PLACE-BASED TRANSLINGUALISM, IDENTITY, AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD LITERARY SPACE: JHUMPA LAHIRI'S TURN TO ITALIAN

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Jhumpa Lahiri's recent turn to Italian through a formal and linguistic analysis of the creative and editorial projects she has undertaken in the last decade. By analyzing the author's trajectory from *In Other Words* (2016) to *Whereabouts* (2021) and by discussing two short stories she has published in the interval between her linguistic autobiography and her first Italian novel, the article argues that Lahiri's aesthetic and political concerns have transitioned from a utopian search for cosmopolitan encounters to a sharper attention to place-making and grounded relationality. Concurrently, her writing has moved from the pursuit of placeless abstraction to a more pronounced interest in site-specific forms of social bonding. The article further situates Lahiri's translingual practice within paradigms of postcolonial, diasporic, and translingual writing, and discusses how her choice to forsake a dominant language for a semi-peripheral one requires a different critical approach that considers both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In fully embracing the precarious translational space between Italian and English, the article contends that Lahiri's latest reinvention contributes to deprovincializing both the Italian and the Anglophone literary field, while offering new ways of articulating identity, cultural belonging, and community in comparative and world literature studies.

KEYWORDS: Lahiri, translingualism, Italian, translation, place

https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.60.2.0312
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDIES, VOL. 60, NO. 2, 2023.

In her autobiographical memoir, *In altre parole* (2015; *In Other Words*, 2016), Jhumpa Lahiri employs the image of the triangle to describe the relations between the three languages that have defined her life and creative career: Bengali, the mother tongue, English, "la matrigna" ("the stepmother"), and Italian, the language in which she has now chosen to write.[1] As Lahiri reflects on the reasons that prompted her to stop writing in English and reinvent herself in a language that, unlike Bengali, has no connection to her family's cultural heritage, she declares: "Credo che studiare l'italiano sia una fuga dal lungo scontro, nella mia vita, tra l'inglese e il bengalese. Un rifiuto sia della madre che della matrigna. Un percorso indipendente" (152) ("I think that studying Italian is a flight from the long clash in my life between English and Bengali. A rejection of both the mother and the stepmother. An independent path" [153]).[2] Two elements are worth noting here: first, the "flight" that, Lahiri firmly believes, has facilitated her creative independence; and second, the trigger behind her decision—a long clash or, as she writes in the same chapter, "una contraddizione in termini" (148) ("a contradiction in terms" [149]).

The past decade of Lahiri's career has been defined by the urge to escape from a state of linguistic if not existential uneasiness, as well as by the expectations that have been imposed on her transcultural identity. In choosing to forsake English for Italian, Lahiri has tried to overcome these expectations and carve an autonomous creative space, detached from the burden of identity affiliations. However, because it is structurally impossible for a writer to fully succeed in this utopian search for depersonalization, her move has generated a series of highly generative thematic, formal, and translational binaries: hyper-personalization is countered by abstraction, rootedness by mobility, and placelessness by site-specificity. Each work of fiction, translation, and critical intervention that Lahiri has published in Italian, in English, or in Italian and English after her decision to learn and write primarily in Italian would not have been conceivable without a sustained engagement with such generative contradictions. In a recently translated essay in which she reflects on why she has chosen Italian, Lahiri claims: "Writing in another language reactivates the grief of being between two worlds, of being on the outside. Of feeling alone and excluded."[3] My main contention is that, in the process of articulating this sense of disorientation and the dissonances it has engendered, Lahiri's approach has transitioned from a utopian and romanticized idea of linguistic enchantment to a more self-aware creative posture, characterized by a search for small-scale social connections and place-based practices of community-making.

By choosing Italian "in order to experiment with weakness,"[4] Lahiri's unprecedented move establishes a new paradigm in which linguistic vulnerability, as Rebecca L. Walkowitz has argued, is conducive to "a project of affirmative not-knowing."[5] In doing so, Lahiri envisions different and more ethical modes of belonging, premised on deploying unfluency as "an affirmative strategy of anti-racist cosmopolitanism."[6] Yet, whereas Walkowitz rightly stresses that, in the first phase of Lahiri's turn to Italian, linguistic vulnerability and the refusal to fully possess a language testify to broader cosmopolitan ambitions, my concern here is to delineate a trajectory whereby, progressively, the linguistic romance and the depersonalizing thrust that defined Lahiri's initial encounter with Italian have given way to a stronger focus on spatial and cultural groundedness and on small-scale sociality. This is what I define as place-based translingualism, that is, a creative ethos and aesthetic practice Lahiri has embraced by privileging linguistic, socioeconomic, and spatial materiality over abstraction and by foregrounding a more pronounced awareness of her position and sociocultural identity.

To support this argument, I analyze Lahiri's creative trajectory from *In altre parole* to *Dove mi trovo* (2018, *Whereabouts*, 2021), and explore how two short stories—"La festa di P." (2019, "P.'s Party") and "The Boundary" (2018)—she has published in the interval between *In altre parole* and *Dove mi trovo* signal a gradual shift in her self-positioning and aesthetic concerns.[7] If the central push behind *In altre parole* was a hopeful effort to escape imposed labels by leveraging the symbolic capital she had acquired in the Anglophone space, with "La festa di P.," in which a romantic fantasy between two characters gets diegetically foreclosed, Lahiri questions the possibility of dispensing with spatial attachments and social identities to reach an idealized cosmopolitan dream. "The Boundary," moving along similar lines of self-critical reflection, addresses another central hindrance to the fantasy of cosmopolitan nomadism by suggesting that migration and, more broadly, the meaning of escaping a place and a language, depend heavily on class status and socioeconomic conditions. This trajectory of revision of the initial utopistic push culminates in *Dove mi trovo*, Lahiri's latest novel. Here the author envisions a different solution, in which the fragmentation of the protagonist's self and her sense of discomfort, rather than hindering relationality and cultural openness, are conducive to place-based strategies of affective and political bonding.

Scholars of Lahiri have approached her work in English from a wide range of critical perspectives, focusing alternately on the intricate dynamics of gender and migration, on the difficult construction of diasporic subjectivities, and on the long durée legacies of colonial structures of power in the

postcolonial present.[8] Some of these problematics are present in Lahiri's works in Italian; yet, in getting displaced into a translingual space and creative practice she perceives as particularly destabilizing, they acquire new and culturally specific meanings. In this sense, my discussion of Lahiri's writing in Italian wants to identify the elements of novelty that characterize her latest phase by connecting them to extrinsic determinants and to her position in the world literary system. Some of these elements have been discussed in recent scholarship on Lahiri's Italian turn. Esterino Adami has focused on the fragmentation of the narrating self and on how choosing another language of expression has offered Lahiri another way of framing a "nomadic and translingual spirit."[9] Similarly, Rita Wilson has praised Lahiri for transcending strict literary-national categorizations and for championing a "more fluid, less structured transcultural process that encompasses adaptive re-interpretation and contestation."[10] And Fabrizio De Donno has compared Lahiri to another renowned translingual author, Yoko Tawada, to highlight how their linguistic experiments compellingly transform "the ontology of rootlessness and the dilemmas of identity into narratives of self-discovery, creative freedom and linguistic romance."[11] These appraisals rightly stress the cultural and political potential of Lahiri's translingual practice, yet they tend to homogenize Lahiri's works in Italian by approaching them as a cohesive whole. In tracing a trajectory from *In altre parole* to *Dove mi trovo*—and in analyzing two short stories that have been mostly ignored by critics—my intervention instead wants to identify a conceptual and creative turn *within* Lahiri's linguistic turn, and thus assess more precisely the political and cultural stakes of her translingual practice.

