

Transnational Identities and the Subversion of the Italian Language in Geneviève Makaping, Christiana de Caldas Brito, and Jarmila Očkayová

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Abstract. In this article I analyze literary works written in the Italian language by three women authors: Geneviève Makaping (who migrated to Italy from Cameroon), Christiana de Caldas Brito (from Brazil) and Jarmila Očkayová (from Slovakia). In these texts migration is not only a biographical experience, it is an existential condition: a kind of critical consciousness where knowledge and behaviour are not taken for granted. The article focuses on the different strategies adopted by the three migrant writers to subvert the normativity of language in order to represent their experience of crossing different physical and/or metaphorical borders. According to them, this experience transforms their subjectivity in a space open to multiple belongings, turning the fragmentation of their identity into a source of empowerment.

Keywords: Italian literature, migration literature, postcolonial literature, gender studies, feminist criticism, Italian language, transnational identities, mother tongue, creolization, nomadism, diversity, blackness

After a long history of emigration, only recently has Italy transformed itself into a site of immigration. Between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, writers intending to settle in Italy and to participate actively in Italian social and cultural life, started to publish poems, novels and short stories in Italian. In these literary texts migration is not only a biographical experience, it is an existential condition: it represents a form of critical consciousness that resists settled, hegemonic patterns of thought and behaviour. In this article I analyze literary works written in the Italian language by three women authors: Geneviève Makaping (who migrated to Italy from Cameroon), Christiana de Caldas Brito (from Brazil) and Jarmila Očkayová (from Slovakia).

According to Christiana de Caldas Brito, migrants have to abandon their traditions, their habits, their way of life and thinking, and, above all, they abandon the motherland, the mother tongue, and the biological mother, if they want to immerse themselves in the new country.¹ She

considers the act of writing in Italian as the only way to make sense of her own experience, and to represent herself rather than being represented by others. This crossing of language borders and this appropriation of a new sound are ways to establish a real contact with the "other."

Many of the migrant writers now living in Italy can speak at least three languages: the mother tongue, the hated language of the European colonizer country (used as a "vehicular" international language),² and the Italian language, considered to be neutral and uncompromised. Of course this model does not work for writers coming from the former Italian colonies (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya), who, as a result of cultural policy during the colonial period, could already also speak Italian before arriving in Italy, and consequently identify this language with the colonizer. In this case, textual criticism has to take into account the comprehensive denial of the colonial adventure that has been perpetrated within Italian culture, the absence of any revision of Italian history that admits this colonial past, and the lack of a postcolonial critique. As Sandra Ponzanesi has pointed out, Italian colonialism is a rather obscure and forgotten chapter of Italian history, and – due to a long history of invasions and internal migrations – nowadays Italy still perceives itself more as a colonized country than as a colonizer.³ Thus, the analysis of the new corpus of Italian multicultural literature also sheds light onto this removed past.

Several common features in this new literary production can be identified: cultural contamination, linguistic hybridization, an intense connection with the rhythm of oral speech (especially in African writers), and a strong presence of irony that is the result of multiple points of view. These texts are often characterized by estrangement, as Italian everyday life is observed from the outside and seen as something strange and unusual. The migrant writers appropriate the Italian language and transform the Italian literary tradition by de-provincializing it. In so doing, they create something new: an intercultural literature that corresponds neither to the literature of their country of origin, nor to the one of their country of arrival.

Of course this process of cultural integration through the use of a new language is problematic: Geneviève Makaping feels she does not have a full command of Italian, and because language is a site of fight and resistance – a "place" to recognize and to take possession of one's self – she considers this lack to be a weakness.⁴ On the other hand, Jarmila Očkayová states that the Italian language is part of her everyday life, and the choice of using it is a means to escape from a condition

of "internal isolation," and a way to overcome the "barrier between herself and her perception of the world."⁵ The use of memory and the experience of autobiographical writing are for her the only possibilities to bridge two different cultures, to compare her nostalgia for the loss of a place of origin with her will to assert her role inside the host country both as a citizen and as a writer.

