RECOUNTING ROME'S RESONANCES

Diffractive Listening to Lahiri's *Racconti* in the Eternal City

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A Roma transeunte

SUMMARY

The city has the same structure as text (De Certeau; Iovino) and is of a palimpsestic nature (Huyssen). It has layers that are both discursive and material, and consist of spaces, humans and other-than-humans. Together they form a vibrant assemblage (Bennett). One layer that often gets little attention, is that of sound. Attending to sound can open up a space for voices and stories for which there is no room in the visual realm of the city. Sound studies takes a corrective attitude to the visual biases of the 'ocularcentric' academy. Urban sound studies does so in the realm of the city; literary sound studies, on the other hand, in literary scholarship. My research is positioned on the crossroads between these two fields, in relation to the modern city of Rome. I listen to alternative literary narratives that make noise inside the city, and that consequently contribute to the deconstruction of the stable image of the 'eternal city', a tenacious, limiting and fixed narrative that clings to it, while instead this city continuously changes (Holdaway & Trentin; Thormod). To pair literary-urban sound as my object of study, this research also takes a sonic theoretical and methodological approach. The concept that I introduce for this, is *resonance*, interpreted both metaphorically and materially. Building further on Dimock's "Theory of Resonance", I shape a resonance theory that has a stronger spatial focus as it looks at how certain literatures resonate while they are set in the city of Rome. Also, my theory stands more explicitly in relation to intertextuality. To my case study – Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of *Racconti romani* – I will apply the method of *diffractive listening* (Barad; Oliveros) in a threefold way: I will listen to intratextual, intertextual and extratextual resonances; the latter, I argue, being an urgent and inevitable consequence of any kind of intertextual analysis, especially in my case. In this last part, I bring Lahiri's *racconti* and the city into dialogue by engaging with the method of 'research-creation' (Manning). My hypothesis is that the stories I intend to discuss, resonate internally and externally in their deconstruction of the narrative of Rome as the 'eternal city', while explicitly positioning themselves as 'Roman' (*romani*). In their narrations of isolation, hybridity and liminality, they are as fleeting as sound; they urge us to listen to them beyond the eye; and they form a vibrant assemblage of echo's and overtones, in relation with other *racconti* and with the city they are deeply rooted in.

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PREFACE

The first time I went to Rome, was with my class in the last year of high school. The second time, years later, I stayed in a hostel, alone. The third time I came to stay with a Roman friend whom I had met the second time. The fourth time I did an intensive course at the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome, about the 'divided memory' of the city – during that week I got to know Lahiri's *Racconti romani*. The fifth time I came to Rome I came to study and live there, for six months. The sixth time is now, to write this thesis. I remember that the second time, my mind was confusedly trying to match the pieces of the city I was experiencing together with the memories I had from five years earlier. This seemed impossible – it was like I was in a completely different city, maybe also because I had become a completely different person. When I crossed a square or walked through an alley I had also seen when I was seventeen, my mind experienced some sort of short circuit: my eyes confirmed something that felt impossible, namely that this was the same city. The subsequent times I came to Rome, time and again the same thing happened, and it still does. The six times I have been to the supposedly 'eternal city', for me, six different cities were born. And I would like to say that Jhumpa Lahiri created a seventh Rome for me. The mosaic of places where her *Racconti romani* took me consists of a completely different texture than any of the Rome's I have seen – and heard – before. Like this, the city continues to fracture into an uncountable amount of shards, one for each time someone listens to her.

INTRODUCTION: DIFFRACTIVE LISTENING TO LITERARY RESONANCE IN THE ETERNAL CITY

> "come due correnti opposte che si incrociano nel mare,
> che realizzano per un attimo una nitida forma simmetrica
> e che poi subito si cancellano."
> (Jhumpa Lahiri, *Racconti romani* 40)

CITY AND SOUND

Cities and languages are structured similarly, argues Michel de Certeau in his seminal text "Walking in the City", and "[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (97). First, we have to make ourselves acquainted with such a linguistic or urban system, then we manifest our knowledge by moving through it, a process in which we also inevitably move into relations with others (De Certeau 97), forming a vibrant web of interactions. Consequently, walkers – as opposed to those in power who plan the city from above – are constantly creating urban text "without being able to read it" (De Certeau 93): a "pedestrian unfolding of the stories accumulated in a place" (De Certeau 110). The city and stories, stories and the city: by their very structural nature they are intrinsically related with each other.

As part of what has been called the *spatial turn*, other scholars have taken up on this interpretation of landscape as text as well, also in the Italian scholarly context. Famous Italian ecocritic Serenella Iovino argues: "il corpo del paesaggio (…) [è] un testo, un grande racconto materiale", which consists of "significati, esperienze, processi e sostanze che compongono la vita di esseri e luoghi. Un testo (…) emerge dall'incontro di azioni, discorsi, immaginazione ed elementi fisici che si coagulano in forme materiali" (11-12). She argues that moving through and interacting with the landscape is like reading it. Differently from De Certeau, perhaps less anthropocentrically, she thus conceptualizes landscape as already, *a priori*, textual. I would like to combine De Certeau's urban approach and Iovino's posthuman approach. I do agree with the latter that landscape already has a texture from itself, but I also agree with De Certeau that moving through it is like an active contribution to its text, rather than a passive reading. Accordingly, the city is a palimpsest, as argued by Andreas Huyssen. Literally speaking, a palimpsest is a document from antiquity which has been written on and erased several times, and of which several layers are still visible on top of each other. In the context of the city, these layers are both material and discursive, and therefore we could speak of a semiotic landscape (Kress & Van Leeuwen; Jaworski & Thurlow), which consists of places and spaces (De Certeau 117), humans and other-than-humans, and their movements and interactions.

A layer that often gets less attention than the visual world, is that of urban acoustics. In this research, I want to bend our 'gaze' from vision towards sound. Sound studies have become quite an established academic field throughout the past decades. This shift of attention towards sound is referred to as the 'acoustic turn' (Meyer). One of its pioneers is Jacques Attali, who argues that "[f]or twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible" (29). Indeed, sound studies often take this "corrective" attitude, to counter the visual biases of the academy (Schweighauser 476), also called "ocularcentrism" (Mieszkowski 13).

From the 1990s on sound studies has grown considerably, as we can read in Sylvia Mieszkowski's summary of the genealogy of the field (14-15) – although attention had already been given to sound, also in relation to literature, before the explicit establishment of this field. Several important sound studies anthologies have been published (Bull & Back; Bull; Pinch & Bijsterveld; Sterne). In the introduction of the *Sound Studies Reader*, Jonathan Sterne describes the field:

> Sound studies is a name for the interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it redescribes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world. (...). It reaches across registers, moments and spaces, and it thinks across disciplines and traditions, some that have long considered sound, and some that have not done so until more recently. (2)

It is thus a fairly broad and interdisciplinary field. In the context of the city, a hub of noise which sound scholars have always been keen to focus on, sound is the most contemporary and evolving structure there is, while also carrying and activating layers of memory. As argues Fran Tonkiss in *The Auditory Culture Reader*: "Sound gives us the city as matter and as memory. In this register, the double life of cities – the way they slide between the material and the perceptual, the hard and the soft – is spoken out loud, made audible" (Tonkiss 303). Accordingly, sound plays a role in all cultural mechanisms, and listening can make us aware of how power functions in those. Tonkiss e.g. addresses the way 'strangers' are sometimes treated in cities: "The pretence that you do not hear – a common conspiracy of silence – (...) is a response, passing as lack of response"; in reality, however, "the city as polyglot soundscape is a space in which differences remain audible" (Tonkiss 305), and marginalized voices cannot truly be silenced.

Sound studies indeed were originally born out of research looking at urban soundscapes. Two of the founding scholars here are Barry Truax and R. Murray Schafer. Schafer has developed a theory of noise pollution, with a critical, ideological approach: although we cancel out the noises we hear, they are part of our acoustic ecology and have a negative effect on us, according to him. Not all scholars are in favor of cancelling out the noise, however. For example, Attali argues that: "Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise and that death alone is silent: work noise, noise of man, and noise of beast. Noise bought, sold, or prohibited. Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise" (29). Noise is essential, it is everywhere, and it also contributes to the

production of meaning, as argues Wai Chee Dimock: she points to scientific research on resonance that has shown how noise can have the positive effect of lifting out certain sounds that were unheard before.

LITERATURE AND SOUND

Literature tends to be interpreted, unjustly, as a silent medium (Ong). Thus, the aforementioned 'ocularcentrism' also applies to literature. Under the umbrella field of sound studies, a branch of literary studies called 'literary sound studies' has been working against this bias by attending to sound. In *Resonant Alterities: Sound, Desire and Anxiety in Non-Realist Fiction* Sylvia Mieszkowski "build[s] a bridge between the interdisciplinary field of Sound Studies and literary criticism" (9). She explains the resistance of sound studies to include literary sound studies, because it does not address literal, physical sound, and on the other hand the reluctance of literary studies to interact with sound studies, perhaps because of its very interdisciplinary nature (23). Mieszkowski argues that literature is in fact very apt for sonic research, and that "not only aural/oral genres are suitable for scrutiny guided by an interest in Literary Sound Studies", because sound is not only a physical phenomenon but moreover "also a cultural artefact" (9). Like Mieszkowski's approach, my research also engages with literary sound studies and sound studies at large, by listening to both literal and literary sound.

One of the intersections between sound studies and literary sound studies, according to Mieszkowski, has to do with noise (22). As I have shown above, this is a common theme in general sound studies. In his chapter "Literary Acoustics", Philipp Schweighauser conceptualizes noise as information in the densest and most unintelligible and unpredictable form, as opposed to how it is often commonly understood, i.e. as redundancy (477). This is an interesting point of departure to analyze literature, a medium that is also often unpredictable and even dense or unintelligible. William R. Paulson indeed frames literature as "the noise of culture" (180). Arguing against the fallacy of some literary critics, who try to argue for literature's central position in society, Paulson describes it as an inherently marginal artform, which picks up noise from society and transforms it into new noise. De Certeau agrees with this idea of literature as noise, describing it as becoming an "ambiguous depth in which sounds that cannot be reduced to a meaning move about. A plural body in which ephemeral oral rumors circulate" (De Certeau 162). My research will investigate to what extent the literatures under scrutiny can be understood as literary noise. It is a noise that entangles itself with the noise of the 'outside' world. Anna Snaith claims in *Sound and Literature*: "The sonic takes us to literature's place in the world – how it is heard, read, declaimed – as well as its representation of multi-sensory experience. Sound is central to conceptualisations of the literary whether formalist, socio-political, philosophical or embodied" (2). Although most of this claim is accurate, the term 'representation' to talk about sound in literature, argues Schweighauser, is inherently faulty, as literature never actually re-presents, but rather transforms and (re-)produces: it produces sound internally, i.e. it creates soundscapes within the confines of its pages, as well as externally, i.e. it makes noise in

society. It thus goes both ways: literature produces sound in the world, and the world produces sound inside literature. This twofold approach to literature is very important for my study.

As I have shown, it is utterly relevant to study literature in relation to its sound and space, especially when it concerns literatures that take place in the city. Most research that has been done on sound, literature and the city is focused on modernism (Snaith; Wilke; Groth; Perloff). My research takes a more contemporary approach. Situating itself at the crossroads of literary sound studies and urban sound studies, it wants to contribute to making the former more urban, and the latter more literary. The city it focuses on in particular, is modern day Rome. It takes as point of departure the image of the 'eternal city', a tenacious narrative that clings to Rome and which first and foremost lifts out the visual elements of the city.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The intersection between the fields of urban sound studies and literary sound studies I have sketched out above, in relation to contemporary Rome, leads me to my central research question: How can the concept of 'resonance' – interpreted materially as well as metaphorically – be used as an analytical tool, combined with the method of 'diffractive listening', in order to investigate how the soundscapes produced by *racconti* set in modern day Rome deconstruct the image of the 'eternal city'? Accordingly, what can attending to urban-literary sound through the use of a sonic method teach us about reading literatures in relation to the place they are set in?

THE ETERNAL CITY

In the century before Christ, Roman poet Tibullus first called his city *urbs aeterna* – 'eternal city' – and it has been referred to as such, perpetually, ever since. The word 'eternal' implies the absence of change. Something that is eternal, will be carried unmodified into the future, longlastingly. As such, "[a]s the 'eternal' city, Rome has in a sense often been perceived to be outside time", argue Weststeijn and Whitling (16). This image of an unmoved, unchanged city that persists the passing of time, belongs to a dominant narrative that clings to Rome. Certeau makes a comment in passing about the eternity of the city, seduced by the idea that Rome masters "the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts" (91). De Certeau here refers to an element of Roman history that is popular in the common discourse about the city: that old structures were never destroyed, but were filled up before new buildings were built on top, or still remain visible in the cityscape. This results in an ultimately layered city, something which speaks to the imagination in relation to the idea of the 'eternal'. The city, narrated like this, does not destroy its pasts to

make space for the new, but lives on with these old facets inside, in a continuum from antiquity through its many epochs into the present and the future.

One can imagine that because of the structural layering of this city, the earlier mentioned idea of the urban palimpsest is an eminently popular concept for scholars who write about Rome. For example, David Larmour and Diana Spencer address in their edited volume *Global Rome: Changing Faces of the Eternal City* the "Roman practice of adapting or adding to existing structures and sites, rather than demolishing them in the manner whose consequences are so visible in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, New York, Chicago, or Shanghai" (2). They argue that because of this layering technique the city of Rome is a particularly interesting site for studying history. Accordingly, R. J. B. Bosworth writes in *Whispering City: Rome and its Histories*: "One typical approach has been to read the place as a palimpsest, wherein, peering through the accumulated debris of the years, a present observer can find much to learn from those remnants that somehow have not been buried for ever but instead resurface in reality or imagination" (1). Importantly, Bosworth implies here that the palimpsestic nature of city of Rome is not just a physical reality but moreover also takes form in the collective imagination of the city.

Hence, the eternity of Rome in connection to the palimpsestic structure of it, is a dominant narrative inside academia and society at large. Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin explain in the introduction of their edited collection of essays *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape* how this "singular and total narrative of the city" (9) came into place:

> Until the mid-twentieth century, a vast majority of cultural representations of Rome within the Western collective imagination relied, almost incessantly, on notions or echoes of the classical city: from 'Caput Mundi' or the 'Eternal City', to the 'Divine City' of Christendom or the 'City of Ruins' of the Grand Tour. Throughout the decades these temporalities have been preserved and have coexisted, moulding the image of the Italian capital as though a palimpsest of written and re-written layers, whose original traces never completely fade. (1)

Holdaway and Trentin call it a "romantic idea" (5) that was born in the times of the Grand Tour, when intellectuals like Freud and Goethe came to the city and let their fantasies about eternity blossom in their descriptions of it. It is a narrative that continues into the present age, in which we can e.g. read in tourist guides: "Far more than a city, [it] is a series of eras stacked atop one another. Ruins, churches and *palazzi* (...)" (*Lonely Planet* qtd. in Holdaway & Trentin 5). The Colosseum, the Pantheon, the Trevi fountain and the Vatican: all are forever here, for the visitor's eye to see. It is an image that is focused on the city's past, not its present.

However, like in any city, some of Rome's elements tend to be highlighted, while others are obscured. Something for which there is little to no space in this narrative of the 'eternal' palimpsestic city, is that some things *do* vanish and *do* get destroyed, and moreover that new layers are added continuously to it.

These layers do not represent a harmonious, unchanged continuum from the past into the present, but that they are diverging, clashing, opposing, but coexisting. It is "a space defined by fragmentation, contradiction, and instability" (7), as Larmour and Spencer argue. It is a deeply inequal city (Lelo et al.) that has a history and a presence of immigrants who experience various forms of discrimination (Sonnino). They, for example, are not considered 'Roman', tend not to be included in the common image of Rome, and their voices often remain unlistened to.

In the past decades there has been scholarship that has complicated or diverged from the societally upheld narrative of the eternal city. In the introduction of his book *Artistic Reconfigurations of Rome: An Alternative Guide to the Eternal City, 1989-2014*, Kaspar Thormod synthesizes the scholarly discourse on the city into two main categories: an anthropological and urban studies branch; and a historical, literary and cultural memory studies branch. Holdaway and Trentin make a similar distinction (2). Scholars belonging to the first group "focus on the gritty reality of contemporary Rome" (Thormod 6). Amongst them are social scientists Isabella Clough Marinaro and Bjørn Thomassen, whose edited volume *Global Rome: Changing Faces of the Eternal City* looks at "contemporary Rome, its people, its politics and economy, its environment, the challenges of globalization" (2), and identify it as a city of "opposite extremes" (1). In their analysis they produce a binary between two faces of Rome. They write: "Its endless and timeless beauty persists side by side with urban degeneration, pollution, and crime proliferation" (1). Holdaway and Trentin are critical about such binary approaches, which frame the city through "the sharp contrast between the beauty of Rome's ancient city centre and the ugliness or corruption of its modern peripheries" (2), thus splitting Rome not just narratively but also geographically in two.

Secondly, Thormod explains, there are historians, literary scholars and cultural memory scholars, "who focus primarily on the imaginary of Rome, examining many contrasting myths and historical narratives that have flourished during the centuries and still characterise the view of the city today" (6). A prominent scholar here is Bosworth, who in his book provides an in-depth analysis of the origin of the narrative of the eternal city, and the role antiquity, the church and fascism have played and still play in this. Holdaway and Trentin argue that this second group is often fixated with the decay "of the (historical) city's classical image" (2), and I agree that these writings often have a nostalgic tone.

There are also scholars who combine the urban studies and the cultural studies approach – as is my intention in this research. An example is Michael Herzfeld who analyzes the current housing crisis of the city, and points to the paradoxical fact of an eternal city from which its own residents are expelled. He concludes: "all is provisional, fixable, negotiable. (...) Here, eternally, eternity continues to fracture and to coalesce, repeatedly and without rest" (308-312). He thus points at the dynamic processes that constitute the city of Rome, juxtaposed with its image of eternality. Holdaway and Trentin are critical of Herzfeld's book, calling also his approach nostalgic (2): although it complicates the narrative, it still holds on to the desire for a sense of eternity.

Instead, perhaps we should turn to alternative narratives. As writes Daniela Brogi in her book *Lo spazio delle donne*, "fare spazio" (3) for counter-narratives is an essential process in the reimagining of the Italian literary landscape. Some scholarly contributions have been done in this regard. "*L'Italia, l'altrove. Luoghi, spazi e attraversamenti nel cinema e nella letteratura sulla migrazione* è una riflessione su come il cinema e la letteratura che affrontano il tema della migrazione ci invitino a ripensare gli spazi e i luoghi non come elementi stabili e immutabili, ma in termini di mobilità", writes Simone Brioni about his own book (3-4), which is partly focused on Rome and also close reads a book by Jhumpa Lahiri. Some other scholarship has been done on the role of film in the reimagining of the city, for example on how "decadence" and the "ephemeral" in *La Grande Bellezza* by Sorrentino and *La Dolce Vita* by Fellini go against the idea of the 'eternal' (Trifonova). Also, the essays in the aforementioned edited volume of Holdaway and Trentin, which take a postmodern approach, try to shape "an idea of the city that is detached from any claim to universalism or eternality. To re-semanticize Rome it will be necessary to turn to a series of alternative narratives" (5). The scholars argue that "[i]n spite of stereotypical, over-simplistic and homogenizing categories which are usually attached to its idea ([like e.g. the 'Eternal City']) Rome's cityscape is a contradictory, ambivalent and dialectical territory where different temporalities, styles and forces interweave and clash against each other" (8). Their "idea of postmodern Rome finds its root in the deconstruction of the classical palimpsest, that image of a Rome as a stack of different eras which the contemporary tour guide still proposes, and finds instead its theoretical backbone in an anti-universal, anti-eternal, fluid and decentred idea of its cityscape" (7). Accordingly, they propose a more modern palimpsest: "Rather than points on a linear timeline, past and present become axes of intersection in a historical constellation" (9). Similarly, Mieke Bal writes in the preface to Thormod's book that "the idea of the 'eternal city' is deceptive in its suggestion of stability, and ignores the social differentiations and the temporal layering that define any city as it lives on over time" (vii). Like Holdaway and Trentin's collection of essays, this book as well creates space for alternative narratives in the city that contribute to the deconstruction of the romantic idea of the eternal. Such is also my intention in this thesis. It departs from a conceptualization of the city of Rome similar to Thormod's and Holdaway and Trentin's, and like both books also engages with forms of deconstruction of the narrative of the 'eternal city'. I, however, approach it by listening to its soundscape.

My research is part of a landscape that consists both of scholarship – which I have outlined above – and of cultural objects – some of them will be explored in the various chapters – which themselves are part of a mechanism of deconstruction of the traditional image of Rome. I propose that some of these cultural objects resonate amongst each other in their deconstruction of the romantic narrative/image of the 'eternal city'. They create a 'hum' in the city, and listening to how they sound can help us understand this process. Because, as Tonkiss argues, urban differences can be ignored by the eye, but always remain audible (303).

In continuation of Holdaway and Trentin's critique of binary scholarly approaches to the city, I argue that Rome – as any city – is an inherently entangled assemblage. Jane Bennett elaborates Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'assemblage' in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. She writes:

> Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. (23-24)

It occurs to me that a soundscape, although perhaps less (or differently) matter-like, could be seen as the ultimate of vibrant assemblages. Unequal, clashing but entangled by essence, it also tends to cluster in unexpected contradictory ways. Sound is multidirectional, mostly non-linear, chaotic, fleeting. It is intangible, because it exists simultaneously in your head, at its point of origin, and all around (Toop 169). And any city is significantly defined by its soundscape.

The narrative of the 'eternal city' which is critiqued by the scholarship I have cited above, I argue, is mainly an image. It is an imaginary assemblage consisting of, amongst other things, ancient ruins and churches, in which the other senses barely take part. Attending to sound in the city can be a way to, on the one hand, understand urban change, as sound inevitably continuously changes and escapes from the illusion of fixity that an image can have; and on the other hand understand the entangled nature of the city, as soundwaves always overlap and entwine, resonating and dissonating, flowing through each other, unlike the illusion of separation that the visual elements of the city can give us. Thus, listening to the soundscape of the city could help us reconsider the deceptively stable image of the 'eternal city'. It can also contribute to a new, entangled way of thinking about or with difference, as I will explain when I come to introduce my methodology of diffractive listening.

If the city of Rome is a palimpsest which consists of clashing but entangled layers, I propose sound is another everchanging layer on top of it. I conceptualize this layer as consisting of material as well as discursive sound. The latter has to do with how the city is talked, written, cried and sung about. Literature, as have explained, could – and perhaps should – be listened to. If literature is explicitly set in Rome, the sound or noise it produces forms part of the sonic layer of the city. It is through this framework, that my thesis attends to Roman contemporary literature. It will particularly focus on the genre of the *racconto* – the Italian short story – because of its adequacy for a sonic analysis. I will indeed use the term *racconto*, because of the distinct nature of the genre within the Italian context.

RACCONTI ROMANI

My study revolves around central case study *Racconti romani*, written by internationally well-established author Jhumpa Lahiri. Where the first chapter focuses primarily on this book, the second and third chapters of my thesis will engage with some examples of cultural objects that resonate with it in the aforementioned process of deconstruction. *Racconti romani* is a short story collection which came out in 2022 and is displayed in many bookstores in Rome and throughout Italy. Embedded in the established tradition of the Italian *racconto*, the book contains stories about characters who deal with a sense of isolation inside the city, and many of them struggle with being accepted as 'Roman' while they live in the city. It is written in Italian, a language the author has acquired as an adult, after already having a successful career as a writer in English. On this collection, perhaps partly because of its recent publication, not much scholarly research has been done yet. What has been written already, focuses mostly – though not solely – on the theme of translingualism (Rousseva; Jansen; De Rogatis; Gandhi). Translingualism is an important theme for the author herself, about which she wrote amongst other things her first book in the Italian language: *In altre parole*. Within the realm of translingualism, she is also very concerned with the practice and the topic of translation – on which she wrote the book *Translating Myself and Others*. Analyzing the subsequent translations of *Racconti romani* could be an interesting terrain for sonic inquiry, especially the English one which was translated in collaboration with the author herself (*Roman Stories*). However, for this thesis I have decided to remain with the original Italian text. I diverge from what has already been written about the book, and leave the theme of translingualism on the sideline – although my second chapter does extensively address Lahiri's language use, also in relation to *In altre parole*. My research takes a sonic-urban perspective, focusing on the way *Racconti romani* resonates with and within the city of Rome, where the original language of the book is dominant. A research that incapsulates also the English translations of the text, although a possible topic for future inquiry, would drift away from how the *racconti* are spatially situated. It moreover simply would stretch the research beyond the scope of this master's thesis. For similar reasons, I also do not include English translations of quotes: not only because of an economy of space, but also because as I am investigating sound, dealing with the original language seems the only right approach. In short, my thesis will listen diffractively to the way in which these Italian short stories 'tell' the city of Rome, through the nature of their characters, the places they take us and the human and other-than-human encounters they have: a vibrant assemblage of literary elements.