Furthermore, because the existing scholarship fails to relate Lahiri's choice of Italian to her previous and current position in the global literary field,[12] my discussion ties specific features of Lahiri's writing, on the one hand, to her move toward a place-based translingualism, and on the other, to the extrinsic dynamics of literary recognition. On the thematic and formal levels, Lahiri's Italian texts shed light on her progressive distancing from narratives of romanticized encounter and placeless abstraction. From a literary-historical perspective, her trajectory further compels us to rethink critical paradigms that address how contemporary writers gain recognition and symbolic capital in the contemporary, globalized literary system. Whereas postcolonial and diasporic authors have traditionally accessed the world literary stage by adopting a colonial or dominant language and by foregrounding the cultural specificity of their local identities, Lahiri's unprecedented move from the most hegemonic language (English) to a symbolically prestigious yet semi-peripheral literary field (Italian) is an attempt to escape these dynamics

of recognition, perceived as stifling, through the simultaneous foregrounding and erasure of her authorial persona. As I show in the course of my discussion, Lahiri's progressive awareness of the impossibility to fully overcome, to use her own words, "the trap" of identity,[13] results in a different solution to the initial dilemma that prompted her decision to forsake English. In renouncing idealistic solipsism, Lahiri has now decided to fully inhabit the translingual space between Italian and English in all its contradictions and limitations, and with a stronger focus on place and community. In this way, her translingual turn has contributed to deprovincializing both the Italian and the Anglophone literary fields from a perspective that fully embraces translational precarity and cultural groundedness.

Lahiri's latest reinvention reveals important elements of discontinuity in relation to the canonical definition of literary translingualism as well. In recent years, scholars have criticized the monolingual paradigm and stressed that "it is monolingualism, not multilingualism, that is the result of a relatively recent, albeit highly successful, development."[14] Starting from this premise, critics have proposed alternative ways of describing the artistic production of contemporary writers that smoothly move across different languages, media, and forms—from "the postmonolingual condition" to the "postlingual turn."[15] In relation to these new critical vocabularies, the significance of Lahiri's creative and editorial work since her turn to Italian lies in the artistic construction of a translingual space of expression that is both more complex and less stable than traditional understandings of literary translingualism, which, in Steven G. Kellman's working definition, consists in "the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one."[16] Building on this definition, scholars have offered a broader historical and geocultural assessment of translingual writing, a practice that "may well have developed shortly after the invention of writing itself,"[17] and that has been entangled with diasporic and colonial histories, as well as with literary exchanges between multiple cultural spaces long before contemporary processes of globalization. Whereas multilingualism works through addition, "translingualism emphasizes process and literary interaction between different languages," and "freedom from cultural and monolingual restraint."[18] Within this vibrant and complex formation, Lahiri's translingual practice is particularly interesting because her works reveal a specific interest not only in the creative opportunities of a language she has chosen to learn later in life but also in the personal, sociological, and ethical implications of moving across languages from a specifically situated position. By analyzing the translational and transcultural space between Italian and English that Lahiri now inhabits, this essay thus

argues that, both from the perspective of literary sociology and of formal and thematic analysis, Lahiri's latest reinvention offers new ways of thinking about cultural identity, place-making, and community in comparative and world literature studies.

In Altre Parole: A Linguistic Romance of Escape

The most lucid explanation of what Lahiri wanted to escape from while writing *In altre parole* is articulated in the "Postface" to the book. This concluding chapter, in which the author delves deeper into her linguistic history, sheds light on how minority writers acquire symbolic capital in the global literary field. As several critics have pointed out, Lahiri's categorization as an author has been quite challenging, and her writing has been studied as Bengali American, ethnic American, postcolonial, diasporic, and Asian American.[19] On the one hand, this wide range of critical approaches testifies to the dynamism of her literary trajectory and to the impossibility of pigeonholing her creative work into stable critical fields. On the other hand, the common element among all these labels is what we might qualify as minority or peripherality in relation to hegemonic literary fields—the American and the global Anglophone. But whereas these frameworks can illuminate Lahiri's emergence as an English-writing author, her Italian turn presents important elements of discontinuity when compared to the linguistic trajectory of many postcolonial, diasporic, and minority writers.[20] Hence, its analysis requires a critical approach attentive to the peculiar tensions between the intrinsic and extrinsic determinants she has struggled to resolve in her writing, starting with the definition of her authorial identity.

To explain her decision to turn inward and write "una sorta di autobiografia linguistica" (212) ("a sort of linguistic autobiography" [213]) in Italian, Lahiri describes the creative process behind what might prove to be her last novel written in English, *The Lowland* (2013). This novel was partially set in 1970s Calcutta, the city her parents had left before she was born. Writing about this now unfamiliar place, Lahiri says, was "un modo, attraverso la scrittura, di colmare la distanza, e di renderlo presente" (220) ("a way, through writing, to bridge the distance, and to make it present" [221]). She then adds: "Oggi non mi sento più in dovere di restituire un Paese perduto ai miei genitori. Mi ci è voluto molto tempo per accettare che il mio progetto di scrittura non dovesse assumere una tale responsabilità" (220) ("Today I no longer feel bound to restore a lost country to my parents. It took me a long time to accept that my writing did not have to assume that responsibility" [221]).

Unburdening herself from what she describes as a self-imposed personal responsibility, she declares, is the reason why choosing Italian, a language that is not part of her family history, feels so personally and creatively liberating. Indeed, when pressed to explain why she did not consider Bengali, which she already knew (albeit not thoroughly) as the obvious choice for her new creative phase, Lahiri stressed that, in choosing to write in Bengali, she "would be satisfying a certain set of expectations that I felt have been weighing on me my whole life."[21]

This cumbersome responsibility certainly responds to a peculiarly personal history, that of her parents' migration from India to the United Kingdom, where Lahiri was born, and later to the United States, where she grew up and became an acclaimed writer. At the same time—and it is here that the personal dimension intersects with field dynamics—Lahiri alludes to the external pressures that have influenced her choice. In another passage from the same chapter, she writes: "Più di una volta mi sono trovata davanti a un giornalista, un critico che sostiene che io abbia scritto un romanzo autobiografico" (216, 218) ("More than once I've been confronted by a journalist or critic who maintains that I've written an autobiographical novel" [217, 219]). In those occasions, she comments, she had felt hurt and irritated. The tension that emerges here is common to the experience of postcolonial and diasporic writers, who are often expected to foreground their ethnic, racial, or cultural identity in order to gain symbolic recognition. While Lahiri feels a responsibility toward her family history and cultural heritage, the expectation of the literary field that has contributed to her success is that her identity and biographical vicissitudes must be invariably prominent, no matter the topic or historical period in which her works of fiction are set. This tension arises in the space that Graham Huggan has called "the postcolonial exotic," that is, a "site of discursive conflict" that depends on "a global apparatus of assimilative institutional/commercial codes"[22]—one of which being the expectation of autoethnography laid on non-Western writers. What Lahiri does with *In altre parole* is particularly interesting because she is foregrounding herself in the most explicit way (through the choice of a linguistic autobiography), and yet, she is doing so in order to explain why she has stopped writing in the language that is most attached to those expectations.

