Writing Beyond the Nation:
Expressions of Hybridity Through Spatial and Languaging Techniques in Laila Wadia’s “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale”

by

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Class of 2018

An essay submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Italian Studies

Middletown, Connecticut
April, 2018
Writing Beyond the Nation: Expressions of Hybridity Through Spatial and Languaging Techniques in Laila Wadia’s “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale”

Le minacce all'italianità non sono esterne, bensì interne. Sono costruite da chi pensa che niente debba mai mutare. Invece solo il cambiamento è costante.” (Laila Wadia)

“Threats to the Italian identity are not external, but rather internal. They are built by those who think that nothing must ever change. But really change is the only constant.”

At a 2011 event marking the establishment of the Archivio Scritture e Scrittrici Migranti (Archive of Migrant Writing and Writers) at the Università Ca’ Foscari in Venice, writer and teacher Laila Wadia gave an interview in which she discussed the impact of a new cohort of writers on Italian literature. She sustained, in Italian, that migrant writers “iniettano nuova linfa [nella] lingua italiana, sono aperti a nuove sfide, propongono nuove prospettive letterarie, ma anche sociali.” She invoked Armando Gnisci’s term glocalizzazione — a portmanteau of globalizzazione (globalization) and localizzazione (localization) — to describe the way in which migrant writers structure contained familiar spaces to project and magnify aspects of contemporary Italian society. She discussed living between multiple linguistic and national traditions, and how everybody loses when an individual is considered to be né...né (neither...nor) as opposed to e...e (and...and).

Displacement and belonging are two fundamental tenets of what is commonly referred to as migrant writing, or scrittura migrante, in Italian. Comprised of literature by authors who have themselves migrated to Italy or were born to a parent

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1 “They inject new blood into the Italian language, are open to new challenges, propose new literary perspectives, and also cultural.” All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.
who has, this variegated body of work challenges and transforms fixed notions of identity incompatible with the state’s dynamic, multicultural populace.\(^2\) By bringing marginalized voices to the forefront of their writing, migrant writers confront conceptions of *italianità* (Italianness) as it was written into existence in classic Risorgimento-era texts with depictions of how it is lived on a daily basis (Orton 23).\(^3\)

Roberto DeRobertis provides a comprehensive definition of the subgenre, considering it to be comprised of “testi scritti da autori e autrici che provengono da altre geografie e culture, da altre lingue materne” (3).\(^4\) The use of the term “migrant” to refer to this category of writing immediately alerts the reader to the centrality of Otherness in such literature, that it concerns the position of the migrant as an individual who exists at the intersection of multiple places, languages, and cultural system. By writing this sense of in-betweenness into their works, Italian migrant writers introduce new identities into the social imaginary.

As Italy transitioned from a country characterized by persistent emigration to one of mass immigration—a shift that began in the late 1970s, became stronger following the fall of the Soviet Union, and has become a chief national concern in over the past decade—migrants began telling their stories in the Italian language (Trindafyllidou 65). The earliest pieces were treated as sociological documents, usually detailing the journey from a point of origin to Italy. By strictly adhering to

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\(^2\) The term “migrant writing” (in Italian *scrittura migrante*) is not a perfect descriptor of the subgenre of writing taken up as a central concern by this essay. In an online interview for *El Ghibli*, writer Igiaba Scego notes its limiting qualities, particularly in terms of how publishers approach writing by those of non-Italian ancestry. Literary scholarship on this genre, however, employs the term regularly and specifically in relation to writing concerning the experiences of individuals for whom the process or consequences of migration largely contributes to their identities.


\(^4\) “...texts written by authors who come from other geographies and other mother tongues” (DeRobertis 2006: 3).
grammatical conventions, migrant writers of this so-called “first generation”
expressed their desire to be easily read and understood by their audience, the
members of the new societies in which they were living (Ali Farah 2005). In order to
achieve this objective, first-generation migrant writers co-wrote with native Italians,
the result of which produced not genuine firsthand account of the migrant writer’s
experience, but rather one filtered through the stylistic choices and social
representations of the co-author. The storyteller’s voice, therefore, is weakened in
relation to that of the co-author (Chambers and Curti 392).

The subsequent emergence of a new generation of Italians, who either came to
Italy as young children or were born in the country to at least one parent of foreign
descent, brought new voices into this literary category. The defining characteristic of
the second generation of immigrants — or first-generation Italians — is linguistic
expertise. Social organizations such as the Rete G2 (G2 Network) connects
individuals from different backgrounds through the Italian language, advocating for
citizenship rights for those who have grown up in Italy and promoting cultural
recognition of new identities in Italian society (Andall 175). In literature as well, the
use of the Italian language in novel ways serves as the unifying aspect of a category
comprised of stories characterized by such a broad range of experiences.

Not only do second-generation writers utilize the Italian language, but they
also assert their own presence by presenting various manipulations of language and

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5 The 1992 reform of Italian citizenship laws strongly favor *ius sanguinis*, or the conferral of
citizenship based on one’s blood relations to another Italian citizen. Then seen as a way to allow the
emigrant population to retain citizenship rights, today the laws work to delay or prevent the
naturalization of Italian immigrants, even those who had spent their entire lives in Italy. Proponents of
citizenship based on *ius soli* principles support the conferral of citizenship on all born on Italian
storytelling techniques. Whereas first-generation writing was concerned with linguistic accuracy, second-generation works embrace innovative techniques to craft narratives that reflect the multiplicity of identities that exist within many contemporary Italians. In works of poetry and prose, second-generation migrant writing features protagonists who occupy intermediary spaces in which they act as arbitrators between cultural traditions and expressions of a new identity that stands apart from any pre-existing associations. Telling stories in Italian is, in this sense, a civic act. It is also a way in which members of the second generation can claim citizenship rights denied through formal legal channels (Wadia 2011).

One way such identities are communicated is through manipulations of social space within narratives. The arrangement of space to represent a microcosm of Italy, a common construction, challenges fixed notions of what it means to belong to the nation. Through a spatial re-imagination of contemporary Italian spaces, both public and private, these works mirror, and ultimately disrupt, literary representations of Italy as monocultural. By constructing narrative spaces that situate individuals of Italian and foreign descent in close proximity to one another, stories of conflict and emergence transpire, offering alternative representations of national and hybrid identities.

Such themes are found at the core of Laila Wadia’s writing, selections of which will be evaluated in this essay for its expression of hybrid identities in contemporary Italy. Born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, in 1966, Wadia has lived and worked in Trieste since age the age of 20. In addition to her work as a writer, Wadia is employed as an English Language Tutor for the University of Trieste’s
Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting, and Translation Studies. She is a journalist, novelist, poet and playwright who has published books and collections for which she has earned much praise and attention. She is particularly known for her use of humor and irony to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of cultural divisions and animosities between individuals in an ostensibly multiethnic Italy. In 2005, she contributed two short stories, “Curry di Pollo” and “Karnevale” to the anthology *Pecore Nere*. Published by Laterza and featuring contributions from prominent writers Igiaba Scego, Ingy Mugiabi, and Gabriella Kuruvilla, *Pecore Nere* is a collection of eight works considered second-generation migrant literature. These stories portray the lives of young women, children of at least one immigrant to Italy, navigating their surroundings from the interstices of multiple national traditions.