RESONANCE

In this study sound will be approached in a twofold manner. Not only are the soundscapes produced by literary texts my objects of study, but also my theory and accompanying methodology are concerned with sound. I am not the first to use sound as a tool to analyze literature. As I have shown in the State of the Art, sound has often been attended to epistemologically or symbolically, rather than merely as the notion

of vibrations traveling through the air and being perceived by the ear. Outside of the sound studies discourse, metaphorical terms like 'silence' (to address e.g. gaps in the archive) or 'unheard voices' are perhaps even more widespread than within sound studies itself – although rarely attention is paid to the material or conceptual implications and consequences of the use of such metaphors, and instead these silences are addressed in the realm of 'representation', as opposed to sonic production. I agree that sound (including silence), beyond its undeniable actual presence in the world, potentially has a strong metaphorical power for (literary) critique – but mostly so if we take seriously the literal physical implications that sonic concepts offer us. Sound is fleeting, volatile, everchanging, omnipresent, inescapable. Listening to it could contribute to the deconstruction of established, stuck images, make them vibrate and tremble at their foundations – as such: the narrative of the 'eternal city', which is in the first place very visual in nature: it is built on images of old ruins and churches, and other layers of history that are still present today, before our eyes, as we roam the city's center. By attending to the urban sonic layer, which includes literary-urban sound, we might open up a space for stories for which there is no room inside the visual realm of the city, that is, inside its predominant imaginary. We will hear the city as it is: a vibrating, noisy, layered assemblage of voices and other-than-voices, that speak to each other, with each other and against each other.

To conceptualize sound, and silence, I turn to Lawrence Kramer's book *The Hum of the World*. The book has an epistemological focus, on the way sound is represented and imagined in our society. It is seen both as a sensory and a symbolic phenomenon, that moreover tends to break down this dichotomy (15). This is a crucial point that also applies in my own analysis, which approaches sound in its material as well as its metaphorical shape, between which there is not always such a clear line, as Kramer shows as well. The central concept of this book is that of 'the hum' (4-6), which has to do with a sort of disposition to sound of our environment – before sound is born. This is not silence, not quite. It is rather how silence *waves* back into sound once we bundle our attention and direct it towards what seems to be silent. Any kind of sound only emerges in relation to our attention to it. Thus, this 'hum' of Kramer is not a condition of the world that exists *a priori*. It rather has to do with modes of attention, than with a material acoustic state of the world. In relation to this, silence is not the absence of sound; it is a "sound one cannot yet hear", a "near-sound of life in motion" – because sound is always in motion (Kramer 5). This makes the notion of a soundscape fundamentally different from a landscape: in a landscape, pre-framed by our gaze, there exists always a tension between stillness and movement, whereas a soundscape is all movement (86-87). According to this movement we can understand sound like a waving body of water: "Sound is not quite borderless, but its edges are fluid", fringelike (6).

I propose literary language deconstructs the dichotomy of metaphor/matter. Although literature is often seen as silent, ultimately language is essentially sonic, making "meaning *in* sound", rather than "*with* sound" (Kramer 25). Sound is not just a tool that language sometimes uses in order to communicate itself; it exists *a priori*, envelops and embeds language, is inseparably entangled with it. Even when we read a

book in silence, as Kramer explains, a soundscape is created inside our mind, composed of both the sounds of language itself, and the sounds it semantically evokes (25-26). Sound stretches itself here beyond its literal acoustic definition. For language, even when resting in silence, *is* sound. In the context of Rome, Kramer's idea of the 'hum' will help us to attend to the unheard voices in the city, not as silenced but as scattered noise which the literatures I discuss pick up on, bundle together, and direct back into the world in the form of more concentrated noise. Listening to them as they position themselves as part of this motionful soundscape, we will see how they (partly) succeed to deconstruct the eternal city's more static visual landscape.

The sonic concept I am proposing for this research, is that of *resonance*. Every system has its own, internal, preferred frequency. What a system is, is ambivalent: it can e.g. be an object, but it is to be defined according to the convenience of the researcher before an experiment. When a neighboring system produces an oscillatory force at the preferred frequency of the determined system under scrutiny, that system vibrates along. This is resonance. In other words: without its own, internal movement production, something can be triggered to resonate, if the right soundwave is produced nearby. Most instances of resonance are not composed or shaped, but are accidental entanglements that take place inside the cacophonical soundscape of our world.

Resonance has already been used as a theoretical concept inside the academia. The most famous example is Hartmut Rosa, whose book *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* uses the term in the field of sociology. Although the way in which I interpret my own sonic subject position resonates with Rosa's phenomenological and bodily approach, otherwise my engagement with the term largely diverges from his. My approach, within the field of comparative literary studies, is more intertextual, as it listens to urban assemblages that vibrate between text and space. Concretely, I will listen to intratextual, intertextual and extratextual resonance – on which more when I discuss the three different chapters.

Although intuitively resonance and noise seem to be quite opposite, in fact physically speaking the former often emerges from the latter, and therefore the choice of 'resonance' for my theoretical framework extends from the idea of literature as noise (Schweighauser; Paulson). I am not the first literary scholar who uses the term 'resonance'. Wai Chee Dimock has shaped "A Theory of Resonance", in which she also looks at "literature" as "vibrant" (1060), in the sense that it continuously resonates in diverging ways when it moves "through new semantic networks" (1061), even far after its birth: "frequencies received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their points of origin, causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places" (1061). Importantly, she argues that "[t]he 'object' of literary studies is thus an object with an unstable ontology, since a text can resonate only insofar as it is touched by the effects of its travels" (1061). The approach of Dimock to resonance is, thus, first and foremost a diachronic one. It focuses on how literary works resonate with readers throughout time; an approach that counters the usual interpretation of literature inside the context from which it originated.

My theory of resonance moves beyond the one Dimock proposes, in two ways. First, where Dimock's theory regards resonance very much as a temporal phenomenon, my theoretical approach has a stronger focus on the spatial. I will look at literatures that emerge from the city of Rome, and analyze the way in which they resonate while set in that city. Second, my theory situates itself more explicitly as part of the discourse on intertextuality as it has been developed since the 1930s (Mikhail Bakhtin) and 1960s (Julia Kristeva; Roland Barthes). Bakhtin recognized that a literary text is not a self-contained unit, but that it consists of a multiplicity of voices which are informed by and embedded in discourses not only within, but also outside of the text. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" he introduces the term 'heteroglossia', which is

> [t]he internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, Ianguages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (262-263)

Interestingly, in this citation there is a strong – although implicit – presence of (stratified; linguistic) sound. Extrapolating this idea, Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality', to address the networks texts form between each other and with the outside world. Intertextuality is an organic mechanism: because of the deconstructionist idea that signs are not stable, a text cannot be subject to stable signification, and is always on the move within this broader web of texts. In this way, it resembles a soundscape.

Resonance is a powerful term to conceptualize intertextuality: the phenomenon that surrounding objects vibrate along once a (literary) sound is produced; the entanglements between separate systems – i.e. texts – as inevitable results of a vibration. When used in the context of literature it must have a twofold implication: a metaphorical and a literal one. Metaphorically, we could for example ask: how do genre and thematic resonate throughout different texts? This is one of the focuses of my study. However, as intertextuality and deconstruction have taught us, it is impossible to cut loose a word from its many reverberations, and use it in isolation. Each word carries a baggage which it inescapably evokes when uttered. As such, we must take into consideration the sonic implications of the term 'resonance'. As Dimock makes implicitly clear in her essay, it is impossible to steal away a sonic term for your own use, without being serious about the actual, physical connotations that are associated with this concept. Therefore, I also engage with literary sound studies and soundscape studies, to ask how literature sounds and how it echoes against, in my case, the walls of the city in which it situates itself – interpreting literary works not only in resonance with one another, but as being part of an urban sonic texture. In doing so, I activate sonic metaphors as they already have been used in literary criticism, and listen to their actual material referents; and I look at what soundscapes literature *produces*, rather than merely represents.

In short, my theory of resonance has a stronger and more explicitly spatial and sonic focus than the discourse on intertextuality thus far, invigorated by its interaction with posthuman concepts like 'vibrance' and 'assemblage': it listens to literature as a vibrant assemblage, which emerges from one and contributes to one. It regards urban space as part of this intertextual network: an everchanging, scattered but intertwined assemblage, in which sound and meaning are produced by human and other-than-human elements.

DIFFRACTIVE LISTENING

Matching my theory of resonance, I want to propose the method of what I call *diffractive listening*. This method brings together Pauline Oliveros's "deep listening" and Karen Barad's "diffractive reading". It can be used on a metaphorical as well as an actual material level, and is applicable to intratextual, intertextual, as well as extratextual resonance. 'Deep listening', methodology developed by composer and scholar Pauline Oliveros, entails "learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound – encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible" (xxiii). This implies perceiving in a multidirectional, non-linear and also, initially, non-interpretative way, dealing with the layered complexities of a soundscape. This method seems to have a lot in common with Karen Barad's methodology of "diffractive reading", which uses the physical phenomenon of diffraction – "the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading out of waves when they encounter an obstruction" – to shape a way of reading: "[a] diffractive methodology provides a way of attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another" (28-30). Indeed, this approach to reading that counters fixed structures like 'comparison' or 'juxtaposition', but instead proposes to interpret things *through* one another and in their dynamic, non-linear and non-fixed nature, resonates, I argue, with Oliveros's 'deep listening'. Although the latter has a more explicitly sonic focus, both Oliveros's and Barad's concepts are very applicable in the context of 'resonance' – also a multi-directional, dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, I bring together these two approaches in the methodology of my research: 'diffractive listening'. More concretely, this entails what is described by Pinch and Bijsterveld as "*Exploratory listening*", which is "listening to discover new phenomena", as well as "*Synthetic listening*", which "focuses on the understanding of polyphonic patterns of sound" (14). Thus: listening to hear new things, as well as listening to synthesize meaning out of noise.

Then, my thesis will entail various descriptions of sound. Kramer explains with the term 'constructive description' (14-15) that our description of a sonic phenomenon is not merely a 'reflection' – indeed a highly problematic term (Barad 71-94) – of some fixed reality, but that it is rather a "speech act that forms and (...) transforms" the perceived sound itself, according to the way we pay attention to it; auditory experience forming itself only "in and through the accounts we give of it" (Kramer 14). 'Constructive description' turns sound into both an object and a means of knowledge (Kramer 14), as also happens in

my research which has a twofold attention to sound, indeed both as method and as object of analysis. This becomes particularly relevant when in the last section of my thesis I explore the possibilities of 'research creation' (Manning), and produce a creative representation of the soundscape I have perceived.

In accordance with this, it is important to mention that in the practice of the method of 'diffractive listening', the researcher herself is not excluded from the soundscape she observes. Listening is a deeply personal practice; our sonic interpretation is dependent on our own very particular subject position. This is inevitable, as argues Salomé Voegelin: "[T]he senses employed are always already ideologically and aesthetically determined, bringing their own influence to perception" (3). In the analysis, I will pay explicit attention to my sonic subject position. Hearing and listening are indeed deeply subjective modes of perception and knowledge production. Hearing is a sensory experience. It is not a choice to hear, but hearing does imply interpretation. It is an unvoluntary processing of sound. Listening is pre-sensory. Rather, it is a mode of attention, which directs our ear towards a sound, but this does not mean we hear it. In fact, in order to hear we do not have to listen, and when we try to listen we do not necessarily hear. In my research, both listening and hearing play a role. Listening happens when I direct my sonic attention to a hum that might turn into sound. Hearing applies when a sound reaches my ear, surprising me before I could listen. As claims Kramer, sound facilitates a practice of listening that urges us to have a self-reflective mode of thinking (1-2). Listening to sound is like departing from and coming back into the Self. When studying sound, it is not only necessary to include the subjectivity and position of the researcher in the research for the sake of completeness – furthermore, this idea of subjectivity lies at the very heart of my methodology.

In the aforementioned text of Mieszkowski on literary sound studies, she gives a short history of sound in relation to subjectivity. She explains how Hermann von Helmholtz, in the nineteenth century, "provided a model of hearing which described the ear as a measuring instrument" (Mieszkowski 11). Later, Georg von Békésy described "the ear as an active organ, which (...) is able to measure and analyse frequencies"; an understanding of the ear that "is still considered valid. Moreover, it has paved the way for a concept of hearing as an active process" (Mieszkowski 11). Hearing, thus, is never objective and passive; the listener always takes on an active participatory role in it that contributes to the production of meaning deduced from what is heard. Still later, Alfred Tomatis "differentiated between forms of conscious and unconscious hearing" (Mieszkowski 11), which also means we do not always have control over what we hear, and we are not always aware of it. "In contrast with the eyes, the ears have no lids, and hearing continues during sleep" (Mieszkowski 11). Because my methodology is concerned with listening, it is inevitably very subjective. My research departs from my own, very personal "auscultation" (Cuddy-Keane qtd. in Mieszkowski 27), the acoustic counterpart of Mieke Bal's 'focalization'. I cannot escape from it, but this does not mean it should be discarded as non-scientific. In fact, all sciences have to deal with the positionality of the researcher. As will become clear in the subsequent discussion of Karen Barad's 'diffraction', not only in the humanities but across the entire academy, including natural scientific studies,

it has been shown that the method applied and the researcher applying it are inevitably entangled with the nature of the final results.

I will now go a bit deeper into the phenomenon of diffraction, in order to explain better what my methodology entails. Diffraction is a term from classical and quantum physics, which Karen Barad has extrapolated interdisciplinarily, in order to create a method of what she calls 'diffractive reading'. In short, this method has to do with reading texts "through one another" instead of against each other, as overlapping waves (25). Where Barad uses this method mostly to read academic insights from different disciplines through each other, in this research I will show that this method is also applicable to literary texts. The phenomenon of 'diffraction' or 'interference' in physics draws our attention to the entangled nature of wave behavior. Diffraction is all around us, and who wants to fathom this phenomenon fully needs to read my thesis through Barad's book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, however here is the attempt to a short explanation. "[D]iffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction" (Barad 74). It is caused by a 'grating': "an apparatus or material configuration that gives rises to a superposition of waves" (Barad 81). Imagine a dike in the water – for me as a (Dutch) humanities scholar easier to picture than, say, light waves. The dike, with one or several holes in it, is the diffraction apparatus, and as waves at one side approach it, the waves in the water that comes out of the holes on the other side seem to bend – although as explains Barad this is just optical appearance, and technically speaking there is no bending involved. As opposed to particles, waves have the capacity to overlap – to be at the same place at the same time – thus, as the waves on the other side of the dike encounter each other, their phase and amplitude combine into new waves: two high waves form an extra high one, whereas a wave and a trough equal each other out, and a wave encountering still water stays the same. What results is a pattern of differences (Haraway qtd. in Barad 29), something that can help us think through the notion of difference in general. Whereas usually we tend to think of difference as the fact of two separate entities juxtaposed against each other, diffraction shows that difference exists in an entangled state. Waves cannot be understood separably from each other: because they overlap and flow through each other, the difference between these waves can only be read from the patterns that these superpositions present. This is diffraction and difference in a nutshell explained through classical physics in a humble attempt, with the help of Barad, by a humanities scholar.

It however gets even more interesting when quantum physics comes in, and to understand diffraction well in the first place, physicians nowadays agree that quantum physics becomes impossible to ignore (Barad; Feynman qtd. in Barad 73). Because the striking thing is that it has been found that particles, as well, can perform wave behavior, *under the right experimental circumstances* (Barad 29). For classical physics, this is impossible, as particles cannot be at the same place at the same time. And yet, it is true. Under some measuring circumstances, matter behaves wave-like, under others it does not. This made physician Werner Heisenberg come up with the 'uncertainty principle': "there is a necessary limit to what we can

simultaneously know about certain pairs of physical quantities" (Barad 7). As describes Barad in her book, Heisenberg here still assumes that there is an essential, *a priori* state of matter before we measure it. Eventually, however, Heisenberg agrees with his colleague Niels Bohr, who goes further and claims that matter has no essential state, and that its essence changes according to how we measure it. As opposed to Heisenberg's 'uncertainty' which was still merely epistemological, Bohr's claims are way more far reaching: his 'complementarity' is not merely epistemological, but moreover ontological. This, as claims Barad, has huge consequences not only for physics, but for our entire epistemological and ontological system:

> The lesson that Bohr takes from quantum physics is very deep and profound: there aren't little things wandering aimlessly in the void that possess the complete set of properties that Newtonian physics assumes (e.g., position and momentum); rather, there is something fundamental about the nature of measurement interactions such that, given a particular measuring apparatus, certain properties become determinate, while others are specifically excluded. Which properties become determinate is not governed by the desires or will of the experimenter but rather by the specificity of the experimental apparatus. (Barad 19)

This idea of non-essentialism, and the relevance of the subject position of the researcher and the apparatus they use to do their research for the ultimate outcomes of it, is one of the basic principles of my sonic research.

Barad explicitly prides her diffractive methodology on being a visual one, standing on the shoulders of a long tradition of visual metaphors to analyze the way we make knowledge (86). However, as Barad names in passing several times (28; 74; 75) the phenomenon of diffraction also applies to sound waves. I would like to argue that diffraction is a particularly apt metaphor/phenomenon in an analysis of sound. Perhaps even more obviously than light, sound behaves in overlapping, non-linear ways. As Barad, I believe that behind anything in the world lies "(...) a complex network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual. Or perhaps it is less that there is an assemblage of agents than there is an entangled state of agencies" (Barad 23). Sound is such an assemblage, entangled beyond itself with other assemblages. As such, according to this incredible complexity of material and discursive circumstances eternally changing from time to time and from place to place, sound can never be fixed into a singular objective analysis. Sound is a deeply diffractive phenomenon, and listening, as I will show, a deeply subjective activity, but as we can understand after reading Barad's approach to science in general, it should therefore not be discarded as a non-scientific practice – quite the opposite: "*[W]e are a part of that nature that we seek to understand*" (Barad 26, her emphasis).

The first important takeaway of Barad's theory of diffraction for my own research, is the idea of reading texts through one another, as waves. I argue that a comparative literary close reading should ideally to be diffractive, because not only do literary texts form part of an inherently entangled intertextual web, instead of being separate isolated entities, but moreover will our reading of one text inevitably influence our

reading of the one we read afterwards, and our analysis should take this into account. Indeed, the second takeaway of Barad's diffractive reading, is the influence of the researcher on the final results of the research.

Just like in Barad's book, diffraction in my research operates on two scales. First of all, it is my methodology. By reading literary texts through each other and through the soundscape of the city where they take place, instead of against each other, I hope to come to new, richer insights about their differences and similarities. This entails, among other things, that I will actively avoid an analogous analysis – as I have explained above, difference does exist, but without the commonly assumed essential and separable state of things. The notion of analogy, as claims also Barad, does assume this *a priori* fixed state of things; and how can one possible argue A to be *like* or to be *not like* B if A and B are already, beforehand, entangled? Although it is tempting to use 'diffraction' as a metaphor to make highly speculative claims about waves, or tempting to read the *racconti* against instead of through the sounds of the city, this will be at all costs avoided. Secondly, I will interpret my case study itself as diffractive. As I will show, the *racconti* collection that is my case study is itself a diffraction apparatus, which picks up noise waves from society, then transforms them, putting them through the grating of its own form and genre and then pushing them back into the city, in the form of new noise waves. This is perhaps abstract, but not metaphorical or analogical – I talk about the actual noises and silences of the city, and I will address the actual noise literary language produces, invigorated in this case by the use of the genre *racconto* or 'telling'.

INTRA-, INTER- AND EXTRATEXTUAL RESONANCE

In the three chapters of this thesis, I will listen diffractively to three distinct forms of resonance: intratextual, intertextual and extratextual resonance. Intratextual resonance, treated in the first chapter, means listening to the vibration of (spatial, human, other-than-human) assemblages that are produced inside a literary work; especially those assemblages that the eye does not see. Additionally, this research will also encapsulate actual analyses of the sound that (literary) language produces, and of sounds that are described as part of literary narratives. Concretely, this chapter first investigates the various forms and functions of silence that are present in *Racconti romani*, then interpret the meta-narrative network of characters that play a role in the text – a network that produces a tension between connection and isolation – and lastly listen to the more-than-human soundscape the book produces, consisting of, amongst other things, trees, birds, glass, and, most importantly, water. The diffractive methodological approach in this chapter manifests itself in the reading of the various short stories of the case-study together and *through* each other, instead of against each other, in an attempt to find out how they resonate inter- and meta-narratively, as part of the collection as a whole. Moreover, chapter one will also argue that these *racconti* by Lahiri produce noise in the outside world. In many ways, they seem to express a counter-

voice against the established cultural narratives that exist inside and about the city of Rome, deconstructing the image of the 'eternal city'.

The second chapter will engage with intertextual resonance, by investigating how the collection of Lahiri forms part of a broader literary soundscape constituted of different traditions of Italian *racconti*. I will listen to how these literary works speak to and resonate amongst each other, and examine how e.g. themes, style and genre are treated, paying attention to resonances amongst them. First, I will provide an in-depth analysis of the Italian genre of the *racconto*, guided by Lahiri's own understanding of it. In the introduction to another short story anthology collected by Lahiri, she writes of the important place that the genre holds in Italian culture, a category that is actually slightly different from the anglophone 'short story'. The *racconto* is a genre which is very apt for a sonic analysis: the word 'racconto' or 'tale' etymologically implies the act of "telling" a story "to a listener", as argues Lahiri in the introduction of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* (*Penguin*): it is an "exchange" in which (at least) "two people are involved", and because it is originally told instead of read, it is more "[f]leeting", "unstable" by nature (*Penguin* xvii). Therefore I argue that an analysis of a *racconto* would be fundamentally incomplete without taking into consideration its sonic implication. Further in the chapter, departing from Lahiri's claim that Italian literature is "an open system" (*Penguin* xx), I will argue that *Racconti romani* positions itself on the crossroads between two different currents of Italian short stories, which all, in different ways, contribute to the deconstruction of the narrative of the 'eternal city'. On the one hand the collection finds itself embedded in the soundscape of an established twentieth century tradition of *racconti* to which e.g. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elsa Morante and Alberto Moravia have contributed – all authors who stand in an intertextual relationship towards one another as well. This chapter will provide a comparative diffractive analysis of Lahiri's collection in relation to the Roman *racconti* of all three authors. Especially with Moravia, Lahiri is quite explicit in conversation: her book is full of resonances with Moravia's *Racconti romani*. She has written about Moravia's collection that it is "a cornerstone of the twentieth-century Italian short story tradition" (*Penguin* xvii). Just as Lahiri, Moravia tells the stories of people who are in one way or another excluded from society: in his case Rome's ex-prisoners, prostitutes, taxi drivers. Also Morante's and Pasolini's stories amplify unheard voices, the latter an author who is particularly notorious for focusing his writings and films on the marginalized people of Rome. But Lahiri goes beyond this tradition by adding the stories of Roman immigrants. Here we can hear a second intertextual resonance, the second aforementioned current: Lahiri's collection fits well in the contemporary soundscape of short stories that amplify the unheard experiences of exclusion and marginalization of Roman migrants. The chapter will analyze Lahiri in relation to the *racconti* of Ubah Cristina Ali Farah and Igiaba Scego. In short, this chapter will investigate how Lahiri positions her writings at the intersection of these two currents of *racconti*. Listening diffractively here means: reading the tales of Lahiri *through* the abovementioned ones, listening to their literary resonances.

