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IDENTITY, SPLIT-SELF AND TRANSLINGUAL NARRATIVE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI

ABSTRACT This paper offers a preliminary investigation of the interconnection between identity, translanguaging and split-self in the non-fictional production of Jhumpa Lahiri, a Bengali American author, focusing in particular on her *In altre parole* (2015), a text originally written in Italian. Moving across languages and cultures, Lahiri interrogates her own sense of identity by considering the nodes of tradition and transformation, in particular through her crucial translingual practice, thus shifting away from English and adopting Italian as a professional literary language. The outcome is a hybrid text that can be approached via the notion of “split self” (Emmott 2002), i.e. the plural manifestations of consciousness in its various expressive forms. The investigation will be conducted by applying an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the methodological tools and frames of postcolonial studies, narratology and cognitive poetics.

KEYWORDS Translingualism, Jhumpa Lahiri, Identity, Split self, Non-fictional narrative

Introduction

Recent scholarship in linguistics, psychology and other fields has convincingly shown that, rather than being a monolithic entity, identity constitutes a fluid work in progress affected by many factors and complexities of life, and often linguistically constructed in texts and discourses. Bucholtz and Hall (2010, 18), for example, propose the idea of “approaching identity as a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories.” Such premise recognises the centripetal work of various agencies (Jenkins 2004; Joseph 2010) and can also be used as a perspective to investigate writing as a site of possible dimensions of identity, since authors bring their own life experience into their work, shaping language and constructing meaning by working out a sense of the self. This aspect is particularly salient in the case of postcolonial authors, who have to appropriate and abrogate language, translating and connecting a variety of traditions, discourses and styles (Ashcroft 2009; Talib 2002). The outcome of such productive process

concerns a range of linguistic, identitarian and intercultural forms that go under the umbrella category of translingualism. This notion, which has recently gained attention especially in the educational field and in relation to second language acquisition, can be defined as follows:

The term translingual conceives of language relationships in more dynamic terms. The semiotic resources in one's repertoire or in society interact more closely, become part of an integrated resource, and enhance each other. The languages mesh in transformative ways, generating new meanings. (Canagarajah 2013, 8).

Emphasis is thus laid upon the real and fruitful interconnection, overlapping and integration of resources and devices within the communicative act. Translingualism also surfaces in narrative texts and "is connected, though distinct from, the process of (self-) translation, another important field within multilingual studies" (Gardner-Chloros and Weston 2015, 185). From this angle, what matters is not the simple act of translation, of writing in another language, but rather a movement between codes that implies amalgamation, elaboration and productions of new practices and styles.

In this paper I will look at the narrative and translingual representation of identity through a recent non-fictional text by Jhumpa Lahiri, *In altre parole* (2015), originally written in Italian, in which the Bengali American author (who was based in Italy for a few years) provides a linguistic and cultural meta-reflection on her ground-breaking attempt to express the manifold articulations of her personality. Moving across languages and cultures, Lahiri interrogates the nodes of tradition and transformation, in particular through her crucial decision as an Anglophone writer to shift away from English and adopt Italian as a literary language, thus building up a hybrid text that intimately pivots around the notion of "split selves" (Emmott 2002), i.e. the plural manifestations of consciousness in its various expressive forms.

My starting point for the exploration of Lahiri's translingual project acknowledges the key role of storytelling by following the contention that "narratives are one of the fundamental aspects of understanding" (Stockwell 2002, 122). Then it takes into consideration the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A NARRATIVE (Bruner 2004), from which stem two important considerations, namely that narrative can be viewed as cognitive tools to communicate and encode human experience as well as the reflection that reality and experience are acquired and constructed through narratives. In this perspective, therefore, Lahiri's experiment with languages, memories and writing constitutes an attempt to decipher and come to terms with her own peculiar condition of postcoloniality and her (re)positioning in a dynamic and stratified cultural scenario, driven by different forces and fluxes (Kachru and Smith 2008; Pennycook 2010; Talib 2002).

The investigation will be conducted by applying an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the methodological tools and frames of postcolonial studies, narratology and cognitive poetics (e.g. Ashcroft 2009; Emmott 2002; Jeffries 2010, Stockwell 2002) to a

selection of extracts. The focus in particular will be on how the translingual nature of the text, namely the bond between language and identity, can be interpreted via the idea of split self and how such cognitive strategy allows the blending of various text types and perspectives, ranging from a semi-autobiographical account, an (almost) imaginary life history, to a personal commentary on second/third language acquisition, sometimes interpolated with literary episodes and references.