In “Curry di pollo,” the space of a traditional Indian home is used to establish a dichotomy between her immigrant parents and the Italian friends she invites over for dinner. Having spent her entire life living in Milan, protagonist Anandita aims to distance herself from her parents’ attachments to their home country by directing all of her energy toward being a typical Italian teenager. She embodies the tensions of existing between the two traditions, which appear at first glance to be mutually exclusive. In “Karnevale,” Rima, another second-generation Italian teenager from Trieste, sees her life upended during a visit by her cousin, Nandini, from India to participate as a dancer in a cultural exchange. Her presence disrupts both the private space of the home as well as that of the public square, the piazza, during a celebration.
held in honor of *Carnevale.* In both of the selected texts, the principal conflicts stem from a pressure to remain within a rigid set of cultural bounds. An easing of tensions occurs in each work’s ironic ending, whereby the emergence and recognition of hybrid identities is realized.

Anandita and Rima experience a renegotiation of identity throughout their respective narratives, at the ends of which fixed conceptions of nationality begin to give way to novel expressions of identity based on lived experience in a globalized, multicultural society. This process is traced through constructions that reorder literal and figurative mappings of their worlds. This essay will examine how the narrative structures of these two stories trace the process of emergence, specifically in terms of spatial and languaging techniques. Manipulations of space render the nation on a microcosmic scale, within which intimate cross-cultural interactions stand as representations for the increasing heterogeneity of the country on a larger scale. The employment of languaging techniques demonstrates that new vernaculars inevitably alter, but in no way undermine, the idea of what it means to be Italian. Ultimately, through close readings of the selected texts, this essay suggests that a reconceptualization of nationality in an age characterized by globalization and movement requires, in part, literary representations of the nation as mutable, as a space in which it is possible for *italianità* to take on myriad, ever-changing forms.

**Theoretical Approaches to Nationality**

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*Carnevale* is an annual festival held in cities throughout Italy, most notably in Venice, in the days before the start of Lent, forty days before Easter. Traditionally, masks and other elaborate costumes are worn by festival-goers.
In the same 2011 interview, Wadia questioned the utility of considering such literature as belonging to a certain binding category. Calling these works either “migration” or “postcolonial literature,” for example, can serve to further marginalized works produced by already marginalized voices, as such a designation removes them from consideration as simply works of Italian literature. If she had to assign nomenclature, Wadia suggests that one may instead choose to consider such works to be *transfrontaliera* (transborder) or *postnazionale* (postnational), as they all concern movement between national communities. In the Italian case, particularly, the choice to write in the language of the host country does not necessarily have any relation to Italy’s colonial history. Moreover, not all writers whose work falls under the broad categorization of migrant writers are actually migrants. Instead, it speaks to the presence of a group of “[scrittori] — cioè professionisti della parola — che scrivono di immigrazione con varie finalità, con diversi stili che spesso riflettono la loro origine diversa.”7 Using a more inclusive label, particularly *postnazionale*, situates the work in a space beyond the nation as it was once conceived, rather than expressly outside of it.8

The sentiments expressed by Wadia closely align with the direction taken by the study of world literature in recent decades: away from the consideration of works and the nations to which they are attached as fixed, homogeneous, and mutually exclusive entities. Rather than conceptualize works as vehicles for the “transmission

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7 “[Writers]—that is, literary professionals—that write about immigration to various ends, with different styles that often reflect their different origins.”

8 The use of the term migration literature is used in this essay in order remain consistent with established categorizations of works by Wadia and her contemporaries. The suggestion of alternative characterizations suggests that this term is limiting, and that writers have more to share than just experiences of migration. For further analysis of the relationship between migration literature and broader characterizations, see “Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneities” (2012), edited by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo.
of national traditions,” theorist Homi K. Bhabha argues in favor of a reconsideration of the discipline whereby “we can now suggest that transnational history of migrants, the colonies, or political refugees — these border and frontier conditions, may be the terrains of world literature” (12). With such an approach, nationality ceases to serve as the only basis for identity. It becomes possible to exist not just within or outside of a given place, but also in-between. This sense of in-betweenness is characteristic of hybridity, defined by Robert Young as

[involving] processes of interaction that create new social spaces in which new meanings are given. These relations enable the articulation of experiences of change in societies splintered by modernity, and they facilitate consequent demands for social transformation. (79)

Hybridity is produced by the border and frontier conditions described by Bhabha, where the homogenous national space is fractured by the presence of Otherness. From these interstitial spaces, processes of emergence and transformation generate new understandings of national membership and belonging.

With their emphasis on homogeneity and historical continuity, national literatures have traditionally defined not only what characterizes a nation, but also that which does not. The construction of a dichotomy between the national community and the Other is the cornerstone of nation-building, a process that requires the perfect alignment of population and territory (Gellner 1). Literary representations proved essential to this process, generating a shared imaginary, comprised of an ahistorical narrative that exists in a “‘homogeneous empty time’ between modernity and progress” (Bhabha 66). Such narratives tend to marginalize minority populations, be they ethnic minorities situated within another national territory or colonized populations, against which many European identities were constructed and reinforced
via literary representations of the nation (Said 70). More recently, the rapid
diversification of European cities — a product of a new wave of international
migration — has precipitated a renewed interest in nationality and its relevance in
increasingly heterogeneous societies.

Transnational migration, particularly from the global East and South into
Europe, has generated tensions between the nation as it is known, and the
increasingly multiethnic character of European states as seen in everyday life. In
Italy, a country formerly troubled by persistent emigration, an influx of migrants has
triggered a new crisis of identity. As prized cultural spaces become “contact zones,”
hegemonic national narratives are challenged, disrupted, and ultimately transformed
in the process (Ashcroft 411). By presenting other perspectives on the nation, Italian
writers of foreign descent question assumptions of national homogeneity and the
function of national literatures as a means of socialization. Furthermore, this body of
literature challenges some of the core tenets of Western nationhood: Enlightenment
philosophies of rights and citizenship; persistent ethnocentrism; and complex
histories of colonialism are among the paradigms ruptured with their reorganization
of cultural space and, by extension, national experiences (Orton 25; Curti 157;
Coppola 122).

Popular theories of nationalism consider ethnolinguistic homogeneity to be
the foundation upon which national identity is built. Modernist theories—particularly
those of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson—emphasize the artificial nature of
the concept of homogeneity, arguing that this sense of shared identity does not
originate from an actual shared, continuous history. Instead, the generation of a
uniform, shared culture proved to be a functional necessity of the modern state, as the elimination of difference increases both group cohesion and productive capacity (Gellner 42). To this discussion, Anderson adds that these cultural constructions, though inorganic, are neither arbitrary nor inconsequential. Rather, they become real parts of a shared imaginary (6). As communities become more industrialized and individualistic, people are still bound by this sameness, communicated via mass education projects and print media.