Furthermore, this choice illuminates other crucial aspects of her self-positioning in the world literary field. In this case too, Lahiri's trajectory does not conform to the prevailing model through which postcolonial and diasporic writers acquire literary and cultural prestige, as her escapist move is symptomatic of a different way of rejecting and contesting the expectations

thrust upon those authors by metropolitan audiences. Lahiri in fact does not deploy, "strategic exoticism" in order to excuse the reader[23]—and herself—for their "postcolonial touristic conscience."[24] Instead, she chooses to both expose and conceal her authorial figure, through a double and contradictory movement toward hyper-personalization and abstraction. In other words, instead of deploying self-reflexivity to denounce the pressures and expectations of the literary field, Lahiri's awareness of these dynamics results in her choice to stop writing in the language that granted her success, to seek translingual literary models, and to justify this utopian attempt at depersonalization by detailing the difficult and partially successful process of linguistic acquisition.

In this first phase of translingual experimentation, Lahiri seems to suggest that the push toward depersonalization, her passionate encounter with another language, and her attempted escape from external impositions are enough to grant her creative freedom. Yet, some doubts and tensions begin to destabilize this utopia of escape. Unable to fully circumvent the structural limits of her authorial position and to completely rid herself of affiliations to class, gender, and ethnicity, Lahiri often resorts to the semantic field of romantic love, describing her encounter with Italian through a vocabulary of selfless purity of intentions—as when she writes: "Quando ci se sente innamorati, si vuole vivere per sempre. Si vagheggia che l'emozione, l'entusiasmo che si prova, duri. Leggere in italiano mi provoca una brama simile" (44) ("When you are in love, you want to live forever. You want the emotion, the excitement you feel to last. Reading in Italian arouses a similar longing in me" [45]). The operation only partially succeeds, as the push toward abstraction and idealization begins to crack under the weight of lived, social reality. In this way, although the affirmative, resistant thrust of her deliberate choice remains the foundational drive throughout the memoir, the emergence of formal and thematic dissonances hint at the instability of Lahiri's solution during this first approach to translingual writing.

This can be seen in the tensions between the requirements of the genre and the lived experience of a place and a language. In line with the autobiographical impulse of *In altre parole*, the perceptive realism that had characterize Lahiri's previous work in English gives way to self-introspection. As a consequence, social and political questions seem to recede in the background. In a scathing review published in *The New York Review of Books*, Tim Parks has criticized the book's lack of "a single situation characteristic of Italy."[25] He then adds: "I can think of no other book set in Italy that has less of the color and drama of Italy in it."[26] Here Parks is voicing a common set of expectations, premised on exoticizing tropes about Italy's characteristic local flair, its color, and—of course—its drama. Unsurprisingly, Parks

proceeds to misread a crucial episode from the book, when a shop assistant, during a trip to a touristy location in Southern Italy (Paestum) assumes that Lahiri's white-passing and Spanish-speaking husband is Italian, whereas she must be a foreigner who speaks with an accent.

Lahiri, in a telling understatement, titles this chapter "Il muro" (134) ("The Wall" [135]), as if the exchange with the shop assistance was simply an obstacle to her desire to fully belong to the Italian language and culture, and not an instance of casual racism. Yet, a few pages later, she lucidly explains that the ultimate wall she won't be able to overcome, no matter how hard she studies the language, is "il mio aspetto fisico" (136) ("my physical appearance" [137]). Nested among chapters where Lahiri's primary aim is to detail her infatuation with Italian, this chapter stands out as a reminder, both to herself and to her readers, that there is a substantial difference between the literary-aesthetic experience of a language and its lived, social reality. In an interview about her most recent novel, *Dove mi trovo*, Lahiri has reiterated that "identity can be a trap at times."[27] Analogies accumulate: a wall to climb, a trap to avoid; and yet, the wall and the trap are still there, whether one walks on the streets of New York, Rome, or Paestum.

This episode from Lahiri's lived experience of Italy can thus be seen as the moment when she begins to discover what several Italian writers of migration have been pointing out for quite some time: that literary and cultural gatekeepers construct and ghettoize their authorial, social, and racial identities, and that this marginalization heavily influences their experience of the Italian language, both as a literary medium and in daily social interactions. As Lahiri explains in the same chapter, these are the exact same dynamics she had experienced as a Bengali American woman growing up in the United States. The realization that "the wall" cannot be crushed by forsaking English is a crucial moment in the book, because it is a brief acknowledgment that a pure, liberating desire cannot ultimately obliterate socially determined dynamics of identity formation, and that pursuing abstraction and depersonalization might not be a viable option when confronted with the harsh reality of racial discrimination.

In this sense, Lahiri's emerging awareness prompts a comparison with Italy's postcolonial authors. Writers such as Igiaba Scego, Cristina Ubah Ali Farah, and Gabriella Ghermandi, who have always perceived Italian as their mother tongue but also a colonial language, offer a telling counterpoint to Lahiri's adoption of Italian.[28] Although they share with her a family history of migration and a condition of marginality (in terms of gender, racial, or ethnic affiliations), they often lack the cultural and symbolic capital that has allowed Lahiri to freely choose Italian as her new language of creative expression.

As a consequence, postcolonial Italian writers have had to constantly negotiate how their identity and cultural attachments are presented and marketed, often without their consent. Consider for instance Igiaba Scego, an Italian writer of Somali descent, who has criticized Italian editors for imposing on emerging writers of migration editorial choices they do not agree with.[29] Conversely, because Lahiri has joined the Italian literary field as a celebrated author coming from the dominant Anglophone space, she has had immediate access to reputable venues of publication and was invited to join the editorial board of one of the most prestigious literary magazines in Italy, *Nuovi Argomenti*. As Kellman has remarked, "the ability to choose a language is a product of privilege."[30] Lahiri's trajectory thus exemplifies how cultural capital acquired in a dominant field can be smoothly translated into a less prestigious one, whereas the symbolic rewards available to less visible postcolonial writers are unevenly distributed. At the same time, the episode of casual racism Lahiri experiences in Italy adds another layer of complexity, as it illuminates how cosmopolitan encounters and idealized linguistic romances fall short when confronted with the lived experience of discrimination.