If their conscious choice of writing in Italian is a claim for being listened to by "native" Italians, and a way to join the Italian community and intervene in the Italian literary tradition, these texts also reveal a deep connection between language and identity. The renunciation of the mother tongue is often experienced by a writer as a betrayal of her roots, leading sometimes to guilt and frustration. On the other hand, the interiorization of the new language is the starting point for recognizing the plurality of the identities acquired by the author as a woman and as a migrant, and to question the integrity and the completeness of her subjectivity.

Geneviève Makaping, for example, argues that, "If language is one of the main elements of identity construction," she must also recognize that her identity is "kaleidoscopic:" it is "like a mosaic."⁶ But nothing can be completely pure, neither language, nor culture nor identity. The simultaneous contact between languages and cultures typical of modern reality has forced Western thought to abandon the belief that one's identity is valuable and recognizable only if it excludes the identity of others. Edward Said has pointed out that, in our time, Europeans and Americans have to cope with a large population of immigrants, whose voices demand to be heard. He has argued that intellectuals must recognize this general historical trend towards transnational mobility and reconsider their positions and their identities. The migration of people from the colonies to the metropolises is one of the effects of imperialism and of globalization, which have contributed to bringing different cultures into contact. In contemporary times many cultures are interconnected, hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and not at all monolithic. This is the reason why Said has claimed that a "contrapuntal" and "nomadic" literary hystoriography is needed in order to be able to reveal the mutual interdependences and power relations among different cultures.⁷

As Édouard Glissant points out, migrant writers experience on their bodies the process of "creolization" that characterizes the postmodern world.⁸ Although it is thanks to this experience that their works are able to catch the essence of the contemporary world, the aesthetic value of migrants' literary production has, nevertheless, always been

underestimated and neglected by Italian academia. It is necessary to problematize the dualistic thought of the Enlightenment, which based identity on a series of oppositions (self/other, male/female, body/mind, nature/culture, civilized/primitive) and confined difference (for example, sexual, gender and ethnic differences) to a subordinate position. On the contrary, following Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant suggests a notion of identity as a rhizome: not a unique root that excludes any other root, but a root which meets other roots.⁹ Contemporary writers, then, do not have an absolute single identity: they are always changing, for they write in the presence of all the languages of the world.¹⁰ From this perspective, Christiana de Caldas Brito describes migrants as people who "expose" their roots to others, without any fear of being diluted by this encounter. She considers the condition of migration to be a process of consciousness-raising, grounded in the recognition of multiple points of view.¹¹

Similarly, Makaping states that she wants "the religious, social and political borders of her identity to remain open"¹² without falling into a relativistic perspective. Since she does not command all the languages she speaks, no single language possesses her, nor does she possess any of them.¹³ She experiments with the "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries," which Donna Haraway considers to be an efficacious remedy for the racism and the phallogocentrism typical of Western capitalism.¹⁴ In this claim for multiple belonging, there is the possibility of a world in which people do not fear either incomplete identities or conflicting points of view: a world in which people are not worried about reconsidering the borders between subjects, their bodies, and the outside world. According to Geneviève Makaping, Christiana de Caldas Brito, and Jarmila Očkayová, this crossing of national and cultural boundaries transforms their subjectivity into a space open to multiple belongings, turning their feeling of uprootedness and the fragmentation of their identity into a source of empowerment. In the following pages I analyze the different strategies that these three migrant writers have adopted to subvert the normativity of language in order to represent their experience of crossing different physical and/or metaphorical borders.

Sandra Ponzanesi has applied Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of "minor literature" to Afro-Italian women's narratives, arguing that their condition of minority is not an expression of less value but a figuration of resistance and subversion within the establishment: a position that allows them to express creativity and innovation.¹⁵

Deleuze and Guattari based their theorization of minor literature on the

study of Kafka – a dislocated Jew writing in German and living in Prague – claiming that a writer should become a “stranger within his own language” and comparing the appropriation of the German language by the Jews with that of the English language used by African Americans.¹⁶ I consider this condition of being a stranger inside one’s own language to be a strategy of resistance that allows the Italian migrant writers to assume control over their own subjectivity and to interfere in the Italian literary tradition. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language, it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.”¹⁷ It therefore represents the transformative conditions for every literature within the established canon.

