appresso, urlandogli di aspettare. Anche i servizi sociali mi stavano addosso in quel periodo, con controlli tutte le settimane. Quella bici mi avrebbe svoltato la vita, me lo sentivo. Di sicuro, cazzo. Avevo speso quasi tutti i soldi del sussidio per comprare quella figata, tanto con l'affitto ero già in ritardo di brutto. Sarebbero state due settimane a porridge e patate, ma comunque metà delle volte che cucinavo altra roba Nile manco la toccava.

*Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, binsate che danno mangiare asida a loro fili bir colazione? La mettono su lingua bambini bir fare cabire da dove loro vengono? Binsate che loro imbarato fare shorba? Io dico voi: no! Li danno mangiare tutti tipi schifizze. Birfino Mc Donald. Sbutano su usanze loro nonne. Sbutano su nostri biatti, su nostre cucine.*

Wheeling the new bike up Barkly Street I noticed a woman, standing on the footpath, gawking. She was the colour of roasted coffee beans, a shade darker than me, wearing black from headscarf to shoes, carrying a string grocery bag. She cleared her throat, started on me. 'Little Sister, is that your bike?'

This young woman, she walking down Barkly Street with that red bike, brand new and for herself even though she look like she Sudanese and a grown mother too. Straight away, she remind me back of David. She remembering David to me.

Way back when things were better more good, before the trouble in my Sudan, a man in the village, Masud, who used to being a mechanical engineer, he make my boys a bike. With own two hands, he builds it. I don't even knowing how he make it from scrap of metal around that place, tin cans even, but he did. And my little David, seven then, he look at that bike like he never saw a more beautiful thing. His brothers were too small to ride without adult helping, but David always on that bike. He riding it from one end of village to other one, poking his little-boy nose in about everything that going on.

Little David riding that bike so much that Masud tell him about country call France, where is very long bike race which will make you famous if you win. Long bike ride is call the Tour de France because it goes all over that country. After the day Masud told David about the famous bike race, every time David passes him on that bike Masud calls out to him. 'Here come David, on his Tour of Sudan!' he call.

My David, he would grow the biggest smile ever you saw when Masud say that.

Mentre cammino con la bicicletta nuova su per Barkly Street, noto una donna, in piedi sul marciapiedi, che mi fissa. È del colore dei chicchi di caffè tostati, una tonalità più scura di me, vestita di nero dal velo in testa alle scarpe ai piedi, con una borsa della spesa di corda attaccata al braccio. Si schiarisce la voce e mi fa: "Sorellina, è tua bici quella?"

Questa ragazza, cammina per Barkly Street con quella bicicletta rossa, tutta nuova e tutta per lei, anche se lei sembra sudanese e pure madre famiglia. Subito subito, lei fa pensare David. Lei ricorda David a me.

Tanto tempo fa, quando le cose andavano più meglio, prima di guai in mio Sudan, un uomo in villaggio, Masud, che faceva ingegnere meccanico, fa bicicletta a miei figli. La costruisce con sue mani. Non so neanche come lui fatta da pezzi metallo trovati in giro, perfino lattine, ma lui fatta. E mio piccolo David, sette anni, guarda quella bici come se mai visto cosa più bella. Suoi fratelli erano troppo piccoli per pedalare senza aiuto di adulti, ma David sempre su quella bici. Pedala da parte all'altra di villaggio, ficcando suo piccolo naso in tutto che succede.

Piccolo David va così tanto su quella bici che Masud racconta lui di paese che si chiama Francia, dove lunga corsa biciclette che diventi famoso se vinci. Lunga corsa biciclette si chiama Tour de France perché va in giro dappertutto in quel paese. Da giorno che Masud detto a David di famosa corsa biciclette, tutte volte che David passa davanti lui in bici, Masud dice a lui: "Ecco David in suo Giro di Sudan", dice.

Mio David faceva il sorriso più grande mai visto quando Masud dice così.



‘One day, David,’ Masud say, carrying on to David to make him all proud and smiling. ‘One day you will be so famous because of bike riding that they will name after you a beautiful bike.’

David so dreamy he believe that might come true.