In chapter three, and this is perhaps the most important part of my research, I will travel beyond the text, follow the threads that lead outside of the page, to the spaces that are evoked, in which these narratives are embedded. I will listen diffractively to the *racconti* in relation to these places. Importantly, urban space is always changing, especially its soundscape. This deeply influences the way we read (or listen to) works that are set in a certain city. How does this changing soundscape interact with the writings? Does the actual urban soundscape bend the way I listen to the *racconti*? Perhaps even vice versa? What does my method teach me about the urgency of reading literature in resonance with the current world? In the case of urban stories this is not merely a resonating relationship; stories *are* a city's narrative texture, they "traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (De Certeau 115). "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (De Certeau 115). Therefore our analysis has to take into account where the *racconti* take place. I argue this form of research is an urgent and inevitable consequence of any kind of intertextual analysis, but especially in my case. Returning to Bakhtin's ideas on heteroglossia, we can conclude that theorists have long realized that literary writing is a manifestation of the layered, mosaic nature of society. If we take this notion seriously, we should not remain inside the isolated realm of the book, but, not only metaphorically but truly, have our research travel beyond. Hopefully this will help me to arrive at a better understanding and a more sonically inclusive interpretation of the *racconti* I analyze. Concretely, for chapter three I have tried to find out where Lahiri's stories take place in Rome. I have mapped them out. As Franco Moretti argues in *Maps, Graphs, Trees*, mapping literature can give us new insights about it. Indeed, I have found that most *racconti*, if not at the edges of the city, surprisingly mostly take place alongside the river, symbolizing the liminality of the characters' identities.

The last part of the third section of the thesis is a soundscape, made following the ideas of the methodology of research-creation. I take the methodological idea of "research-creation" from Erin Manning. She describes this new, creative way of doing research as both experiential and experimental, often consisting of extra-linguistic forms of knowledge production. Research-creation is a practice that thinks, that is, it consists of making/doing by thinking, and thinking by making/doing. Through this interaction, the ideas and methods form in the process. That means that it is impossible to frame the project and its methodology clearly beforehand, it rather forms as one goes: it "begins in the midst, in the mess of relations not yet organized" (Manning 134). Research-creation is indeed process, not product oriented. Very much in accordance with 'diffractive listening', in a research-creative approach knower/known relations are attended to and tend to shift. Also in line with the notion of diffraction, is that research-creation is relation and assemblage oriented: invention happens at the interstices of societal networks. For my soundscape, I have gone to the places where Lahiri's *racconti* take place, and recorded sounds and some videographic images. I argue that the urban short stories and the urban space where they are set already inherently form a soundscape together, and my goal with this creative part is just to make this entangled literary-urban relationship explicit. This soundscape consists of urban sounds, literary

fragments from the case-study, and other elements that play a role in *Racconti romani*, like glass, trees, birds and water. It is accompanied by images, in order for the listener to connect the sounds to urban spaces.

The aim of my research is first and foremost a theoretical and methodological one. Hopefully, it will show how a theory of resonance and a multi-faceted methodology of diffractive listening can in principle be applied to any literary text. Literature is composed of language, and in essence language is sound, sound that is entangled with multidirectional assemblages of meaning that are always in movement, hence the relevance of looking at intra- and intertextual resonance. Moreover, literature almost always takes place somewhere, in a world, be it abstractly or concretely, and therefore an extratextual analysis could always be an interesting approach which makes explicit the already *a priori* existing extratextual tendencies of any literature. However, as I hopefully have explained, this theory and method are particularly applicable to urban short stories like *Racconti romani*, as tales are told and supposed to be listened to, and they are set in a complex literary assemblage ánd urban landscape. My hypothesis is that these stories resonate internally and externally in their deconstruction of the narrative of Rome as the eternal city, while explicitly positioning themselves as 'Roman' (*romani*). In their narrations of different forms of marginalization, they are as fleeting as sound; they urge us to listen to them beyond the eye; and they form a vibrant assemblage of resonances, in relation with other *racconti* and with the city they are deeply rooted in.

CHAPTER ONE: DIFFRACTIVE LISTENING TO INTRATEXTUAL RESONANCE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *RACCONTI ROMANI*

> "Pensava, in quello spazio stretto e curvo, che tutto sarebbe stato silenzioso.
> Invece, (…) tutto tremava e vibrava." (Jhumpa Lahiri *Racconti romani* 126)

"L'espatriata", one of the characters of the central, longest *racconto* in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Racconti romani* (RR), has to undergo a medical scan. Suffering from an illness in Rome, thousands of kilometers away from where she feels at home, makes her suffer even more. In the small, isolating space of the scan, she is deafened by the noise this machine makes. When we think of isolation, we often think of silence. But in this case, the opposite is true. The noise almost isolates her more. Perhaps we could see this narrow space as an analogy for Lahiri's collection of *racconti*: a space where the characters feel isolated and alone, and where noises echo back and forth, noises we did not expect to be there.

This first chapter will look at the intratextual resonance within Jhumpa Lahiri's *Racconti romani*. Although some of the *racconti* in this book were published – in slightly different form – before (as specified in a list that can be found on one of the last pages of the collection), the book is really presented as a collection, and this chapter will analyze it in its entirety, as such. In the introduction of a special issue of scholarly journal *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* on short story collection theory from a comparative perspective, Elke D'Hoker and Bart Van Den Bossche address various theoretical traditions in this field. Most of those traditions engage, they explain, in one way or another with "recurring characters, settings, or themes" (15), as I will also do in the analysis of this chapter. In the Italian academic context, where from the 1960s the approach to this topic has been mostly structuralist and semiotic (D'Hoker and Van Den Bossche 12), a term that has been prominent is that of the "macrotesto"; the macrotext (D'Hoker and Van Den Bossche 7). Within this same issue, Mara Santi, part of the aforementioned Italian theoretical context on short story collections, makes a few important points I would like to touch upon here. She indeed engages with the term "macrotext", "defined for the first time by Maria Corti as semiotic units generated by the assembling of autonomous texts and superior to each of the individual texts" (147). A collection, thus, is an assemblage which carries narrative meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts. However, adds Santi: "Although the collected texts compose a new and broader semiotic entity, in turn autonomous and independent, they do not lose their original autonomy" (147); that is, the individual short stories that form part of a collection do still remain independent, self-contained narrative structures. Within the assemblage that is a collection, interaction, as explains Santi, takes place vertically – stories give meaning to the collection as a whole, and the collection gives meaning to the individual stories – and also

horizontally – different stories stand in connection and give meaning to each other. (Santi 147).
"Consequently, the narrative macrotext is a dynamic network" (Santi 149). Santi also addresses the role of
the performative oral nature that is traditionally connected to the short story (149-150), an element with
which I will engage in the second chapter of this thesis. She determines the role of the reader as essential
in the performance of the connectivity between the various components of a collection (153-154), and
accordingly, my subject position plays a crucial role in the analysis of *Racconti romani* as a whole. Making
the theory of Santi more sonic, I introduce the concept 'macro-soundscape': the sounding assemblage of a
collection as a whole, as opposed to the micro-soundscapes all individual *racconti* contain. With this term, I
thus intend to describe the phenomenon that different *racconti* in the collection resonate amongst each
other in various ways, forming a vibrant assemblage in which literary elements stretch beyond the confines
of the single story they belong to, and entangle themselves with those elements of other *racconti*.

In this chapter, I will apply my methodology of diffractive listening like I have explained in it the
introduction of this thesis: I analyze the *racconti* and the sounds they contain and produce *through* each
other, instead of *against* each other. Diffraction here also entails my awareness that the analysis is the
product of my own subject position as a researcher: the resonances that have reached my ear are not
necessarily all there are to be found, and other researchers would most likely interpret them differently
than I do. After an introduction of the author and the book, this chapter's research consists of three
sections. First, I will listen to the various forms and functions of silence in *Racconti romani*. Then, I will
analyze the network that appears to exist between characters cross-*racconti*, drawing a map using 'social
network analysis' (Everett; Donath), in order to show the striking resonances between characters of
different *racconti*, which produce what I call an 'almost-touching-but-not-quite' effect: often, main
characters of one *racconto* seem to appear as side characters of another, tempting the reader to think they
form connections throughout the book, but in the end the facts never match up, which makes the
characters' silence, their sense of isolation, even more poignant. Lastly, I will explore the macro-
soundscape that is created throughout the collection, particularly by attending to the recurring themes of
trees, birds, glass and water.

Jhumpa Lahiri, born in London and raised in the United States by Indian parents, has always experienced
a sense of alienation, exile even, from the languages and cultures in between which she lives. This thematic
of hybridity, double identity (*In altre parole* 116), estrangement and belonging seeps through in many of her
writings (*In altre parole* 155). These themes are explored by, amongst others, literary scholar Paola Sica, in
her article "Identità, narrativa bilingue e canone letterario (trans)nazionale: Jhumpa Lahiri". Other
important themes in Lahiri's writings are metamorphosis and transgenerational trauma, argues Tiziana De
Rogatis, one of the major contributors to scholarship on Lahiri's writings in Italian, in her book
Homing/Ritrovarsi: Traumi e translinguismi delle migrazioni in Morante, Hoffman, Kristof, Scego e Lahiri. Simone
Brioni writes in *L'Italia, l'altrove: Luoghi, spazi e attraversamenti nel cinema e nella letteratura sulla migrazione* about
similar themes to the ones my research is concerned with, that is, he reads Lahiri's literature in relation to
space and place, but his book does not yet engage with Lahiri's *Racconti romani*.

For her English writings, Lahiri has received extensive recognition in the anglophone world throughout the past twenty-five years – she received several nominations and a Pulitzer Prize. From the year of 2012 (*In altre parole* 152), her writing career took an interesting turn: she started to write and publish in Italian, after having studied the language for years. This change came after a choice to read exclusively in Italian, and to move to Rome. In her first book in Italian, *In altre parole* (*IAP*), she describes the liberating feeling that came with this chosen form of linguistic exile – the limits of a language one has learned as an adult, actually inserted the writing practice with pace and inspiration.

My own relationship with Rome and the Italian language resonates with Lahiri's: also I learned Italian as an adult and moved to Rome for a period of time. I recognize this feeling, of how not knowing a language perfectly well can actually create velocity in writing. As I spent half a year in Rome last year, only reading and speaking Italian, my own writing took a sprint. You are always outside of the language, but this tragic distance, the fact that you will never speak or write it perfectly, actually makes writing a more intuitive, demarcated process, as Lahiri also describes in *In altre parole*. While in Rome, as I was preparing this research, I came to the striking conclusion that almost no one here knew Lahiri, and her book *Racconti romani* about the city where I was living. I spoke about my thesis to many people in different formal or informal contexts, and although most bookstores had a few copies on the shelf it did not seem to form part of neither the common discourse, nor the literary studies discourse at the university where I was studying. Even most literature students never heard about Lahiri. This of course also partly has to do, as I quickly learned, that here the ridiculous unwritten rule is that authors can only be studied once they are dead. In any case, the big contrast in terms of familiarity with Lahiri's writing between the anglophone and the italophone world was striking to me, but also somehow telling about Italian culture and the silence that tends to exist around outsiders who form part of the Italian culture. It actually made me more eager to study this book.

Lahiri is self-aware of this marginal literary position: "Scrivo ai margini, così come vivo da sempre ai margini dei Paesi, delle culture. Una zona periferica in cui non è possibile che io mi senta radicata, ma dove ormai mi trovo a mio agio. L'unica zona a cui credo, in qualche modo, di appartenere" (*IAP* 75). Somehow, she has nonetheless found a home in the Italian language. She writes:

> NeoFascist violence towards immigrants has been on the rise, and the government still denies birthright citizenship to Italians with foreign-born parents. In spite of this distressing reality, Italy has become a second home to me, and Italians have, on the whole, welcomed my efforts to explore their literature and experiment with their language with an outsider's sensibility. (*Penguin* xix-xx)

The central case study of this thesis is the short story collection *Racconti romani* (because of the genre-specific nature of the Italian, as opposed to the anglophone, 'short story', as I will explain in the subsequent chapter, I will mostly refer to such writings as '*racconti*'). It was published in 2022, ten years after Lahiri wrote *In altre parole*. *Racconti romani* carries on addressing the same aforementioned themes that have always been important in Lahiri's English and Italian writing. In one of the few papers on this

collection, Stiliana Milkova Rousseva underlines that the characters of these *racconti* "span different socio-cultural milieus and points of view – from caretakers to professors, from tailors to writers, from immigrants to Italians, and from teenagers to delinquents". These different identities do not remain unattended to. Rousseva writes: "These stories, like all [Lahiri's] writing in Italian, explore questions of (...) border crossing – literary and metaphorical, linguistic and cultural – in relation to the self." As all *racconti* deal in one way or another with this liminal identity formation, the city of Rome functions as "a site where one's identity can be taken apart and then sewn back together" (Rousseva). As mentioned before, some of the characters are born and raised in Rome, whereas others are new Romans. As a result, some are more subject to 'the gaze', as argues Rousseva, than others. *Racconti romani* plays with this, by jumping back and forth between perspectives, sometimes misleading readers by hinting in several *racconti* to the possibility that one of the (privileged) characters is actually writing this, leaving us with the question: through whose eyes were we actually looking – or rather: through whose ears were we listening? For example, at the end of "Il confine" the reader gets the highly suggestive suspicion that the mother of the richer family on vacation has used the focalization (auscultation) of the less privileged girl who works for the holiday house, in order to write this story; and in "Le feste di P." the main character, a writer, forms a whole narrative web inside his head about a foreign woman at a party whom he actually knows nothing about.

Yet, despite their differences, all main characters suffer from a form of alienation, and struggle with finding a sense of belonging. In a review of the book (and its Dutch translation), Monica Jansen argues that "Lahiri shows in her ode to the city also clearly how estrangement, anxiety and displacement can lead to inarticulate or public forms of violence and xenophobia" (my own translation). Indeed, in *Racconti romani* the characters' sense of alienation not only leads to loneliness, but also sometimes to hostile behavior towards other people, resulting in an interesting tension between reaching out and pushing away. The exploration of tension between apparent opposite forces is a familiar playing field for Lahiri. It resonates, for example, with the author's first encounter with the Italian language, a tension of (non-)belonging that Lahiri explores in *In altre parole* and which is echoed in this complex constellation of the *Racconti romani*: "Sento una connessione insieme a un distacco. Una vicinanza insieme a una lontananza. (…) Una tensione squisita" (*IAP* 23). And indeed, also *Racconti romani* is full of different forms of unresolvable, exquisite tension, also for example between happiness and unhappiness, as argues Jansen:

> [I]n Lahiri's stories, happiness and unhappiness are entangled with each other in such a way, that the one element cannot provide a solution for the other. They exist alongside each other, and alternate continuously in time, place and action, as it occurs in any human inner life which, consciously or unconsciously, stands in contact with the tactile and sensory worlds of animals, plants, objects and elements. (my own translation)

Thus, these human emotions present in *Racconti romani*, however different are inseparably entangled with each other, as a coin eternally spinning at its edge, or as waves overlapping – soundwaves, perhaps. As we all know, tension and friction produce noise, resonance even. The following chapter will explore this resonance.

As I have shown before, in their reviews of the book Rousseva and Jansen have already explored the main themes in *Racconti romani*. Beside the fact that my research is longer and therefore permits a more thorough approach, it is also a crucially different approach: I pay attention to *Racconti romani* as a sonic phenomenon. In the "Postfazione" of *In altre parole*, Lahiri urges us not to fall into the trap of superimposing an autobiographical narrative interpretation on her non-autobiographical writings – like of course *Racconti romani*. While taking this to heart, I do want to draw our attention to a citation from *In altre parole*, in which Lahiri describes that her personal relationship with Italy and Rome was from the start a sonic one:

> Io sono venuta per una settimana, per vedere i palazzi, per ammirare le piazze, le chiese. Ma dall'inizio il mio rapporto con l'Italia è tanto uditivo quanto visuale. Benché ci siano poche macchine, la città ronza. Mi rendo conto di un rumore che mi piace, delle conversazioni, delle frasi, delle parole che sento ovunque vada. Come se tutta la città fosse un teatro che ospita un pubblico leggermente inquieto, che chiacchiera, prima dell'inizio di uno spettacolo. Sento l'eccitazione con cui i bambini si augurano buon Natale per la strada. Sento una mattina all'albergo la tenerezza con cui la donna che pulisce la camera mi chiede: *avete dormito bene?* Quando un signore dietro di me vorrebbe passare sul marciapiede, sento la lieve impazienza con cui mi domanda: *permesso?* Non riesco a rispondere. Non sono capace di avere nessun dialogo. Ascolto. (*IAP* 21-22)

This quote shows that Lahiri is very attentive to the soundscape of the city, and this echoes forth also in *Racconti romani*. Sound is not always so explicitly present in it, but it is always there, sometimes in the form of (apparent) silence.

As I have explained in the introduction, guided by Lawrence Kramer's theory, sound has everything to do with where we direct our attention to, and silence is not the absence of sound but a 'hum', a "sound one cannot yet hear" (Kramer 5). Accordingly, Fran Tonkiss explains that not listening to sounds of the city, not paying attention to them, can be a discriminatory strategy. On this cancelling out by city dwellers of unknown voices in the cityscape, she writes:

> Not listening in the city makes spaces smaller, tamer, more predictable. The pretense that you do not hear – a common conspiracy of silence – in this way is a response, passing as lack of response, to the modern city as a place of strangers. Some people, though, sound stranger than others; certain voices jar to certain other ears. The immigrant, it has been said, is *audible*. (Tonkiss 305)

This painful strategy of ignoring, likely more often unconsciously than consciously applied, leads to a sense of exclusion for those who are by others defined as not-Roman. In *In altre parole*, Lahiri describes a similar experience, as a result of her foreign accent in Italian in combination with the color of her skin:

> Non mi capiscono perché non vogliono capirmi; non vogliono capirmi perché non vogliono ascoltarmi, non vogliono accettarmi. Il muro funziona così. Quando qualcuno non mi capisce può ignorarmi; non deve tenere conto di me. Queste persone mi guardano ma non mi vedono. Non apprezzano che io fatichi per parlare la loro lingua, anzi, questo li infastidisce. A volte, quando parlo italiano in Italia, mi sento rimproverata, come un bambino che tocca un oggetto che non va toccata. 'Non toccare la nostra lingua' alcuni italiani sembrano dirmi. 'Non appartiene a te.' (*IAP* 104-105)

Yet, "the city as polyglot soundscape is a space in which differences remain audible", writes Tonkiss (305). Listening, therefore, can be a counter-strategy against this 'conspiracy of silence'. And one of the things we can listen to, as I have argued in the introduction, is literature. Literature is "[a] plural body in which ephemeral oral rumors circulate: (...) a 'stage for voices.'" (162), writes Michel de Certeau in his text on language and the city (162), echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on heteroglossia. Combining this idea with William R. Paulson's idea of literature as "the noise of culture", I hypothesize that Lahiri's *racconti* are like literary noise. They pick up on an unlistened-to hum of voices scattered around the city, which bundled together in the collection of *Racconti romani*, are directed back into the world: a unit of more concentrated noise. Listening to Lahiri's *racconti* as they position themselves as part of the motionful soundscape of the city, we will see how they (partly) succeed to deconstruct the more static image of the eternal city's landscape.

SILENCE RESOUNDING INTO NOISE

Like any book, *Racconti romani* contains descriptions of sound. It will however be trivial to quote them here. Instead, in this section I would like to focus on how sound and silence are used as literary devices to shape the characters whose voices tend to be unheard in the city of Rome, and who experience severe forms of exclusion. With regards to silence, Lahiri herself wrote in *In altre parole*, referring to the art of Matisse: "Ho capito come lo spazio bianco, come il silenzio, possa avere anche un significato" (151). And indeed, the silences in *Racconti romani* are almost more telling than the sounds.

Silence inside a narrative can have many very different, almost opposite functions. For example, silence can communicate agency: a stubbornness or a refusal to talk, like the right to remain silent in court. Gerlov van Engelenhoven and Mireille Rosello both look at such functions of silence in narrative. In *Racconti romani*, however, silence rarely or never has such a function. First and foremost, it is connected to discrimination and isolation. What is of particular importance, is the role of language in this. According to Rousseva, many of the characters do not speak Italian fluently, and therefore struggle to connect with other people. For example, in "La scalinata", we read about "l'espatriata" how "i commercianti (…) le raccontano vicende complicate che lei fa fatica a seguire. Certe volte le loro parole le fanno perdere l'equilibrio" (123-124). Moreover, many characters are silenced because of their linguistic disabilities (Rousseva). A striking example of this, is *racconto* "Il confine", in which the father of the narrator is violently attacked in his flower stall in the middle of the night, by a couple of racist guys. The man loses his teeth. "Da allora fa fatica a parlare. Le parole si ingarbugliano, come se lui fosse un vecchio. (…) Io e mia madre lo capiamo ma gli altri no, pensano che, essendo straniero, non sappia bene la lingua, a volte perfino che sia muto" (*RR* 23). In this story the voice of the immigrant man is quite literally taken away from him, not only by the people who with violence have made it physically difficult to talk for the man, but also by those who afterwards do not listen to him and assume he does not speak because he does not know the language. The man turns silent even at their own dinner table, where he and his daughter almost

do not speak (*RR* 16). In "Dante Alighieri" the main character feels lonely and unseen at home, because of a similar silence: "A cena ci raccontavamo poco; a casa ospitavamo principalmente il silenzio" (221). We thus see how silence in *Racconti romani* has an isolating effect in the public as well as in the private sphere. In "La riunione", we find an instance of Tonkiss's "conspiracy of silence" in public space. While the owners of the restaurant are open and friendly to the white, Roman woman, they barely communicate with the woman of color who is visiting the city. The most poignant element of the story is that the character who is the most clearly racist, is the young child, who does not respond to the question of the 'professoressa' if she can move to clear the way to the bathroom. This deconstructs the idea of the innocent child, and shows how children are taught racist ideas from the moment they are born. We notice how the girl copies the silence strategy of the adults in the room, who also do not correct her behavior. Other moments of discriminatory silence we encounter in "I bigliettini", when the old people on the bus, without saying a word, fix their eyes on the mother who speaks another language than Italian with her sons (*RR* 198) and the children at the school where she works put anonymous, racist little notes in her pockets, without saying a word to her. We could see these two elements of this *racconto* as another sort of silence strategy; more than using silence to ignore and freeze someone out, the silence of these side characters actually protects them in their discriminatory behavior, and their act of Othering, while their gazes and words are actively working to make the main character feel excluded. The old people on the bus could never be accused of something, and neither can the children: the adults appeal to their innocence – "Mi pare un gioco tra bambini" (203) – and the notes are anonymous, anyway. At the same time, this choice of the protagonist's coworkers to take side with the children, makes her feel even more isolated.

In *Racconti romani*, there are several instances where we hear how a discriminatory isolating silence turns into sound that also has an isolating effect. An example is the way in which discrimination develops in "Casa luminosa". First, it just manifests itself as follows: "Il macellaio, per esempio, che tagliava la carne senza mai chiedere a mia moglie, con il suo abito lungo fino ai piedi e la testa riparata dal velo – solo così si sentiva a suo agio se andava in giro –, come avrebbe preparato il pollo o il fegato, cosa che invece chiedeva amichevolmente alle altre signore" (*RR* 86). Then, "[a]lcuni abitanti avevano iniziato a parlare tra di loro nel cortile" (*RR* 90), and when the sound of their discontent swells, "anche dentro casa, anche con le finestre chiuse, quelle parole penetravano e scurivano sempre di più le stanze luminose" (91), and the narrator tells us how these neighbors turn into "donne-corvo" who with their crow noises try to chase the family away (91), in the end forcing them out of the neighborhood again. In "Il ritiro", peaceful silence suddenly, out of nowhere turns into sound, when two guys on a scooter scream: "Vatti a lavare quelle gambe" (163), and shoot the protagonist. The freedom these guys feel to loudly voice these insults on the streets of Rome, painfully shows how comfortable they are in making other people not feel at home – perhaps emboldened by the fact that both their parents tend to complain about immigrants (166-167), which we read about in the pages that follow where the focalization switches to that of the guys. And just like this *racconto* makes us jump from the perspective of the discriminated against, towards the discriminating, similarly "La scalinata" shows us both sides of the same coin. Alongside the stories of new

Romans, "La scalinata" also contains the story of "La vedova". When we focalize through the widow, we hear with her the immigrants whose presence sounds strange to her, and consequently she feels estranged in her city, while her sense of distrust and loneliness increases: "le capita di ascoltare le conversazioni degli stranieri in giro. Non solo i turisti che ammirano il quartiere e fanno due spese per gioco poi vanno via, ma gli altri che lavorano alle bancarelle e fanno figli e parlano fra di loro" (116). There are also instances in the book, where sound in relation to isolation does not necessarily have to do with discrimination or Othering. When the husband and wife in "La processione" find themselves on a crowded square, waiting for the procession to pass, they observe how everyone is chatting, and they feel utter outsiders because they almost do not understand a word. In the same story, the piano in the rented apartment becomes a symbol for their lost child who could have learned to play it if he had not died, and when the woman stomps with her two fists on the keys, "producendo un suono cacofonico" (189), this cluster of dissonant sound turns into a metaphor for the abyss between her and her husband in the way they deal with their grief.