Of course the act of renouncing the integrity and the completeness of one’s identity is not a painless process. Black, postcolonial, and feminist thinkers have criticized the paradoxes of late postmodernity: the scholars who are actively working to deconstruct the power of the subject/author are exactly the ones who inhabit the centre of the empire, while the “others” are more disposed to assert their own identities and the authority of their experiences. As Rosi Braidotti argues:

“One cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted; one cannot diffuse a sexuality which has historically been defined as dark and mysterious. In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demistify metadiscourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation.”¹⁸

Thus, for Geneviève Makaping, Christiana de Caldas Brito, and Jarmila Očkayová, the experience of writing – an experience that opens the possibility of gaining access to a place of enunciation – becomes an important step in the process of liberation. Through writing they become able to transform their condition of exclusion and marginality – a marginality that is chosen “as location of radical openness and possibility”¹⁹ – into a site of resistance.

Geneviève Makaping writes an anthropological essay using the methodology of participant observation, but reverses the usual gaze of her discipline, which traditionally focuses on the “other.”²⁰ Her book, *Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi?* (Trajectories of gazes. What if the *others* were you?), is also an autobiographical diary in which the author’s personal experience of suffering violence and intolerance becomes a study of “native” Italians. In showing that “self” and “other” are but interchangeable positions, the author reveals “the black

conscience of the white man:"²¹ she looks at the ones who consider her diversity as a condition of inferiority, forgetting their own responsibilities, and she confronts the white readers who will be forced to recognize themselves in these pages.

When migrant writers decide to establish a dialogue with their Italian readers, they face a choice between the need for speaking the same language as the oppressor, and the possibility of creating a new linguistic code. Geneviève Makaping decides to use the Italian language and to subvert it from the inside. Her strategy consists in renaming everything that people have already marked, labelled and judged as negative and inferior. She engages herself in the deconstruction and the reconstruction of given meanings and concepts. First of all, she states: "I want to be the one who says my name;"²² and later she adds, "Call me nigger."²³

The preservation of the name is a recurring issue in Italian migrant literature: in many texts Mohamed becomes Ali,²⁴ Fitahianamala becomes Mina,²⁵ Yousef becomes Marco, "Mustafa becomes Mino, and Hussein becomes Enzo."²⁶ As a matter of fact, the practice of the "italianization" of migrants' names – usually performed by Italian interlocutors – is not innocuous: it is an attempt to appropriate the migrants' identity and to normalize whatever seems to be different and deviant. Makaping's claim to say her name is a clear act of resistance against the cannibalistic misappropriation of the works and experiences of black people. She attempts to create a space in which the oppressed can affirm their own subjectivity and can articulate their own perception of the world.

The critical reappropriation of the term "nigger," which deliberately causes Makaping's interlocutors embarrassment and uneasiness, is a strategic one as well. It suggests that the negative valence traditionally attributed to negritude is no longer justified, since it can be interpreted through other strategic reappropriations. For example the term "queer," has been reappropriated as a way to deconstruct a label used to exclude and to relegate all sexual identities alternative to the dominant heterosexual one to the realm of the "abject." Starting from Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject," Judith Butler reverses the term "queer" from a term of abuse against homosexuals to a positive, radically anti-normative notion, which includes a wide-ranging diversity of sexual identities and practices.²⁷ In the same way, Makaping intends to deconstruct and reconstruct the negative meaning of negritude, turning it into a creative and positive notion.