‘Little Sister, is that your bike?’ the woman said again. She was my mother’s age and looked like a Sudanese too, so I knew nothing I said was gonna be the right thing. Anyway, it wasn’t really a question, just a kind of judgement, like when Mum found out I was knocked up; she never even looked up from her maize porridge. Mum never liked Ahmed. Liked him less than his mum liked me. Probably that was the reason we were ever together. To piss them the fuck off with all their whingeing and nagging.

I ignored the woman, made myself busy fitting my backpack into the bike basket, looked down at the weed-filled cracks in the pavement, at the shiny silver bike stand – anywhere but at her.

*These children that born here in this country, they so disrespectful. They not even address us elders properly. Do not look us in the eye. Back in Sudan, you remember, we used to say Auntie and Uncle. We knew how to speak to one another with proper dignity. We would never ignore Auntie on the street.*

‘It is my bike, Auntie. Yes.’

The woman touched the back of the baby seat, looked me up and down. ‘What will your husband think, when he sees?’

I wanted to laugh and say, ‘What husband? Who even cares? My boyfriend was no good, so I left him. Now he’s off with some slag down the Fitzroy Estate. But seriously, she can

“Un giorno”, dice ancora Masud a David per vedere lui tutto orgoglioso e sorridente, “Un giorno sarai ciclista così famoso che faranno bellissima bici con tuo nome”.

David così sognatore che crede si avvera.

“Sorellina, è tua bici quella?” mi fa ancora la donna. Aveva l’età di mia madre e sembrava anche lei sudanese, quindi sapevo che potevo dire qualsiasi cosa e non sarebbe stata la cosa giusta. La sua non era nemmeno una domanda, era più tipo un giudizio, come quando mamma aveva scoperto che ero incinta, non aveva nemmeno alzato gli occhi dal porridge di mais. A mamma non era mai piaciuto Ahmed. Gli piaceva meno di quanto a sua mamma piacevo io. Forse era proprio quello il motivo per cui ci eravamo messi insieme. Per rompergli il cazzo con tutte le loro lagne e rotture di coglioni.

Ignoro la donna e mi metto a sistemare lo zaino nel cestino della bicicletta, fisso le crepe piene di erbacce sul marciapiede, la rastrelliera di metallo argentato – guardo dappertutto tranne che verso di lei.

*Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, non hanno risbitto. Non parlano con risbitto a noi anziani. Non guardano noi in occhi. Quando eravamo in Sudan, voi ricordate, sembra dicevamo Zia e Zio. Sabivamo come parlare con li altri con dignità che ci vuole. Mai ignoravamo una Zia bir strada.*

“Sì, Zia. È la mia bici”.

La donna tocca il seggiolino e mi squadra dalla testa ai piedi: “Cosa dice tuo marito quando lui vede?”

Volevo mettermi a ridere e dire: “Quale marito? Chi se ne frega? Il mio tipo era uno sfigato e l’ho mollato. Adesso sta con qualche troietta giù alle popolari di Fitzroy. Ma può tenerse lo, davvero, quella povera disperata! È da

have him, bless the desperate thing! I've wanted a bike like this ever since I was six. So please, lady, hands off and back away from my childhood dream.'

*You children, you have no respect, no manners. When you have lived long as we have, you will realise everything we said, it is for your own good. You should be show us respect, like real African children. You may have been born in this country, but do not forget where is it you came from.*

I smiled sweetly. 'Oh, my husband won't mind, Auntie. After all, for better or worse, he has vowed to love me.'

The woman sucked her yellowing teeth, adjusted her headscarf, did that one-eyebrow raised thing at me. 'You don't have a husband. Do you?'

We had been thinking about the army would come and destroy the village, since they took my husband Daud e his friend Samuel two years ago. But somehow, they leave us alone. Before, when we thought the Janjaweed must be about to come and burn our houses like they did to many others, we were always ready with bundles of food and clothes, but after years pass, we were thinking they don't care about us anymore – maybe they busy in Khartoum or near the border where there are more things to steal.

One day Amina, my friend and the daughter of Masud who build David his bike, she come running, tripping through the village screaming. 'Army! The army coming near! They just now burn the whole of Haskanita to the ground. It is the Janjaweed! We got to run!'

Everybody around us terrified, packing all what they can.

'Quickly, Asha, where your little ones?' Amina say to me. 'Where your boys are? No time to gather, you just bringing water and the boys!'

quando ho sei anni che volevo una bici come questa. Quindi per favore, signora, giù le mani dal mio sogno di infanzia."