Against the hegemonic authority of national literature stands that which is produced by minority voices, by those who occupy uniquely precarious positions in intermediate or border spaces. In a world increasingly characterized by movement of people across borders, the image of the nation as a homogeneous entity becomes progressively less credible. A gap exists between that which Bhabha refers to as the “pedagogical,” or national identity inscribed in a nation’s written history, and the “performative,” or that which is representative of lived experiences (145). The agonistic relationship between the two render the concept of the nation “ambiguous” as the projected image of the national character only loosely matches the experience of living in the state itself (Vetri 52). In response to this ambiguity, new writers assert “hybrid” identities that serve as a “critique of the essentialist ideas of notions such as culture, nation, and identity (Skalle 77). The inability to maintain the supremacy of the “pedagogical” collapses this tenuously constructed model.

These reconsiderations of nationalities and national literatures “compels us to recognize the need of a mode of thinking that is neither fixed nor stable, but is one that is open to the prospect of continual return to their events, to their re-elaboration
and revision” (Chambers 3). The terminology and methodologies used to investigate works in this way derive from theories of the nation, with an emphasis on postcolonial theory, which confronts ideas of the (Western) nation as unequivocally fixed, uniform, and virtuous. Bhabha’s seminal work in this discipline, *The Location of Culture*, elaborates on the goal of such criticism, of using the term “post” to signify “beyond”:

> The term ‘post[colonial, feminist, modern],’ does not refer to linearity (“after”) but instead to “the beyond, only [embodying] its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. (4)

It signifies a reexamination of the ways in which global imbalances of power continually prioritize the same, limited perspectives, and how salient such issues become when migrants—from former colonies or otherwise—are recognized as Other and marginalized in order to maintain a continuous narrative of what the nation is and what it is not. Bhabha indicates the presence of a “Third Space,” which “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (37). To exist in the Third Space is to be apart from that which has existed previously, a condition that permits the formation of novel conceptualizations of the nation or of national membership. It is the space in which “Curry di pollo” an “Karnevale” are situated, where “even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (37).

Due to a particularly marked absence of a colonial memory in Italy, the relationship between native Italians and those of foreign descent continues, in certain ways, the inequality of power established by Italy as a hegemonic force. It is both possible and useful, then, to adapt postcolonial thought to the Italian case, particularly
with respect to migration literature. It evokes what Sandra Ponzanesi refers to as “the awareness, and with that the consciousness, of forms of domination and resistance within Italian culture as related to power structures that are connected both to colonial policies and new global dynamics” (60).

The supremacy of Italian language and culture is rooted in its history as a colonial power, as a national consciousness developed specifically in relation to its colonial history. The Italian colonial project, which spanned nearly the first century of its nationhood, served not only to fulfill the ideals of conquest projected by the Risorgimento — and later reappropriated in fascist rhetoric — but also to engage the newly formed, regionally and dialectically disparate polity in a popular nation-building project (Proglio 71). The norms canonized in the literature of the period — the image of Italians as a forceful yet uniquely benevolent people (a brava gente) — were projected on these popularly supported overseas endeavors, imbuing the nation with an early character that remained largely intact via the transmission of values in popular texts. Edward W. Said’s contention that the national novel perpetuates images of European cultural supremacy, then, is particularly applicable to the Italian case. Having unified and colonized later than its Western European counterparts, Italy undertook both projects nearly simultaneously (Vetri 48). As a result, the development of the Italian national identity is inextricably linked to ideas for sustaining colonial or hegemonic power.

Given these two contemporaneous developments, the Italian case is, in a sense, an optimal one with which to examine how national identities carry with them a coercive power. The Italian nation — as a people, a set of cultural symbols, a
language — as written into existence was immediately utilized to generate a sense of in-group cohesiveness vis-à-vis an Other. Because the Italian identity was built on tenuous historical and geographical connections and lacked a popular revolutionary element, the shared colonial consciousness became a national consciousness. Italian identity was based on the most ostensibly similar characteristics, including race and language. Such broad criteria generated self-concepts against which it became possible for Italians to differentiate between themselves and Others, a situation that makes difference all the more marginalizing.

In each of the selected texts, “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale,” the protagonist begins with an understanding of national identity based in the traditional, modernist tenets of nationalism, which causes a considerable amount of distress. The narratives feature the individual negotiating an identity that exists outside the strict geographic and linguistic confines of national identity. Tensions between expectations of belonging are on full display as the protagonists, second-generation adolescent women living in Northern Italian cities, navigate private family expectations with those of the Italian public. Operating from interstitial spaces, they demonstrate the ways in which hybrid identities emerge and exist in a multiethnic Italy. They come to articulate a postnational or transnational identity that more accurately encompasses their experiences and imbues them with a sense of self inconceivable within more restrictive conceptualizations nationality.

**Narrative Space and Sites of Interaction in “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale”**

The Italian canon — not unlike other European national literatures — casts the Italian identity as culturally homogenous, as representative of a uniform populace
with a continuous, millennia-long, shared cultural history. Since the latter half of the 20th century, however, it has become increasingly apparent that a dissonance exists between the nation as written and Italian spaces inhabited by a changing, diversifying society. It is because of this incongruity between commonly accepted conceptualizations of national identity and lived experiences that literature of migration takes up the rearrangement of narrative, and, by extension, national spaces. Writers insert themselves into spaces that they have otherwise been written out of, as the idea of the nation was not designed with them in mind. Classically Italian spaces are initially approached with a sense of apprehension, for one is aware that her presence may transgress social expectations (Coppola 127).

By complicating the categories of national and foreigner, literature focusing on trans- or post-national themes present counter-narratives that redraw the nation as a hybrid space. Distances between geographic locales are collapsed and superimposed onto one another to convey the increasing proximity between individuals and, paradoxically, the ways in which these juxtapositions evoke an even stronger sense of distance (Derobertis 4). The minimization of physical space between individuals generates intercultural dialogue, which in turn prompts the renegotiation of identity.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said writes that the novel itself did not create hegemonic powers, though it did write the powerful nation-state as it is still conceived today into existence (70). In these texts, writers inscribed social meaning into geographical places, constructing spaces that represent what the nation ought to be. He writes, “The appropriation of history, the historicization of the past, the narrativization of society, all of which give the novel its force, include the
accumulation and differentiation of social space, space to be used for social purposes” (73). The differentiation of national and foreign spaces further contributes to the solidification of a dominant national identity, as the spatial configurations found in national literatures play a key role in the construction of Otherness (Orton 25). In this way, narrative space becomes a powerful social tool through which hegemonic ideas are reinforced. It can also, however, disrupt such ideas, serving as a tool through which the nation can be re-imagined.