Christiana de Caldas Brito uses a different strategy: she creates a new expressive code grounded in the parodic mimesis of the "mistakes" that

Brazilian people make at their first contact with Italian. The result is "Portuliano," a hybrid language in which she mixes the sounds and rhythms of Portuguese and Italian. Her short stories, collected in the book *Amanda, Olinda, Azzurra e le altre*²⁸ (Amanda, Olinda, Azzurra, and the others), give voice to a number of women who have always been silenced or spoken for. These female characters all speak with a different "accent."²⁹ According to Christiana de Caldas Brito, the experience of writing in the Italian language opens new potentials for expressing her critical view on Italian society and for establishing contact with Italian readers. Moreover, her works reveal the intercultural reality of Italy that is the result of transnational migration. She states that she does not want to be "a 'well-bred' writer. Grammar cannot be a castrating mother which gives me insurmountable rules on how to behave properly as a writer."³⁰ She lets her indelible cultural background coexist with her new Italian identity. She refuses the standardization imposed by the rules of linguistic correctness, reclaiming her creative freedom and defending her dignity as an author. Besides, she suggests that migrant literature can be an antidote for the linguistic homogenization caused by globalization, by the hegemony of the English language, and by the supremacy of the technological languages, which are jeopardizing the vitality of the Italian language and literature.³¹

In this way Christiana de Caldas Brito challenges a common stereotype about migrant writers: the belief that, because of their inadequate knowledge of the Italian language and literature, they cannot be good writers. Usually Italian literary institutions take for granted that migrant people are not qualified enough to be writers. What is evidently at play here is a system of procedures of exclusion and control that, according to Michel Foucault, restrict the power of all the potential discourses (especially the ones that concern power and desire), by limiting access to certain areas and selecting subjects who may speak.³² Thus the hybrid language used by Christiana de Caldas Brito can be seen as a part of a battle for language against phallogocentrism: a fight, which Donna Haraway has identified as the politics of the "cyborg" against perfect communication, against a unique code that perfectly translates every meaning.³³

If writing in Italian implies a problematic encounter with the authority of the literary canon, it also embodies the differences experienced by the author. Italians, however, are still suspicious or indifferent towards what seems to be "foreign" and "different." This attitude is not only confined to racist or xenophobic events. It also permeates the publishing market, which hardly believes in the potential of migrant

literature. As a result, migrant writers often cannot find a publisher, and when they do, their works are corrected by native editors, and, because of the lack of distribution, they remain almost invisible.

Jarmila Očkayová complains that the right to write in Italian is considered to be the privilege of nobility, acquired by right of birth and that foreign writers daring to write in the language of Dante are treated as plebeians yearning for a title. It is not important that elsewhere the literary use of an adopted language is considered normal. It is not important how much richness the "foreigners" bring from their own world, or how deeply they penetrate inside the new world. Their command of the language and of its stylistic features is an issue of minor interest: "to be welcomed in the fortress of Italian literature, the foreign writers still lack 'blue blood.'"³⁴

The choice of adopting a new language compels the author to give up the sensation of tranquillity that comes with what is already familiar. At the same time it requires a consciousness that frees her from subjection to the norm of tradition, because language also encodes power relations. The use of the Italian language by migrant writers can be connected to the strategy of cultural decolonization performed by postcolonial narratives (even though the authors I am examining here are not strictly speaking postcolonial). Anglophone writers like Salman Rushdie or francophone writers like Tahar ben Jelloun and Assia Djebar have made their way into the mainstream literatures of their "adopted" countries. Thus, Standard English has been replaced by the proliferation of a variety of Englishes, such as Black English, or the musical language of rap and of Caribbean dub poetry. All these phenomena of appropriation, of metamorphosis, and of adaptation undergone by "Standard English" contributed to diminish the imperial language's political and ideological supremacy.³⁵ Similarly, the preservation of regional dialects in Italy during the last century has been interpreted by Antonio Gramsci as a strategy of resistance that helped the working class to oppose the power of political and cultural hegemonies.³⁶