*Voi ragazzi, voi non avite risbitto, niente buone maniere. Un giorno, quando avite vissuto lungo come noi, vi accorgirite che tutto quello che diciamo è bir vostro bene. Imbarate trattare noi con risbitto, come veri fili africani. Siete nati in questo baise, ma non diminticate da dov'è che vinite.*

Le faccio un sorriso: "Oh, a mio marito non dispiacerà, Zia. Dopotutto, ha promesso di amarmi nella buona e nella cattiva sorte."

La donna si succhia i denti giallastri, si sistema il velo e mi fa quella faccia con un sopracciglio alzato: "Tu non ce l'hai un marito, vero?"

Aspettavamo che esercito veniva a distruggere il villaggio da quando loro preso mio marito Daud e suo amico Samuel due anni prima. Ma per qualche motivi, loro lasciato in pace. Prima, quando credevamo i Janjawid stavano per venire dare fuoco a nostre case come loro fatto con tante altre, eravamo sempre pronti con pacchi di roba da mangiare e vestiti, ma anni passati e noi pensato che non importava più di noi – forse loro impegnati a Khartoum o vicino a confine dove c'è più cose da rubare.

Un giorno, mia amica Amina, figlia di Masud che fatto bicicletta per David, lei arrivata di corsa, inciampava per villaggio e gridava: "Esercito! Arriva esercito! Loro appena bruciato tutta Haskanita. Sono i Janjawid! Dobbiamo scappare!"

Tutti intorno noi terrorizzati, impacchettano tutto che possono.

"Presto, Asha, dove tuoi figli?" dice Amina. "Dove tuoi bambini? Non c'è tempo fare valigie, porta solo acqua e bambini!"

I am standing very still because is like when they come for my husband and Amina's husband and put them in the jail in Khartoum, like when last I saw my Daud.

Amina grab hold of me and put her hands on my face and hold my face to look at her face. 'Asha, already we lost Daud and Samuel – already we lose our husbands, but that is past now. Where they boys, Asha? Where your children? Or are you also wanting to losing the not-yet-men you give birth to, as well as the man you make them with?'

'Yes, I do have a husband.' Fuck her, for making a judgement on me.

*These children, born in this country, they doing the sex and having babies and then not even wanting get marry. Oooh, if we did that back in Sudan, we would be cast out. The government would not give us money to raise our babies. Can you imagine us asking?*

Rain was starting to fall now, and the peak-hour traffic along Barkly Street was bumper to bumper. I wheeled my bike quicker along the pavement, but Auntie kept in step with me.

'What does your mother think about the cutting of your hair off like that? Is not like a woman. So short afro. Is she alright about you wearing the jeans and riding around on the street? And where is your baby, Little Sister? The baby who going go on that bike seat? Baby will be missing you!'

*They put the babies in the childcare and they let them looked after by strangers. Strangers! When the babies are not even yet out of nappies. Did you ever hear of such thing? Why they having the babies if they do not want to look after?'*

'It's okay, Auntie, I can handle myself. Bikes are awesome, though. If you want to, we could go up a side street where no-one will see. I'll hold the back

Io sto ferma immobile perché è come quando loro venuti prendere mio marito e marito Amina e messo loro in prigione a Khartum, come quando visto per ultima volta mio Daud.

Amina mi prende e mette sue mani su mia faccia e tiene mia faccia di fronte a sua faccia. "Asha, noi già perso Daud e Samuel, già perdiamo nostri mariti, ma quello passato ormai. Dove i ragazzi, Asha? Dove tuoi bambini? O vuoi perdere anche le creature che tu partorito, dopo uomo che fatte loro con te?

"Sì che ce l'ho un marito". Che si fotta, come si permette di giudicarmi?

*Questi ragazzi, nati in questo baise, fanno il sesso e fanno i bambini e boi non voliono neanche sbusarsi. Oooh, se noi fatto così in Sudan, cacciavano via. Il governo non dava soldi bir crescere bambini. Immagini noi chiedere soldi?*

La pioggia adesso stava iniziando a cadere e le macchine erano incolonnate nel traffico dell'ora di punta su Barkly Street. Allungo il passo spingendo la bici sul marciapiede ma la Zia mi sta dietro.