In some cases, manipulations of space allow for the condensation of the national into a smaller, more intimate environment. Apartment buildings in Wadia’s *Amiche per la pelle* and Amara Lakhous’ *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* present environments in which recent migrants to Italy as well as Italian nationals of varying origins and ideologies live in close quarters. The conflicts generated as a result of these interactions echo national discourses surrounding migration and its related social, political, and cultural implications. In both “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale,” the arrival of guests precipitates similar cultural discourses, complicating the presentation of public and private identities. In both, the home becomes an even smaller microcosmic representation of the nation. Other short stories in the volume *Pecore nere*, including Igiaba Scego’s “Dismatria” and “Concorso” by Ingy Mubiayi also place the home at the center of discussions regarding identity and hybridity.

In “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale,” the arrangement of space illustrates the increasing fluidity of boundaries in contemporary Italian society. In both the public and private spheres, interaction between generations, histories, and individuals is
accomplished through these reconstructions, which allow the protagonists to stake a claim in the Italy in which they live, one either overlooked or not imagined in past literary works.

From the very first words of “Curry di pollo,” it is apparent that Anandita Kumar, a teenage girl from Milan, is not fully comfortable identifying as a member of her own family. Beginning with the declaration that, at times, she wishes she were an orphan, she expresses a desire to distance herself from her steadfastly traditional, Indian parents—who have lived in Italy at this point for approximately twenty years—to whom she is unsure how to relate. To this end, Anandita delivers an indignant articulation of the Indian aspects of her home, as well as those embodied within her parents themselves:

I miei sono dei Flintstones indiani che pensano di vivere ancora in una capanna di fango nell’oscuo villaggio di Mirapur, nell’India centrale, con le loro due mucche e le tre capre. Invece, da più di vent’anni abitano qui nel centro di Milano. Ma per loro non è cambiato niente. Dentro di loro vivono ancora circondati dalla puzza dello sterco di vacca, dall’umidità spaventosa delle piogge monsoniche e anche, devo ammetterlo, dal profumo degli alberi di mango in fiore. Per loro una casa con l’acqua corrente, un gabinetto interno e il frigorifero sembrano non fare alcuna differenza, anzi. Quasi quasi rimpiangono il fatto di non dover più andare al pozzo a prendere l’acqua, l’abitudine di alzarsi all’alba per dare da mangiare alle galline, la fatica immancata sotto il sole cocente nei campi. (39-40)

Questions of place play a prominent role in shaping Anandita’s attitude toward her identity. She expresses her resentment toward her parents’ romanticizing

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9 The Italian text reads, “A volte, vorrei essere orfana” (39).
10 [My] parents are Indian Flintstones who think they still live in a mud hut in the obscure village of Mirapur, in central India, with their two cows and three goats. However, for more than twenty years they’ve lived here in the center of Milan. But for them nothing has changed. In their minds they still live surrounded by the smell of cow dung, by the dreadful humidity of monsoon rains and also, I must admit, by the perfume of mango trees in bloom. For them a house with running water, an indoor bathroom and a refrigerator don’t seem to make any difference, actually. They almost resent the fact that they don’t have to go to the well to get water, the habit of waking up for at dawn to feed the chickens, the enormous strain under the scorching sun in the fields. (39-40).
the remoteness and scarcity of their central Indian homeland that stands in direct contrast with her own, firmly rooted in the Milan centro.\textsuperscript{11} The juxtaposition of a renowned historic city center, a font of Western intellectual and artistic production, with a provincial inland community brings into stark relief the way that Anandita views her world compared with that of her parents. Through Anandita’s hypercritical eye, Mirapur is an undesirable place to live, save only the scent of the mango blossoms. She cannot understand her parents’ idealization of a life far less comfortable than the one they have in Milan, at least in terms of modern amenities. Life in Mirapur and Milan exist to Anandita in diametric opposition, and as a result place competing pressures on her as an individual who cannot fully identify with one or the other.

Though initially these two territories appear distant from one another, they remain inseparable in the narrator’s everyday life. The overlay of her parents’ Indian traditionalism on the modern Italian lifestyle Anandita insists on living in its entirety comprises a central tension of the short story. A dinner of penne al pomodoro at the Kumar home—at which Anandita’s secret, new boyfriend Marco and her best friend, Sam are guests—serves as the backdrop for confrontation between deeply held national sentiments and emerging forms of self-representation among younger generations. It is in the overlap of the two traditions, once believed to be mutually exclusive, that the construction of narrative space becomes critical. As a result, borders between individual social spheres are also becoming more porous, and greater

\textsuperscript{11} The centro [storico], or historic city center, normally contains the defining elements of an Italian city. In particular, the Milan centro is known for its rich intellectual history, architectural beauty and prominence as a global fashion and economic capital. Few places represent the popular conception of Italian national identity more ostensibly than Milan’s centro storico.
interaction is occurring in these interstitial areas, which function as sites of interaction.

The home is one such site. Fashioned as a space of relative comfort, the entry of outsiders into the home becomes a border crossing of sorts. It is a place in migrant literature where the public and private interact, which also gives the house potential to function as a “site of cultural conflict” (Coppola, 127-9). As Anandita’s apprehension increases prior to the arrival of her friends for dinner, she remarks, “Non abbiamo quasi mai ospiti e non ha mai cucinato la pasta per degli italiani prima d’oggi” (47).12 The distinction between herself and the “Italians” her family is hosting for dinner is notable. By placing Anandita on one side of a border—inside the home—and her friends on the other, the groundwork is laid for a potential conflict when the “Italians” cross over and enter into the Kumars’ space.

An even smaller, more intimate setting appears in the form of the table around which the Kumars, Marco, and Sam gather and functions as much as a space to dine as it does to negotiate. The role of food in migration literature can be seen as a metonymic device that more generally representative of different national traditions. When they come into contact with one another, the exchange of foods and tastes serve as way to demonstrate interaction (Horn 160). During the meal, Signor Kumar is quick to assert his identity by rejecting the pasta set before him for this special occasion. Moreover, he goes to great lengths to emphasize the fact that his daughter is more like her family than her friends, using a clumsy moment in which Anandita drops her fork to make a statement about his family belonging to another national

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12 “We’ve hardly ever hosted and have never made pasta for Italians before today” (47).
community, stating, “Anche Anandita non è abituata a mangiare queste cose e con queste forchette….A noi non piace questa roba, a noi piace il curry. E mangiare con le mani. Ma Anandita ha detto che a te non piace il curry, Marco” (47). Signor Kumar uses his dinner preferences to distance himself from his guests and assert difference. By focusing on Marco’s supposed dislike of curry, it appears as if Signor Kumar is about to make a major statement regarding their incompatibility. Instead, Marco’s response, that he has enjoyed eating curry on pizza and in risotto, gives his host pause.

Although he regroups and insists again that Marco has never had real curry, the realization that these two culinary traditions do not have to be mutually exclusive still upsets the balance of the conversation. In “Curry di Pollo,” the idea of adding curry to risotto or to pizza shows another way that geographies overlap each other in migrant writing, and, by extension, in a globalized world. Furthermore, Anandita’s friend Sam is already a fan of Signora Kumar’s curry, and Marco is open to trying it as well. In shrinking the distance between culinary traditions, they are also weakening the rigid boundaries between two ostensibly incompatible cultures and showing that individuals can cross borders to not only express a multiplicity of identities, but also to better understand that with which they are coming into contact.