The adoption of a language different from the native standard not only requires a higher consciousness. Since this process gives rise to doubts and questions for which Očkayová does not have ready-made answers, it also allows her to overcome the awe evoked by the sense of belonging to a given tradition. Actually writing in a new language can have a salutary effect on stylistic courage, since it ensures the possibility of breaking established rules. In the novel *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (The Essential Is Invisible to the Eyes),³⁷ Jarmila Očkayová uses a culinary metaphor to explain the different ways she approaches her two

languages, Slovak and Italian. Agata, the protagonist of the novel, affirms that "speaking the native tongue is like finding food ready to eat on the table, prepared in the kitchen of a restaurant. On the contrary, adopting a new language is like being expected to prepare the same dish by yourself: you do the shopping, you dirty the kitchen and you pay attention to every ingredient. Afterwards, when you eat, you are fully aware of what you have in your plate."³⁸

In this clear rejection of the ideal of the mother tongue by Jarmila Očkayová, there is a connection with the figure of the "polyglot," defined by Rosi Braidotti as a version of the nomadic critical consciousness. Adopting Deleuze's nomadic epistemology, Braidotti argues that nomadic subjectivity is not simply a geographical category, but an imaginary and symbolic one: "it is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling."³⁹ Since the polyglot is a person in transit between languages, this condition of simultaneous belonging and not-belonging enables the polyglot to look skeptically at fixed identities and mother tongues, to face multiplicity, and to resist the temptation to fix oneself in one univocal conception of identity.

According to Očkayová, the negative attitude towards migrant writers and the excessive defence of the Italian language displayed by the literary establishment are grounded both in a fear of diversity and in a search for normativity, which are a consequence of the fragmentation of the Italian national identity and lack of cultural cohesion.⁴⁰ In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti extends her gaze to all of Europe, viewed as an ethnocentric fortress, in which the ideal of the mother tongue is stronger than ever, and as a result the strength of any kind of nationalism, regionalism and localism is increased. Here Braidotti also alludes to the ethnic rape perpetrated against the women of Bosnia and Croatia chiefly for their identification with the mother tongue and the motherland. As a matter of fact women often play important symbolic roles in racialized narratives, and nationalist imaginings have a strong gender dimension: women are often constructed as symbols of the nation and as "guardians of the race," marking the boundaries between different ethnic groups.⁴¹

On the contrary, the polyglot has already given up any ideal of linguistic and ethnic purity, and any kind of nostalgia for a place of origin. The polyglot is intimately aware of the arbitrariness of language that Saussure expounded on a theoretical level. From this perspective, as Braidotti suggests, writers are the ones who can become polyglot inside their own mother tongue, and if they can speak only one

language, they are able to write in many different shades of the same language. Writing in this way means to deterritorialize language, freeing the words from their settled nature, destabilizing fixed meanings and traditional concepts, and using polylingualism, for example inserting foreign words inside Italian discourse, creating neologisms or using existing words in creative ways. Jarmila Očková comes to a similar conclusion. She wants her two tongues to cohabit in her mouth, speaking the language of the Italian present without cutting off the language of her childhood and adolescence. In the novel *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi*, the dialogue between Agata and Elia suggests that polylingualism is a distinguishing feature of every language and of every discourse.⁴²

Foreign authors contribute to Italian literature in many different ways. An important one is represented by the potentials offered by the critical distance typical of people living in transit between two cultures. These writers are able to dismantle the essentialist and stereotypical image of the immigrant and of the "third world woman."⁴³ They cross the borders between different disciplines and literary genres. But most of all, these writers remind us that human diversity is the raw material and the reason for the existence of literature.

Notes

¹ Christiana de Caldas Brito, "Lo zaino della saudade," in Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti, eds., *Memorie in valigia*, (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1997), 11. This book is a collection of poems and short stories that were awarded prizes at the third edition of the Eks&Tra literary prize, the first literary prize for immigrants living in Italy and writing in Italian. See <http://www.eksetra.net>.

² A "vehicular" language is a language that can be used as a means of communication by people speaking another mother tongue.