What It Means to Flee: Lahiri's Short Stories

In the trajectory I am tracing toward a more self-aware practice of place-based translingualism, two short stories Lahiri wrote between *In altre parole* and *Dove mi trovo* reveal a keener alertness to the shortcomings of placeless cosmopolitan mobility and to the social hierarchies that determine the value and meaning of fleeing—a place, a language, or a social collectivity. As a result of her collaboration with *Nuovi Argomenti*, in 2019, Lahiri published "La festa di P." ("P.'s Party"), which has not yet been translated into English. Some of the formal features I have identified in *In altre parole* are present here as well, particularly the double push toward abstraction and depersonalization. There are also significant thematic and stylistic continuities with Lahiri's writing in English before her turn to Italian: her acute ability to portray small family betrayals and incomprehension, as well as a sense of upper-middle class ennui that the narrative diagnoses with a mix of sarcasm and compassion. The story is told from a first-person perspective by a married, middle-aged narrator, who fantasizes about an affair with another married woman. The fantasy ends up compromising his own marriage. For the purpose of my analysis, it is crucial to note that the narrator is firmly rooted in the unnamed city he comes from. Having never left it, he belongs to the kind of people for whom,

Lahiri writes, "cambiare quartiere [. . .] significava un grande spostamento, addirittura uno strappo" ("moving to another neighborhood [. . .] signified a big break, even a tearing apart").[31] The choice of creating a narrator that shares very little with Lahiri's background and cultural journey might seem unusual, especially given the hyper-personal focus of her linguistic autobiography. This marks a further push toward the erasure of her authorial persona, and thus can be seen as the manifestation within a fictional space of the intention, elucidated in nonfictional form in her previous work, to escape the trap of identity. At the same time, there are important elements suggesting that Lahiri is now more interested in exploring how one's sociocultural and economic identity, rather than a trap to escape, should be thought as a highly generative element of self-reflection—one that opens up a broader investigation of class and of the uneven distribution of mobility, enjoyed by the characters of the story and by Lahiri herself. Displaced within a work of fiction that is seemingly about a conjugal crisis, the central contradiction that underpins this short story is that between rootedness and upper-class cosmopolitanism. By fictionalizing this tension and showing the impossibility of being both rooted and mobile, Lahiri further problematizes the initial push toward placelessness and depersonalization.

The story revolves around a party that one of the narrator's friends, P., organizes every year at her country house. This setting becomes the fictional pretext for bringing together two groups of people, the locals, who like the narrator have never left the big city, and another group, the "stranieri" ("foreigners"), "una popolazione nomade" ("a nomadic population") who come and go,[32] and never seem to belong. Just like the city where the story takes place, the characters all remain unnamed. This abstraction of place and characterization results in an enhanced sense of typification, whereby the characters and the groups they represent come to stand as symbols of two opposite and seemingly incompatible tendencies. Both groups enjoy economic stability, several characters work in the culture industry, and their conversations are mostly about "argomenti frivoli di gente benestante" ("the frivolous topics of wealthy people").[33] However, they seem to suffer from two different kinds of ennui: the narrator, as the typification of rootedness, is unsatisfied with his tedious routine and conjugal life, whereas the foreign woman he imagines falling in love with laments her restless life and the impossibility for her son to call any place home.

By creating these two symbolically charged groups, Lahiri lays the ground for articulating, within the fictional space, a fantasy that would imaginatively solve the fundamental contradiction sustaining the short story.

Toward the end of the narrative, the narrator's imagined betrayal becomes another story he begins to write about the affair he never had. Through this narrative device of a story within the story, Lahiri thus deflates the narrator's fantasy of sexual adventure into a second-degree fiction. But if we scale up beyond the diegetic space, this failed merging of the two groups—the rooted and the mobile—through the imaginary relationship between the two characters that symbolize them becomes an indictment of a fantasy where cosmopolitan mobility *and* rootedness could unproblematically coexist. That is to say, the resolution can only be successful within the second-degree fictional realm of the narrator's story, and in fact, the imagined affair fails as soon as he tries to actualize it. When he clumsily attempts to kiss the married woman, he only elicits her utter indifference and his wife's contempt. In "La festa di P.," Lahiri thus displaces into second-degree fiction the clash between two irreconcilable pulls. At the same time, the story still does not clarify why the resolution fails, since all the characters portrayed seem to possess the economic and linguistic tools to feel at home anywhere. Indeed, the expatriates that frequent P.'s house, Lahiri writes, "arrivavano da diversi Paesi per lavoro o per amore, o per cambiare aria, o per motivi più misteriosi" ("had come here from different countries because of work or love, for a change of scenery, or for more mysterious reasons").[34]

But whereas these groups of rooted locals and restless expatriates fully enjoy—or can choose not to enjoy—the privileges of cosmopolitan mobility, in another short story, "The Boundary" (2018), Lahiri creates a very different kind of narrator, one who does not. Published in *The New Yorker* and translated from Italian by Lahiri herself, "The Boundary" signals a further transition toward a more sustained reflection on the social and economic inequalities that determine one's sense of place and belonging. Once again, Lahiri abstracts the geography and the identities of the characters. Yet, she also provides interpretive hints that are rather site-specific. In this way, the story exposes the risk of homogenizing the experience of migration and uprootedness, and highlights how escaping can mean very different things for different people. In reflecting on the reasons why someone decides to flee a language or a place, Lahiri thus confronts the incommensurable boundary that separates those who migrate to escape violence and discrimination from those who do it for pleasure or "for more mysterious reasons," as she writes in "La festa di P."

"The Boundary" recounts the vacation of a wealthy family in an unnamed seaside town and is narrated by a young girl who, along with her parents, works as a caretaker in the house where the family is lodging. As the narrator observes and describes, with a sense of curiosity and stupor, the

leisure activities of the visitors, the reader is informed that her parents had migrated from another country, lived in the nearby city, and later moved, or rather fled, to the seaside town where they found employment as caretakers. During their time in the city, the narrator's father, who had opened a flower stand, had been harassed and violently beaten by a group of men. Though the city where the racist attack took place remains unnamed, it is not difficult to guess that it is an Italian city—for instance, Lahiri writes that the flower stand is in a "piazza."[35] Lahiri is still committed, as she explained in the postface to *In altre parole*, to abstracting geographical and cultural coordinates, and yet she articulates a much more pronounced sense of place and provides revealing clues about the historical and social background in which the narrative is set. Indeed, Rome—Lahiri's city of residence when she spends time in Italy—hosts a large Bengali community, and some of it is employed in the floral business. Rome is also home to several neo-fascist groups, whose members have been repeatedly convicted for racist attacks against migrants. Between 2013 and 2014, members of one of these groups (Forza Nuova) specifically targeted Bengali and Bengali-looking workers in a series of violent expeditions that gained the infamous name "Bangla Tours."[36]

The correspondences between these events and Lahiri's story are striking and further point to a change in the author's narrative interests. After the autobiographical parenthesis, the focus here shifts to the social and economic conditions that determine how individuals are welcomed or rejected by the cultures and languages they encounter. "The Boundary" conveys a socially denser and more politically charged sense of place, and this generates—on the formal level—the opposition between the perspective of the narrator and that of the woman she is observing, who is also a writer. At the end of the story, after the family has left, the narrator finds written traces of their stay: "sheets of paper" that the visitor will use, the narrator sardonically observes, "to write all about us."[37] Walkowitz has argued that, by introducing the potential perspective of the wealthy visitor, Lahiri "communicates the visitors' failure to know and also affirms that failure as a realistic limit on the utopian visions of elite cosmopolitanism."[38] If in "La festa di P." the dichotomy between cosmopolitan mobility and rootedness results in a failed romantic fantasy—and thus reveals the shortcomings of framing these questions within the semantic and imaginative field of romantic love—"The Boundary" draws attention to the fact that, for some people, freely choosing a place, a home, and a language is not even an option in the first place.