The examples of curry given by Marco demonstrate a “modern innovation” on a classic tradition, similar to how hybrid or transnational identities are a modern expression of multiple national traditions within the same person (Horn 163). The older generations, as portrayed in “Curry di Pollo” by Anandita’s father and Marco’s

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13 “Anandita too is not used to eating these things with these forks….We don’t like this stuff, we like curry. And to eat with our hands. But Anandita said that you don’t like curry, Marco” (49).
xenophobic parents have trouble comprehending the novelty of such identities, which directly challenge fixed beliefs about nationality that are losing favor among younger, more mobile generations.

Just as juxtaposing the traditions of central India with life in the center of Milan collapses the space between countries, setting the narrative entirely within the home concentrates national tensions into an intimate space. Interaction between native and non-native Italians is a ubiquitous feature of contemporary Italy, yet the experiences of the individuals operating within the society vary. Constructing the space of the home to represent a microcosm of Italian society, then, succeeds in highlighting the personal elements of transnational interaction while simultaneously presenting common understandings of the relationship between migrants and Italian nationals.

While in “Curry di pollo” the primary interaction is that which occurs between the immigrant family and Italian friends, the interaction that occurs in the home of “Karnevale,” is less clear-cut. Rima, also of Indian descent, lives in a wholly Italianized environment. In order to please her visiting aunt and cousin, Nandini, her mother (called “la Mutti”) prepares Indian dishes and enforces a Hindi-only policy, “per non tradire il fatto che sono anni che non fa assolutamente NiENte di indiano a parte guardare qualche video e cacciare nel microonde un piatto nazional-popolare precotto trovato alla Super COOP” (58). Rima’s sense of identity, already nebulous, is further called into question as a result of Nandini’s arrival. Despite having never felt truly Italian or Indian, Rima has managed to strike a tentative

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14 “[to] not betray the fact it’s been years that nothing Indian has been done apart from watching a few videos and microwaving a frozen meal from Super COOP” (58).
balance for herself in her home of Trieste with a group of multicultural friends who make ample use of Italian slang and strongly emphasize the importance of attending a carnevale festival in a city square.

Rima recounts a recurring daydream of hers in which she encounters Johnny Depp on the streets of Los Angeles, and he asks her if she misses her country. She responds, incredulously, with “Quale paese?” (55-6).\textsuperscript{15} Having been born in Germany to Indian parents and raised primarily in Italy, fictional Johnny Depp’s question is impossible to answer. This particular, imagined exchange underscores the interstitial positions occupied by individuals of foreign descent brought up within the Italian context. Neither fully within or without, the identities represented by Rima and Anandita demonstrate the constant confusion and tug-of-war played by various aspects of identity. In a society that expects one affiliation to reign supreme, asking those with multiple ones is arresting. Caught in an in-between space, Rima’s sense of self was already fairly fragile. The introduction of her cousin disrupts the careful construction of \textit{italianità} she had made for herself. Nandini entering Rima’s domain – to participate in a cultural exchange, no less – serves as another sort of border crossing. Consequently, Rima resents the presence of her cousin and the set of expectations with which she is confronted as a result. Here as well, the space between India and Italy is collapsed into the intimate space of the home, calling Rima’s sense of identity into question.

In the public sphere, too, the entry of foreigners and migrants into distinctly Italian spaces—not as tourists but as actual members of the national community—

\textsuperscript{15} “Which country?” (55-6).
demonstrates the reconstruction of individual and collective identity. Like the uneasy balance she strikes with *italianità* at home, Rima’s approach to attending a festival in a *piazza* of Trieste also rests on a set of norms, to which she feels she must strictly adhere. She has a Minnie Mouse costume picked out and a group of friends to go with. Having to bring her cousin with her, then, may contaminate the Italian cultural space, something Rima actively seeks to avoid. Not only will Rima have to arrive late to the celebration as a result of her cousin’s performance, but she will also have to face the dreaded possibility that Nandini will not be able to blend into her surroundings.

In the days leading up to the potential disaster, Rima pleads with her parents first to allow her to attend the celebration at all, preferably without her cousin. She takes an unwinnable position, arguing against her mother’s proposed compromise—that she can go only after the dance performance and must take Nandini with her—with an argument that her cousin will not enjoy the celebration “[p]erché non è quel tipo di ballo che fa lei” (Wadia, 59). More than anything, though, Rima fears being tasked with managing her cousin’s public presence. With Nandini in the *piazza*, all of Rima’s careful work to manage her own public appearance could unravel in an instant.

Rima’s initial conceptualization of the *piazza* can be understood in terms of Said. Within the text of the short story, the normative ideals of what it means to exist in an Italian public space are reflected in Rima’s qualifications for attending the festival (e.g. costume, style of dance, linguistic competency) and her apprehension to

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16 “...because it’s not the type of dance she does” (59).
allow difference to enter that space. The norms of Italian public life are then inscribed into the narrative space of the story, reproducing the expectations and limitations that national identity places on the individual to stand squarely within the confines of a single category. What actually occurs within the space, however, completely transforms what it means to stand in a piazza, and, by extension, to exist in a multiethnic, contemporary Italian city.

Flanked by her sari-wearing cousin (choosing to wear her performance outfit instead of the giraffe costume picked out for her), Rima shows up to the piazza already expecting the worst: “Per un attimo ho pensato di rinunciare a tutto. Meglio non andare che portarmi dietro una così e fare una figura di M” (63).

In her eyes, it is not worth bringing down the value of the group and embarrassing herself in front of Ale, the boy she is interested in. Despite these expectations, something just the opposite occurs. Rather than holding the group back, Nandini actually pulls it forward. Upon entering the space, Ale and Nandini enter into a dialogue that would have hit a dead end had it not been for their ability to find commonality in the English language.

The casual way in which Ale switches from Italian to English merits attention in reference to spatiality as well. The modern Italian language is grounded in late-eighteenth century literary production, the same works that wrote the nation into existence through the use of the narrative space of the novel. A national language, then, should in theory be the one spoken in the epitome of a public, Italian space. However, by switching to English, Ale not only chips away at the particularity of the

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17 “For a moment I thought about giving up on everything. Better to not go than to be held back by [Nandini] and make a fool of myself” (Wadia 63).
national space, but also invites others into it. Asking Nandini if she speaks English (to which she replies “Yes, of course”) reorients the site of interaction. The barriers to entry come down and the space opens through this seemingly small gesture.

Of course, Nandini is just a visitor in Italy, whereas Rima is—in a cultural, if not a juridical, sense—a member of the national community. Still, it is Rima’s anxiety regarding the culturally exclusive space of the piazza that is projected onto her cousin’s presence. The language switch thus marks the first realization that the spatial organization of the nation is changing, from which fluid identities have the potential to emerge.