³ For an analysis of the removal of the colonial experience from Italian history, see Sandra Ponzanesi, "Il postcolonialismo italiano. Figlie dell'impero e letteratura meticcica," *Quaderni del '900. La letteratura postcoloniale italiana: dalla letteratura d'immigrazione all'incontro con l'altro*, ed. Tiziana Morosetti, IV (2004): 25–34. For an analysis of how Italian history is marked by a form of colonization within the nation, see Pasquale Verdicchio, "The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy," in Beverly Allen and Mary Russo, eds., *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁴ "La mia espressione linguistica, invece, è ancora solo 'traduzione' in italiano di concetti pensati in chissà quante altre lingue contemporaneamente, il francese, il pidgin, l'inglese e la mia lingua madre che è il bahunese del Camerun. Avrò mai la padronanza di almeno una di queste lingue?". Geneviève Makaping, *Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi?* (Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubettino Editore, 2001), 79.

["My linguistic expression is still only a 'translation' into Italian of concepts simultaneously thought in who knows how many other languages: French, Pidgin, English and my mother tongue, that is the Cameroonian Bahuanese. Will I ever have a full command of at least one of these languages?"]. All the translations from Italian are mine.

⁵ "Se dovessi scrivere in una lingua lontana dal mio quotidiano – mi autocondannerei a una specie di ingessatura del pensiero, a un isolamento interiore, creerei una barriera tra me e la mia percezione del mondo, della vita." Jarmila Očkayová, "Al di là della parola," *Kúma* 2 (September 2001), <http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/kuma/sezioni/poetica/Ockajova.htm>. ["If I should write in a language that is far away from my everyday life – I will doom myself to put my thought in a sort of plaster cast, I will condemn myself to an internal isolation, I will create a barrier between myself and my perception of the world"].

⁶ "Se la lingua è uno degli elementi fondamentali nella costruzione identitaria, allora io ho un'identità frammentata? O forse, a prescindere dalla mia conoscenza delle lingue, devo comunque riconoscere di avere un'identità caleidoscopica o a mosaico, poiché niente – la lingua, la cultura, la stessa identità – è puro?". Makaping, *Traiettorie*, 79–80. ["If language is one of the main elements of identity construction, then do I have a fragmented identity? Or perhaps, apart from my knowledge of languages, do I have to recognize that my identity is kaleidoscopic, that it is a mosaic, because nothing – language, culture, even identity – is pure?"].

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁸ The francophone poet from Martinique defines the process of "creolization" starting from the history of the Caribbean, but he opens up the possibility of also using this notion to understand the condition of the writer in the contemporary world. Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ De Caldas Brito, "Lo zaino," 13–14.

¹² "La mia convinzione è quella di tenere aperti i confini della mia identità, confini religiosi, sociali, politici." Makaping, *Traiettorie*, 108.

¹³ "Se avessi una piena padronanza linguistica [...] Ahimè, non ce l'ho, né in italiano, né in francese, né in bahuanese-camerunese, né in inglese, eppure sono tutte lingue nelle quali mi esprimo, ma nessuna ha avuto possesso di me, né io di loro. Credetemi, non è una contraddizione" Makaping, *Traiettorie*, 110. ["If I had a full command of languages ... Alas, I don't have it, neither in Italian, nor in French, nor in Cameroonian-Bahuanese, nor in English, and yet I express myself in all these languages, but none of them possessed me, nor have I possessed any of them. Believe me, there is no contradiction"].

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 15 (1985): 65–107.

¹⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture. Contemporary Women Writing of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature?", *Mississippi Review*, 11(3) (1983).

¹⁷ Ibid., 16

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, "Envy: or With Your Brains and My Looks", in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (Methuen: London, 1987), 237.

¹⁹ Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991) 153.

²⁰ "Guardo me che guardo loro che da sempre mi guardano." Makaping, *Traiettorie*, 40. ["I look at myself looking at them who have always looked at me"].

²¹ "*La coscienza nera dell'uomo bianco*" is the unwritten subtitle of the book. Ibid., 41.

²² "Voglio essere io a dire come mi chiamo." Makaping, *Traiettorie*, 31.