Moreover, when read against *In altre parole*, this story can be viewed as yet another way of staging the pressures and responsibilities leveraged on migrant and diasporic writers. It is worth noting here that the visitor's perspective is projected by the narrator into an imagined, non-diegetic future, yet never actually verbalized within the narrative. Hence, despite the fact that the visitor will probably write about the incommensurable experience of the migrant family, Lahiri seems to be distancing herself from this potential narrative by choosing not to articulate it. This choice has significant implications on the symbolic and political level: first, the erasure of the visitor's story can be read as Lahiri's refusal to be a spokesperson for the condition of migrancy and uprootedness—a pressure to which migrant and diasporic authors are often subjected. Second, Lahiri's subtle reflection on the economic and social conditions that determine the meaning and reasons of escaping becomes a cautioning gesture against the aestheticization of this experience and its celebration as a liberating act.

Dove mi trovo: Translation, Community, and Place-Based Translingualism

The boundary of the title is thus the limit, which in this case is self-imposed, beyond which writing all about others becomes ethically questionable. In this sense, this boundary is different from the wall in *In altre parole*, where it represented racist understandings of linguistic and cultural belonging. Nonetheless, both images point to a sense of uneasiness that Lahiri expresses in the conclusion of the story—and that she has often described as a "certain degree of permanent discomfort" when writing in Italian.[39] The first discomfort is ethical, the second is linguistic. Yet, both are foundational to her latest creative chapter, and both seem to delimit a new space of expression that has been particularly generative. It is then not coincidental that, after asking Ann Goldstein to translate *In altre parole*, Lahiri has stopped delegating to others the translation of her works from Italian into English. Just like she did with "The Boundary," Lahiri has self-translated her latest novel, which appeared in Italian as *Dove mi trovo* (2018) and in English as *Whereabouts* (2021).

Lahiri has described the act of translating as "a metamorphosis" and "a very violent operation"[40]—one that, significantly, she has now decided to perform on her own. This decision implies the active pursuit of a more precarious creative self-positioning, since inhabiting a translational space also means embracing the discomfort of the translator, wrestling with two languages and their creative possibilities, and finding compromising albeit

often unsatisfactory solutions. Significantly, in a recent essay in which she reflects on the challenges of self-translation, Lahiri writes: "This task is not for the faint of heart. It forces you to doubt the validity of every word on the page. It casts your book—already published, between covers, sold on shelves in stores—into a revised state of profound uncertainty."[41] This uncertainty is reflected, self-consciously, in her translation choices. Consider for instance the two titles, *Dove mi trovo* and *Whereabouts.* Lacking the personal pronoun of the Italian or its more direct English equivalent, "my whereabouts," the translated title conveys a sense of depersonalized indeterminacy, whereas "dove mi trovo" (literally, "where I am located") implies a stronger association with place and identity. The Italian title, through the presence of the first-person singular verb ("trovarsi," to be located), conveys both individuation and place-basedness. Furthermore, it acquires other connotations, as "trovarsi" also refers to a psychological and affective condition.

Dove mi trovo, the first novel Lahiri has written in Italian, is composed of a series of short chapters narrated by an unnamed woman in her late forties who teaches Italian in an equally unnamed city that closely resembles Rome. At the end of the novel, the narrator leaves the city after having lived there all her life to begin a fellowship residency abroad. Lahiri's style is characterized by a minimalism that is both stylistic and atmospheric, as both the language and the descriptions of places are terse and essential. And despite her apparent rootedness in her city and neighborhood, the narrator struggles with feeling at home in the streets she traverses every day. Right before taking the train to the foreign country where the fellowship is based, she ponders: "Esiste un posto dove non siamo di passaggio? *Disorientata, persa, sbalestrata, sballata, sbandata, scombussolata, smarrita, spaesata, spiantata, straniata*: in questa parentela di termini mi ritrovo. Ecco la dimora, le parole che mi mettono al mondo" ("Is there a place we're not moving through? *Disoriented, lost, at sea, at odds, astray, adrift, bewildered, confused, uprooted, turned around*. I'm related to these related terms. These words are my abode, my only foothold").[42] This is the central ambivalence around which the novel is organized: the protagonist has never lived anywhere else, and yet she finds herself in a constant state of transition and disquieting motion, whose elusiveness is here formally rendered through the accumulation of qualifiers that try to capture its nuances. Lahiri's self-translation of this passage is quite free, leaning toward acceptability rather than adequacy.[43] For instance, in the Italian original, she uses the verb "ritrovarsi" (finding oneself), which explicitly refers back to the title of the novel; yet, she translates it with "I'm related," which preserves a sense of affinity but does not convey the connection between finding the deeper meaning of one's psychological condition

by inhabiting, albeit uncomfortably, a place and a language. Feelings of discomfort and restlessness are projected onto the narrator, who lives in an interstitial space where she is unable to feel at home, despite being in a city she knows intimately.

We might see this more pronounced focus on dynamics of placemaking and belonging as a return to some thematic nuclei that had been central to Lahiri's writing in English, from *The Interpreter of Maladies* to *The Lowland*. These are indeed significant elements of continuity, which might also be connected to another return, on the formal level, to the genre of the novel. At the same time, the crucial difference in this new phase of creative expression lies precisely in the challenges Lahiri encountered when she decided to stop writing in English. In this sense, the turn to Italian has prompted Lahiri to draw into conversation her longstanding interest in placemaking and belonging with the ambivalences and contradictions of her authorial identity and sociocultural positioning. As a consequence, the central thrust behind her creative endeavors in the past decade has been the attempt to give form and possibly transcend a structural disunity. Commenting on Georg Lukács' claim that "every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence,"[44] Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall write that "every effort of comprehension, as well as every act and every expression, testifies to a struggle taking place in the grip of fundamental disunity."[45] As I have shown, Lahiri articulates this disunity by formalizing various oppositions—between belonging and feeling out of place, between placelessness and site-specificity, between abstraction and autobiography. My contention is that, whereas in *In altre parole* Lahiri suggested that forsaking English would have been enough to solve these oppositions, the more she has written in Italian, the more pronounced her thinking about positionality, mobility, and social privilege has become. In this way, a different approach has started to emerge. Instead of envisioning a potential solution in the erasure of identity, place, and socioeconomic determinants, Lahiri's writing focus and creative thrust have shifted to the ethical and political potential of grounded connections to local spaces and languages, and to the generative discomfort of moving across them. This is the translingual space Lahiri now wants to inhabit, and this creative space finds its most compelling articulation in *Dove mi trovo*.