In altre parole: in other words

It is necessary to provide some background of the text under consideration, which was originally published in 2015 by the Italian publishing house Guanda, based in the northern city of Parma, and which from the very title – intertextually evocative of a famous textbook on translation studies (Baker, Mona. 1992. *In Other Words*. London: Routledge.) – foregrounds the key role of language and implicitly calls to mind identity and alterity. By projecting the sense of selected words' otherness versus standard language, the title builds up an instantiation of opposition in discourse (see, for example, Jeffries 2010b) by implying difference and deviation from the backdrop of the expected.

This work combines different textual formats and it could be considered as a kind of personal diary or journal, a sort of autobiography, or even a short essay on the values of Italian language and literature. Organised into 23 short chapters, it also includes two short stories ('Lo scambio' and 'Penombra'). The unifying theme of the book concerns the author's love for Italian culture and her wish to move to and live in Italy, but the work also constitutes a reflection on the idea of writing, translating and learning a second language, and ultimately of coming to terms with the plural notion of identity, or identity evolutions. Naturally Lahiri's Italian literary project is not the first of this kind, and in the Anglophone world there are some examples of authors writing in this language, for instance the American journalist Diane Hales' non-fictional text *La Bella Lingua* (2009), whose subtitle ('My love affair with Italian, the world's most enchanting language') triggers poetic schemas and traditional echoes of romance. However, the Bengali American's writing is built up within a translingual perspective as it deeply foregrounds, discusses and problematises the dynamic interaction of languages, modalities and conceptualisations.

The book is also available in English, but interestingly the author decided not to translate it herself but chose to turn to Ann Goldstein, an editor of *The New Yorker* and translator of important Italian writers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Primo Levi and Giacomo Leopardi. In her introductory note to the English version, Lahiri (2016, XII) justifies her choice by affirming that:

Writing in Italian is a choice on my part, a risk that I feel inspired to take. It requires a strict discipline that I am compelled, at the moment, to maintain. Translating the book myself would

have broken that discipline; it would have meant re-engaging intimately with English, wrestling with it, rather than with Italian.

My analysis, however, specifically concerns the writer's stylistic and textual manipulation of the Italian language in the meaning-making process, and thus I shall focus on her translingual experiment rather than the English-language translation, which is mainly addressed to her traditional world readers.

Identity, translingualism and split-self

In this paper I investigate how Jhumpa Lahiri constructs a complex, multifaceted and translingual sense of identity through her writing, in particular in the way she imagines and articulates her relation with the language(s) she knows or is able to use. Here I argue that the author elaborates four specific trajectories to grasp the meaning and value of language as systems that function as interpretive keys to life. The four trajectories take figurative forms and can be illustrated as 1) the idea of mother tongue, 2) the image of language as a stepmother, 3) the notion of a new language, and finally 4) the maternity metaphors. I am now going to look at how these paradigms operate as rhetorical and conceptual mechanisms within the text, projecting the author's point of view, ideology and position.

Obviously, for Lahiri, the sense of a mother tongue, a rather loaded expression, ties up with her past and her very early years: her Bengali is a metaphorical bridge towards the past and the origins, but also a difficult, and sometimes unknown, tool because she affirms that "Non conosco il bengalese alla perfezione. Non so leggerlo, neanche scriverlo. Parlo con un accento, senza autorità, per cui ho sempre percepito una sconnessura tra me ed esso. Di conseguenza ritengo che la mia lingua madre sia anche, paradossalmente, una lingua straniera" (26). In a translingual frame of mind, it is worth noticing that in Canagarajah's words (2013, 7) "meaning doesn't arise from a common grammatical system or norm, but through negotiation practices in local situations," and hence stems the idea of estrangement that Lahiri projects onto Bengali, a linguistic code simultaneously close to and far from her, given the complex circumstances of her life as well as her diasporic condition.