²³ "Chiamatemi negra." Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Mohamed Bouchane, *Chiamatemi Ali* (Milano: Leonardo, 1991).

²⁵ Fitahianamalala Rakotobe Andrianamaro, "Chiamatemi Mina," in Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti, eds., *Parole oltre i confini* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1999).

²⁶ "Mustafa diventa Mino, e Hussein diventa Enzo." Yousef Wakkas, "Io marokkino con due kappa," in Roberta Sangiorgi and Alessandro Ramberti, eds., *Le voci dell'arcobaleno* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Fara Editore, 1995), 143.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).

²⁸ Christiana de Caldas Brito, *Amanda Olinda Azzurra e le altre* (Roma: Lilit Edizioni, 1999). One of these short stories, "Ana de Jesus" – certainly the most effective example of the use of "Portuliano" – has been translated from Italian into English in the anthology *Mediterranean Crossroads. Migration Literature in Italy*, ed. Graziella Parati, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/Associated University Press, 1999).

²⁹ For an analysis of how migrant women authors "writing with an accent" are breaking the rules of the Italian language in order to represent their foreignness both to the countries of origin and of arrival, see Graziella Parati, "Living in Translation, Thinking With an Accent," *Romance Languages Annual VIII* (1997): 280–286.

³⁰ "Linguisticamente non voglio essere una scrittrice 'ben educata'. La grammatica non può essere una madre castrante che mi dà regole invalicabili di buon comportamento letterario." Christiana de Caldas Brito, "Editing: un aiuto, non un'intrusione nella creatività dell'autore," <http://digilander.libero.it/vocidalsilenzio/editingchris.htm>.

³¹ Christiana de Caldas Brito, "L'apporto degli scrittori migranti nella letteratura e nella società italiana," *Gli scrittori della migrazione 1* (2003): 11–17. <http://www.eksetra.net/rivista/rivista.shtml>.

³² Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

³³ Haraway, *Manifesto*.

³⁴ "Per essere accolto nella roccaforte della letteratura italiana, allo scrittore straniero manca il 'sangue blu'." Očkayová, "Al di là della parola."

³⁵ Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes*.

³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1966).

³⁷ Jarmila Očkayová, *L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi* (Milano: Baldini e Castoldi, 1997).

³⁸ "Parlare la lingua materna è come trovarsi la tavola già apparecchiata, il cibo bell'e pronto che ti portano dalla cucina di un ristorante. Adottare una lingua nuova invece, è come doversi cucinare quella stessa pietanza da soli. Fai la spesa, imbratti la cucina, stai attento a ogni ingrediente. Poi, quando mangi, sei più consapevole di quello che hai sul piatto." Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5. Of course I don't mean to identify the migrant writer with the polyglot nomadic intellectual: as a matter of fact, Braidotti juxtaposes the immigrant and the exiled to the nomadic subject, who is not simply a geographical category. Thus, I use this notion to suggest that, in the case of these three women authors, the material experience of travelling is also a way to acquire a sort of cultural and intellectual dynamism, and a form of critical consciousness. Braidotti furthermore states that migration literature speaks of lack, nostalgia, and limited horizons, expressing a fossilized definition of language: thus I use the figure of the polyglot in this article, because I want to complicate this view by arguing that Italian migration literature is not always confined to these topics and to this linguistic attitude.

⁴⁰ Očkayová, "Al di là della parola."

⁴¹ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis identify three component elements of nationalist ideologies (which all may be gendered): citizenship, the sharing of a common culture (especially a common language), and religious practice and belief. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis, *Racialized Boundaries. Race, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991). For an analysis of the gender dimension of nationalism in Europe, and of "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia, see also *Crossfires: Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe*, eds. Helma Lutz, Ann Phoenix and Nira Yuval Davis (London: Pluto, 1995).

⁴² Očkayová, *L'essenziale è invisibile*, 54.

⁴³ For an analysis of the stereotypical representation of the "third world woman," in a hierarchical relation with the self-representation of the western woman, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988): 65–88.