ANONYMOUS NETWORK OF THE LONELY: RESOUNDSCAPE OF ISOLATED CHARACTERS

In *Racconti romani*, all characters are anonymous: nobody carries a name, at the very most a letter ("L."; "F."). Neither are the countries or cities of origin of those characters mentioned who are not born in Rome. Rousseva writes about this:

> [A]s much as *Roman Stories* strives to inhabit diverse and marginalized subject positions, it presents an assemblage of characters whose interiority never fully comes to life. Despite the pressing issues that emerge through the focalization of 'foreigners,' the characters' home countries, native languages, and religious or ethnic identities remain unnamed. Even if this technique may well be intended as inclusive, as a refusal to categorize modes of otherness, it nonetheless risks subsuming individual pain and its narratives into the lingua franca of universalized global suffering.

Rousseva misses the point of this literary device, I argue. Indeed, Lahiri moves towards abstraction from the moment she starts to write in Italian, but this is not necessarily to be "inclusive" or "a refusal to categorize modes of otherness" – a reading that is too simple. First of all, Rousseva in this interpretation is blind to the influence of the specific genre of the Italian *racconto* on the stylistic choices of Lahiri – about which more in chapter two. Moreover, Lahiri herself describes this development in her writing differently in *In altre parole*:

> [N]on do più lo stesso peso alla verità fattuale. In Italiano mi muovo verso l'astrazione. I luoghi sono imprecisati, i personaggi finora sono senza nome, senza un'identità culturale specifica. Il risultato credo sia una scrittura affrancata per certi versi dal mondo concreto. Ora costruisco un'ambientazione meno determinata. (161)

Brioni argues that the abstraction in Lahiri's Italian writing contributes to the decentralization of Italian space and *italianità* (95-98). This is in accordance with my hypothesis that Lahiri's writings contribute to the deconstruction of traditional narratives that cling to Italy, like, I argue, the one of the 'eternal city'.

In the case of *Racconti romani*, ten years after *In altre parole*, this abstraction, which manifests itself amongst other things in the anonymization of the characters, has an additional effect to the one Brioni and Lahiri herself describe, I argue in this following section. Because of their anonymity, the characters sometimes almost become interchangeable – a nod towards the way immigrants are often treated in Rome. And Lahiri plays with this notion of interchangeability. Often, we think to recognize a character of one *racconto* in another *racconto*, but upon closer scrutiny, the details never quite match up. In order to analyze this aspect of *Racconti romani*, this section uses 'social network analysis' (Everett; Donath), a methodology that originated in the social sciences in order to analyze networks of people, as opposed to comparing individuals. Social network analysis usually visually maps out networks of people. In these maps we see nodes and lines that connect them. The lines can e.g. represent knowledge (A knows B), interaction, affiliation, or trust. However, one of the most striking things about Lahiri's collection as a whole is that, despite the many resonances between themes and characters, and even spatial overlaps, the characters of the different stories do not get into contact with each other. Therefore, in my case, the lines between the nodes (which are the characters) do not represent the interaction or knowledge between the characters of the different *racconti*, but rather their similarities. I have drawn a map (see fig. 1), on which I have written
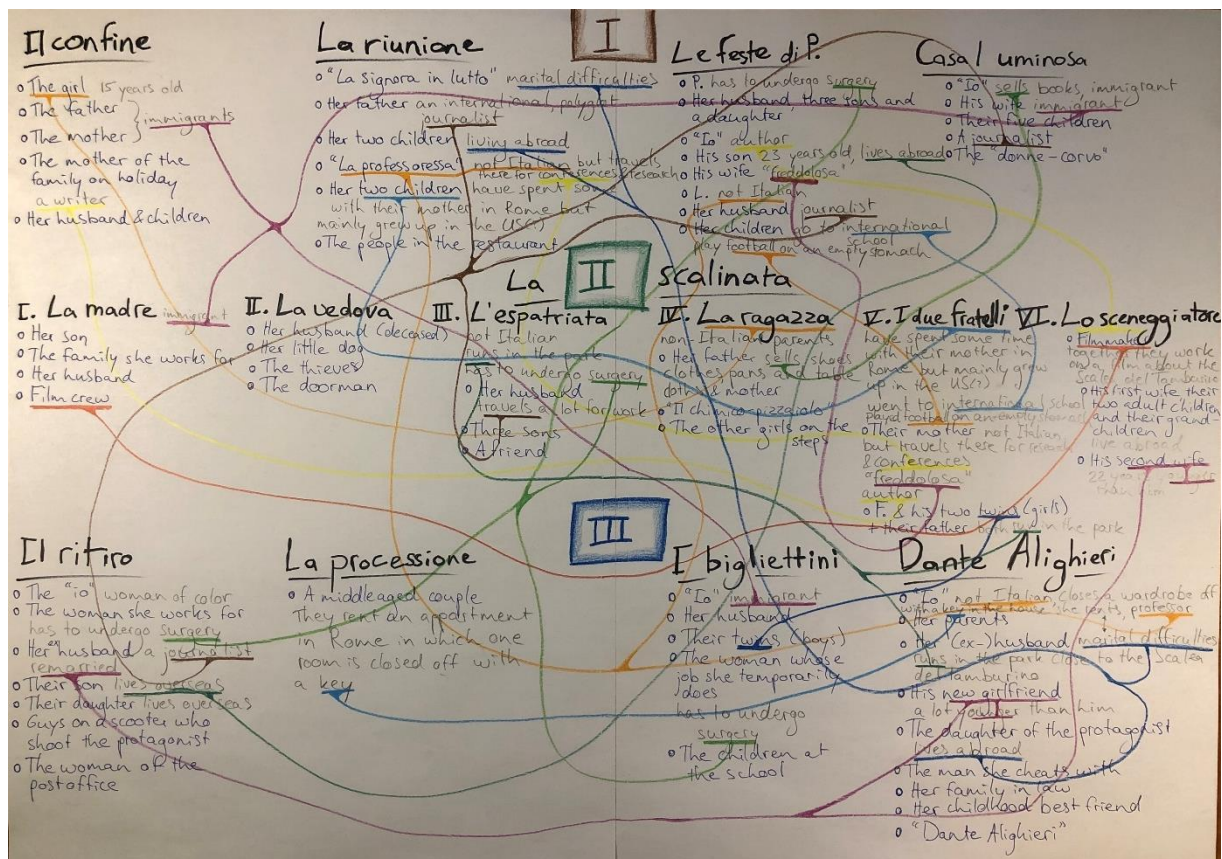

Fig. 1: Character resonances (the colors have no other function than to provide clarity; I used two light sources for this photo, apologies for the diffraction)

down the characters and their (relevant) traits that are mentioned in *Racconti romani*. Then I have drawn lines between resonating traits cross-*racconti*. The choice to make this a hand drawn map, is not out of convenience. It is a choice that is in accordance with what social network analysis scholar Judith Donath writes about hand drawn versus computer generated maps: "[T]he hand-drawn quality conveys subjectivity; it reminds the viewer that an artist is behind the map, and the map shows the world through his eyes". Because in this research, also in relation to sound studies, I attempt to make my own subject position very explicit, I have also decided on a hand drawn map.

The result is a chaotic network of resonances, full of instances of what I call 'almost-but-not-quite'. In "Il confine" the main character, a girl of fifteen years old, feels different from everyone at school; just like "la ragazza" in "La scalinata". They are also around the same age, but they cannot be the same person, because they live in different places. The father of "la ragazza" in "La scalinata" is a salesman who comes from another, faraway country, just like the narrator of "Casa luminosa", but the former sells "scarpe, vestiti, padelle, tovaglie" (131), while the latter sells books and has more children, of a younger age. The wife of the book seller joined her husband on another continent and left everything she knew to come to Rome, just like "la madre" in "La scalinata", but they cannot be the same person, because their husbands have different jobs, and "la madre" left her son back home while the wife of the book seller has her children with her in Rome. "La madre" sees a "troupe cinematografico" (111) filming on the stairs. This is almost surely for the film that "lo sceneggiatore" is working on, although this is not specified. It makes sense, as they are part of the same *racconto* "La scalinata". But yet these two characters never get in contact; none of the characters of the separate sections of "La scalinata" do. "Lo sceneggiatore", whose second wife is twenty two years younger than him, could be the same character as the (ex-)husband of the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri", who sees him in the church beside a woman who is a lot younger. Both characters live in the close surroundings of the Scalea del Tamburino. Yet they cannot be the same person, as the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri" is still officially married to her ex, whereas "lo sceneggiatore" is officially remarried. Then, there is the odd detail that the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri" rents out her apartment to tourists during the half of the year when she is in the United States, and she extensively describes how she closes a wardrobe where she leaves her personal belongings off with a key. Uncannily, the main characters of "La processione" stay as tourists in a house in Rome where a room is closed off with a key – an important theme in this story. Clearly, readers are tempted to connect these two details. However a wardrobe is certainly not a room. And there is more: there are several characters who are twins ("I bigliettini"; "La scalinata": "I due fratelli"), but their genders and lives are not the same; and there are four characters who in the near past or near future have undergone or will undergo surgery ("Il ritiro"; l'espatriata; "I bigliettini"; "Le feste di P.") – also, of course, underlining the fragility of these characters. There are three renowned (male) journalists ("Il ritiro"; "La riunione"; "Le feste di P.") who travel or have traveled the world, but their ages are different. There are many parents with adult children living or studying abroad: the daughter of the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri", the son of the protagonist of "Le

feste di P.", and both children of "la signora" in "Il ritiro". Several parents send their children to international school ("Le feste di P."; "I due fratelli"); and there are so many divorced or separated parents. There are people in mourning ("La riunione"; "Dante Alighieri"), and there are people, as will be discussed in the next section, symbolically living in the liminal space of the ocean: "la professoressa" in "La riunione", the mother of "I due fratelli" in "La scalinata", and the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri", although the former two live permanently in the US, whereas the latter lives between the US and Rome. Importantly, there are many writers: "la professoressa" in "La riunione", the mother of "i due fratelli" and "lo sceneggiatore" in "La scalinata", the narrator of "Le feste di P.", the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri", and in a way also the mother of the visiting family in "Il confine" – who seems to have written this whole *racconto* in the end. As I have mentioned, these writer characters allow Lahiri to play with the idea of the gaze (Rousseva). The resonances between the characters of *Racconti romani* occur even on the smallest, most detailed level: both "la professoressa" in "La riunione" and the mother of "i due fratelli" are described as "freddolose"; both "l'espatriata" in "La scalinata" and the ex-husband of the protagonist of "Dante Alighieri" tend to jog in the park close to the Scalea del Tamburino; and both in "Le feste di P." and "La scalinata" it occurs that children are playing football without eating enough, and then get unwell.

This selection out of a dizzying amount of resonances shows how the whole collection forms an assemblage of echoes, in which literary sound waves overlap, creating a diffractive pattern of differences within the liminal spaces between the *racconti*. The effect of these resonances – beside, as mentioned before, provoking for the reader a sense of interchangeability of these estranged characters – is that the reader is left with an unsatisfactory, almost eerie feeling: there are so many loose lines, which almost-but-not-quite connect the characters and the *racconti* to each other, and every time again this connection does not manifests itself, after all. This underscores the isolation of the characters even more. It creates, again, a tension, between belonging and not belonging; between the notion of network and the notion of isolation.

SILENT TREES, SCREAMING BIRDS, SHATTERING GLASS AND "IL SOSPIRO MISTERIOSO DELL'ACQUA NELLE ORECCHIE": A MORE-THAN-HUMAN SOUNDSCAPE OF LIMINALITY

Beyond the silence and noise between characters in *Racconti romani*, in this following section I would like to explore the more-than-human soundscape that is produced meta-narratively throughout the book: a macro-soundscape. There are some peculiar elements that resonate many times throughout the *racconti*, creating a constellation of echoes and contributing to the construction and embedding of the sense of liminality – an in-betweenness, being nor here nor there – that is experienced by almost all characters. They are all elements that we would not traditionally associate with Rome, or with the city in general. If we listen well, there are many snippets of nature in an environment that most would frame as fundamentally cultural. First of all, there are the birds, e.g. whose screaming in "Casa luminosa", as I already described, has an exclusionary effect on the main characters, and moreover a chilling effect on the

reader. Additionally, almost each *racconto* contains descriptions of one or several trees. Trees in Lahiri's writing have a strong symbolic function, inside *Racconti romani* and beyond. In *In altre parole* Lahiri writes that *Le metamorfosi* by Ovidius might be her favorite book, and she describes how the moment Dafne turns into a tree, the moment when it is not clear where the nymph ends and the tree starts, represents the idea of "essere qualcosa di indistinto, di ambiguo. Di avere una doppia identità" (121). Elsewhere, as paraphrases Jansen, Lahiri describes her own intercultural identity as a tree that is grafted several times, new branches being connected to the existing trunk that gives them life, making them inseparably connected: difference without separation. In both cases, the tree represents a liminal identity. In *Racconti romani*, trees have a slightly different symbolic function, I would argue. They represent fear (especially in "Casa luminosa" where one of the main characters has developed a phobia for trees), loneliness and estrangement. To be sure, trees are strange creatures in a city, standing silently and relatively alone, being often overlooked. They are at once essentially non-urban, and inherently part of the cityscape. In *Racconti romani* they could be seen as the counterparts of the characters, amplifying their isolation. For example, in "La scalinata", the solemn, silent, solitary "pino marino" at the top of the stairs could be seen as a symbol for the characters who all move past it on their own, separate times of the day, without getting into contact with each other. In "Dante Alighieri", the main character wonders: "Perché cadono le foglie dell'albero di giada appena le tocco?" (247), as if both the tree and the woman are cursed to isolation, prohibited to touch.

One of the most peculiar recurring themes in *Racconti romani*, is that of water. Why would I pay attention to water in an analysis of a soundscape? Surely, water makes sound, but in *Racconti romani* this sound is not always explicitly described. Its presence does contribute to the soundscape we form of the city in our minds while reading the book. Water is present on almost every page, both as matter and as metaphor and as something in between, but it is hidden; like Kramer's 'hum' we only notice it when we direct our attention towards it: perhaps like "il sospiro misterioso dell'acqua nelle orecchie" that "la ragazza" hears in "La scalinata" when she drifts for the first time (134). Furthermore, I analyze water in *Racconti romani* because it behaves similarly to sound. Both sound and water perform wave behavior; moreover, water can carry sound waves: "il sibilo delle onde mi pare quello di un serpente" (168), the guy whose friend just shot someone notices when he listens alone to the sea. The sea hisses at him, like a vicious animal, almost as if it is confronting him with his bad conscience. In *Racconti romani*, water does not only amplify sound, but also cancels it out, carrying silence. When the narrator of "Le feste di P." swims alone in open sea and gets into a dangerous situation when a boat comes towards him, he says: "Non avevo gridato, sarebbe stato inutile: il silenzio del mare, al largo, cancella tutto" (74). When we pay close attention to this sentence, it seems strange, the world inverted. Usually, we think of the ocean as a body of water that makes a lot of noise, and when it does not, it at least carries noise. How can silence cancel out noise? This seems physically unlikely, and therefore all the more striking and worth noting in relation to the recurrence of silence as a theme in the book.

Waves are capable to overlap, and as they do, patterns of difference are born, explains Karen Barad in her book about the phenomenon of 'diffraction', on which my methodology is based. As I have already shown, in *Racconti romani* we see how, instead of being detached unrelated stories, the characters and themes of the *racconti* flow into each other, like sound or water waves, forming one big assemblage. It is a fluid book; and therefore it is no coincidence that water has such a big role in it, as a blue thread, a connective tissue, carrying and amplifying the stories of these Romans. In this book water flows into every corner of the city, and leaves its mark: "[la] città dove l'acqua macchiava tutto quello che toccava" (*RR* 192). Just one example of an eerie water related echo, is the recurrence of "capelli bagnati" (16; 173; 194; 200; 228; 235). An odd detail to include so often, so it catches the eye, or the ear, rather. In Italy, having wet hair is a taboo, considered dangerous, almost. A commonly told story, part of the collective consciousness, is that if you go out with wet hair, you will get something called 'cervicale'. This is not medically proven or explainable, but Italians stubbornly believe in it. The wet hair of the characters of *Racconti romani* thus turns them into outsiders of this culture, and makes them, according to people who believe in this conspiracy, physically vulnerable, going hand in hand with their social position in the city. Even before knowing this story, when reading the book the wet hair already immediately stood out to me like a vulnerable detail; it reminds me of somebody who just took a bath in the protected space of their home, or children jumping in and out of the water in summer. Their wetness almost turns the characters into amphibian creatures who live liminal lives, between water and earth. Or perhaps these are just instances of them being flushed over by all the water this book contains.

Racconti romani even makes quite literal references to the phenomenon of diffraction. At the parties of P., the narrator notes, observing the visitors: "Ci si trovava davanti a due gruppi distinti, come due correnti opposte che si incrociano nel mare, che realizzano per un attimo una nitida forma simmetrica e che poi subito si cancellano" (39-40). This water pattern is exactly what diffraction is. Similarly to these two groups of people, I argue that the *racconti* in this collection also encounter each other in a diffractive way, creating patterns of difference. Also "la ragazza" in "La scalinata" experiences an instance of diffraction, when she unnotedly flows into the current of adolescents on the steps:

> Scendono insieme in uno sciame gorgogliante, o meglio, scivolano giù come una cascata, un flusso vitale (…). [La ragazza] si sente piacevolmente tirata in varie direzioni come se galleggiasse. Al posto del sospiro misterioso dell'acqua, ha nelle orecchie il mormorio delle voci delle altre ragazze. Ogni giorno, per due minuti o tre, sentendosi sia bene in vista sia impercettibile, si fonde a loro insaputa all'organismo collettivo – alle braccia, alle gambe lisce e scoperte, ai capelli sciolti – e immagina temporaneamente di essere una di loro. (…) La sensazione dura poco: è come quelle piogge ritrose che cadono per brevissimo tempo in estate, quando si sente lo scrocchio delle gocce, a una a una, sulle foglie o sul tetto o contro il vetro e si corre fuori un istante per sentire l'acqua sul viso. In effetti la ragazza avrebbe voglia di stare più a lungo sulla scalinata, anzi, di stare sempre sulla scalinata. (129-135)

This is an echo of what "la madre" notes earlier in the *racconto*: "La madre pensa che, pur essendo fatta di pietra, la scalinata di questa città è un po' come il mare la cui risacca restituisce tutto prima o poi" (113).

Both experience the stairs as a fluid rather than a sturdy place. It rhymes with their liminal, hybrid identities, that are not fixed but – because of their being in-between cultures – are unsettled, volatile, fluctuating. In relation to this, the fact that "La scalinata" as the backbone of the collection takes place on these steps is not coincidental. Jansen interprets this part of the book as the equivalent of the *Purgatorio*, the central section of the *Divina Commedia*, which, similarly to the Scalea del Tamburino, in Dante's case is also a mountain that can be climbed. I find this a clever interpretation which I do not discard, but I would like to give an additional interpretation of the stairs in this *racconto*. In Homi Bhabha's description of hybridity and liminality in *The Location of Culture*, he uses the image of a stairwell:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity (...). The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (5)

Accordingly, in *In altre parole* Lahiri describes the sense of in-betweenness she gets from climbing the bridges in Venice: "In mezzo a ogni ponte mi trovo sospesa, né di qua né di là" (*IAP* 77). Like Bhabha's stairwell, Lahiri's Venetian (*IAP*) and Roman (*RR*) steps also prevent us from settling into binary thinking or being. As Bhabha describes, movement is a crucial element of this process. When this idea of non-fixity in relation to hybrid identities and liminal spaces is projected onto Lahiri's "scalinata", we can explain the metaphor of water several characters use to describe the steps. The fluidity of the stairs matches the characters' identities, but it also creates hope for them: if nothing is fixed, perhaps they have to freedom to reinvent their identity, and the city with it, while they walk these steps.

Another peculiar presence of water in *Racconti romani* is that of the sea or the ocean. It is striking how often it occurs, as Rome is not (really) a coastal city; it does of course have a river, but the Tiber seems to have a less explicit presence than the sea – about this more in the last section of the thesis. Two characters who visit the city also find it striking: "Qui sa tutto di mare anche per via dei gabbiani. Non me l'aspettavo" (174). Jansen argues in an analysis of "La scalinata" that the references of "la madre" to the sea are connected to her traumatic experience of leaving her home country and her son behind, at the other side of the ocean. Indeed, there is not a more explicitly liminal space in *Racconti romani*, than the ocean, which splits many characters in two: they long for home, or travel back and forth each year, crossing that ocean; and they have children living at the other side of it, or even working at sea, helping refugees (217). The ocean, this vast, fluid body of water in between continents, in between cultures, stands for the hybridity and liminality of the characters of *Racconti romani*.

Often mentioned in relation to the sea, is a fourth more-than-human recurring element of *Racconti romani*, the sound of which it is worth sticking our ears out for: that of glass. "La madre" in "La scalinata" sees in the spinning bottles on the steps the turning light of a lighthouse (108), while "la vedova" muses about how the sharp pieces of glass on the stairs are nothing like the beautiful colored ones she used to find on the beach with her mother, all smoothened by the sea (114-115). At the end of the *racconto*, when "lo

sceneggiatore" is robbed, the thieves use this very glass they found on the steps as a weapon to threaten him (152-153). Similarly, broken glass appears in "I bigliettini", in which a lamp is shattered on the ground of the sewing atelier where the protagonist works, leaving thousands of splinters and even thinner powder which is toxic to inhale (189-190); and it appears in "La processione", in which the couple is shook by a deafening sound: "un rumore assordante nella casa, in un'altra stanza: un fracasso intenso e travolgente. (…) 'È sbattuta una delle ante della portafinestra in cucina.' (…) 'C'è vetro dappertutto?' 'Purtroppo sì. I frammenti ancora attaccati al telaio sono pericolosi.'" (189-190). I argue that the leitmotiv of scattered glass in *Racconti romani* symbolizes the all-over-the-place, scattered sense of identity that most characters experience. Moreover, I argue that it stands for fragility and danger at the same time, as if it is a metaphor for the characters themselves, as if in their state of isolation they have to choose either to be fragile, or to be sharp, as we saw with the widow and her discriminatory comments about the foreigners. If they are not sharp themselves, their shattered scattered identities will be used against them, as in the case of the scenario writer, who, lonely walking the steps at night, is threatened with sharp, broken glass. Again, like with the recurring theme of water, also here the book shapes hope: the glass could also stand for colorfulness, transparency and connection. The noise of the shattered glass in "La processione" finally leads the mourning couple to talk, and in "I bigliettini" it leads the protagonist to call her sons for help. Perhaps the characters of "La scalinata" can find beauty in the colored pieces, like the widow did on the beach (because, in the end, the steps are like the sea), or find inspiration in the networks formed by the adolescents on the stairs, who left the glass there in the first place, and whose presence on the Scalea del Tamburino is woven into the whole *racconto*, as a connective tissue.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a practice of diffractive listening to a collection of *racconti*: it has attended to the silences and noises produced in the stories, mapped the resonances in the liminal spaces between *racconti*, and interpreted the more-than-human macro-soundscape of the book. These instances of listening hover constantly in between the realm of material sound, and metaphorical sound – a dichotomy that the idea of 'resonance' actually deconstructs, as in principle, language *is* sound, so a metaphor uttered in language becomes a material sound in and of itself. I have argued that the sense of isolation of the characters in *Racconti romani* is often born from the silence of their surroundings, freezing them out – it is a silence that sometimes turns into discriminatory noise. Moreover, because of the thematic and character related resonances throughout the book, giving it an implicit meta-narrative, a tension arises. On the one hand, we see how the sometimes eerie similarities between the characters, and the recurrence of more-than-human elements like water and glass throughout the whole book, create hope for the characters, and an apparent network between them. The fluidity of water becomes a symbol for the malleability of their liminal identities, and the shattered glass for their fragility but transparency and colorful beauty, making clear their potential to reimagine themselves against the backdrop of the everchanging city. On the other

hand, despite their striking similarities, connections between the characters of different *racconti* in the end never are effected. Once and again, we think to recognize the recurrence of characters cross-*racconti*, but eventually this is never the case. This underlines for the reader the interchangeability and isolation of these anonymous Roman lives, echoed by the solitary silent trees in the city. The characters are not only frozen out by the silence of their surroundings; their own voices are also silenced. Similarly, one could say about the *racconti* themselves to be largely unlistened-to in the city of Rome: they are not the kind of writings that are usually considered or accepted as part of the dominant narrative that exists within and about the city of Rome. But they are there. They are like a 'hum', as Kramer calls it; something that turns into sound once we turn our attention towards it. Literature, as argues Paulson, picks up unusual noises from society, transforms them, and sends them back into the world. I argue that Lahiri attends to this 'hum' of voices yet to be heard in the city, bundles them together in this collection of *Racconti romani* which she then redirects into the city – an amplification of urgent tellings.