If Bengali is defined as a mother tongue, then the label 'stepmother' is applied to English, a language that the writer acquired soon and with which she built a very strong and intense relationship: "Avevo sei o sette anni. Da allora la mia lingua madre non è stata più capace, da sola, di crescermi. In un certo senso è morta. È arrivato l'inglese, la matrigna" (109-110). As it happens in the case of many postcolonial authors who have to renegotiate their own identity, in terms of language too, English arises as a 'necessary' means of expression that is characterised by diatopic and idiosyncratic features, including a feeling of separation and division: "Non era possibile parlare in inglese senza avvertire una sensazione inquietante di separazione. [...] Vedevo le

conseguenze del non parlare l'inglese alla perfezione, di parlarlo con un accento straniero" (112). In a nutshell, here Lahiri picks up the overlapping of different discourses such as the linguistic ideology of English, its hegemonic spread and the emotional sphere of language production against the monolithic idea of competence (Clark 2013).

Between the poles of a mother tongue and a stepmother language, there is a locus of identity formation, namely how the subject strives to live and come to terms with two, or more languages, accommodating, elaborating and sometimes rejecting some linguistic aspects. In her text, Lahiri documents her splitting uncertainty when she had to mediate between the use of Bengali and English: "I miei genitori volevano che io parlassi soltanto il bengalese con loro e con tutti i loro amici. Se parlavo inglese a casa mi rimproveravano. La parte di me che parlava inglese, che andava a scuola, che leggeva e scriveva, era un'altra persona" (110). The sense of being 'someone else', of assuming a certain persona brings to light a new form of crisis, which however in a translingual dimension can become an instance of a multiplicity of language recourses.

Why does this author of Indian heritage eventually decide to embrace the study of Italian and yearn to become fluent in a language so remote from her family and cultural background? Lahiri herself meditates on this issue and, in considering her complicated relations with both Bengali and English, she spells out the idea of learning and speaking Italian as a sort of escape, a way to detach herself from a heavy, and perhaps unsolved, past towards a better future:

Credo che studiare l'italiano sia una via di fuga dal lungo scontro, nella mia vita, tra l'inglese e il bengalese. Un rifiuto sia della madre sia della matrigna. Un percorso indipendente. Dove mi porta, questo nuovo tragitto? Dove finisce la gara, e quando? Dopo essere fuggita, cosa farò? In realtà non è una fuga nel senso stretto della parola. Pur fuggendo, mi accorgo che sia l'inglese sia il bengalese mi affiancano. Così come in un triangolo, un punto conduce inevitabilmente all'altro (114).

In reality, for Lahiri the quotation illuminates not merely the act of distancing from her two main languages, but rather the interweaving of codes, signs and resources that is consistent with translanguaging seen as an overarching cultural phenomenon designing a space of freedom and reflection for human beings. From this angle, the multilingual awareness represents a sort of mediation and balance between different languages, all of which are important and integrated within a coherent system of polyphonic expressivity.

Polyphony, a term derived from Bakhtin's critical work, should be observed in tandem with the relevance of heteroglossia, that is, the plural manifestation of voices, languages and styles at work, a principle that informs translanguaging and that particularly characterises the postcolonial field. Collaboratively, various communicative resources operate to favour the identitarian expression of those subjects that are able to move between codes and traditions, adapting and adopting different types of language materials, and sustaining an overflow of "heterogeneity of signs and forms in meanings

making, which incorporates the aspects of tension-filled interaction, indexicality and multivoiceness” (Kananu 2016, 118). To cross in and out of this multilingual scenario, and to emphasize the fact that humans should not view languages as cognitive separate compartments, but rather as cogs working within the same broader machine, Lahiri wonders about the bond between life and the word: “Cosa significa una parola? E una vita?” (72). Such a rhetorical question naturally requires an intricate answer that in reality captures her own multidimensional exploration of identity, so that languages traverse the sense of being and experiencing the world, giving substance to the human approach and gaze onto the surrounding reality.

The last trajectory that I have previously introduced to illustrate the writer’s configuration of languages is based on an assortment of metaphors related to motherhood, and the relationship between a mother and her child. In this light, Lahiri envisages her Italian as a child, a newborn that needs to grow and to be looked after, against the personification of English as a youngster, with whom the woman has an uneasy relation:

Rispetto all’italiano, l’inglese mi sembra prepotente, soggiogante, pieno di sé. Ho l’impressione che, finora in cattività, si sia scatenato e che sia furibondo. Probabilmente, sentendosi trascurato da quasi un anno ce l’ha con me. [...] Voglio difendere il mio italiano, che tengo in braccio come un neonato. Voglio coccolarlo. Deve dormire, deve alimentarsi deve crescere. Rispetto all’italiano, il mio inglese mi sembra un adolescente peloso, puzzolente. Vattene, voglio dirgli. [...] Adesso mentre traduco me stessa, mi sento la madre di due figli. [...] La maternità è un legame viscerale, un amore incondizionato, una devozione che va oltre l’attenzione e la compatibilità (90-92).