"Che cosa pensa tua madre di tagliare capelli così? Non è per donna. Afro così corto. Per lei va bene tu metti il jeans e vai bicicletta per strada? E dove tuo bambino, Sorellina? Il bambino seduto su quel seggiolino? Bambino sente mancanza!"

*Mettono bambini in asilo e fanno guardare loro da sconosciuti. Sconosciuti! Quando bambini ancora bortano bannolino. Voi mai sentito cosa di genere? Perché fanno bambini se non voliono guardare?*

"Tranquilla, Zia, so badare a me stessa. Andare in bici spacca. Se vuoi, possiamo infilarci in una stradina laterale dove non ci vede nessuno, ti tengo da

while you have a ride. Then you can have a proper turn.’ It came out of my mouth before I had the time to rethink.

‘You are wicked,’ Auntie chocked, like she was trying to stop herself from laughing. ‘You so funny, Sister. You Muslim girl?’

‘No.’

She waited for my explanation.

‘What religion you are, Little Sister?’ she nosed again, scratching the outside elbow of her robe, shifting to one side of the footpath so and old Chinese man with a trolley could pass by us.

‘None.’ I shrugged, kept wheeling.

The woman’s eyes opened wide. The whole of Barkly Street seemed to go quiet.

Everything around me silent. I suck the air into my mouth but I cannot talk. Amina, she push into the house and I turn around, following her. Clement and Djoni playing in the house with David.

‘Boys, like I tell you would happen, the time is here, we must leave quietly, quietly,’ I say. I get the water container and quickly roll up some bread and put some blanket in the bag. When we get out of the house, Masud and Amina are waiting, but David, he say he going get his bike, he not leaving without it. Before we can catch him, he run. David run so fast towards the middle of the village where all the children play in the big fiori tree. That is where he left his bike. So fast he run away, his little legs kicking up the dirt.

‘Get Asha and the boys to the edge of village. I will go back to get David,’ Masud tell Amina, and he walk quickly after my boy. Masud was not young man anymore, and he did not run, but fast, fast we walk.

dietro mentre ti fai un giro. Poi puoi provare da sola”. Mi esce così dalla bocca, prima di avere il tempo di ripensarci.

“Sei terribile”, tossicchia la Zia, tipo cercando di trattenersi dal ridere. “Proprio simpatica, Sorella. Tu musulmana?”

“No.”

La Zia rimane in attesa di una spiegazione e poi continua a farsi gli affari miei: “Quale tua religione, Sorellina?” mi chiede, grattandosi il gomito da sopra la manica del vestito e facendosi da parte sul marciapiede per far passare un vecchio cinese con un carrello.

“Nessuna”, le dico con un’alzata di spalle, continuando a spingere la bicicletta.

La donna spalanca gli occhi. Tutta Barkly Street si ammutolisce.

Tutto intorno a me silenzio. Prendo aria in bocca ma non riesco parlare. Amina entra dentro casa e io mi giro, seguo lei. Clement e Djoni giocano in casa con David.

“Bambini, come io spiegato, il momento arrivato, dobbiamo andare zitti zitti”, dico. Prendo tanica acqua, arrotolo velocemente il pane e infilo qualche coperte in borsa. Quando usciamo di casa, Masud e Amina aspettano, ma David dice che va a prendere sua bicicletta, non va via senza quella. Prima che riusciamo a fermare, lui corre via. Corre velocissimo verso centro villaggio dove tutti bambini giocano su grande pianta di gudeim. Lui lasciato sua bici qui. Velocissimo lui corre, sue gambette calciano in aria la terra.

“Porta Asha e i ragazzi in fondo a villaggio, io torno indietro prendere David”, Masud dice Amina, e cammina veloce dietro mio figlio. Masud non era più giovane e non corre, ma veloce, veloce cammina.

Amina pulling my arm. ‘Don’t be stupid, Asha, you got two boys with you and David safe with my father.’

The others in the village are running past quickly, quickly. Amina is pulling me to come away. Clement and Djoni, they crying. Masud disappear into the village and it swallow him up the way two minute ago it swallow little David.