CHAPTER TWO: DIFFRACTIVE LISTENING TO INTERTEXTUAL RESONANCE BETWEEN ROMAN *RACCONTI*

"Mi spiego:" (Jhumpa Lahiri *Racconti romani* 223)

By adding this little phrase, the narrator of the last one of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Racconti romani* not only makes the speech act explicit that these 'tellings' are, but also the presence of a listener, someone she is narrating the story to, someone in need of further explanation. The implicated presence of the audience is one of the important characteristics of the twentieth century Italian *racconto*. It is not only by its title that Lahiri's *Racconti romani* – literally derived from the seminal 1950s work by Alberto Moravia – is in conversation with this Italian literary tradition. Also stylistically and thematically, we can detect many resonances. This second chapter interprets Lahiri's book as part of a web of literary writings: a palimpsestic assemblage of resonances. It also examines how Lahiri moves beyond this tradition, by positioning her writings on the intersection between this twentieth century *racconto* form, and a more recent development of authors who write down the often silenced stories of immigrated Romans. Both currents pay attention to the marginalized and unheard voices in the city of Rome – as, like we have seen in the first chapter, does Lahiri. I provide a genre-specific analysis, focusing on Lahiri's book in relation to the Italian genre of the *racconto*. A comparative analysis in this specific light has not been done yet and is crucial, I argue, for the understanding of how literary resonances happen within the realm of this slightly recalcitrant genre, in the specific case of Lahiri but also more broadly within the assemblages of twentieth and twenty-first century *racconti*. As I will demonstrate, interpretations of *Racconti romani* that do not take into consideration the peculiarities of the Italian literary landscape in which they position themselves, and the stylistic traits that come with this, can lead to a misunderstanding of some of their elements. In Italy, the genre of the *racconto* is what I call 'controcorrente': in these short stories, with their sometimes provocative tone and intuitive style, writers tend to highlight parts of society that are not often written about. Indeed, they transcend, as argues Caterina Romeo in "From *Pecore nere* to *Future*: Anthologizing intersectional Blackness in contemporary Italy", traditional modes of writing in Italian: "experimental and irreverent writing styles, a sharp use of irony, and a somewhat 'affectionate' disrespect for Italian 'mainstream' society and ancient culture, which no longer intimidate the authors" (611). This chapter will explore some of these writings and the resonances between them, both in terms of thematic and style.

The first section of the chapter goes extensively into the genre of the *racconto* in relation to the Italian literary landscape at large, guided by Lahiri's own explanation of it in the introduction of an anthology she has edited for an anglophone audience: *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* (*Penguin*). Subsequently, the

close reading part of this chapter reads Lahiri's *racconti* through two currents of stories. First, it listens to resonances between Lahiri and the twentieth century Italian *racconto*. Here, the first section explains the style of the genre by listening to Alberto Moravia's *Racconti romani*. Then, it close reads short story "L'uomo dagli occhiali" by Elsa Morante, from her collection *Lo scialle andaluso*. Next, it close reads Lahiri in relation to Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Ragazzo e Trastevere" from his *Racconti romani*. The second literary current this chapter attends to, is that of more recent, twenty-first century *racconti* that are part of the broader field of Italian migration literature. Firstly, I analyze "Dismatria" by Igiaba Scego, from the collection *Pecore nere*; then "RapdiPunt" by Ubah Cristina Ali Farah – both through Lahiri's collection of *Racconti romani*. For all these writings, I will show that although the *racconto* is in fact a widely used genre in Italy throughout the twentieth century until now, authors who use it tend to write about people or themes that usually remain unseen in Italy and, in my case, in the city of Rome. Their characters, for example, are people who are usually not considered particularly Roman. Moravia writes about the precarious lives of taxi drivers, prostitutes and thieves of the city, Pasolini about the youth that commits little crimes and moves at the margins of the city, while having no future, Ali Farah writes about the sense of isolation of young women of color, and Scego writes about hybrid, liminal identities and questions of belonging; all often use complex, paradoxical, divided Rome as background.

Although the aforementioned *Penguin* anthology edited by Lahiri, and particularly her introduction to it, is guiding in my analysis of the *racconti* I discuss, the stories I have selected for my close reading do not appear in this collection. This is mainly because most stories in it are not as linked to Rome as was needed for my research, in which a focus specifically related to that city is essential. Morante and Moravia do appear in the collection, Pasolini does not, but because of the importance of his *racconti* in the Roman literary landscape, and moreover the striking thematic resonances with Lahiri, a close reading of one of his *racconti* is included.

Romero argues that short story collections have had and have the potential to have an "innovative function in the Italian literary and cultural context" (608) – she makes this comment in relation to *Pecore nere*, a collection from which I also analyze one story. Although some comments will be made on the collections the short stories stem from or appear in, my analysis chooses to mostly focus on the *racconti* separately from the context of their collections. Other than the fact that an analysis which does take these into account simply would stretch this research beyond its scope, I am mostly interested in how entanglements between separate *racconti*, as little instances of resonance, can be seen to form assemblages in and off themselves, that transcend their fixed position inside the books they happen to be published in. Accordingly, I argue that *racconti* also have an innovative function in and off themselves, by the noise they produce individually and in resonance with one another.

This chapter is perhaps the most traditionally comparative of the whole thesis. In this comparative analysis, it will take an intertextual diffractive approach. This means, amongst other things, that it will avoid juxtaposition. As I have explained in my introduction, diffractive thinking makes juxtaposition

impossible, as it regards texts as inherently inseparably entangled instead of opposable. I will, therefore, read the stories *through* each other, listening, for example, how the reading of one *racconto* unavoidably influences the reading of another. In this, my subject position is important and will be taken into consideration.

Inevitably, I am in conversation with the existing discourse on intertextuality. As I explained in the introduction, in the 1930s Mikhail Bakhtin recognized that a literary text is not a self-contained unit, but that it consists of a multiplicity of voices which are informed by and embedded in discourses not only within, but also outside of the text; for this phenomenon he used the term 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 262-263). Later, Bakhtin chooses a more sonic term to indicate this: in the case-study *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he uses 'polyphony' to talk about the plurality of voices present inside Dostoevsky's work. These voices are continuously in conversation with each other: "[They] are not self-enclosed or deaf to one another. They hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another" (47). In other words: they form a resonating assemblage. My research extrapolates the implicit sonic nature of Bakhtin's heteroglossia and polyphony by taking seriously its material sonic overtones. This will be applied to another genre than the novel, i.e. the Italian *racconto*.

Julia Kristeva extrapolated the idea of Bakhtin, because she saw as an inevitable consequence of his theory that not only a text within itself consists of a plurality of society-informed voices, but that texts are also all in conversation among each other, or even more so, entangled with and dependent upon each other in their meaning production. Kristeva coined this phenomenon as 'intertextuality': "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). Intertextuality is an organic mechanism: because of the deconstructionist idea that signs are not stable, a text cannot be subject to stable signification, and is always on the move within this broader web of texts. When interpreted in this way, the notion of intertextuality holds many parallels with that of a soundscape. Like a web of texts, a soundscape has a multidirectional form, consists of noises, resonances and echoes, which in their perception are inextricably connected. Stretching this point even further, we could frame an 'intertext' as a soundscape in and of itself, especially if we come to terms with the fact that language is, in fact, sound.

LAHIRI AND THE GENRE OF THE *RACCONTO*

Roughly three years before publishing the collection of *Racconti romani*, Lahiri collected and edited, for an anglophone audience, *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, published by Penguin Classics. Many of the stories are translated by Lahiri herself. This collection, especially its introduction, will be a leading document in this chapter, as it shows Lahiri's awareness of, and interaction with the intertextual field of Italian *racconti*, four years after the publication of her first *racconto* in Italian, in *In altre parole* (*IAP*). In the

introduction, Lahiri extensively goes into the nature of the genre of the *racconto*, which, indeed, is slightly different from the English genre of the 'short story' – and this is why I have been calling these writings '*racconti*'. Following the important anthology of Enzo Siciliano, Lahiri explains the difference between the 'novella' and the 'racconto'. The *novella*, not to be confused of course with the English word 'novel', is a genre that was born in the late middle ages, extensively used by Matteo Bandello, Masuccio Salernitano, and in Giovanni Boccaccio's famous *Decameron*. The *racconto* is a newer genre, which, as writes Lahiri, "is etymologically connected to the English 'recount': a telling (...). A *racconto* aims to communicate a story, personally and purposefully, to a listener" (*Penguin* xvi-xvii). This is an important detail for my research, as it is exactly the implicated speech act inherent to the genre that, I argue, turns *racconti* into sound. It is not silent text we are reading. We are this listener, and the text presented to us is told, not written.

As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, Stiliana Milkova Rousseva is quite critical of Lahiri's style in her review of *Racconti romani*, asserting that the writing has a "dry, somewhat clinical descriptive voice". I argue that Rousseva underestimates the influence of the genre conventions of the Italian *racconto* on this work. It is a genre well known to the Italian reader it is written for (*Penguin* xi), in a country where the *racconto* is indispensable from the literary landscape of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Because it is a telling instead of a writing, as argued above, it is by nature somehow simpler, less ingeniously constructed, more intuitive even, as explained by Lahiri herself when she addresses Moravia's *Racconti romani* – "a cornerstone of the twentieth-century Italian short-story tradition" (*Penguin* xvii) – in the introduction of the Penguin collection. She paraphrases Moravia's claim that "a *racconto* is something born from *intuizione*, intuition. I agree. (...) The novel, according to Moravia, derives from reason, and is imbued with structure, elements that short stories routinely undermine and resist" (xvii *Penguin*). This is in line with Lahiri's autobiographical description of the writing of her own first *racconto*, as she portrays it in *In altre parole*: "Lì, a una scrivania anonima, mi viene in mente un racconto intero in italiano. Viene in un lampo. Ascolto le frasi nel cervello. Non so da dove vengano, non so come io riesca a sentirle" (57 *IAP*). It is as if she is sonically persuaded by this Italian genre, dragging her away from her writing habits in English, a language in which, as she explains, writing was a slower process of construction. Instead, when writing a *racconto*, she just comes up with three simple elements: a person, a moment and a place (*IAP* 55). The rest follows. I would like to emphasize the role sound plays in this process, like we read in the above citation: Lahiri does not *imagine* – she *listens* to the unfolding of the *racconto* in her head.

I argue that the intuitiveness and the active resistance of structure and reason in the genre of the *racconto*, are inherently connected to the telling-aspect of *racconti*. When one writes down a story, one has more time to think, more space to cut and paste, deconstruct and reconstruct until a coherent text emerges. Moreover, one perhaps takes into account the audience which, when reading, has more time to process, think, read over. When one tells a story, instead, to a *listener*, one does not have time to think, the language becomes more spontaneous, less complex and artificial, lives and dies in the moment. At the same time, the teller has to take into account that the listener has little time to process: the story cannot have too many elements, the listener has to follow. And indeed, as we have read before, Lahiri claims *racconti* to be

written for a listener, not for a reader. Most importantly, in this genre, as Lahiri writes, the listener is implicated in the act of telling (*Penguin* xvi-xvii). The narrators, who as I have explained often experience isolation, might be liberated from their loneliness by this aspect of the genre: a listening ear is finally shaped for them. Later, I will show how this genre specific element functions in the writings of Moravia, which have been the most explicit source of inspiration for Lahiri's collection.

Accordingly, I argue that a *racconto* is essentially a conversation, an instance of interaction – although with one silent and one speaking participant, in which the silence is turned around: now we are the ones who have to silently listen to those who are usually silenced. Lahiri writes in the introduction of the Penguin anthology:

> The spirit of the *racconto* implies a dynamic relation, with at least two people involved; though distinct from dialogue, it indicates a form, immediate and typically brief, of exchange. In modern Italian, the verb *raccontare* is commonly used, in conversation, when people want to narrate something casually but colourfully, imbuing this literary term with ongoing quotidian currency. (xvi-xvii)

This means that the genre of the *racconto* rebels against the passive and silent readers' response other literary genres tend to take into account. Instead, I propose, a *racconto* in fact tries to evoke a reaction.

It is not surprising that Lahiri chooses this genre to accompany her on her journey of discovery in this new language. In her writing in general, she is seeking interaction: "La mia scrittura non è che una reazione, una risposta alla lettura. Insomma, una specie di dialogo. Le due cose sono strettamente legate, interdipendenti" (*IAP* 39). Beyond the interaction with the reader, though, here she rather addresses an intertextual kind of interaction, which reaches out to other texts, and converses with them. Accordingly, Lahiri's switch to the Italian language for her writings comes as a logical step after her choice to read only in Italian (*Penguin* ix), and moreover I suggest that her choice for the genre of the Italian short story in *Racconti romani* could be seen as a logical result of her research into the genre, which also manifests itself in her collecting and editing of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*. This chapter, beyond the evident interaction of *racconti* with the listener, which turns Lahiri's writings into sounding conversing pieces of literature, focuses on the – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – resonating dialogues between Lahiri and other Italian short story authors.

ITALY'S LITERARY LANDSCAPE: "AN OPEN SYSTEM"?

As Lahiri describes in the introduction of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, the Italian literary landscape is, partly because of the absence of extensive translation, to a certain extent self-contained (x), with of course some internationally famous exceptions. But so is the English, in fact: "Every language is a walled entity. English is a particularly fortified one", Lahiri argues (xviii). By editing the Penguin collection, Lahiri tries to contribute to the breaking down of this wall between the English and the Italian reading world, making the Italian literary landscape more accessible for anglophone readers. "The fruit of

my research was the discovery of a potent, robust tradition of the short form in Italy, a harvest far more vast and varied than I'd anticipated" (xi), she writes. In selecting the *racconti* for the collection, she focuses on the twentieth century (xii), and moreover, she explains: "It was my priority to feature women authors, lesser-known and neglected authors" (xii) resulting in a collection that not only educates English speaking audiences about writers they never heard of, but moreover often contains authors who are even forgotten in Italy itself (xviii). Because of the latter, the same collection has also been published in Italian, by Guanda: *Racconti Italiani scelti e introdotti da Jhumpa Lahiri*. Thus, one could say that Lahiri's editing work has a decentralizing and destabilizing effect on the Italian literary landscape. Not only does her edited anthology for non-Italian speakers break down the walls around it, but moreover, by editing also a version for Italians themselves from her outsider's perspective, it is as if she holds up a mirror to them.

In the introduction of the English version Lahiri addresses the complex issue of dealing with the way women are portrayed in many of the – male written – stories. Indeed, upon reading e.g. Alberto Moravia's *Racconti romani* myself, I have been struck by the way women tend to be described: as flat characters, either as an object of desire or as an object of repulsion, and most often as both at the same time. Already on the first page of the first *racconto* in Moravia's collection, we read:

> La donna, poi, era proprio magrissima, col viso affilato e lungo tra due onde di capelli sciolti e il corpo sottile in una vesticciola verde che la faceva parere un serpente. Ma aveva la bocca rossa e piena, simile ad un frutto, e gli occhi belli, neri e luccicanti come il carbone bagnato; e dal modo col quale mi guardò mi venne voglia di combinare l'affare. (3)

Lahiri explains that her choice to include these kind of stories in the collection, despite their sexism, was based on a desire to represent Italy as it really is: she wanted to show how the writings represent the patriarchal structures of Italian society that women had to deal with and continue to face (xiii). Her collection critically echoes these structures.

Paradoxically, to Lahiri this 'walled entity' is at the same time an open, network-like landscape. It is not a coincidence that my approach of Lahiri's *racconti* and Italian *racconti* in general is very much focused on the notion of network. Apart from the fact that I like to approach literary intertextuality in general, self-evidently, as a network-like phenomenon, Lahiri herself also describes the twentieth century Italian literary landscape – or soundscape, if you will – as very interconnected. She explains how during fascism and the Second World War, the country forcibly turned itself inward, politically, culturally and even linguistically, when Benito Mussolini even started to ban foreign words from the Italian language – after and in continuation of a period in which it had been attempted to make a national unity from Italy, a fairly new country (xiv-xv). This period and Mussolini's subsequent strategy included a process of linguistic homogenization and the cancelling out of dialects, eliminating their mosaic of cultural and linguistic variety. Nonetheless, Italy's authors have always had an outward, transnational orientation, up until today, argues Lahiri, and "its literature [is] always an open system" (xx). She also speaks from her own experience here as a foreign-Italian writer, whose literary endeavors in the language have always been welcomed with

relative openness (xx) – standing in stark contrast with the hostile fact that "the government still denies birthright citizenship to Italians with foreign-born parents" (xix-xx). Lahiri claims that this "open system" started to blossom even more in the period of post-war freedom, when the amount of literary magazines grew, many of which founded by authors represented in the collection edited by Lahiri, and "the spirit of community and collaboration among writers" grew (xv-xvi). This shows how it came to be that the "separation between writers and publishers is less rigid in Italy, and the editorial milieu, more intimate, less corporate than its American counterpart" (*Penguin* xix). Often, writers went, and continue to go into editing themselves, and vice versa. In general, Lahiri emphasizes the hybrid identities of the Italian authors of the twentieth century, who not only often had various jobs on the side of their writing or editing pursuits, but who also played with this shifting sense of identity inside their writing and by using pseudonyms (xii). In this period, "[the] editors prided themselves on promoting new, innovative, heterodox voices. They were proof of how individually published short stories, free from the economic machinery of book publishing, are by definition autonomous texts" (xix). It is indeed in this literary landscape, that the rise of the *racconto* occurred (xix). In the collection, Lahiri has made an attempt to capture this "range of voices" (xi) that have uttered them: "a wide net" (xi). Between the authors, there is a "myriad personal connections" (xvi), like a true network, or as I would call it, a resonating assemblage:

> Several members of this group knew one another during their lifetimes. They sustained, influenced, promoted, edited, reviewed and were at odds with one another. They formed part of a community, a network, bound together by vital personal and professional friendships and, in one case, even by marriage. (*Penguin* xii)

With the latter, Lahiri refers to Elsa Morante and Alberto Moravia, who have a central place in the close reading of this chapter – together with Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was their friend. Also the contemporary writers I will discuss in a later section, know and influence each other, especially Jhumpa Lahiri and Igiaba Scego – I will reference a printed conversation between the two authors. I have doubted for some time, if for my comparative analysis choosing authors who (intimately) knew each other would make my argument less convincing. After having read the introduction of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, Lahiri actually convinced me that the opposite is true: as the Italian twentieth century literary landscape consisted of such an intricate network of connections, we should not evade this connectivity when we analyze how literary resonance functions in this context. The way several authors influence each other and, as a result, their works seem to resonate, is in fact exactly the object of this study.

RACCONTI FROM THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: ALBERTO MORAVIA, ELSA MORANTE AND PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

In this section, I will listen to literary resonances between Lahiri and twentieth century *racconti* writers. As I have shown in my analysis of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories*, Lahiri is quite aware of this literary field. It is a field which springs from the innovative approach of the Italian Realist writers who, at the turn of the century, started to be "alert to social tensions, refusing to elevate or evade" (*Penguin* 7), Lahiri writes

in her introduction about Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), who was part of the school of *Verismo*, which did not eliminate dialect and described poorer lives as they really, supposedly, were. The three writers I discuss in this section follow in the footsteps of Verga – and Lahiri herself, I argue, does as well – : Moravia, Morante and Pasolini are amongst the most famous Italian authors of *racconti* which draw the reader's attention to the lives of marginalized people.

According to Lahiri, important themes in the twentieth century stories collected in *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* are, amongst other things: "the theme of identity, of fluctuating selfhood, and (...) the issue of naming in particular. Characters have complicated relationships to their names, and a few lack names altogether" (xiii). This is in line with the role of hybridity, liminality and anonymity in Lahiri's own *racconti*, which I have discussed in chapter one. Moreover, Lahiri adds: "the anthology contains powerful mediations on alienation, estrangement, states of solitude. The only true common ground for each of these authors is the Italian language, an invention in and of itself, described by Leopardi as '*piuttosto un complesso di lingue che una sola*'" (xvi). This is striking, because before, on the other hand, the interactivity between authors was underlined. Having been a prominent topic in chapter one, also here we thus see a tension between the simultaneous network and isolation of the authors, something which evidently resonates through in their characters. The Leopardi quote about language consonates *avant-la-lettre* with Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia', and is used by Lahiri to refer to this literary assemblage of diverging voices that turn Italian literature into a cacophony. These voices talk in a language that belongs to no one and gets reinvented every time someone decides to write in it. Another theme is the more-than-human, in particular the role of trees, birds, glass and water – I will read *racconti* that deal with this through my close reading of these themes in Lahiri's *Racconti romani.*

I agree with the resonance cross-*racconti* of these three themes Lahiri points out: hybrid identity and anonymity; estrangement and isolation; and the more-than-human. The close reading section of this chapter will analyze these resonances and point out how also in Lahiri's own short story collection, *Racconti romani*, these same themes recur. Before going into a close reading of the thematic resonances, however, I would like to pay attention to the aforementioned stylistic component that makes *racconti* into sonic text, and moreover, into conversation. In doing so, I take Alberto Moravia's *racconti* as an example. I have listened to five of Moravia's *Racconti romani*, read by Roman actor Valerio Aprea, broadcasted by *RaiRadio3: Ad alta voce*. Although the 'telling' already becomes explicit in the written versions of the stories, listening to them completely conveys this element, making the listener almost forget that these words have been written on a page. It is truly as if a narrator is, convincingly, spontaneously, telling the listener a story, inventing the words as it continues. Nothing about these *racconti* is cleverly construed, everything sounds 'intuitive' as Lahiri and Moravia himself already claimed about the genre.