Given that Rima has worked to suppress her Indian identity to manage her public presence, it shocks her that Nandini is not only accepted, but is also earning positive attention from her peers without changing anything about herself. Rima works to hide her jealousy and resentment from Ale, but she does not have to for long. Musing aloud, he says, “Sai, un giorno mi piacerebbe andare in India. Magari ci possiamo andare insieme” (72). Not only is Rima amazed because the boy she’s interested in is paying attention to her, but also because she realizes that her friend did not hold the fact that she does not have Italian heritage against her, a fact that she holds against herself.

The relationship between narrative and national space in literature has historically been used to structure the nation as a fairly homogeneous entity, one in which a uniform ingroup is defined against all Others. Likewise, the permutations of space in contemporary Italophone narratives present alternative conceptualizations of

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18 “You know, one day I’d like to go to India. Maybe we can go there together” (72).
the nation, in which the fixed nature of national identity is rejected, and in its place more fluid concepts arise. Individuals define on their own terms what it means to exist in a — or between multiple — national context(s).

In “Curry di pollo,” the neatly arranged spaces of identity are ruptured in this moment of mutual appreciation for curry. Anandita no longer needs to fear that an intractable conflict will break out between her father and Marco. Additionally, in this new, interstitial space, she no longer needs to feel that she must reject all things Indian to conform to the projected image of the typical (perfect) Italian teenager. Hybrid identities become possible by the end of “Curry di pollo,” as the characters discover that certain affinities and characteristics, long believed to be culturally specific or stereotypically ordered, can be arranged in myriad combinations. Curry goes well with pizza, and an Italian teenager’s father can be a bricklayer while an immigrant owns his own successful business. The home becomes an in-between space, where one need not be Italian or Indian in their typical arrangements, but, in Bhabha’s terms, “something else besides” (219).

Again, the tensions generated by the maintenance of staunchly separate cultural spheres in “Karnevale” become untenable in a space where difference is increasingly visible. The rupture occurs when, through the English language—an official language (colonial vestige) of India as well as a global lingua franca—Rima’s love interest, Ale, is able to easily communicate with Nandini. Such an act, the switch to a third language, situates the narrative in a Third Space, where one can celebrate Carnevale in multiple languages, dancing to popular Italian music in a classically Indian style. Nandini is admired, and others become genuinely curious about India, an
inquiry that astounds Rima. By stepping outside of the dominant narrative inscribed into the of the *piazza*, the Italian space loses part of its hegemonic significance. It becomes a space of emergence and interaction, emblematic of the capacity for change in an identity based not on fixed ideals, but instead on negotiation and the value of lived experience.

**Languaging in “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale”**

What distinguishes the second generation of Italian migration literature from the first is the linguistic mastery exhibited by its writers. As opposed to the co-authored works of first-generation writers, these do not strive for conventional linguistic perfection. Rather, they frequently contain manipulations of language only made possible by the fact that the authors understand the rules well enough to break them. As with the configuration of narrative space, the stylization of language in Italian literature of migration demonstrates the ways in which identities are transformed, shaped and expressed in a dynamic cultural landscape. Notions of language as emblematic of the nation, pervasive since Italy’s establishment, are challenged through this literature, which features multiple linguistic traditions in a single text (Derobertis 12). Walter Mignolo further extends Said’s relation of the novel to European cultural dominance further, considering national languages as well to be an instrument of hegemony.

In Italy, a single language, representative of the nation itself, exerted a disproportionate influence over regional dialects within the state as well as the local languages of conquered territories (Mignolo 182). Because national languages are still conceived of as inextricably linked to specific nations themselves, the emergence
of individuals existing between a diverse set of linguistic conditions appears, at the very least, puzzling: “As people become polyglots, their sense of history, nationality, and race becomes as entangled as their languaging” (Mignolo 191). However, it is also through the innovative process of languaging that new imaginaries are born.

Languaging, or “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language,” has the power to both set and break a society’s norms regarding verbal communication (Swain 89). In discussions of Italian literature of migration, two processes in particular are employed. First, polylingualism refers to the inclusion of more than one linguistic tradition in the same text (Polezzi 90). As opposed to bilingualism, the concept of polylingualism encompasses a multiplicity of linguistic choices. One may write in Italian, using words from her first language, another national tradition, a global lingua franca, a dialect or any linguistic system outside the one to which the intended audience is accustomed. The use of minority languages is of particular interest, given that the literature in which they are present often focuses on the relationship between one’s inherited nationality and the Italian context in which they live.

A related concept, self-translation refers to the “[creation] of hybrid forms of expression, or even [the] disguising of their presence below a deceptively homogeneous surface” (Polezzi 91). It relates to the transmission of thought in multiple languages, juxtaposed in order to convey multiple meanings within the same text. The writer puts herself in a position from which she has the power to incorporate multiple codes into a single text, which in turn is analogous to the increasing porosity of national borders and flexibility in expressing national identities.
Applying these concepts to the question of the presence of minority languages in contemporary Italy, Polezzi draws parallels between these languaging techniques and Carlo Dionisotti’s 1951 essay “Geografia e storia della letteratura” (Geography and history of [Italian] literature). This essay questions the presumed linearity of Italian literary history and instead recommends a spatial approach so as not to prioritize “standard Italian over regional dialects” and instead emphasize “the complexity of multiple lines of development in which the local, national, and international vectors intersect” (94). In Italian literature of migration, one finds similarities between the ways that dialects have been marginalized and the ways that minority languages, or languages of migration, often remain on the periphery of discussions of Italian culture, even as the cultural landscape continues to undergo indelible changes.

In this new cultural milieu, “those authors who actively choose to adopt Italian as their native language of expression aim to exploit, as writers do, all of its multiplicity” (Polezzi 101). By adopting a “translingual imagination,” writers demonstrate their linguistic mastery by transforming the Italian language in such a way that it becomes open to contact with the various identities embodied in the transnational identities of the authors themselves. By engaging in a process of languaging, it becomes possible to “[move] away from the idea that language is a fact...and toward the idea that speaking and writing are moves that orient and manipulate social domains of interaction” (Mignolo 188).

Though the more robust examples of languaging are found throughout “Karnevale,” in “Curry di Pollo” Wadia also constructs a narrative where multiple
linguistic codes interact with and shape one another. When Anandita’s mother is discussing preparations for their upcoming dinner, she refers to one of the guests, Marco, as “Makku” (Wadia 42). Anandita is mortified at the thought of her mother mispronouncing such a commonplace Italian name and jumps quickly to correct her. Signora Kumar, perhaps sensing her daughter’s frustration, mispronounces the name once more: “Makko?” (42). Anandita’s concerns over her evening override any recognition of a joke when she answers with the exasperation of a teenage girl desperate to make a positive impression on her new boyfriend. She responds, “Ma-R-co. È un banalissimo, comunissimo nome, mamma” (42).19

In a story that explores widespread cultural tensions over an ironically exaggerated dinnertime conflict, the dramatic exchange between Anandita and her mother over the correct pronunciation of Marco’s name reveals something specific about the role of language in the construction of identity. Eliminating the, “r” and adding two “k’s”—a letter not normally found in Italian spellings—and replacing the final vowel of Marco’s name renders the it familiar enough to know that Anandita’s mother is in fact referring to Marco. At the same time, the change in pronunciation and spelling allude to difference. In this act of (self) translation, the correct pronunciation of Marco’s name is juxtaposed with the transliteration of Signora Kumar’s articulation to express the tensions that exist within the home. Anandita is unwilling to risk her mother speaking less-than-perfect Italian in front of her friends, as if such an act would serve as a poor reflection on her as well.