In this novel, which entangles authorial self-reflection and characterological tensions, the central formal device Lahiri chooses is the doppelganger, whereby she explodes the unity of the narrator into multiple other selves. It is worth noting here that the biographical correspondences between Lahiri and the narrator are quite thin yet not inexistent—both are middle-aged women, both teach. This seems a purposeful choice, aimed at

preventing any immediate identification between the author and the narrator while introducing the idea of the double, which will become the structuring device within the diegetic space. Much like *In altre parole*, *Dove mi trovo* is a deeply introspective novel, characterized by a constant mirroring and exchange between external impressions and intimist contemplation. The reality the narrator observes with keen and curious eyes can heighten her sense of inadequacy and distress, or it can provide a sense of relief when "mi avvolgono i particolari altrui" (109) ("being surrounded by things that don't belong to me" [102]). Similarly, the doubles she encounters elicit contrasting feelings, as they embody personifications of paths not taken or future selves. There is a young girl she admires for her "grinta" (25) ("grit" [17]) and as "una creatura a suo agio ovunque" (25) ("the type that fits in anywhere" [17]); there is an old woman who is sitting in a doctor's waiting room by herself, and in whose solitude the narrator sees her own future; there is her best friend, married and with kids, whom she envies for having "la vita realizzata che i miei genitori si auguravano per me" (43) ("the successful life my parents had hoped I'd lead one day" [35]); and finally, there is an enigmatic woman dressed just like her, whom the narrator sees or imagines she sees on the street and decides to follow before she mysteriously disappears. Significantly, the narrator calls this final mirage of herself, which appears in the penultimate chapter, "la mia sosia" (157) ("my double" [151]) and "una mia variante" (158) ("a variation of myself" [152]). This diffraction of the narrator's identity into real or potential selves she encounters or fabricates in her mind resembles quite closely the depersonalizing impulse that has triggered Lahiri's turn to Italian. Here, however, the fictionalization of the protagonist and the proliferation of doppelgangers signal a further displacement of the autobiographical element, as well as a stronger structuring thrust and a more intimate approach to socially lived spaces. In fact, Lahiri creates a complex interplay of mirroring images and shifting reflections whereby the sense of discomfort experienced by the protagonist is countered by her effort to arrange and make order. The impulse of giving form so as to better comprehend—a topos of literary creativity—can be seen in the fantasy of an impossible affair in "La festa di P.," or it can signal the impossibility of comparing two incommensurable experiences of fleeing, as in "The Boundary." In *Dove mi trovo*, it becomes a kind of disciplined solitude that the protagonist pursues to counterbalance her disorientation, but also as a way to reach out to local communities through grounded relationality.

In this sense, just as Lahiri has decided to embrace the vulnerability associated with writing in another language, and later the discomfort of moving across the translational space between Italian and English, the protagonist

of *Dove mi trovo* inhabits a similar state of transition and restlessness by deliberately practicing solitude, which the narrator revealingly defines as "il mio mestiere" (27) ("my trade" [27]). The impulse to move, to escape the confined space of a city she knows too well is still present, and yet, there is also a strong determination to be still, alone, and alert. This tension between stasis and movement is yet another crucial binary that underpins this novel and that mirrors quite poignantly Lahiri's own linguistic peregrinations. At the same time, the narrator's perceptive stillness is not simply framed as a strategy of introspection; rather, it enables her openness toward others as well as toward the dense materiality of the places they inhabit. This posture often results in a sense of enchanted stupor the narrator feels as she moves across unfamiliar spaces. In a chapter titled "At his place," the narrator is asked to take a friend's dog for a walk. As she curiously looks around the apartment and records the traces of the family who has left in a hurry, she voices her astonishment and fascination for what she calls "la morfologia privata di una famiglia" (135) ("the private morphology of a family" [127]), which remains to her "un organismo ingegnoso, un insieme impenetrabile" (135) ("an ingenious organism, an impenetrable collective" [127]). This is certainly a reference to *Lessico Famigliare* (1963, *Family Lexicon*) by Natalia Ginzburg, who has been a source of inspiration for Lahiri, particularly for her acute exploration of family, identity, and history.[46] Most significantly, this and other episodes in which the narrator reaches out from her solitude to a collective, however impenetrable that might be, indicate a transition in Lahiri's artistic and political concerns, whereby she articulates a more sustained engagement with the sociality of the city and its local communities. In this sense, as the narrator's solitude gets projected outwards, *Dove mi trovo* suggests that her sense of disorientation can be mitigated only by practicing forms of place-based relationality.

Throughout the novel, the narrator strives to establish intimacy and connection, particularly with strangers around her. Consider, for instance, the chapter titled "In albergo" (59) ("In the Hotel" [51]), in which she is attending a conference in a nearby town. Although she voices her disgust for the architecture of the hotel and the "abisso collettivo" (60) ("collective chasm" [52]) where the attendees gather, she is intrigued by an older man who is staying in the room next to hers. Without ever speaking to each other, the two establish a powerful albeit unspoken connection and, the narrator concludes, "il nostro legame tacito mi mette oscuramente in pace con il mondo" (62) ("our tacit bond puts me obscurely at peace with the world" [54]). This nonverbalized form of solidarity and belonging, a prominent motif in this novel, acquires a gendered dimension when the narrator joins a community

of women in the locker room of a local swimming pool. Here, intimacy is built through vulnerability. The narrator ponders: "In quest'ambiente umido, arrugginito, in cui noi donne ci vediamo umide e bagnate, in cui ci mostriamo le cicatrici ai seni, i lividi sulla coscia, i nei sulla schiena, si parla della sfortuna" (50) ("In this humid, rusty place where women congregate, naked and wet, where they show each other the scars besides their breasts and on their bellies, the bruises on their thighs, the imperfections on their backs, they all talk about misfortune" [42]). The Italian "noi donne" ("us women") conveys a stronger sense of community-making and belonging than the English "they," as if Lahiri had felt more comfortable expressing this communal participation and solidarity in the language she has chosen to belong to. Moreover, in this passage, vulnerability and imperfection are framed as conducive to belonging. This is not the same linguistic vulnerability Lahiri had described in *In altre parole*: not only is the scale reduced—from a national language to a highly localized community—but it is the bodily dimension, and not the purity of an infatuation, that enables the possibility of becoming part of a social collectivity.

The thrust toward different forms of affective and social bonding is mirrored by a parallel process of place-making that insists on the value and potential of sociality and rootedness. In a significant episode, the narrator is surrounded by the "confusione morbida" (68) ("contained mayhem" [60]) of her neighborhood. As she is biting into a sandwich, she reflects: "Mentre lo mangio crogiolandomi al sole mi pare un alimento sacro, e so che questo quartiere mi vuole bene" (69) ("As I eat it, as my body bakes in the sun that pours down on my neighborhood, each bite, feeling sacred, reminds me that I'm not forsaken" [61]). Once again, translation choices hint at different aspects of experiencing and building a sense of place. The English translation highlights the affective aspect of her sense of belonging ("I'm not forsaken"), while the Italian stresses the place itself: her neighborhood, now personified ("questo quartiere") loves her, cares for her ("mi vuole bene"). The sense of community described here, which the narrator finds almost sacred, is thus inextricable from the process of place-making that substantiates the novel.