First of all, the language that is being used is generally very colloquial. Several times, the narrators utter a Roman "Eh" of affirmation – even in the written version. Furthermore, the word "basta" as a filler word recurs a few times, outside of its verb function. Also, "insomma" is said on almost every page, as if the

narrator is trying to sum things up for the listener, trying to clarify what he (all of these five stories have a male narrator) has actually been saying, or perhaps suddenly aware that he is being long-winded. Second, there are many instances where the language refers to itself as being spoken, when the narrators say, for example: "voglio dire che" (Moravia 64); "e non dico che" (172); "Bisogna dire che" (116); "dico la verità, faceva paura" (170); "lo confesso" (261); and "Dico una mela e non scherzo" (321). The narrators sometimes correct themselves or reflect on things they have said earlier, also very typical for spoken as opposed to written language: "Avevo la testa vuota (...). Ho detto che avevo la testa vuota, ma (...)" (63), says the narrator of "Il pensatore", realizing while he is speaking that what he is saying is not exactly correct, and should be adjusted to the nuances of the truth; and later, when he starts to have ugly thoughts about his customers, he says: "Non era un gran pensiero, lo riconosco, ma (…)" (64), not only reflecting on his own past thoughts, but also in a way confessing and at the same time justifying them to who is listening. There are also explanations in which a listening audience is implicated: "Mezzo milione poi non è una gran somma" (118), says the narrator of "Lo sciupone", half contemplating on the fact, half explaining to the listener the monetary situation at the time the story takes place. "Doveva essere rimasto, come si dice, al 'carissimo amico,' ossia al punto di partenza" (170), explains the narrator of "Impataccato", clarifying a Roman colloquialism. The explanations are sometimes even directed straight to the listener, when the narrator uses the second person plural: "come noterete" (64); "Avete mai veduto il fuoco saltar su da un po' di petrolio se ci avvicinate un fiammifero? Così (…)" (116); "Ma sapete che va dicendo?" (120). Lastly, this second person is also often applied when the narrator is rhetorically trying to convince the point he is making to the listener:

> Provatevi a dire ad alta voce: 'Mi serve un paio di scarpe… mi serve un pettine… mi serve un fazzoletto,' tacete un momento per rifiatare, e poi dite: 'Mi serve un pranzo,' e sentirete subito la differenza. Per qualsiasi cosa potete pensarci su, cercare, scegliere, magari rinunziarci, ma il momento che confessate a voi stesso che vi serve un pranzo, non avete più tempo da perdere. Dovete trovare il pranzo, se no morirete di fame. (320)

By including the audience into the story in this way, Moravia's narrator tries to evoke in them a sense of empathy with himself, right before he tells them something slightly criminal he has done. In Lahiri's *racconti* this spoken style is less explicit. With a few exceptions – like the one cited in the epigraph of this chapter – she never clearly directly addresses the listener. This is in accordance with Marta Santi, who argues that in the case of more modern Italian short stories the performativity has a more covert presence – this does not mean it is not there; rather, the performance of the story shifts to the readers themselves (153-154) who, I argue, form a soundscape in their mind of the 'telling', in line with their expectations of a text written in this genre with its conventions. Nonetheless, the style of Lahiri's *racconti* rhymes with the style of Moravia. As argued before, in the introduction of *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* Lahiri shows to be aware of Moravia's literary writings and moreover also of his reflections on the genre. She is not only in conversation with him in the obvious reference in the title, but also stylistically. Like Moravia's *racconti*, the ones by Lahiri have a very intuitive build-up, and as is Rousseva's critique they have a

"descriptive voice". Although Rousseva's comment is concerned with the English translation of the text, the Italian *racconti* have a similar tone and structure. They do not consist of dense literary text or ingenious, calculated literary constructions, but flow as if they are spoken, from one person to another.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will close read Lahiri's book through a *racconto* by Morante and one by Pasolini, and discuss thematic resonances. As I have already extensively delved into Moravia for the sake of discussing style, I will not go into a close reading of a particular short story of him here. My first diffractive close reading engages with "L'uomo dagli occhiali" by Elsa Morante, written in 1936 and published in *Lo scialle andaluso*. I have chosen this story for a diffractive analysis, because it resonates with Lahiri's collection in terms of the vulnerability of the characters. Moreover, it is perhaps the *racconto* in *Lo scialle andaluso* in which the city plays the strongest role, although it remains unspecified which city it concerns. A cold, snowy winter as described in the story seems unlikley in Rome, but there have been winters like that in the city in the 1930s and 1920s. Perhaps, however, this does not matter a great deal. Morante lived in Rome for most of her life, a city that greatly influenced her writing, and it is interesting to look at the way she sets a *racconto* in a city, regardless from the question whether that city is Rome. Actually, the fact that she chooses not to specify the city adds an interesting element when we consider the notion of anonymity. In Lahiri, one of the only things that is not anonymous, is the name of the city in which these stories take place, even specified in the title of the collection. The characters and often also the specific locations of the stories remain abstract. In Morante's case, some of the characters do have names (Maria; Clara) – although the main figure of the *racconto* always remains "l'uomo dagli occhiali". The city, however, stays anonymous here, rendering the place, not the characters, interchangeable. In this anonymous city, we follow a confused, shaggy man, who roams the city looking for someone. The story gets eerie when he stops to wait in front of a school gate, and talks to a girl who tells him: "È morta ieri". The perspective switches to that of the girl, who in the middle of a crowd finds the ghost of her deceased friend. The latter tells her how she died, and that the man we got to know earlier killed her – most likely, he is Death himself.

There are a lot of resonances with Lahiri's writing in this *racconto*, but first I wanted to draw our attention to the fact that sound has a very prominent role. The loneliness that is present in this piece of writing, experienced among others by "l'uomo dagli occhiali", is amplified by echoes, that make clear that the only one the man is interacting with, is himself: "E rise forte, ascoltando la propria voce ripercuotersi a lungo sul ponte vuoto. – Eppure non bevo mai, – disse a voce alta, come per giustificarsi". The same holds for the voice of Clara, who is in vain screaming for her friend: "un'eco replicò la sua voce, poi un'altra eco, da punti lontani". Noise also functions to make clear that the perspective we are following, is not a trustworthy one; that we are getting a distorted impression of reality. When the man walks out of the house, "lo scricchiolio della scala di legno suonò come un rimbombo vicinissimo ai suoi orecchi". The fact that he hears a small sounds so intensely, already gives the reader a sign something is off. The opposite happens on the sickbed of the little girl: "io sentii che lui rideva con un rumore basso. La sua risata correva per la camera come un topo, ed io non riuscivo a scacciarlo, anche coprendomi gli orecchi. Udivo

lontano le vostre voci che parlavano di me, e capivo che eravate intorno al mio letto". The fact she hears the actual voices that are next to her from so far away, maybe gives an indication she is dying. Like in Lahiri's writing, sound and silence are thus used to express the isolation of the characters. Moreover, the deafening sound Clara hears could be compared to the deafening noise of the "donne-corvo" (91) in "Casa luminosa", where a surreal sound gives the already isolated characters an extra unsafe feeling.

The story of Morante is full of representations of precarity and poverty. The *racconto* starts: "Il tre dicembre (era un giovedí) l'uomo uscí dal suo studio squallido posto alla periferia della città. I suoi capelli erano arruffati, la barba lunga e irta per il freddo, e le occhiaie mettevano sulle sue guance un'ombra nera". This man is immediately described as a man who is lost, wanders lonely around the city: "errare da pazzo". It is a precarious kind of wandering, in the cold city, where he does not find who he is looking for and loses his mind. With 'precarious wandering' I mean an instance of walking that opposes the idea that is usually connected to wandering, that is, an activity born from the luxurious position of being able to do something that has no goal. 'Precarious wandering', contrarily, is a kind of walking that underlines the (bodily) fragility of the character, exposed to loneliness and severe circumstances like freezing cold, while they cannot do *but* wander, in search of something they are not sure they can find. If, like De Certeau argues, walking in the city inscribes it with meaning, (a literary description of) precarious wandering inscribes it with vulnerability.

Also the girls are precarious wanderers. When the perspective has switched to that of Clara, also she finds herself lost in a "folla senza numero" in which "il suono dei loro passi era continuo, simile ad una pioggia, e come attutito da un'immensa distanza" – note again the sonic description in combination with irrational distance. Later, the girls find each other, but then loose each other again and cannot hear each other: "Ma non riuscí a far sentire la sua domanda, né il suo accento di rimprovero". Within this whole dynamic of precarious wandering, the body is depicted as ultimately fragile. The ghost of the girl is described: "In mezzo a quelle alte case senza forma, ella sembrava cosí piccola, che Clara ne ebbe pietà" and opening her school uniform, "'Sotto non ha nulla', pensò [Clara]". The *racconto* ends with a bitter sweet moment, when the girls look at the body of Maria in the cold snow; a beautiful instance of bodily fragility, in which the girl cannot help but grow into a woman – even beyond death: "Si vedeva che il petto cominciava a nascere; sulla pelle infantile, bianca, ai due lati spuntavano due piccole cose ignude, simili a due nascenti gemme di fiore. Risero insieme, piano piano." It is, however, not just the girl who has died who is fragile. Also the man who supposedly is Death himself, is depicted as afraid, during various instances in the *racconto*. Even when he is in the room of dying Maria and admits he wants to make her afraid, he cannot hide his own fear: "ma ancora non oso toccarti". He does not say he does not *want* to touch her yet; no, he does not *dare* to do it.

This *racconto* reminds me very much of "Il ritiro" in Lahiri's *Racconti romani* – a story in which two guys on a scooter shoot a woman of color. First of all, both stories have a sudden switch of focalization in the middle. In Morante's story, we start with the character who does evil, in Lahiri we end with him.

Interestingly, both in Morante and Lahiri, good as well as evil are depicted as fragile. As I have explained for the case of Morante above, the character that impersonates evil, is described as poor and moreover also afraid. This can be compared to Moravia's stories as well; many of them are written from the perspective of a villain, and as I have shown we are seduced to feel sympathy for the precarious living that is behind these deeds. In Lahiri's case, one of the guys on the scooter, through whom we focalize the last part of the story, feels very depressed and alone, and also feels like his life in the city is in danger of changing because of the foreigners. Perhaps in this case, the villain (or actually the accomplice of the villain) is living a less precarious life. But he is utterly lonely. In the depiction of this loneliness we see both in Morante as well as in Lahiri a tension between network and isolation – as I have elaborated on extensively in the first chapter. In Morante's story, it becomes clear that the man we follow does have a social network. But in the conversation with the doorkeeper as well as at the dairy shop, it becomes clear that they do not understand each other, talk completely past each other, even have a different sense of time: the man thinks yesterday was Sunday, while everybody says that today is Thursday. Even if we are inside the focalization of the man, we understand that he has lost a rational sense of time. Also when we are inside the perspective of Clara, the setting suddenly shifts from a full schoolyard to a completely empty one, and the girl suddenly finds herself alone: "La bambina si volse indietro, verso la scuola; le compagne, certo stanche d'aspettarla, erano andate via, e le finestre erano chiuse; anche la cancellata era chiusa, ed ella si meravigliò che la scuola, già cosí animata, si fosse in pochi minuti fatta deserta". In the story of Lahiri, the guy has many friends and family members, even right there at the beach where they go after they shot the woman, but he distances himself from them, goes into the sea, because nobody can understand how he is feeling about what happened.

Other resonances with Lahiri, are the trees, the birds and the glass that recur in descriptions of the city, here even together in one sentence: "ora, dietro il vetro opaco, scorgeva piú chiari gli alberi simili a grandi uccelli immoti". When the man in Morante's story is looking for the girl, he compares her eyes with those of a bird, and also her friend describes her as such: "come un uccello perduto che sbatta le ali". Interestingly, here the bird stands for fragility and helplessness, where of course in Lahiri's "Casa luminosa" on the other hand the birds represent hostility and fear. With regards to glass, also in Morante's story there is an instance where it represents fragility, right before the aforedescribed instance of nakedness: "quando giunsero presso un muro basso, su cui cresceva l'erba, la nebbia era diventata trasparente come un vetro". Also the representations of trees are similar in Lahiri and Morante: "Lunghissimi alberi senz'ombra sovrastavano le case dal tetto bianco". The absence of the shadows contributes to the estranged presence of the trees in the city. Moreover, the man who represents death waits patiently for days, leaning against a tree. We could say that, as I have argued in chapter one for Lahiri, also here the trees stand for isolation and loneliness in the city.

As I have shown, there are many literary resonances between Morante and Lahiri, concerning silence and representations of anonymity; precarity and poverty; roaming and being lost; fragility and the body; isolation versus network; glass, trees and birds; the playing with perspective and focalization; and of

course the rootedness in an urban landscape. I would however like to go even further, and argue that a diffractive reading of Morante can inspire new interpretations of Lahiri. In Morante, we see how the sense of confusion that is provoked by the narrative, as it is not always clear what has actually happened, can provoke estrangement. I would like to argue that Lahiri's switches of perspective create a similar sense of estrangement. This happens for example at the end of "Il confine", where the reader gets the eerie impression that this whole *racconto* was written by a side-character who was eavesdropping into the lives of its main characters. Another additional interpretation of Lahiri could be that the notion of precarious wandering, as for example but not only present in "Il ritiro" where the woman decides to walk home instead of taking the bus and is then shot, invigorates a sense of isolation and fragility of the characters.

Pier Paolo Pasolini is one of the most famous creative figures of twentieth century Italy. He was notorious for drawing attention to the stories of the marginalized people of Rome, especially in his cinema, but also in his writings. He was friends with Morante and Moravia, whom I both discuss in this chapter as well, and their literary attention to the marginalized and unheard stories of the city is a clear resonance between their work, in particular within this genre of the *racconto*. Considering Pasolini's fame, it is striking that it was almost impossible to get a hold of a collection of *racconti* from his hand. This likely has to do with the fact that his *racconti* were often published initially separately, for example in newspapers. Those collections that have been published in the past are out of print; the only available versions are antiquary, and extremely expensive. In the end, to choose the right *racconto* I used a French version, which had the original Italian included. This scatteredness of Pasolini's *racconti* shows us that in his case, perhaps differently from Morante and Lahiri, the narratives operate more strongly on themselves instead of being part of a macro-soundscape.

The story I analyze, is called "Ragazzo e Trastevere", published first in Italian-Argentinian daily newspaper *Il Mattino d'Italia* on the fifth of June 1950. It does not have a very elaborated narrative; it is just a reflection of the narrator, on an encounter with a chestnut seller. Beside the fact that also this story plays with perspective, I choose it because several of Lahiri's *racconti* also take place in Trastevere – amongst which "La riunione" and "La scalinata" which is, I argue, the most important *racconto* of the book. It is an interesting place in Rome, as geographically speaking it is not marginal at all, and yet it pops up many times in the *racconti* of authors like Lahiri, Pasolini and also Moravia, whose other stories often do take place at the edges of the city and which describe the stories of people who do live marginal lives. I suggest that this neighborhood, which in a way falls out of line with the geographical tendencies of the stories I discuss in this thesis, pops up so often because it is full of internal tensions, which have to do with marginality. Trastevere is originally a working-class neighborhood, currently subject to floods of tourists and processes of gentrification – something that is particularly relevant for Lahiri's stories. The people who used to live there are driven out by rising rent, or remain but become increasingly unseen. Situated at the edge of the Tiber, even its name carries a sense of 'beyond': 'tras-Tevere' means 'at the other side of the Tiber'. The narrator of Pasolini's story notes: "Dietro di lui il Tevere è un abisso disegnato su una carta velina" (28) – an abyss that separates it from the rest of the city. From the river, "foschie

cadaveriche" (Pasolini 28) rise, but nonetheless the river functions as a vein that connects and plays a role in almost all the *racconti* I look at: a blue thread.

So explicitly set in Trastevere, Pasolini's story is more firmly rooted in the place where it is set than Morante's story which I have discussed before. We even see how at some instances the city and the main character – the chestnut seller – flow into one: "Io, per me, vorrei poter sapere quali sono i congegni del suo cuore attraverso i quali Trastevere vive dentro di lui, informe, martellante, ozioso" (26), the narrator says, and later asks: "Per comunicare la topografia della sua vita, dovrebbe non farne parte: ma dove finisce Trastevere e dove comincia il ragazzo?" (30). Note how the chestnut seller subtly becomes excluded from the description of his own life. It is difficult to judge whether this narrative step is intended ironically, and if it is not, it might be seen as objectifying and problematic. But it might very well be ironic, as the narrator seems aware of his own sense of imagination. When he thinks of where the seller goes after work, he says "dove immaginarlo?" (24), and the fact we are very much inside the head of the narrator who is making everything up becomes even more explicit when the man surprises him by asking him for the time: he breaks through the sense of isolation that the narrator had imagined for him – "egli si comprime tutto dentro un cerchio che nessuna formula magica potrà mai spezzare". The narrator is struck after his object of imagination directly talks to him: "io credevo di essere assolutamente al di fuori della sua realtà utile". We also saw this play with perspective, where the narrator reflects on his own subject position, in Lahiri, where there are several instances of somehow privileged authors who find the inspiration for their writings in the stories of more marginalized people ("La scalinata"; "Il confine"; "Le feste di P."). And I would argue that this element belongs to the genre of the *racconto* – we also saw a play with perspective in Morante, as I have pointed out before. Although the gaze in "Ragazzo and Trastevere" is directed towards the poor chestnut seller, this *racconto* also gives him agency. This is because the story switches around who is invisible to whom. Instead of the poor man being invisible to the people around him, which tends to be a trope in stories of this genre, the man is actually indifferent to the people he sells to. He is so focused on his work and indifferent to the people around him, that the narrator reduces him to just a hand: "una mano astratta" (22). The story ends with the phrase: "la povertà e la bellezza sono una cosa sola" (31). Indeed, this *racconto* shows the entanglement between poor and rich as the chestnut seller and the more privileged focalizer seem to narratively implode into one, while also city and person implode into each other. These two elements are crucial as well in the interpretation of Lahiri. The latter does not write *racconti* just about poor Roman people, but her collection is a mosaic of different forms of isolation that are deeply rooted in the urban landscape, with which they almost even melt into one.

As I have shown, Lahiri's *racconti* thus flow from a tradition of short stories in Italy, which in the twentieth century were used by several authors to draw attention to the stories of the marginalized of the city. Reading Lahiri's and these twentieth century *racconti* in light of each other – or, rather, within the noise of each other – gives us a new understanding of Lahiri's *Racconti romani*. It shows her great awareness of the genre as she echoes and transcends it in terms of its intuitive style, which consists of spoken language and

continuously plays with perspective; and its engagement with themes like anonymity, isolation, fragility and the more-than-human city.

RACCONTI FROM THE TWENTYFIRST CENTURY: IGIABA SCEGO AND UBAH CRISTINA ALI FARAH

I argue Lahiri is not only in conversation with the twentieth century *racconti* tradition she so explicitly refers to with her *Racconti romani*. She also forms part of a current day literary landscape in Italy; a vibrating assemblage of what some have called 'letteratura della migrazione': writings in which authors urge for the voices of (first or second generation) migrants to be heard, while laying bare the complex identity dynamics that are part of these lives. My argument is that Lahiri positions her writings on the crossroads between the established twentieth century genre of the *racconto* on the one hand, and these newer voices on the other hand. This following section will analyze Lahiri in relation to the second current.

For the sake of my argument, I have separated these currents into two, but as we know, in any encounter between currents they overlap, and display patterns of diffraction and entangled difference. The writings discussed below also resonate with the writings discussed above. Within this assemblage that is the Italian literary landscape, it is not just Lahiri who echoes on the one hand a twentieth century tradition, and on the other hand migration literature from the twenty-first – rather, everything vibrates and resonates amongst each other.

'Letteratura postcoloniale' or postcolonial literature is a term that is often used in this context, also by the authors themselves. Nonetheless, I choose to use 'migration literature'. As opposed to the term 'postcolonial literature', the former term has the ambition to address a broader group of literary works, referring to all kinds of migration, also those not necessarily related to colonialism. This is important when it comes to Lahiri's *Racconti romani*, in which not all international movement occurs between Italy and (former) colonies. Moreover 'migration literature' does not explicitly put the literatures it refers to inside the political framework associated with colonial realities or pasts – although related themes are not excluded from the category. I do not use 'migrant literature', a term that could be problematic, as it implicitly gives too much weight to the background of the authors and makes the unsubstantiated assumption that this background necessarily influences the writing. Instead, in 'migration literature', 'migration' refers to the themes that play a role inside the writing. As writes Serena Guarini in *El Ghibli*, Italy's first journal for migration literature founded in 2003 by amongst others Ubah Cristina Ali Farah whose work is also discussed here, this literature is not 'della migrazione' because it is written by immigrants – Scego and Ali Farah, for example, are not – but because it engages with migration related themes like exile, diaspora and uprooting. Indeed, I consider it important to turn our gaze away from the biographies of the authors I discuss – some might frown upon my comparison between Lahiri and Scego

and Ali Farah because they relate to Rome and are or are not migrants in fundamentally different ways from each other – but focus on the styles and themes of their writings instead.

The literary field that this current section engages with, is, according to Caterina Romeo, a "by-now-established tradition" in Italy since 1994, in which important themes are "migration and feelings of alienation and otherness" (608). Additionally, as my close readings will show, migration writings are intimately entangled with notions of gender. In terms of thematic, Lahiri's *Racconti romani* thus fits well into this field. Simone Brioni argues in his book *L'Italia, l'altrove. Luoghi, spazi e attraversamenti nel cinema e nella letteratura sulla migrazione* that migration literatures like Lahiri's contribute to a sense of destabilization and decentralization inside the Italian literary landscape, as they insert it with places and spaces that are other than the peninsula. In accordance with this, Romeo argues about the short story collection *Pecore nere*, in which amongst others also Igiaba Scego, one of the authors I discuss in this chapter, appears, that "the authors in *Pecore nere* perceive themselves as being simultaneously inside and outside the nation" (612). This idea of destabilization and decentralization inside migration literature agrees with my hypothesis that Lahiri's writing, as part of the field of migration literature, contributes to the deconstruction of the stable image of the eternal city – an Italian-centered image.

This section thus focuses on short stories written by Igiaba Scego and Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, two Italian-Somalian writers who have written *racconti* that take place in the city of Rome. Both authors are amongst the most well-known names in the field of migration literature in Italy ("The Transcultural Italophone Literature" 128-129). In scholarship about Italian migration literature, they are often mentioned together, or together with Lahiri. Their writings do differ a great deal; Ali Farah herself said about this: "Siamo molto diverse, quindi anche complementari" (qtd. in Lavagnino 104). In Claire Genevieve Lavagnino's dissertation called "Women's Voices in Italian Postcolonial Literature from the Horn of Africa", Scego's and Ali Farah's works are the central case studies. Interestingly, Lavagnino engages a lot with the term 'resonance', which of course I also use to talk about Lahiri's writing. Resonance is a relational phenomenon which opens up a space for conversation, a space for the listener, she argues: "The act of listening highlights the plural nature of this relationality [that is resonance]" (20). This connects to what I have argued about the style of *racconti*, that provoke a sonic relationality between narrator and reader/listener. With a focus on the voice, Lavagnino's research is, although implicitly, deeply embedded in the field of literary sound studies. Throughout her dissertation, she argues that in the writings of these two authors, the written word is summoned into the characters' bodies, turning it into voice, evading the – often discriminatory – visual bias which is at the basis of our society. "The voices of Ali Farah's and Scego's protagonists narrate the intertwined histories between Italy and Somalia", she argues (ii), and adds that the voice in these stories functions as "a counterpoint to the voiceless representations of East Africans that span from Italy's beginnings as a nation to today in literature, visual media, and journalistic reports in Italian" (iii). Similarly to what I have argued in the first chapter of this thesis, these migration writings thus also attempt to fill a gap of silence, to send noise into society.

There are more scholars who make the networked relationality between these three authors explicit. One scholar who studies all three authors, is Dagmar Reichardt. She argues in her article "The Transcultural Italophone Literature from its Beginnings Through to the Third Millennium: Italy's Transnational Role Model for Europe" that the writings of Lahiri, Scego and Ali Farah are manifestations of 'transculturalism', a hybrid, networked phenomenon itself (123). In a conference paper by Reichardt which focuses mostly on Lahiri, titled "'Radicata a Roma': la svolta transculturale nella scrittura italofona nomade di Jhumpa Lahiri", she calls Lahiri's turn to the Italian language a "transcultural switch" (219) – not only because she switched to another language, but also because her writing is hybrid, and invites the reader to a "sensitivity for all that could appear other" (220). This is something, as I will show, that can also be said about the other two authors. As I have argued in the last chapter in connection to Homi Bhabha, hybridity in Lahiri's writings implies movement. Consequently, the hybridity of these migration writings contributes to the process of destabilization of Italian literature that I have addressed above. In what follows, I will go a bit deeper into what has been written about Scego and Ali Farah, particularly in relation to Lahiri.

Igiaba Scego is an Italian-Somalian author, born in 1974 in Rome. She is a publicly active, politically engaged writer ("The Transcultural Italophone Literature" 129). In a non-fiction book called *Roma negata: Percorsi postcoloniali nella città*, created in collaboration with a photographer, Scego revisits and rewrites Rome, showing the reader a side of the city that usually remains unseen – as I will show, her fictional *racconti* do the same. In the introduction of the book, Nadia Terranova gives it a sonic flavor, writing about the effect the book might have on the reader: "Non sentiamo più le urla del mercato, le frenate catastrofiche degli autobus, lo stridore del tram, il chiacchiericcio di chi ci passeggia accanto" (9). It is as if Terranova here points out that all other noises of the city first are to be silenced, before we are able to direct our attention to the unheard voices which in the introduction of this thesis, inspired by Lawrence Kramer, I have referred to as 'the hum of the world'. Perhaps this will finally make "Italia sorda" (*Roma negata* 123) hear again.