19 “Ma-R-co. It’s a very banal, very common Italian name, mom” (Wadia, 42).
At the actual dinner, however, it is Anandita’s mother who makes a concerted effort to keep the evening on track, despite her husband’s best efforts to stir up a cultural clash over dinner. Though earlier in the day Anandita reacted with strong disapproval to a potentially transgressive pronunciation of Marco’s name, she ends up grateful for her mother’s sincere efforts to host a pleasant, Italian dinner in her home. Despite the fact that she does end up mispronouncing Marco’s name and a few other words throughout the dinner, Signora Kumar is an equal participant in the events of the evening. The use of imperfect pronunciation, in a non-pejorative manner, instead highlights the ubiquity of accented linguistic practices in multicultural societies. Moreover, it breaks through the expectations of linguistic homogeneity and precision associated with national literatures.

Furthermore, languaging techniques are integral to both the structure and content of “Karnevale.” Protagonist and narrator Rima refers to her parents as “la Mutti” and “il Pater,” German and Latin terms, respectively, for mother and father. They are brought into the Italian language through the attachment of the appropriate definite articles to each term. At the same time, the German grammatical practice of capitalizing all nouns renders these two words foreign throughout the story. Rima consistently refers to her cousin Nandini as “la Kousin,” again merging multiple languages. The word is assigned an Italian article and derives from the German (or, potentially, English) “cousin.” That much of the linguistic polyvalence in “Karnevale” is found in family names is indicative of Rima’s family’s multinational background as well as of her own transnational identity. Her parents, from Bangalore India, lived in the United States and Germany—Rima’s place of birth—before
moving to Trieste, Italy. It is logical that her referents for family members fall outside the Italian linguistic paradigm, despite her strong inclination toward Italian language and culture.

Her attachment to the language of her adopted nation still dominates, extending far beneath the surface of Standard Italian. The most ostensible application of languaging in “Karnevale” is that of alternative spellings and occasional abbreviations in the narration, which portray a highly specific, recently developed Italian linguistic tradition: the language of text messaging and online communication. Not only is the frequent use of k’s instead of c’s and tz’s in place of zz’s indicative of Rima’s youth, but it also suggests that she, at least in this way, is a full member of the social scene. Even the story’s title refers to the way an Italian teen might communicate with her friends about this culturally specific event.

In a text conversation with her friend Mitzi, Rima complains about the fact she must bring her “Kousin” along with her to the party in the piazza. In it, she reveals the extent to which linguistic polyvalence has invaded contemporary youth culture and patterns of speech:

Deve venire con noi —, esplicito.
Ki? Il fenomeno?
Yes. Kzzo.
Vieni un po’ prima a skola? —, chiede Mitzi.
Non puedo. Devo trovare dei gelsomini freschi per il Kobra.
Ke?
Ti spiego dopo. (60) 20

20 She has to come with us —, I say. Who? The phenomenon? Yes, damn. Are you going to go to school for a little? —, asks Mitzi. I can’t. I have to find some fresh jasmine for the Kobra. What? I’ll explain later. (60)
In this exchange, the girls seamlessly intertwine alternative spellings of Italian words with English and Spanish terms (“yes,” “puedo”). *Scuola* (“school”) becomes *skola*, a change that does little to alter the meaning or pronunciation of the word, yet still renders it different from Standard Italian.

In the first generation of Italian literature of migration, adherence to formal linguistic conventions were considered necessary for the stories to be accepted by an Italian readership. As a result, and to the detriment of the storytellers’ own voices, works were often co-written with an Italian author to ensure linguistic perfection. With the second generation, however, as clearly demonstrated by the techniques used in “Karnevale,” linguistic control becomes a powerful tool used by authors to write themselves into the national framework. Millennial and teenage Italians belong to a multicultural generation and incorporate subcultural and multinational traditions into their colloquial language of communication. The incorporation of such language into “Karnevale” underscores the acts of self-translation executed by young Italians daily, especially young people considered second-generation migrants by virtue of their or their parents’ countries of origin. The use of various languages, metonyms for nationalities themselves, reifies the multicultural landscape of Italy through new forms of literary production.

Rima’s general insecurities about her Italian identity, having been born in Germany to Indian parents, leads her to express her *italianità* in any way possible. For an individual whose external expression of identity is so carefully constructed, her reliance on the use of colloquial language is illustrative of her pride for having successfully adapted to what is often perceived as a hostile environment to Others.
Furthermore, the pervasive use of juvenile language throughout the story is distancing. As with the inclusion of imperfect pronunciations, undoubtedly common in contemporary Italian cities, the language of text messaging requires closer attention in order to decipher what exactly is written in a text that the average Italian should have no trouble reading. However, among young readers or those who subscribe to the current norms regarding new forms of technology and communication, the texts may not be as initially opaque. In this way, the use of such language functions as a sub-language or new dialect, using Italian linguistic conventions in a culturally (though not necessarily regionally) specific manner.

When Rima and her cousin, Nandini, arrive in the piazza, they are immediately confronted with issues of linguistic expression and understanding. When Ale first approaches Nandini, Rima is quick to jump in and assert that Nandini will not understand him because she does not speak Italian. The problem is quickly resolved when Ale and Nandini begin speaking to one another in English. The Italian piazza is a culturally specific context, one in which a Carnevale festival is taking place. That polylingualism, as written in the text of the short story and as experienced by the characters, occurs at such a distinct site is significant. The ability of these two seemingly incompatible characters to come out of their individual cultural paradigms through the use of a common language is of particular importance in migrant writing, as it highlights the ways in which multiple national traditions can exist in a single cultural space without diminishing its status as an Italian national symbol.

As Mignolo notes, European national languages are, as a result of their widespread installation by colonial regimes, systems of cultural hegemony. As such,
they continue to play prominent roles in contemporary societies. They are the language of the national novel, within which national myths and cultural norms have long been circumscribed. In the Italian context, the imposition of a standard language in order to subsume regional dialects—and, by extension, cultural practices—beneath it has always underscored questions of language and its relationship to the nation. In its overseas territories and colonies as well, the privileged status afforded to the Italian language imbued it with a coercive power. While questions of regional-versus-national language primacy still exist, questions regarding the presence of multiple national languages in Italy have more recently arisen alongside them. If the consideration of Italian as a colonial or hegemonic cultural system is to be reformed, it is necessary to break the linguistic monopoly of the Standard Italian language in increasingly multicultural spaces.