Adopting a new language is thus seen via a double metaphor that maps out languages as humans seen in different ages and that hints at processes of narrative and literary creation through the lens of biological birth (i.e. the mother and her baby child) and social contact (i.e. the mother and her difficult teenage child).

Split-self and metaphor in Lahiri’s *In altre parole*

The emergence and blending of various linguistic forms can also be indicative of a split self, which for Emmott (2002) refers to a double narrative perspective for the authorial or narratorial subject. Emmott also points out that this phenomenon typically emerges “at times of personal crisis” (153) and by and large suggests “the sense of fragmentation of identity in postmodern society” (*Ivi*), two conditions that both apply to Lahiri, a Bengali American author who now adopts a different linguistic code to articulate her writing. On the one hand, this is a personal stylistic but also cultural and emotional choice, and on the other it somehow mirrors the fluidity of the contemporary age, the spread of languages across the world, the impact of cultures in motion.

As a whole, the notion of split self provides considerable cognitive insights, since it can conceptualise the different ways of understanding our consciousness, sometimes even imagining different representations of the same personality in conflict, for example with figurative expressions (realised via the indefinite pronoun 'self' premodified by a possessive), such as 'I'm not feeling myself today', 'I really cannot stand myself', 'I have left myself and am now doing other things', and so forth. In general, it is an important narrative strategy, particularly relevant in autobiographical literature because it depicts the successions or series of different sides of the self, going through the experiences of life and thus constructing different agents/narrators, as it occurs indeed in the text I examine here.

I shall now explore Lahiri's text in order to find textual examples and patterns of the writer's idiosyncratic stylistic choices, which cumulatively point to the manifestations of identity, in an effort to balance tradition and transformation. The sense of split self is crucial not only in the narrative orchestration of the entire text, but also in the linguistic elaboration underlying metaphors and schemas, many of which regard a mental discomfort and displacement that is reminiscent of those nomadic and diasporic subjects who cross frontiers, have to learn new languages and adapt themselves to other norms and contexts. Lahiri intentionally decides to move to Italy and use Italian as a literary professional language: in spite of her determination, however, she has to face the expectations and anxieties typical of an L2 context, in which language acquisition is a key emotional factor for writers too (Zhao 2015), and such significant aspect is often reflected in her employment of linguistic devices and constructions. In particular, for the author various rhetorical resources substantiate the issue of split identity, leading to split nationality, language competence, and vision as well.

The idea of language, imaginatively conceived as an important part of identity, is figuratively rendered as an object that can be placed in a box referring to our cognitive ability to approach and understand surrounding reality. Recalling the moment when she impulsively starts writing her journal in Italian, the novelist reflects on her innermost relation with her somehow conflicting languages, English and Italian, and deploys an example of conceptual metaphor (Stockwell 2002, 109), in particular the subtype CONTAINER metaphor, as in the construction: "Quel sabato, faccio qualcosa di strano, inaspettato. Scrivo il diario in italiano. Lo faccio in modo quasi automatico, spontaneo. Lo faccio perché quando prendo la penna in mano, non sento più l'inglese nel mio cervello" (50-51). In this structure, the image of the head/brain seems to be unable to 'contain' a language, and implicitly once again this generates a fracturing of the whole, a divided identity with the opposition inside/outside. This perspective adopts the cognitive mechanics of a container metaphor, which in figurative terms relates to the conceptualisation of a mind within a body, and the possible alternative configuration of something outside the body, linguistically rendering the paradox of identity outside its supposed site, i.e. the body in flesh and bone. In the mapping of such metaphor, the mind is seen as an inhabitant of an edifice (the body), and consequently

the movements towards and from the edifice/body signal the inner mental tensions of the psyche. Lahiri intensifies this perception as if two selves were present in this scene, one opposite the other, one outside the other: “Non riconosco la persona che sta scrivendo in questo diario, in questa nuova lingua approssimativa. Ma so che è la parte più schietta, più vulnerabile di me” (51). The two sides of the same self (with the overlapping roles of subject, writer and narrator) are divided by the difficulty of the language experience, and implicitly testify to the complexity of the workings of the mind.