With *Dove mi trovo*, Lahiri thus continues to reflect on the binaries and contradictions that have shaped her emergence as a globally renowned author, her linguistic and formal choices, and her thematic interest in transcultural formations and diasporic expression. At the same time, by fully embracing the discomfort of inhabiting the creative and translational space between Italian and English and by foregrounding locatedness and socio-spatial density, the partial solipsism of *In altre parole* gives way to a more explicit opening toward local collectives and place-based forms of bonding. Fantasies of upper-class

mobility recede in the background as the focus turns to the small and fleeting pleasures of rootedness. Abstraction continues to be sought, and yet, the novel's descriptive minimalism testifies to a more pronounced interest in the intimacy of place and in the possibility of community-making. To argue, as I have done so far, that these tensions are closely connected to Lahiri's position in the Anglophone literary field is not to propose a deterministic interpretation, whereby formal and thematic elements are read in light of the author's biography. Rather, it is a critical approach aimed at showing how deeply field dynamics, authorial self-positioning, and narrative choices are entangled in today's world literary system. This is particularly true for postcolonial and diasporic authors, who operate in a space in which, as Sarah Brouillette has written, "the figure of the author becomes an increasingly important marker of differentiation, a way of concealing mass production in individuation."[47] Lahiri's authorial trajectory is characterized by an even stronger focus on individuation, and yet it does not easily fit in current theories of world literature and global comparative studies. From the perspective of literary sociology, Lahiri's simultaneous presence in multiple literary fields—the global Anglophone, the American, the Italian, and the postcolonial—requires a closer look at how extrinsic pressures and expectations intersect with the opportunities granted by her symbolically powerful position. Moreover, because she has chosen to write in a less prestigious language, her latest creative phase does not conform to the canonical trajectory of peripheral writers—defined by Jean el Mouhouv Amrouche and later by Pascale Casanova as "thieves of fire"[48]—who choose a dominant language to reach wider audiences and attain global symbolic recognition. Rather, Lahiri's choice can be seen as a subsequent deviation from this trajectory, built upon and enabled by her acquired global status.

I want to conclude by highlighting another important element of novelty in Lahiri's latest phase. By actively intervening in the Italian and the Anglophone spaces, Lahiri has been able to deprovincialize both—particularly through her editorial and translational endeavors. Indeed, since her turn to Italian, she has been pursuing a range of parallel projects: among them, the translations into English of two novels by Domenico Starnone and a collection of essays about book covers. Most significantly, she has curated an anthology of Italian short stories, which has been published both in English (*The Penguin Books of Italian Short Stories*, 2019) and in Italian (*Racconti Italiani*, 2019). Through this curatorial work, Lahiri has made available to Anglophone audiences several Italian authors whose work had never been translated before. At the same time, she has contributed to reviving, within the Italian literary field, the rich and lamentably neglected tradition of the

short story.[49] This has been possible only because of her partially distanced perspective and literary sensibilities, which have resulted in a peculiarly personal choice of authors—with the inclusion of several women who had never been included in Italian anthologies—and in the encouragement, directed at the Italian readers, to "look at themselves from an alien point of view."[50] Lahiri's appreciation for the authors and stories she has chosen for this anthology, along with her curiosity and fresh eyes in introducing them to Italian and English audiences, can be seen as a productive counterpart to her partial unfamiliarity with the Italian canon and tradition. This interplay between aesthetic or identity-based affinity and geocultural distance has resulted in curatorial choices that carry implicit political undertones: in asking her readers (whether Italian or Anglophone) to estrange themselves from stable categories and definitions of literature and literary canon, Lahiri has transformed her multiple belongings and movements across different literary fields into a call for transcultural openness. In this sense, her editorial projects are sustained by the same ethical and political concerns that have shaped her creative endeavors in Italian. And just as her trajectory as a creative writer has veered toward a sharper attention to the materiality of cultural and linguistic spaces, the anthology complements this turn with the effort to actively intervene in those spaces by shaping reading practices and communities of readers.

Certainly, the complex challenges Lahiri has faced since her turn to Italian have proven to be quite fruitful for her creative, translational, and editorial projects. But even more significantly, they have stimulated a shift from romantic notions of linguistic encounters and cosmopolitan ambitions to the cultivation of small-scale attachments and grounded forms of social and political relationality. In this sense, Lahiri's trajectory urges scholars of contemporary literature to pay closer attention to the phenomenon of translingual writing and to the strategies through which it prompts "redefinitions of collective and individual identities" in light of field dynamics and the unequal distribution of symbolic capital in the world literary system.[51] The tensions and contradictions that get formalized in Lahiri's work continue to be experienced by anyone who inhabits translingual spaces, and several examples of contemporary translingual writing are no less remarkable.[52] Yet, Lahiri's peculiar choice of forsaking a hegemonic language that has granted global status and substantial symbolic capital to reinvent herself in a less prestigious literary space, unrelated to her family history or cultural background, is a unicum in contemporary literature. Whether other authors will follow her example remains to be seen. But the path she has opened certainly encourages a broader rethinking of the critical approaches and

vocabularies we use to analyze how contemporary writers are offering new ways of articulating cultural identity, place, and community.

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Notes

1. Jhumpa Lahiri, *In Other Words*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Knopf, 2016), 146. The first Italian edition of *In altre parole* was published by Italian publisher Guanda in 2015. The English edition from 2016 contains both the Italian original and Goldstein's translation on facing pages. All quotations will be from this edition—hereafter cited by page number.

2. This stress on a deliberately sought break that would grant her creative independence returns often in interviews. Lahiri has spoken of a "new voice" she was able to discover in Italian (Cressida Leyshon, "Jhumpa Lahiri on Missing Rome," *The New Yorker*, Feb. 8, 2020, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/jhumpa-lahiri-02-15-21) and of "a search for a certain freedom and a certain happiness" (Ann Goldstein, "Following the Mysteries," *Poets & Writers*, Mar.-Apr. 2016: 37–41, 39).

3. Jhumpa Lahiri, *Translating Myself and Others* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 14.

4. Ibid., 18.

5. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "On Not Knowing: Lahiri, Tawada, Ishiguro," *New Literary History* 51, no. 2 (2020): 323–46, 329.

6. Ibid., 330.

7. Because my main focus here is prose, I will not discuss Lahiri's poetic debut in Italian, *Il Quaderno di Nerina* (Milano: Guanda, 2021), though this book is deeply shaped by the tensions I explore in this article. Lahiri has also published a collection of short essays, *Il vestito dei libri* (Milano: Guanda, 2017) [*The Clothing of Books* (New York: Vintage, 2016)], in which her complex relation with wearing or embracing another identity gets displaced into a reflection on the visual and material attributes of the book object.