If the act of writing national literature inscribed the enduring cultural norms of the modern nation, then disrupting homogeneous linguistic practices renders the novel something else entirely. Self-translation practices in “Curry di pollo” legitimate the speaking of an imperfect, accented Italian through the character of Signora Kumar, whose imperfect conjugation and pronunciation first appears as a threat to Anandita’s Italian identity. However, no meaning was lost in translation. Neither Standard Italian nor an entirely different linguistic practice, the inclusion of a grammatically less-than-perfect, accented—nonetheless well understood—Italian further pushes the narrative of “Curry di Pollo” into the in-between, Third Space associated with alternative, postmodern depictions of the nation.
Furthermore, by reaching beyond the surface of Standard Italian and employing language commonly used in text messaging, the narrative style of “Karnevale” clearly demonstrates postcolonial languaging techniques. Between using the German word for mother and texting her friend, Mitzi, “yes” and “no puedo” (“I can’t,” in Spanish), the polylingualism of “Karnevale” rebukes the demand for linguistic homogeneity associated with the nation-state. Non-Italian words are only sparingly present in the text, yet they make enough of an impact so as to disrupt the assumption of linguistic—and, by extension, cultural—uniformity of the Italian nation. The Trieste inhabited by Rima in “Karnevale” is characterized in actuality by a hybridity, which she comes to realize and accept as she witnesses the strict, tense construction of a world strictly divided by nationality collapse.

The act of speaking is itself counter-hegemonic, given that “the migrant’s silence elicits those racist fantasies of purity and persecution that must always return from the Outside, to estrange the present of the life of the metropolis; to make it strangely familiar” (Bhabha 166). By breaking this silence, assumptions of what it means to exist in the Italian context are disputed, reinterpreted and ultimately rejected in favor of a hybrid Italian identity, with the capacity to support transnational identities within the Italian paradigm as well as to reflect the lived experiences of its inhabitants as they change and develop.

**Conclusion**

This essay begins with a quotation from Laila Wadia, in which she identifies two ways of conceptualizing the Italian national identity: as a mutable entity and, at the opposite end of the spectrum, something that must never change. In Wadia’s
estimation, it is this latter belief, categorized as an internal perspective that presents a clearer danger to *italianità*. She argues that, really, “solo il cambiamento è costante,” or that “change is the only constant.” Such ideas are reflected in “Curry di pollo and Karnevale”—as well as in a host of other short stories and novels by Wadia and her counterparts—through the tracing and construction of new, hybrid identities. Both narratives proceed in such a way that adherence to fixed identities becomes unsustainable in a world characterized by global movement. The tension between what Bhabha terms the pedagogical and performative eventually results in the expansion of the Italian cultural space, in which hybrid identities find positions. The two fictional accounts of emergence bring the narratives into a Third Space, a space both in-between and beyond that which existed previously.

Bhabha asks, “How does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present?” (157). Furthermore, how does one move beyond it? This investigation of “Curry di pollo” and “Karnevale” attempt, in part, to move toward an answer to these questions. The processes of emergence in these stories first indicate the ambivalent nature of the nation and then provide counter-narratives that present alternative ways of identifying and existing between or beyond strict national boundaries. The positions occupied through these works’ characters in their respective environments are reflected in the construction of narrative space, particularly at sites of interaction. The home of Anandita Kumar and her family in “Curry di pollo” is an undeniably Indian space, one that, before the events of the story transpire, never hosted Italians for dinner or saw the preparation of *penne al pomodoro* in place of more culturally specific fare.
Anandita, seeking to differentiate herself from her parents’ background, actively avoids all associations with Indian food and culture in order to more completely blend into the society into which she was born. Upon the entry of Anandita’s friends, however, the home becomes a scaled-down site of interaction, whereby negotiation between different identities play out and hybrid identities emerge.

The home in “Karnevale” also serves as a site of interaction, where the arrival of the protagonist’s cousin from India disrupts the Italianized home by reintroducing cultural elements (the speaking of Hindi, the preparation of biryani and other homemade Indian foods) into a space deliberately constructed so as not to demonstrate any signs of difference. In the public sphere, too, it becomes apparent that the space occupied by the characters weighs heavily on their self-concepts. Rima does not see any way for Nandini to exist in the piazza, where she plans to celebrate Carnevale with friends, and fears that she, by virtue of being related to Nandini, will also fail to comply with the perceived demands of the Italian cultural space. It comes as a surprise, then, when a few minor adjustments open the space to Nandini, whose different style of dancing and English-speaking is accepted, even admired. It becomes apparent through this episode that it is not only possible, but in many cases laudable, to possess and present a multiplicity of identities. It is in these spaces that the ideas associated with national homogeneity are disrupted, opening this new, Third Space where identities need not correspond to a fixed set of norms.

Languaging techniques also demonstrate the emergence of hybrid identities. Polylingual texts in and of themselves are a rebuke to the enduring cultural norms of the modern nation, since they situate Italian-language literature in a contemporary,
hybrid context. Self-translation practices, as well, bring a multiplicity of experience into the Italian national framework. In “Curry di pollo,” such techniques are used to legitimate the speaking of an imperfect, accented Italian through the character of Anandita’s mother, whose imperfect conjugation and pronunciation are first perceived as threats to Anandita’s Italian identity. Furthermore, by reaching beyond Standard Italian and employing Latin, German, and a language used for electronic communication, the narrative style of “Karnevale” clearly demonstrates how life is frequently lived between and across borders, be they physical, linguistic, cultural, or the like. The hegemonic power of language — the uniformity of Standard Italian in particular — is subverted in the aforementioned narrative, which contributes to the disruption of the idea of the nation as homogeneous and renders Italian-language literature something new.

This something new is also something else. By inherently challenging these established bases for inclusion and exclusion, migrant literature calls into question the fundamental tenets of the Italian national identity. The Other is entering into the same literary system that defined it in the first place, a subversive process seen by Marie Orton as essential to the recognition of hybrid identities (33). As what Graziella Parati refers to as a “minor literature,” literature of migration serves a vital social function, providing counter-narratives to the homogenizing discourses of the past. Still, editorial houses approach works concerning alternative presentations of the Italian identity with hesitation, so rather than emerging as national texts in their own rights, they continue to risk being subsumed altogether by dominant national discourses (Mauceri). “Minor publishing companies have,” Parati says, “therefore, published
texts that only aspire to be marginally visible, but have also guaranteed the publication of texts that otherwise would never have been made public” (32).

Writing serves as an act of civic engagement, to “talk back” to the marginalizing aspects of Italian public culture, to put individual experiences in conversation with dominant discourses that do not regularly recognize minority and hybrid identities. To write beyond the nation is to re-conceptualize it as one based on a politics of difference and recognition, where existing within a national context does not require specific terms for the expression of identity. To reconstruct the nation as a mutable entity, first in writing, has the potential to shift the imaginary toward a reality in which a wider range of lived experiences are valued and, moreover, are considered Italian.
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