In a similar vein, the split self modality evokes a sense of the changing self, the transformations and hybridisations of identity and its many dynamic expressions. An illustration of such strategy emerges when Lahiri records a brief return to the USA after a year spent in Rome, and she is overwhelmed by a feeling of loss, of uncertainty: like a mother who terribly misses her children, the writer painfully misses the surrounding presence of the Italian language, as the sense of identity seems to evolve through time, before and after the actual experience, which embeds the loaded sentiment of frustration of not only learning a new language, but also adapting and transforming one’s own personality, character and worldview: “Eppure, ora come allora, sono acutamente consapevole di un distacco fisico, doloroso. Come se una parte di me non ci fosse più” (95). It is worth noticing that the mental and pragmatic efforts of those subjects who go through processes of transformation, however, are mediated within a broader sociocultural frame, in which various factors are at work. Jhumpa Lahiri’s love for Italian language and culture is the metaphorical engine for many changes in her life, but nonetheless her willingness and identity do not always lead to a successful performance or to the achievement of her linguistic goals, generating emotional rewards and self-esteem.

A short reference to an episode that occurred in the southern Italian city of Salerno will suffice to illustrate this. Lahiri is in a shop with her husband, an American man who can speak some Italian but has never studied it formally or shown particular enthusiasm for this language. As the shop assistant praises the man’s supposedly good competence in Italian, Lahiri feels once again a kind of split, a breaking of identity, since on the one hand she does strive in every possible way to sound like a native Italian speaker, to act like an Italian and to integrate herself into Italian society – incidentally a kind of behaviour which is typical of a subject who attempts to absorb a foreign culture completely by means of second-language acquisition – but on the other she has to remember her physical condition, her embodied self: “Per colpa del mio aspetto fisico, sono percepita come una straniera. È vero, lo sono” (103). The implicature (Black 2006, 80-84) underlying these words condenses the emotional maelstrom and the clash with reality in the reformulation of one’s identity, in particular through a sentiment of alterity which regards how the body is conceived, but also how the language is perceived: “È sempre la stessa risposta, lo stesso cipiglio. Come se il mio italiano fosse un’altra lingua” (104). In the quotation, the adjective ‘another’ verbally alludes to a

sensation of crisis, since the speaking subject is observed in a twofold manner, in terms of language use (the Italian spoken by the writer seems to be non-standard, deviant), but also in the projection of identity, or rather how her identity is perceived as different, and thus annihilated, rejected and marginalised.

Other language resources: modality and possible worlds

In this section I shall briefly extend the focus of my analysis and look at other textual resources such as modality and possible worlds that, cumulatively, contribute to the translingual atmosphere of Lahiri's book. Often the manifestation of the split self takes the form of conditional or hypothetical constructions ("as if...", "if...") or of other tactics, such as the use of verbs of volition to refer to possible and impossible desires, and consequently express other forms of identity, in particular through various modal items, which encode the way the speaker considers the surrounding context. According to Jeffries (2010a), "modality of all kinds can have the effect of creating a hypothetical or alternative world/situation conceptually for the reader/hearer and in turn this alternative reality may have a number of potentially ideological effects on the recipient of such texts" (117). Lahiri's passion for Italian, for example, is often rendered in figurative terms concerning fatigue, efforts and difficulty, like the idea of swimming across a lake, climbing a difficult mountain, or in other words putting oneself to the test: "Per vent'anni ho studiato la lingua italiana come se nuotassi lungo i bordi di quel lago" (14), "[...] come se, poco attrezzata, scalassi una montagna" (52). By providing such suggestive images, the author in reality constructs an alternative identity in another (im)possible world, in which her mastery of the language mirrors the sense of identity and desire, and is linguistically structured through the technique of hypothesizing. This type of interpretation can also be supported by the application of Possible World Theory (Ryan 1991), whose aim is to explain how readers become involved in the unfolding of discourse and text: in this vein, alternative possible worlds "may represent the point of view of the participants in the narrative (whether fictional or not), and the subtypes, such as knowledge world, obligation world, wish world and intention world, each of which represents some kind of notional extension of the perceived alternative possible world of the relevant character or participant" (Jeffries 2010a, 153).