One of the boys is on my back, the other on Amina’s. Nothing else about that walk I am remembering, even now. When we get to edge of the village, we hide in the spot where we can see back a little bit. In the bushes. Some other people from the village there already, quiet, quiet. When we look back, the soldiers are not coming after us. The village is smoking and the soldiers busy smashing, burning. We hear a woman voice then, and she is screaming, screaming. Amina and me put our hands over Djoni and Clement ears.

After some hours, the boys fall asleep in the bushes. Amina hold her hand over my mouth while I crying.

‘Don’t worry. My father keeping your David safe.’

She crying too, and we both know she is not talking about safe in our village, safe in Sudan, safe from militia, safe alive. The village is burning, and David and Masud are gone. I am praying then. Amina praying also because her husband and now her father she has lost. Because of his love for my boy, her father is also gone.

Auntie walked along next to me, talking to herself. ‘This girl! She has baby but no husband. Tsssk. She ride bike and she doesn’t care even who see. She even going take the baby on it. Tsssk. No religion. No God. She cut her hair short and wear the jeans. Tssssssk.’

The rain was getting heavier. I wanted to cut across the rail line and head up Geelong Road to Nile’s

Amina tira me per braccio: “Non fare stupida, Asha, hai due bambini con te e David al sicuro con mio padre”.

Altra gente da villaggio corre veloce, veloce vicino noi. Amina tira me per venire via. Clement e Djoni piangono. Masud sparisce in villaggio che ingoia lui come due minuti prima ingoiato piccolo David.

Tengo uno dei bambini su mia schiena, Amina l’altro. Di quel cammino non ricordo altro, anche adesso: quando arriviamo in fondo a villaggio, nascondiamo in posto dove riusciamo a vedere un po’ indietro, tra la boscaglia. Altre persone da villaggio già lì, zitte zitte. Quando guardiamo indietro, i soldati non rincorrono noi. Il villaggio fuma e i soldati impegnati distruggere e incendiare. Poi sentiamo voce di donna e lei grida, grida. Io e Amina copriamo le orecchie di Djoni e Clement con nostre mani.

Dopo qualche ore, i bambini dormono tra la boscaglia. Amina tiene sua mano sopra mia bocca mentre piango.

“Non ti preoccupare, mio padre tiene tuo David sicuro”.

Anche lei piange e tutte e due sappiamo che non intende sicuro in villaggio, sicuro in Sudan, sicuro da milizie, sicuro vivo. Il villaggio brucia e David e Masud non ci sono più. Allora io prego. Amina anche prega perché lei perso suo marito e ora suo padre. Per suo amore per mio figlio, anche suo padre non c’è più.

La Zia camminava di fianco a me, parlando da sola. “Questa ragazza! Con bambino ma niente marito. Ohi ohi. Va in bicicletta e lei non importa neanche chi vede. Porta anche bambino in bicicletta. Ohi ohi. Niente religione. Niente Dio. Taglia capelli corti e porta il jeans. Ohi ohi ohi ohi.”

La pioggia si stava facendo più intensa. Volevo attraversare la ferrovia e



occasional care, test out if this Barkly Star really did know how to shoot and shine.

‘Auntie, nice meeting you,’ I lied, flicking the halfway-down bike stand right up.

Auntie turned the corner beside me, grabbed my wrist tightly and whispered loudly into my ear, ‘I have a second husband. I very lucky. My first husband, he die back in my country. I have five children now. My husband, he is good man, but he would not like me riding. Here, nobody is watching. Quick. I can try and have a turn just this one time. You hold the bag.’

Hours, hours must be passing. We waiting for dawn light so can creep away from the bushes to another place without walking into dangerous thing. Sudden in the darkness, we hear a rattling. It is coming out of the smoke, louder, louder. Rattling, rattling. The boys still asleep but Amina and me, we are looking, looking through tree to see.

I laughed, sure that she was joking, but Auntie handed me her string grocery bag. She pulled her skirts tight around her legs to stop them getting caught in the chain, eased herself onto the bike and held on to the handlebars.

‘Um... Auntie, have you ever ridden a bike before?’

Auntie shook her head no. The man who’d just passed us with his shopping turned curiously, stopped to watch.

‘I’ll hold the back for you. Are you sure you want to have a go?’

‘Yes. I want to ride it, Little Sister. Thank you. I will have a try.’