An important theme in the writing of both Scego and Lahiri, argues Tiziana de Rogatis, is "*homing*": "*il fare casa al di là della casa originaria*" (Brah qtd. in De Rogatis 3), which includes the attempt to create familiarity, and both vulnerability and creativity. Other themes in both Scego and Lahiri according to De Rogatis are metamorphosis, translation and (transgenerational) trauma. Serena Guarini mentions the themes in Scego's writing of belonging, migration and diaspora. Brioni claims that these themes are (partially) situated around the station of Roma Termini (60-61). Beside the migrant community that finds itself there, the train station becomes a symbolic site linked to the idea of temporality and movement: coming and leaving – representing almost the opposite of the 'eternal'. Another theme that Guarini pays a great deal of attention to, is exile. Not only in Scego's writing, but also in Lahiri's it is a very prominent theme. In *In altre parole*, for example, Lahiri writes: "Chi non appartiene a nessun posto specifico non può tornare, in realtà, da nessuna parte. I concetti di esilio e di ritorno implicano un punto di origine, una patria. (…) Sono esiliata perfino dalla definizione di esilio" (100). I argue that exile in migration literature has a

twofold interpretation: it can mean exile from a country of origin, but also exile from Italy or from what it means to be Italian. Accordingly, the notion of exile and its presence inside these literatures also contributes to the destabilizing effect I have described before, as it gives rise to a sense of displacement: the thoughts and desires of a place that is elsewhere but where one cannot return, and moreover the cultural strategy of a nation like Italy to formulate itself while excluding a certain part of its inhabitants, exiling them from its own definition. Likewise, many Romans are not allowed to be part of the definition of 'Roman'. The literatures based on their stories could destabilize the definition of the city.

Guarini explains how, to make the sense of exile tangible, Scego uses code switching in her writing. In Lahiri's Italian texts, this technique is not used, although translingualism does manifest itself in a different way in her case, through modes of self-translation after the primary publication in Italian. In Scego's *racconti*, according to Guarini, linguistic traces of Somalian oral culture are audible. This is in accordance with what I have argued before about Lahiri's writing and its sonic nature – although the origin of the audible aspect of Scego's and Lahiri's texts might be different. During an event hosted by the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome from where I am writing this thesis, I got the chance to ask a question to Igiaba Scego, who gave a lecture. I asked her about the role of sound in her work, and she indeed confirmed that the Somalian oral tradition plays a big role in her engagement with literary style. Federico Zannoni also underlines the particular importance of the genre of the *racconto* for Scego:

> Alla violenza delle definizioni Igiaba Scego risponde con la forza del racconto, della parola spesa per trasmettere la complessità e l'unicità della condizione esistenziale di ciascun individuo, nella consapevolezza di come ciascuno non sia altro che la propria storia, e che ogni storia sia necessariamente influenzata dalle storie degli altri. (144)

Note in the approach of Zannoni the tension between the uniqueness of individual stories, and an inevitable connectivity between stories, which according to him is akin to this genre, and invigorated in Scego's writing. About both Scego and Lahiri, Zannoni writes: "[L]eggere queste autrici significa sottoporsi a una necessaria operazione di deterritorializzazione mentale" (148). Again, as in Terranova's introduction to *Roma negata*, we thus see how reading migration stories can contribute to a process of de- and relearning, opening up our ears for previously unheard voices.

One of the reasons I am doing a comparative analysis between Lahiri and Scego, is because both authors are very aware of each other's work. This e.g. becomes clear in an interview between the two authors, published in the *Corriere della Sera*, in which they speak about, amongst other things, the hybrid nature of, and the liminal space between languages. Scego says to Lahiri that in her latest book she wanted to attend to "la genealogia della lingua e della letteratura italiana", and she mentions several writers like Dante, Boccaccio, Morante, and Lahiri herself – the latter being the ultimate proof that both writers influence each other. Scego's listing of these authors is interesting, because it shows that she has a way of relating herself to the Italian literary tradition similar to Lahiri. Moreover, as I have shown in the first section of this chapter, these particular writers are also among those who form an inspiration for Lahiri. Scego says

that it is the Italian language itself that facilitates the deconstruction of etiquettes: "Il suo uso, il fatto che la si abiti, non ti rendono né straniero né nativo, ma semplicemente lingua". Lahiri affirms that language permits herself and Scego to move beyond silence; satisfying the need to "usare la parola per rendere reale qualcosa che, altrimenti, potrebbe scivolare nel silenzio". Accordingly, Scego says:

> Scrivere è stata un'urgenza per uscire dal silenzio, per raccontare quanto aveva attraversato la mia vita: l'esilio dei miei genitori, la guerra, la pelle nera. Perché comunque in Italia c'è un razzismo non esplicitato, e io volevo che diventasse parola. Ecco, nella mia scrittura è come se ci fosse un tentativo di cura sia di me stessa sia di questo Paese meraviglioso, in cui però di alcuni temi ancora non parliamo.

As I have also shown in the analysis of Lahiri's *Racconti romani*, silence is something these authors thus try to break, but at the same time silence has a presence and function inside their writings, that echo Italian society's evasive discriminatory mechanisms. The writings of both authors are deeply rooted in the city of Rome. Scego says: "Roma è complessa, tentacolare, spesso anche raccontata male, ma nella mia vita io mi sono sentita romana prima ancora che italiana". Her story of course diverges from Lahiri's, who was not born in Rome but moved to the city, and whose Roman identity is thus a chosen one. Both authors however, interestingly, interact perhaps more with the identity of 'Roman', than that of Italian, while they take on the agency to rerecount this city.

The *racconto* of Igiaba Scego I will be close reading here, is "Dismatria" and was published in *Pecore Nere*, a collection of *racconti* by four female authors of migration literature, published in 2005. Romeo recognizes the groundbreaking nature of this anthology, calling it "the first collection of short stories to thematize racial difference in postcolonial Italy" (607), arguing that it "marked a turning point in Italian postcolonial literature" (611). More recently, a similar collection called *Future* came out, to which Igiaba Scego contributed as well. The reason I nonetheless chose a story from *Pecore nere* is, beside its influential role in the field of migration literature, that this collection consists solely of *racconti*, as opposed to *Future*, which also contains other writing forms like memoirs and has in general a more theoretical tone (Romeo 620). I chose this particular story because it extensively deals with the notions of belonging, liminality and exile that I have discussed before, and it moreover does so from a transgenerational perspective, something that is very relevant in relation to Lahiri's *Racconti romani*.

The name "Dismatria", as explained inside the narrative, comes from the alternative word a Somalian family living in Rome uses for 'expatriate' – Somalia feels for them as their mother- rather than their fatherland. The *racconto* revolves around the fact that all the family members keep their things in suitcases and do not own any closets or cabinets inside their home. Unpacking and settling for them would mean saying goodbye to the idea of ever returning to Somalia. The main character and narrator of the story, the daughter of this family, does not want to go back to Somalia, hates suitcases, loves closets, and has decided to buy a house together with her friend Angelique, a trans-women. When the latter comes to an awkward lunch at the house, the situation escalates when Angelique suddenly throws the contents of one

of the family's suitcases on the floor. In the end, everybody comes to realize the strangeness of their living situation and empties out their suitcases.

In line with the other *racconti* I have discussed thus far, also this one is written in a spoken style, particularly chatty in this case: the narrator deviates continuously from the story she is trying to tell, and uses very informal language. As I have pointed out for Moravia's tellings before, this narrator also reflects on her own thoughts as she narrates: "Ero sola in questa cosa. Ne avevo l'esclusiva. Bell'affare! Non potevo avere l'esclusiva di qualcosa di meglio? Non so, l'esclusiva dei baci alla francese con il risucchio o delle prugne della California? Invece avevo l'esclusiva di quel problema di merda" (7). She also invigorates what she says by the use of repetition: "Sola, Sola, Solissima. Il mio problema, amici, era costituito dalle valigie. Sì, giuro, valigie." (7); "Da non credere! Giuro, da non credere" (8). With the use of the word "giuro", it is, like in Moravia, as if she addresses the audience directly, trying to convince it. Roman slang also pops up here and there: "'sti dischi" (9). Indeed, although the city of Rome is not evoked in the sense of the naming of particular places in the city, it is through language, and also in the first lines of the *racconto*, when the movement of the city is described. "A Roma la gente corre sempre, a Mogadiscio la gente non corre mai. Io sono una via di mezzo tra Roma e Mogadiscio: cammino a passo sostenuto. Do l'impressione di correre, ma sempre camminando" (5). Not only is this a symbolic description of the sense of liminality between two cultural conventions experienced by the main character, but also it shows how this girl who, as she explains, feels more Roman than Somalian, reinscribes the city with a new way of walking that represents her hybrid identity. In this sense, walking turns into a way of building new urban knowledge. Other than these opening sentences, the Romanness of this *racconto* is more shaped in the private sphere, than the public one, and that, in fact, is symbolic for the isolation that the characters of this story experience. Their lives take place mostly within the walls of their houses, where they are free to manifest the hybridity they experience, but where also transgenerational frictions in relation to that hybrid identity occur. Indeed, the family lives quite an isolated life, as explains the narrator: "mi era stato chiaramente detto 'se non è necessario, PLEASE, non ammorbarci con gli estranei'. Quindi a casa potevo portare poche categorie di persone papabili per una merenda pomeridiana a base di panna montata e crema" (6). This is similar to many of the *racconti* of Lahiri, as I have discussed in chapter one. The most striking similarity we perhaps find in "La scalinata": "La ragazza", where the family of the main character is part of a cultural community different from her classmates', a community which does not turn so much outward, and in which the girl feels trapped. In "Dismatria", the main character also wants to break out of this sense of isolation. At the lunch table with her family and strangely looked upon Angelique, she thinks:

> Dovevo parlare, lo sentivo. Dire qualcosa in sua e in mia difesa. Spiegare. Che potevo avere (anzi avevo) amici gay. Che avevo una vita fuori da lì e che la mia vita fuori era libera da valigie. E che presto me ne sarei andata. Che avrei comprato una casa. E ci avrei messo dentro un armadio. E che mi sentivo italiana. E che sentirsi italiani non significava tradire la Somalia. Ma proprio non ce la facevo a pronunciare verbo. (18)

Within this utterly important place of the home, in this story the meal thus takes on a central role: it is an instance of attempted connection. Like we see in this quote, silence has a strong power over the

characters. It does not only represent isolation, as above, but also the "silenzio di disapprovazione" (5) of the mother. The silence of the daughter, when we listen to it in relation to the mother's silence, is also born from a place of fear. Next to isolation and fear, silence in this *racconto* represents simply awkwardness, especially when the trans-woman comes to lunch unexpectedly, and no one knows how to respond. "La presenza di Angelique le disorientava. Era la prima volta che vedevano una drag queen così da vicino" (16). Interestingly, a person with a liminal identity – with regards to gender – is needed to disrupt the liminal way of living that prevents the members of the family from settling. In the end, surprisingly, it turns out that the mother keeps a suitcase with cliché Roman objects:

> C'erano cose strane. Un pacco di spaghetti, foto di monumenti di Roma, il pelo di un gatto, un parmigiano di plastica, un souvenir pacchiano della lupa che allatta i gemelli, un po' di terra in un sacchetto, una bottiglia piccola piena di acqua, una pietra... tante altre cose strane. Guardai la mamma e anche gli altri lo fecero. Un punto di domanda nei nostri occhi. 'Che significa?', dicevano i nostri occhi. 'Non mi volevo dimenticare di Roma', disse mamma in un sospiro. E poi sorrise. (20-21)

Ultimately, the liminality of the lives of these characters does not only mean there longing for Somalia from Rome, but also their hypothetical longing back for Rome in Somalia.

Reading Lahiri's *racconti* through this one by Scego, we clearly see thematic resonances, of which I have mentioned many already: isolation, liminality and the act of walking to reinscribe the city with new stories. Additionally, an important theme that resonates between the writings of these two authors, is that of the longing for a house of one's own, as a permanent dwelling, which stands for finding a sense of belonging in a strange city. This comes to the fore in Lahiri's "Casa luminosa", which opens with: "Una casa luminosa ti cambia la vita" (82). In the end, the characters are made to feel unsafe and driven out of their home by the racist neighbors. The hostility of the other inhabitants, who deem themselves to be more 'Roman' than these people they frame as 'strangers', thus prevents them to turn Rome into the heterotopia it already is, reinscribed with many often sonic layers of stories and meanings – of which these *racconti* provide an example. Almost contrarily, in "Dismatria" the incapability to settle does not come, however, from an external factor, but from inside the private family sphere, where the characters (initially) display an unwillingness or inability to give up their liminal identities that are symbolically on the move.

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, also of Somalian heritage, was born in Verona in 1973, one year before Igiaba Scego. Currently based in Rome, her writings are entangled with that city as well. Although the direct personal link between Lahiri and Ali Farah is less clear, as I will show there are many thematic and stylistic resonances between their Roman *racconti*, and therefore I have chosen her as the second comparative example of migration literature. Like Scego's and Lahiri's writings, Ali Farah's texts also have a very sonic nature, as argues Lavagnino:

> Playing with semantics, rhythm and aural, oral and written cues (indications of spoken, sung, and written words as well as sounds), she not only valorizes orality; she also calls attention to the uniqueness of

individual voices. Her adaptations of oral testimonies shape her written words in their sequence and musicality. (32-33)

Again, thus, the sonic mode of these writings contributes to the act of making heard unique stories, which are like Scego's texts firmly located in "speaking bodies" (Lavagnino 34). Not just individual stories, however, are treated by Ali Farah; her writings also attend to the practice of collective storytelling (Lavagnino 55). Like Scego's – and Lahiri's – work, also Ali Farah's *racconti* put themselves in relation to the Italian short story tradition, being particularly in conversation with Pasolini's short stories and their attention to the city's marginalized people, adding however the layer of race and "Italy's colonial past" (Lavagnino 54-55).

Similarly to Scego's and Lahiri's, an important theme in Ali Farah's writing is hybrid cultural identity. Like in Scego's "Dismatria", one of the realms in which these hybrid identities are negotiated is that of family, and Brandon Michael Cleverly Breen shows how in Ali Farah's writings, similarly to Scego's, a strong female network is formed between the characters (3). Furthermore, Cleverly Breen underlines the role language plays in the navigation of identities. Similarly to Scego – and different to Lahiri – also in Ali Farah's writings the technique of code-switching is applied (Cleverly Breen 148). Hybrid Italian-Somalian identity is also expressed in Ali Farah's work through the practice of collective storytelling, in which "immagini sia realistiche che favolesche" inspired by the Somalian storytelling tradition are shaped against a Roman background (Cleverly Breen 3), provoking a tension between the real and the mythical which is perhaps less present in Lahiri's work. In relation to the notion of storytelling, like for Scego, also in Ali Farah's writing the oral nature of language becomes explicit (Lavagnino; Cleverly Breen). Like I have shown for Lahiri's stories, Ali Farah's *racconti* thus also have a strong sonic component, manifesting itself, according to the author herself, amongst other things in its narrative rhythm. When we look at the other side of the coin, i.e. the silence in these stories, we can conclude according to Cleverly Breen that in Ali Farah's *racconti* it rather has a powerful role, instead of representing solely isolation. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, silence does not only represent the oppression of noise or loneliness, but it can also mean a refusal to speak, giving the characters more agency. When applying this idea of silence as refusal to Lahiri's *racconti*, reading them diffractively through Ali Farah's stories, the way I have interpreted silence in the first chapter might be subject to change. For example, the fact that the father in Lahiri's "Il confine" does not speak after he has become the victim of a racist crime in which he lost his teeth, might not mean that his voice has been taken away from him, but rather that after the event he refuses to interact any further with the people who have caused him this pain.

When it comes to the creation of physical spaces, according to Cleverly Breen two important themes come to the fore in Ali Farah's writing: birds (80), and the sea (76). This resonates of course very much with Lahiri's *Racconti romani*, like I have discussed in chapter one – both represent the more-than-human nature of the city, and the hybridity of identity that is linked to this. Cleverly Breen uses Michel Foucault's term of 'heterotopia' to explain how in Ali Farah's writings the city of Rome is formed. He describes how

in these writings, the city consists of temporally layered spaces that are continuously reinscribed with new cultural meaning, making the significance of space thus mutate throughout time. Meaning is not fixed in these heterotopia's, but accumulates itself and also vanishes. Eternity, therefore, is actually absent from Rome (Cleverly Breen 53-54). I suggest that heterotopic spaces are like volatile urban palimpsestic assemblages, which include a sonic layer. Because meaning is thus futile in these spaces, I would like to draw a comparison here with sound and the way it behaves. As is one of the arguments of my thesis, the way we read Rome is based on a visual bias, which tends to portray the city as a fixed image. If we follow Cleverly Breen's interpretation of Foucault's heterotopia however, we could argue the city and the meaning that inscribes it actually behave more in a sonic way, because any form of fixity is absent. I argue that the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri, Igiaba Scego, Ubah Cristina Ali Farah and other writers of migration literature form part of this sounding cityscape and contribute to its continuous change, as they make their voices unignorably heard because of their urgent message expressed through sounding language. They make us realize that the city is not eternal, but rather eternally changing, like the sea.

The *racconto* of Ubah Cristina Ali Farah I will analyze here, is called "RapdiPunt", and was published in 2005 as part of the collection *Italiani per vocazione*, collected by Igiaba Scego. It is a story about a girl of color who forms part of a community of young people who tend to hang out at Piazza Flaminio in Rome. She is actually a bit excluded from the group *because* she is a girl, but in the end she becomes friends with Mauro, and together they go to the botanical garden in Trastevere, to steal a plant from their country of heritage. I discuss this *racconto*, because it is so firmly and explicitly rooted in the city of Rome, and approaches that city from a more-than-human point of view.

Of all the *racconti* I have discussed in this chapter, this one by Ali Farah is probably the most clearly 'spoken' one, making it sometimes even difficult to follow. Words of explanation, like "Tipo" (3), and of summary, like "Insomma" (4) are used, as we also saw in Moravia, but also words of indifference, like "boh" (4). The paragraphs are very short and there are a lot of blank lines, creating the scattered effect of an improvised, spontaneous, non-constructed monologue of a teenager. One of the most important themes, like in all the other *racconti*, is that of 'being strange', and connected to that the notions of estrangement and isolation, and the question of belonging. This is indicated quite literally, when the narrator and protagonist says: "Mauro dice che sono strana" (3). In an analysis of this *racconto*, an intersectional approach is necessary, as we find out that the social dynamics in this group of adolescents at Flaminio is constructed along the lines of race – "sempre tutti neri, perché i bianchi non ce li vogliono" (4) – and gender. Indeed, perhaps the only reason the protagonist is considered strange is *because* she is a girl, and throughout the story she is continuously reminded of that: "Ma io devo stare zitta e cercare di togliermi di mezzo, altrimenti Mauro mi manda via per davvero questa volta, ormai lo dice sempre più spesso che non vuole femmine tra le palle" (3), she explains, and remaining silent is the safest option – something she repeats several times. Ultimately, this sense of precarity the girl experiences becomes stronger when the group goes to Ostia, beyond the margins of the city, to find a special kind of plant. She

can come along because she has convinced the group she knows something about this plant, but in the end they do not find it, and are chased by the police:

> In quel posto ad Ostia, sulla litoranea, c'era un ristorante, ma era chiuso, così abbiamo dovuto scavalcare il recinto, con i cani che quasi ci sbranavano ed è pure arrivata la polizia. Non ti dico come correvamo, ma infine ci hanno presi, Mauro dice che è perché lui mi teneva la mano per non lasciarmi indietro e per questo ci hanno presi solo a noi due. Infatti non se l'è voluta prendere con il cubano, ché i cactus non li abbiamo trovati, e invece ha detto che non mi voleva più con loro, perché c'aveva provato in mille modi a farmi capire che la vita da strada non è per le femmine. (4)

We read how the group, with Mauro as its spokesperson, uses the girl as a scapegoat on whom they project the reason for their own sense of precarity which in fact they all experience in the city.

Indeed, the protagonist of this story experiences a sense of isolation within the group as well as in the broader society of Rome, in which she is even invisible: "Mi sono stufata, gli dico, mi sono stufata di fare la ragazza perbene, tanto se non vado a scuola per qualche giorno non se ne accorge nessuno" (3). Sitting at Flaminio, observing the people passing by, she notes: "mi piace pensare a dove va la gente, però mi sento anche un po' sola, io non so dove andare" (3). This loneliness also comes from the fact that, as the protagonist describes, her mother is a bit absent – "con la testa non è che ci sta molto" (4). Symbolically, she thus cannot ask her mother a specific question she actually needs to ask about a plant from her country of heritage, leading to an ultimate sense of liminality: she cannot reach back to the culture of her mother, but the new culture she belongs to does not see her either. The girl engages with this problem creatively, inventing a story herself, inscribing her cultural identity with new, hybrid meaning.

More explicitly than the story of Scego I analyzed, this *racconto* is entangled with the cityscape. Starting from Flaminio, it moves us to Ostia, and to the botanical garden in Trastevere. It also leads us to the viewpoint of the Pincio, in the Villa Borghese, where the protagonist notes: "Allora mi sono fermata sul Pincio, mi piace starci e vedere le cose con un po' di respiro, questo mi sa che è per la mia anima africana, perché da noi non si sta tutti accalcati come formiche con il casino intorno. Certe cose uno poi se le sente nel sangue" (4). This is a strong instance of heterotopic re-inscription of the city, in which the narrator is granted agency or even power, if we read this passage through De Certeau's ideas about the vertical working of power in the city, expressed in his seminal text "Walking in the City". In this text, De Certeau argues that the who people walk in the city inscribe it with meaning, while those who have the power look down on it from above. By making her character look down on the city as well, Ali Farah gives her a similar power.

A comparable sense of urban re-inscription we hear throughout "La scalinata", where the young people hanging out at La Scalea del Tamburino make a heterotopia out of the steps by giving them new meaning with their own presence, with layers of graffiti, and with the empty bottles they leave behind. But beyond the reinscribing of meaning, "RapdiPunt" goes even further, when the girl and Mauro at last make a bond to steal the plant from the garden after an old wise man from their community told them the story about

it. A botanical garden in a city is a complex, contested space, a growing and living example of often painful colonial pasts. Many plants in botanical gardens, as we also read in this *racconto*, have been taken from (previous) colonies, so the garden both materially and symbolically stands for appropriation and power. The vulnerability inside this power relation becomes clear in the story, through the symbol of the small, subdued plant, the rapdipunt: "Era una piantina piccola, piccola, verde cenere, non molto diversa dalle altre, ma chissà perché a noi ci pareva una cosa magica" (5). They uproot the fragile plant, just like their own diasporic lives feel uprooted, and take it home. By stealing it (back), they do not only give their heritage concrete meaning, but also reappropriate the part of the city that was taken from them but actually was theirs all along.

As I have shown, Lahiri's *racconti* also resonate with twenty-first century migration literature. In doing this, they transcend the previously discussed twentieth century *racconti*. By engaging with themes like displacement, exile, liminality and belonging, explicitly in relation to transculturality and migration, they take the question of marginality that was already discussed by Moravia, Morante and Pasolini to a new level. They insert Rome with movement and entangle the city with other spaces in the world, decentralizing and deconstructing its self-containing still image of the 'eternal'.

CONCLUSION

This chapter stepped up in terms of scale with regards to the last one: it zoomed out and analyzed Lahiri's *racconti* in the broader context of the literary assemblage they are part of. Here, I have engaged with sound more metaphorically than the previous and the following chapter. Beside my engagement with the role of silence – which, I propose, functions simultaneously in a metaphorical and a material way inside literature – and with some descriptions of sound present in the *racconti* under scrutiny, the role of 'resonance' here has existed mostly in relation to intertextuality. I argue that resonance is a very fruitful concept to talk about intertextuality, as the physical phenomenon encapsulates perfectly the way in which also literary texts stand in relation with one another. As I have demonstrated, not only do texts that are born in the same cultural literary context communicate amongst each other in terms of style and thematic; it is moreover impossible to read texts separably from each other: the interpretation of one text inevitably influences the interpretation of the second, and we should not try to ignore these resonances but listen to them, as they can give our reading a new, unexpected insight. Accordingly, my diffractive cross-readings have shown how different stories resonate between each other, while also displaying patterns of entangled difference. Within all this, I have been aware of my very subjective positionality. The particularity of the things that sprang to *my* ear might be very different than what resonances other researchers might hear. The moment in which I was most aware, however, of my subject position was when I had to pick the *racconti* for close reading. A similar analysis could have been executed also with other short stories by these or even by other authors. Nonetheless, I hope to have demonstrated that these particular stories produce

interesting resonant entanglements with Lahiri's writings, also outside of and beyond the collections they were originally published in.

Lahiri calls the Italian literary landscape from the past two centuries, despite some internally focused dynamics, an "open system" (*Penguin* xx), and I agree. Beyond her editing work, I moreover suggest that Lahiri's awareness of this field shines through in her own application of the genre, in her latest book *Racconti romani*, which is the central case study of this thesis. This chapter has set out to show the consequences of Lahiri's 'open system' claim – specifically with regards to the genre of the *racconto* – pointing out how this system consists of stylistic and thematic resonances, turning it into an intertextual, vibrant assemblage, which is continuously in conversation with the city.