The manipulation of person, time and place deixis in fact allows the writer to speculate on the developments of discourse and its meanings, and such approach lays emphasis on the attempts of the readers in constructing text worlds (Gavins 2007) and in experiencing textual involvement by which linguistically foregrounded themes resonate in their mind (Stockwell 2009, 17-55). Reflecting on her relation with the Italian language, Lahiri states: "Quando leggo in italiano mi sento un'ospite, una viaggiatrice. [...] Quando scrivo in italiano mi sento un'intrusa, un'impostora" (69). Assuming other configurations of identity sanctions the passage into other text worlds, and opens up a plethora of implications: a traveller is a person who moves across space

while an imposter is someone who pretends to be someone else. Both metaphors express the elaboration of the subjects trying to come to terms with their own world awareness through change, motion, transformation, thus proving again that identity functions as a dynamic force rather than a static repository of characterising traits.

Writing and translation, i.e. two mental activities that are based on the construction, use and elaboration of discourse and its most basic constituents, namely words, are the two scenarios in which the author experiences a process of duplication, thanks to her capacity to switch between English and Italian. When she decides to translate a piece she had originally composed in Italian, she finds such operation very hard and complicated, an act that generates “un senso di estraneità” (90). In a perspective of duplicity and doubling of Lahiri seems to regard the author of the text as another person, another self: “Chi è questa scrittrice, così ben organizzata? Non la riconosco” (*Ivi*). The puzzlement of the split self in particular illuminates the intricate and somehow conflicting bond between the languages she knows as well as her own mental processing of the task of writing and translating, which mediates between the subject writer and the subject translator:

Mentre traduco questo breve testo in inglese, mi sento spezzata in due. Non riesco a gestire la tensione, non sono capace di muovermi tra le lingue come un'acrobata. Mi viene in mente la sensazione sgradevole di dover essere due diverse persone allo stesso tempo: una condizione ineluttabile della mia vita (92).

It is worth noticing here that the sensation of discomfort and confusion is further emphasised by the recourse to obligation through the deontic modal verb of obligation ('di dover essere'), which here encodes an epistemic value of deducing something and being certain about one's introspection. By and large, deontic modality suitably fits with the frameworks of possible worlds and texts worlds, or according to Wales (1995, 480) “other kinds of worlds, which human language has the unique capacity to make reference to, namely the worlds of possibility or of the imagination,” In the extract above, signalled by the use of this modal structure, the author seems to perceive the distressing burden of being two different persons, or in a figurative manner two sides of the same coin.

Concording remarks

In this paper I have concentrated on the intertwining of language, identity and narrative as a possible transformational and translingual site of identity, in which the subject experiences a form of doubling, splitting or multiplication, and I have used Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole* as a case study to detect textual examples of such phenomenon. In exploring the twofold manifestations of language and identity, Lahiri unearths layers of her personality and experience, ultimately deriving a double perspective: “Per colpa della mia identità divisa, per colpa, forse, del mio carattere, mi

considero una persona incompiuta, in qualche modo manchevole” (85-6). From this angle, the very meaning of writing represents a moment of reflection to illuminate the possible instances of identity positioning, a tool that can be used to arrange the variety of sentiments between the self and the other, the person and the world: “Indagando la mia scoperta della lingua, penso di aver fatto un’indagine su di me” (134). If moving into another context and approaching a new linguistic code imply a redesigning, to various degrees, of identity and personality, Lahiri brings to the fore the cognitive efforts required to adopt and adapt a different viewpoint, whose wandering in reality comes full circle, so that getting to know the others coincides with getting to know one’s self, with one’s limits, desires, expectations, dreams and much more.

Siding with current cognitive theories of personality, Stockwell (2009) emphasises the manifold composition and patterning of traits that collectively contribute to the creation of identity as a fluid notion, in transformation and development: in this sense, the idea of personality can be illustrated in the following terms:

we configure both our demeanour to the world and our internal self-sense according to the situation in hand. This comprises our objectives, our sense of local and general goals, our desire for social cohesion and interaction, our natural adaptation to others, our sense of past experiential configurations and our consistency with them, and so on (136).

In turning her life experience into a narrative fabric, which sometimes fictionalises episodes and events, Lahiri ultimately aims to realise her project of identity representation in balance between the poles of tradition (i.e. the broad fields of literary writing, biographical accounts, diaries and intimate forms of expressions) and that of transformation or innovation (i.e. an exploration into the workings of the mind, regulating the connections of identity, language, comprehension). Therefore, the author reflects on her own history, which is characterised by a nomadic and translingual spirit, a disintegration of rigid boundaries and labels, and finally acknowledges the complexity of her innermost self in new linguistic forms.

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