It is David. Somebody hear my prayer because that noise, that rattling, rattling, it is David. He riding that bike to me fast, fast. He is pedalling, pedalling.

andare su per Geelong Road fino all’asilo di Nile, vedere se questa Barkly Star avrebbe retto se la sparavo a manetta.

“È stato un piacere conoscerti, Zia” mento, togliendo il cavalletto alla bici che era mezzo giù.

La Zia gira l’angolo standomi accanto, mi afferra per un polso e mi sussurra con forza nell’orecchio: “Ho secondo marito, io molto fortunata. Mio primo marito, lui morto in mio paese. Adesso ho cinque figli. Mio marito bravo uomo ma non piacerebbe vedere me su bicicletta. Qui non vede nessuno. Presto. Posso provare solo per questa volta. Tieni mia borsa.”

Ore, forse passano ore. Aspettiamo l’alba così possiamo spostare da boscaglia ad altro posto senza sbattere contro qualcosa pericoloso. All’improvviso, nel buio sentiamo rumore ferro che sbatte. Viene fuori da fumo, sempre più forte, più forte. Il ferro sbatte e sbatte. I ragazzi dormono ancora ma io e Amina guardiamo, guardiamo tra gli alberi per vedere.

Mi metto a ridere, sicura che stava scherzando, ma la Zia mi passa la borsa della spesa, si tira su la gonna per non farla impigliare nella catena, si accomoda sul sellino e stringe il manubrio.

“Ehm... Zia, sei mai andata in bicicletta?”

La Zia fa cenno di no con la testa. Il tipo che era appena passato con la spesa si gira e si ferma incuriosito a guardare.

“Ti tengo da dietro, sei sicura che vuoi provarci?”

“Sì, vorrei fare giro, Sorellina. Grazie, faccio prova.”

È David. Qualcuno ascolta mie preghiere perché quel rumore, quel ferro che sbatte e sbatte, è David. Pedala verso di me su sua bicicletta, veloce, veloce.

Three men chasing a little bit after him, but he is soon leaving them in the distance. Some small piece of metal fall down off the pedal but that bike with my David on it is going faster, faster. David is almost to where we are hiding, and he is laughing. My David is riding to me, smiling. The metal on that bike, it glinting, glinting in the darkness, like star or something.

Auntie was heavy – not overweight, but it was hard for me to hold her steady on the seat.

‘Hold the handlebars straight,’ I said. ‘Move the front wheel where you want to go, and push the pedals.’

Auntie was zigzagging all over the place, as if she’d never steered anything in her life. It was a struggle to keep her on the bike.

‘Steer it like a shopping trolley,’ I suggested.

The bike straightened up then, and Auntie started pushing the pedals. I ran along behind, her grocery bag heavy over my shoulder.

‘Slow down. Hey. *Shit*. Slow down!’

My foot caught on a crack in the pavement, and my fingers lost their grip on the bike seat. Auntie kept riding, pedalling faster, more furiously, until she was a few hundred metres away from me.

Then out David’s laughing mouth come roar like a lion. Bright red roar like fire, like sunset, tomato-red roaring. David, he stop pedalling but the bike still rolling, rolling straight towards us. The roar spilling out behind the bike now, the red roar spraying from David’s mouth out onto the bike, splashing onto the dirt and leaving dark patches where the dry ground drinking it in. David, he falling. The bike is falling. The men in the distance have stopped chasing, stopped coming towards us. The men in

Pedala, pedala. Tre uomini inseguono lui per un po’, ma presto loro lontani. Qualche pezzetto metallo si stacca da pedale ma quella bicicletta con sopra mio David va sempre più veloce, più veloce. David quasi arrivato dove noi nascondiamo e ride. Mio David pedala verso di me, sorridendo. Il metallo su quella bici luccica, luccica nel buio, come stella.

La Zia pesava – non era sovrappeso, ma era difficile per me mantenerla in equilibrio sul sellino.

“Tieni il manubrio dritto”, dico. “Muovi la ruota davanti verso dove vuoi andare e spingi sui pedali”.

La Zia zigzagava a destra e a sinistra come se non aveva mai guidato niente in vita sua. Era un casino tenerla su.

“Guidala come se fosse un carrello della spesa”, provo a consigliare.

A questo punto la bici si raddrizza e la Zia inizia a spingere sui pedali. Io le corro dietro, con la sua borsa della spesa che mi pesa sulla spalla.