8. On gendered dynamics of migration and displacement, see Adriana Elena Stoican, *Transcultural Encounters in South-Asian American Women's Fiction: Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015); on diasporic identity formation approached from a psychoanalytical lens, see Delphine Munos, *After Melancholia: A Reappraisal of Second-Generation Diasporic Subjectivity in the Work of Jhumpa Lahiri* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); on colonial deep time and postcolonial futures, see Michael Wutz, "The Archaeology of the Colonial—Un-earthing Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*," *Studies in American Fiction* 42, no. 2 (2015): 243–68.

9. Esterino Adami, "Identity, Split-Self and Translingual Narrative in Jhumpa Lahiri," *Comparative Studies in Modernism* 11 (2017): 85–96, 95.

10. Rita Wilson, "'Pens That Confound the Label of Citizenship:' Self-Translations and Literary Identities," *Modern Italy* 25, no. 2 (2020): 213–24, 220.

11. Fabrizio De Donno, "Translingual Affairs of World Literature: Rootlessness and Romance in Jhumpa Lahiri and Yoko Tawada," *Journal of World Literature* 6, no. 1 (2021): 103–22, 106.

12. Paola Sica does consider extrinsic factors and questions of canonization in her discussion of *In altre parole* and *Dove mi trovo*. However, her main focus is the disruptive quality of Lahiri's writing in relation to ethno-nationalist ideas of the canon. See Paola Sica, "Identità, narrativa bilingue e canone letterario (trans)nazionale: Jhumpa Lahiri," *Forum Italicum* 54, no. 2 (2020): 608–20.

13. Mary Louise Kelly, "Jhumpa Lahiri on Her Unique Use of Place in *Whereabouts*," *NPR*, April 27, 2021, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2021/04/27/991343053/jhumpa-lahiri-on-her-unique-use-of-place-in-whereabouts?t=1661437799707.

14. Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 2.

15. Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*; yasser elhariry and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Introduction: The Postlingual Turn," *SubStance* 50, no. 1 (2021): 3–9.

16. Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), ix.

17. Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich, "Preface," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*, eds. Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), xvii–xx, xvii. For an exhaustive overview of the scholarship on translingualism, see xviii.

18. Rainer Guldin, "Metaphors of Literary Translingualism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism*, eds. Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 382–92, 382.

19. See Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung, "Introduction: Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Bengali, Asian American, Postcolonial, Universal?," in *Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies*, eds. Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung (Lanham: Lexington, 2012), xi–xxvi; and Stoican, *Transcultural Encounters*, 10.

20. Lahiri's choice has no precedent because, unlike countless postcolonial authors who have started to write in a colonial language (which is indeed what Lahiri herself had done with English), to my knowledge no other writer has later chosen to adopt a *third* and less prestigious language, completely unrelated to their family and cultural history. This is also why Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's rejection of English and return to Gikuyu is different from Lahiri's turn to Italian.

21. Goldstein, "Following the Mysteries," 41.

22. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 28.

23. Ibid., 32.

24. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5. The concept of strategic exoticism was first developed by Huggan to describe how postcolonial writers, aware that their recognition in the global literary field is premised on an exoticist paradigm, use the same exoticism strategically, by exposing its mechanisms and by instructing the reader about them. Brouillette has revised the concept by arguing that writers, readers, and critics alike are implicated in the touristic guilt of the postcolonial literary industry.

25. Tim Parks, "L'avventura," *The New York Review of Books*, March 24, 2016, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/03/24/jhumpa-lahiri-lavventura/.

26. Ibid.

27. Kelly, "Jhumpa Lahiri."

28. For an introduction on postcoloniality in the Italian context, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

29. Scego mentions the lack of editing and proofreading, the imposition of a section of Somali recipe at the end of one of her books, and her editor's decision to have her face on the cover of her autobiography—*La mia casa è dove sono* (Torino: Loescher, 2012)—instead of a map, as she had requested. See Simone Brioni, "Intevista con Igiaba Scego," Nov. 22, 2013, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/6165/.

30. Steven G. Kellman, "Jhumpa Lahiri Goes Italian," *New England Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 121–26, 124.

31. Jhumpa Lahiri, "La festa di P.," *Nuovi Argomenti* 6, no. 1 (2019): 61–77, 62. All translations from "La festa di P." are mine.

32. Ibid., 61.

33. Ibid., 65.

34. Ibid., 61.

35. Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Boundary," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 22, 2018, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/the-boundary.

36. Although some members of these groups have been arrested, racist attacks have not stopped. See Federica Angeli and Giuseppe Scarpa, "Pestaggi e raid squadristi, è il 'Bangla tour.' 'Così l'ultradestra va a caccia di immigrati,'" *La Repubblica*, Nov. 22, 2013, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/11/22/news/pestaggi_e_raid_squadristi_il_bangla_tour_cos_l_ultradestra_va_a_caccia_di_immigrati-71577297/; and Eleonora Vio, "Mobbed and Beaten in Rome, this Bangladeshi Man Refuses to go Home," *TRT World*, Mar. 3, 2018, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/mobbed-and-beaten-in-rome-this-bangladeshi-man-refuses-to-go-home-15648.

37. Lahiri, "The Boundary."

38. Walkowitz, "On Not Knowing," 335.

39. Leyshon, "Jhumpa Lahiri."

40. Goldstein, "Following the Mysteries," 40.

41. Lahiri, *Translating Myself and Others*, 79.

42. Jhumpa Lahiri, *Dove mi trovo* (Milano: Guanda, 2018), 159. Jhumpa Lahiri, *Whereabouts* (New York: Knopf, 2021), 153. Hereafter cited by page number.

43. I am using here Itamar Even-Zohar's and Gideon Toury's canonical distinction between translations that are adequacy-oriented (toward the source language) and translations that are acceptability-oriented (toward the target language). See Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), 54–55.

44. George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 62.

45. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, "Introduction. Fundamental Dissonance," in *George Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, eds. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 1–16, 9.

46. Lahiri has stressed her aesthetic affinity to Ginzburg on several occasions. She has quoted Ginzburg in *In altre parole* to describe her autobiographical project (see Lahiri, *In Other Words*, 102); she has mentioned her in interviews (see Max Liu, "Jhumpa Lahiri on the Limits and Liberation of Learning New Languages," *The Financial Times*, Mar. 15, 2009, accessed Aug. 26, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/ddb4c2b4-41bf-11e9-9499-290979c9807a); and she has included one of Ginzburg's short stories in *The Penguin Books of Italian Short Stories.*

47. Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 66.

48. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 259.

49. The Italian critic Gabriele Pedullà has praised Lahiri for curating the most complete collection of twentieth century Italian short stories, a form that, he adds, "has since long been at the margins of the [Italian] literary system" ["Sui racconti italiani scelti e introdotti da Jhumpa Lahiri," *Between* 9, no. 17 (2019): 1–5, 2, translation mine].

50. Jhumpa Lahiri, ed., *Racconti Italiani* (Milano: Guanda, 2018), 12, translation mine.

51. Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena, "Introduction. Conceptualizing Transculturality in Literature," in *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*, eds. Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena (Leiden: Brill, 2013), ix–xxvii, xii.

52. See for instance the work of Yoko Tawada (who writes in Japanese and German), Amara Lakhous (who writes in Arabic, Italian, and English), and Tahar Lamri (who writes in Italian, Arabic, and French).