“Ehi rallenta. *Cazzo*. Rallenta!”

Inciampo su una crepa nell’asfalto e perdo la presa sul sellino della bicicletta. La Zia continua ad andare, pedalando più velocemente, più ostinatamente, finché non arriva a qualche centinaio di metri da me.

Poi da bocca di David che ride esce ruggito come leone. Ruggito rosso brillante come fuoco, come tramonto, ruggito rosso pomodoro. David smette pedalare ma la bicicletta va ancora, ancora dritta verso di noi. Il ruggito ora arriva da dietro la bicicletta, il ruggito rosso spruzza fuori da bocca di David su bicicletta, schizza per terra e lascia macchie scure dove il terreno asciutto lo beve. David, cade. La bicicletta cade. Gli uomini lontani hanno smesso correre, smesso venire verso di noi. Gli uomini

the distance look now very small. They are not men. Like David, they are boys. Two of the soldier boys are cheering and another one he is smiling and holding over his head a gun. Up and down, the boy with the gun jumping. I understand then, the Janjaweed soldier boys were racing my David, for the fun.

The bike swerved suddenly, skidded sideways. Auntie's skirt became caught up in the pedals. The bike toppled, and Auntie with it. Fuck. *Fuck*. When I reached her, she was untangling herself, shaking, crying, the scarf beneath her chin wet with tears. But the oddest thing was, with those big tears running down her face, Auntie was laughing.

'My David. He used to have the bike, back in Sudan. One day I saw him ride, ride that bike, so fast like he was flying.'

'Oh.'

'Thank you, Little Sister. Thanking you. When I ride that bike I remembering my boy, riding towards me, laughing, how he laughing...'

I felt awkward, had no idea what she was talking about, but felt like I was somehow supposed to. Auntie took up her grocery bag from the ground, smoothed some dirt from her skirt, walked away slowly, down towards West Footscray Station.

I stood there for a minute, staring after her. The rain had stopped. A small puddle of water had settled in the baby seat. Nile would be getting testy. It was half an hour past when I usually collected him. I threw my leg over the bike, started pedalling down the street. The Barkly Star was a dream to manoeuvre – smooth gliding, killer suspension, sharp brakes. Felt like I was hovering above the wet tar, flying. Like there was nothing else in the world, except me and my wheels. David. I

lontani adesso sembrano piccolissimi. Non sono uomini. Loro bambini, come David. Due bambini soldato festeggiano e un altro sorride e tiene fucile sopra sua testa. Su e giù, il bambino con fucile saltella. Allora capisco, bambini soldato di Janjawid facevano gara con mio David, per gioco.

All'improvviso, la bici sterza e sbanda di lato, la gonna della Zia si impiglia tra i pedali. Poi la bici cade e la Zia con lei. *Cazzo. Cazzo*. Quando la raggiungo, sta cercando di districarsi, trema e piange, il velo sotto il mento bagnato di lacrime. Ma la cosa più strana è che, mentre quei lacrimoni le colano sulle guance, la Zia ride.

"Mio David. Aveva bicicletta in Sudan. Un giorno visto lui pedalare, pedalare su quella bici, velocissimo come se volava."

"Oh."

"Grazie, Sorellina. Dico grazie te. Quando vado su quella bicicletta ricordo mio figlio che pedala verso di me, rideva, come rideva..."

Mi faceva strano, non avevo idea di che cosa stava parlando ma era come se per qualche motivo dovevo saperlo. La Zia raccoglie la borsa della spesa da terra, si ripulisce la gonna dalla polvere e si incammina lentamente verso la stazione di West Footscray.

Io rimango lì per un minuto a fissarla. Aveva smesso di piovere. Una pozzetta d'acqua si era formata sul seggiolino. Sicuramente Nile stava diventando una peste. Ero mezz'ora in ritardo rispetto a quando andavo a prenderlo di solito. Salgo in sella e inizio a pedalare per la strada. La Barkly Star era un sogno da manovrare – movimenti fluidi, sospensioni da paura, freni decisi. Era tipo librarsi sopra l'asfalto bagnato, tipo volare, nient'altro al mondo tranne me e la mia bici. David. Lentamente, mi

slowly rolled her brand new name rigiro in bocca il suo nome nuovo di  
around my mouth. zecca.