This chapter has started with a stylistic analysis of the *racconto* as an important genre in Italy throughout the twentieth century until now, distinct from the English short story tradition. Within this genre, authors specifically tend to write about people or themes that usually remain unseen in the city of Rome, and are not considered particularly Roman. I have shown, through a close reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's own analysis of the genre and a close reading of Moravia's writing in it, that the genre's particular stylistic characteristics include intuitiveness and the use of spoken, rather than written language. These are characteristics that rebel against, for example, the established genre of the novel. I argue that *racconti* are sounding pieces of literature, with which a story is *told* to an audience. By engaging deeply with the stylistic conventions of the genre, I have proven that these *racconti* should be listened to, not just read.

I have specified two 'currents' inside the assemblage of *racconti* that have influenced Lahiri's application of the genre: on the one hand, the more well-known, established *racconti* tradition of the twentieth century, and on the other hand the newer movement of writers of what I have called migration literature, in which a continuation of the former current is manifested through an attention to themes like hybridity and cultural liminality. Beside their evident similar uses of style, other important themes both currents engage with, are the different functions of silence; in some cases the anonymity of places or people; estrangement and isolation versus networks in the city; the more-than-human – with attention to water, glass, plants, birds, and trees in the city; gender; precarious wandering; and different manifestations of the notion of heterotopia. Most importantly, of course, is the city, a leading thread through all *racconti* discussed, which is at once a backdrop, a character, a source of isolation and loneliness, and a source of agency and reinvention.

I argue that the aforementioned spoken, sonic quality of the genre makes it very apt to 'make noise', to make the voices in the city that are often unlistened to, heard. These noises entangle themselves with the cityscape, and contribute to the deconstruction of the image of Rome as the eternal city, making clear that this city is, rather, eternally changing, eternally reinscribed with hybrid cultural meanings. All *racconti* I have discussed, contribute this deconstruction, and they could all be called 'controcorrente' because of their recalcitrant engagement with literature and the city. However, the twenty-first century migration literatures – to which Lahiri's collection also belongs – have the strongest effect with regards to this deconstruction.

As Brioni has argued for postcolonial literature in general, I argue for this resonant assemblage of *racconti* in particular that their engagement with movement and with spaces that find themselves beyond the confines of the Italian peninsula, contribute to a sense of displacement and decentralization which shakes up what it means to be 'Roman', while explicitly framing themselves as Roman. The next chapter will go more explicitly into conversation with the Romanness of Lahiri's *racconti*, visiting the urban spaces they are tied to, and bring those into conversation with the writings in a creative way.

CHAPTER THREE: DIFFRACTIVE LISTENING TO EXTRATEXTUAL RESONANCE IN THE CITY BEYOND *RACCONTI ROMANI*

"Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (De Certeau 115).

In the former chapter I have argued that *racconti* are, essentially, sonic pieces of literature. This current chapter draws our attention to the fact that stories always take place somewhere – and especially when it concerns stories set in the city, our analysis should take this spatial element into consideration. I will not argue this, but make it audible. After an introduction of how I conceptualize sound and the city in relation to literature, this part of my research mostly consists of a creative project, which aims to make explicit the sonic entanglements between the *racconti* I have been analyzing, and the urban space they are set in.

The tissue cities are made of consists of material and discursive signs; a "semiotic landscape" (Kress & Van Leeuwen) that is entangled and continuously in movement: a vibrant assemblage (Bennett), I would call it. It is a layered assemblage, some mnemonic or material elements buried deeper, others more on the surface. Indeed, we could conceptualize the city itself as a palimpsest, as suggests Andreas Huyssen. In particular, the city of Rome is often looked at as such. From antiquity on, in this city the tendency has been to cover old structures and build new ones on top of them, rather than destroying the old to make place for the new. This speaks to the imagination, leading some scholars to extrapolate this physical trait to symbolic dimensions. For example, Michel de Certeau writes in his seminal text "Walking in the City" that Rome knows "the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts" (91). According to this reading of the city, nothing is ever eliminated, an idea that nurtures the image of the 'eternal' city. However, this is a crooked way of thinking about Rome, because also here, just like in any city, certain elements are cancelled out, not allowed to be part of the common imaginary. Moreover, the idea of the eternal implies that the city consists of a static continuum leading from the antique past through the present into the future. Contrastingly, Rome is actually a highly dynamic city which is continuously subject to change, as claimed by Mieke Bal (in Thormod vii) and others.

I propose that attending to urban sound can help us to bend our attention away from the limiting visual framings of the city, cracking them open, making space for stories usually unlistened to. When it comes to sound, what we hear highly depends on what we give our attention, and unheard stories are not truly silent, but more like a 'hum' (Kramer) that turns into sound once we turn our ears in their direction. Listening to the unlistened-to makes us realize that new noise continuously arises and simultaneously colors ánd counters the stable background image with its Colosseum and St. Peter, entangling itself with it,

claiming its place as an inherent part of the semiotic landscape. I would like to conceptualize sound as the ultimate, top layer of the urban palimpsest. Approaching the city by listening to this layer, brings to the surface of our attention things and people who are very much part of the city, but perhaps often not considered or given the right to be 'Roman'. It counters a form of discrimination that consists of 'not listening' described by Fran Tonkiss in her text "Aural Postcards: Sound, Memory and the City":

> Not listening in the city makes spaces smaller, tamer, more predictable. The pretence that you do not hear – a common conspiracy of silence – in this way is a response, passing as lack of response, to the modern city as a place of strangers. Some people, though, sound stranger than others; certain voices jar to certain other ears. The immigrant, it has been said, is *audible*, and indeed those forms of race thinking that cannot bring themselves to speak of skin often are happy to talk of language. Speaking the same language is always the same requirement of 'assimilation', but the city as polyglot soundscape is a space in which differences remain audible. (305)

Indeed, this strategy of evasion is always temporary, as these sounds first considered not worth listening to will eventually come to the surface. Other scholars, as well, have suggested that by listening to the city, we create space for counter-stories (Palermo; Aceska & Doughty). My contribution to this debate takes the specific angle of literature. It bridges literary sound studies and urban sound studies, arguing that literature makes noise inside the city. The literary stories I have been analyzing throughout this thesis, are like voices that contribute to the reinscription or even reinvention of the urban spaces they are rooted in.

In connecting city and literature, I would like to underline that Andreas Huyssen's notion of the city as a palimpsest, stems of course from a concept that is narrative by origin: "The trope of the palimpsest is inherently literary and tied to writing, but it can also be fruitfully used to discuss configurations of urban spaces and their unfolding in time" (Huyssen 7), he writes when he introduces the idea. As I have already mentioned, stories always take place somewhere. I would like to add now that this 'somewhere' already *is* a story; that is, every place already has a narrative structure – and is therefore not neutral. Ecocritic scholar Serenella Iovino conceptualizes landscape as essentially textual, describing it as "la tessitura materiale di significati, esperienze, processi e sostanze che compongono la vita di esseri e luoghi. Un testo, in questo senso, emerge dall'incontro di azioni, discorsi, immaginazione ed elementi fisici che si coagulano in forme materiali" (12). Slightly different form Iovino, however, Michel de Certeau does not see landscape – or the city more specifically – as already inherently text. Rather, he argues that the act of walking through the city *creates* this narrative. For him, becoming acquainted with urban space is like learning a language, then moving through it is like speaking this newly acquired language, and entering into relations with people and places is like having a conversation (97-98). By walking through the city, he argues, we form narrative text without being aware of it (93). Accordingly, "The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces" (De Certeau 93). I agree with Iovino that each landscape is a text, but as argues De Certeau I think it is important to take into consideration the fact that our movement through it takes part in the story the landscape – cityscape in my case – consists of. As I have explained in the introduction

of my thesis, for my methodology of 'diffractive listening' the position of the researcher is crucial, as it contributes to the formation of the relevant *acoustemology* – a neologism that brings together 'acoustic' and 'epistemology', coined by influential sound scholar Steven Feld – i.e. the sonic ways in which we know (Feld qtd. in Mieszkowski 19). The only possible way in which I can sonically know, is by perception through my own ears. The paths I have made through the city for this research, and the ways my ears have listened, are like a diffractive grating apparatus that bends the results. A different apparatus would have given different results. That of course does not mean my results are insignificant.

The dominant way in which we imagine Rome, as I have discussed above, has a narrative basis. Literary stories entangle themselves with this narrative, sometimes in an attempt to deconstruct it, or insert new kinds of noise into it. For my research, I have listened deeply to Jhumpa Lahiri's *Racconti romani*. For each *racconto* I have tried, with the help of several friends who know Rome well, to figure out through which urban spaces they move. This was a challenge, as Lahiri almost never explicitly names these. In some cases, the best I could do was find a place where a story was most likely to be set. In many cases, however, the descriptions were so detailed that it seemed like they were screaming to be found. Before starting this research, this was something I hesitated about: should I be searching for these places, if the author deliberately left them anonymous? But because the descriptions are so explicit and precise, opposite from what some critiques have claimed (Brügger), the *racconti* very much evoke Rome and only particularly Rome, impossibly interchangeable with any other city. I argue that the purpose of this anonymity is not to render the city of these stories interchangeable, but rather to open up the text for a hybrid audience. That is, an audience that can be Roman, knowing the city so well that it immediately figures out where the stories are set, but also on the other hand an audience that does not know the city: for this last group, explicit names of places would have made the text inaccessible, but now, however, also they can imagine the city vividly.

My hypothesis was that the *racconti* of Jhumpa Lahiri would take place at the margins of the city, as they tend to avoid touristic places, and the main characters are moreover often marginalized. However, I have found something quite striking. With a few exceptions, they do not take place at the edges of the city. Instead, the vast majority of them takes place close to, over, inside or on top of the river Tiber (see figure 2abc). The neighborhoods where most are set are Trastevere and Portuense, which are located along the river, and moreover throughout the book there are several bridges crossed, e.g. in "I bigliettini", "La riunione" and "Il ritiro", and in the latter a weapon with which the protagonist is shot is thrown into the river; there are twins born from the hospital inside the river: "Nella città dell'acqua che sporca ho cresciuto due gemelli disordinatissimi. Li ho partoriti in un ospedale che spuntava anche quello dall'acqua, sembrava quasi una grande nave sempre ormeggiata in mezzo al fiume, che mi pareva del colore del tè con qualche cucchiaino di latte" (193); even "La processione", I have found out, is that of 'La Madonna Fiumarola' who is carried over the river in a boat, before being walked through Trastevere. As I have argued in previous chapters for the ocean, als the river is, thus, a crucial blue thread that holds together the whole collection of *racconti*. This is in line with the idea I have also proposed throughout the thesis:

that the lives of the characters in *Racconti romani* are liminal and hybrid – perhaps rather than marginal. The river is a liminal space in the city of Rome, separating East from West, and walking over its bridges is like finding oneself in a liminal moment of suspension, just like Lahiri herself describes for the city of Venice in *In altre parole* (77). The river itself is simultaneously always the same and always in movement, a hybrid space that knows no fixity. Accordingly, the river and water in general are everywhere in *Racconti romani*, and take on many different forms.
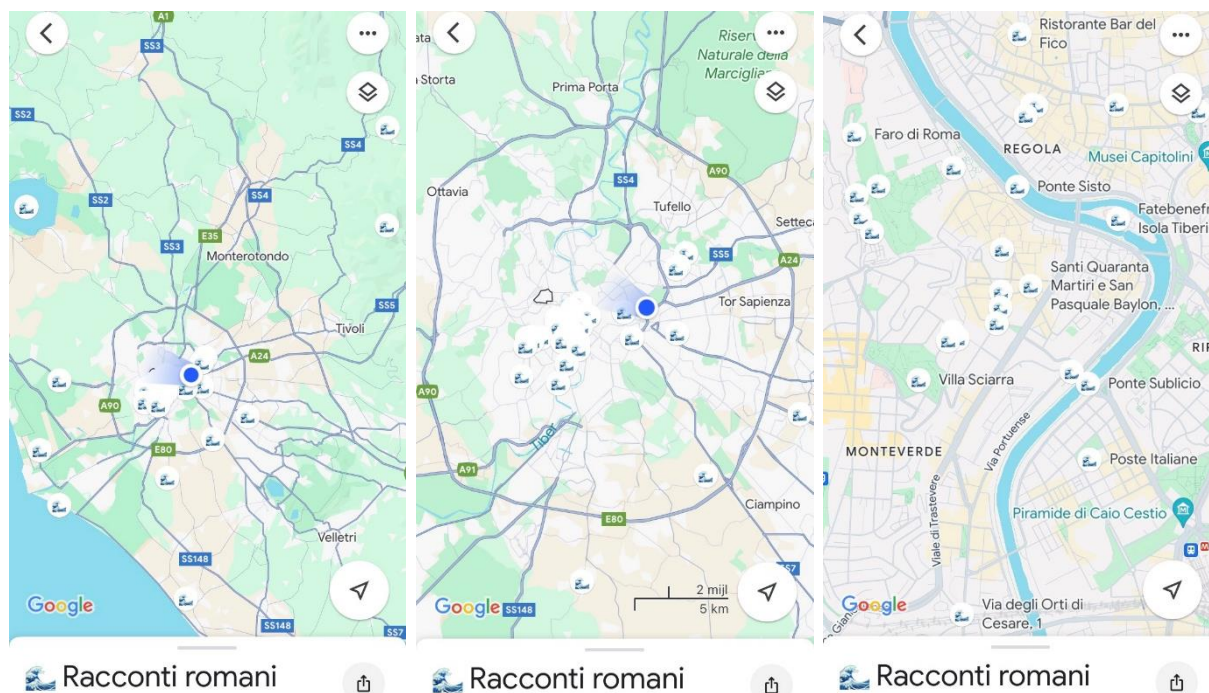

Fig. 2a Rome and surroundings / 2b Grande Raccordo Anulare / 2c center, Trastevere, Portuense and Testaccio
For looking at the map in more detail: https://maps.app.goo.gl/3LuNjMNAPRUmZSZH7?g_st=iw.

I have hesitated for a long time, how I could bring into conversation these stories with the soundscape of the places they are set in. I argue that this conversation already inherently exists, that literary short stories are entangled with the semiotic landscape they are set in, but making this connection explicit seemed like a challenge. I could go to these places, listen to the urban soundscape, and compare it to the soundscape of the book, but this would mean being untrue to my methodology of diffractive listening, which avoids juxtaposition or comparison – and moreover it would most likely lead to an uninteresting result. Then, the element of my research which I had until then mostly considered a stumbling block, an obstacle, suddenly led me to the key answer to this question: my own subject position. As the act of listening is already *a priori* deeply subjective, why should I not manifest the conversation between text and place in a creative way, instead of doing an in vain attempt to analyze objectively something as subjective as a soundscape?

Instead, I decided to create a soundscape myself. I am already a musician and a creative writer for almost all my life, but never have I been able to bring together this side of myself, this form of knowledge production, with my academic skill set that I have acquired during the past years in university. These two worlds – the academic and the creative – barely ever come together, and beside the fact that this is a shame, as it could lead to new fruitful ways of knowing and getting to know the world, it is also strange once we think about it, that we have come to believe that in order to analyze creative objects such as books, music or paintings, we must abstain from all such practices ourselves. As I have been telling people about my project, I encounter a lot of curiosity but also resistance about this idea of combining research with creativity. Luckily, I am not the first one on this path, and I have found examples of artists and researchers who engage in similar endeavors, and who have given me inspiration to pursue this.

I take the methodological idea of "research-creation" from Erin Manning. She describes this new, creative way of doing research as both experiential and experimental, often consisting of extra-linguistic forms of knowledge production. Research-creation is a practice that thinks, that is, it consists of making/doing by thinking, and thinking by making/doing. Through this interaction, the ideas and methods form in the process. That means that it is impossible to frame the project and its methodology clearly beforehand, it rather forms as one goes: it "begins in the midst, in the mess of relations not yet organized" (Manning 134). Research-creation is indeed process, not product oriented. Very much in accordance with 'diffractive listening', in a research-creative approach knower/known relations are attended to and tend to shift. Also in line with the notion of diffraction, is that research-creation is relation and assemblage oriented: invention happens at the interstices of societal networks. One can understand why I choose this method to approach a book like *Racconti romani*, in which as I have pointed out network and liminality play such a big role.

I will shortly mention which projects have inspired me to take on this endeavor. First, there was the graphic novel by Elisa Martino called *Quelli che incontri a Roma e poi te li scordi*, which, like my case study, has as its protagonists people who are usually overlooked in Rome. It has little QR-codes on some pages, that lead to videos filmed very shakily and informally, where one can see the places and hear the sounds of where Martino made her drawings. For me they immediately and strongly evoked the city I was also writing about, while at that point I found myself not in Rome but in Amsterdam. Similarly, but then with a more academic approach, Tânia Cardoso draws the city by way of research, as she explains in "To Know as You Draw: Exploring the City through Drawing". She "considers [her] own artistic practice as research", and this creative research "regards the different ways in which the dynamics of the city enhance, complement, or contradict urban perception and the understanding of urban space by the illustrator". A research that was of great inspiration, was "Going after the liquid chronotope: 'towards the river mouth' performing Celati's literary map" by Giada Peterle and Francesco Visentin, a project with which mine resonates almost in eerie ways; not only in terms of method but also in terms of content, i.e. with regards to the connective narrative role of the river. Peterle and Visentin interpret a literary text as an "implicit map": a "real 'stimulation' to the reader to take himself down that path experiencing the route with his

own body"; an effect that also Lahiri's book has, I suggest. The researchers' performance follows that map, and they argue "practice and performances" to be "relevant methods of research" – something my project deeply concurs with.

My research, of course, focuses on the sonic rather than the visual. I was inspired to make a soundscape by documentary maker and visual anthropologist Jim Brink, whose film *Synthesis*, about two musicians who experiment with nature sounds and synthesizers, just consisted of images of water, nature and machines, and a soundscape – it did not have a clear narrative. This made that the sounds and images really spoke for themselves, which had a very immersive effect. It led me to the idea that my soundscape, which will be accompanied by images of the city, should also not have clear narrative guidance (such as a voice-over). Another source of sonic inspiration was a soundscape performance at the Danish Institute in Rome, next door to the Dutch Institute where I am currently doing my research. The performance was created by Domenico Mannelli, and was called *Geo-Musical Re-Location*. From four different angles of the room we heard fragments of traditional music from Denmark and from Italy, which became mixed, transformed and distorted as the soundscape continued, torn away from the initial geographical indications North/South. The soundscape itself, like Brink's film, did not have any clear single narrative structure, open to interpretation. It did, however, have an extensive introduction by the composer, which explained that the central most important idea was that of the 'soglia', the threshold – this of course resonates with the central position liminality has in my research. This introduction by Mannelli made me realize it would be good to frame my soundscape well and explicitly – as I have been doing in these pages.

My soundscape will travel past the different locations of the *racconti* of Lahiri that I have found. There, urban sounds will be audible, mixed with fragments from the stories, but the latter will not function as solid narrative guidance. Rather, they will come from far, overlap, be loud, vanish. Just like conversations we pick up on the street; just like voices we first hear as a hum, then direct our attention to, because they urge us to listen to them, before our sonic attention is drawn into another direction. Additionally, the soundscape will also consist of more-than-human sounds, because the book is also so full of them. We will hear water, breaking glass, trees, birds. Domenico Mannelli, whom I have met with to discuss our projects, has given me tips about the soundscape, in terms of its technicalities and its content. He has pointed me to the right software to use, and also recommended me to record my own, foreign voice, instead of asking native Italian speakers to read the *racconti* for me. I think this is right, as it is in line with the forms of estrangement the book itself already puts to the fore, and with the idea that my research departs from my own very personal subject position – I am the one who is listening throughout this whole thesis, so why should not also I speak? The soundscape will be accompanied by videographic images, so that we can connect what we hear to specific places in the city. First, I got a filmmaker to agree to help me with this, but because of some unforeseen circumstances unfortunately I had to decide last minute to record and film everything with my phone. This means, although the quality is not extremely bad, that the following soundscape/film is more like a conceptual proposal, which could be executed with more precision when the right means and more time are available.

THE SOUNDSCAPE
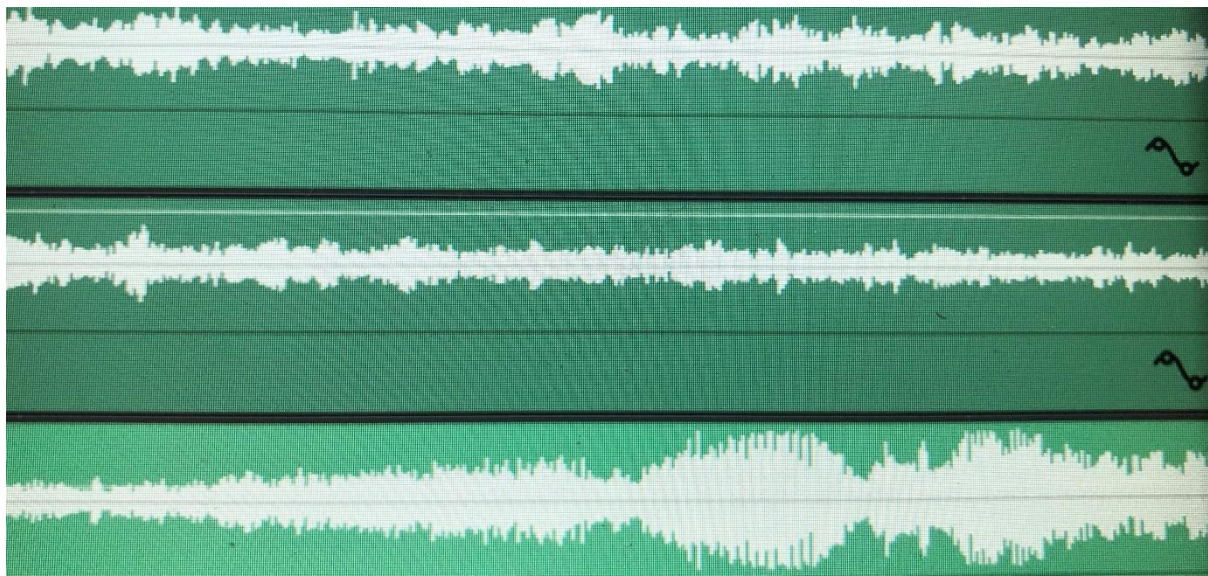
REFLECTION

The creative part of my research started with underlining all the places inside *Racconti romani* and trying to trace down, first by using Google Maps, where in the city they were. This was quite a challenge because, as I said, streets, squares and neighborhoods are (almost) never called by their name. It was, however, not impossible, because they were described in so much detail. It felt like a puzzle. I was quite lucky to be in Rome, as this gave me the opportunity to sit down, for several hours, with friends who are born and raised in this city, and who searched together with me. I know the city quite well for a foreigner. In the months I have lived here my life always moved between different neighborhoods, as opposed to that of many Romans themselves who often remain inside their 'quartiere'; someone once explained the structure of the city to me as "many little cities inside one", an assemblage of microcosms. However, where sometimes I had been searching for hours on the map, my Roman friends said in a split second: "oh that must be there". This made me realize the importance of interaction with the local community and its collective consciousness when you do a research like this. Sometimes, however, the best we could do was say: this story *most likely* takes place there. I decided that for the creative part of the project this did not matter a great deal, as the most important goal is to give the listener the right urban impression connected to the *racconti*; although of course it was a shame and I tried at all costs to avoid it. I saved all the places on an interactive map (see the link under figure 2), categorized them in terms of place to make my physical search the most efficient possible, and went.

I traveled by foot, by bus, by tram, and one day I even biked sixty kilometers: to Appia Antica, Trigoria and Ostia. I realized the texture of the city is rough when one needs to move longer distances through it: buses are unreliable and one often has to change; sidewalks are full of holes and obstacles, if there even are any; and when I took the bike uphill and downhill beyond the GRA, I ended up in a marginal urban wasteland, where provincial roads gave the impression of highways, and there I was with my little bike on the emergency lane, acting as if it were a bike lane. One time when I got off the bus, I found myself on an island between a fence and a highway, and I had to wait for the next bus to be able to escape. Sometimes the places where Lahiri's book took me, or the roads that leaded there, made me feel unsafe, often I felt estranged or out of place. I was at places where I did not belong, and just the unwritten rule of our individualist society not to ask questions to strangers protected me. For example, I entered the terrain of the Sandro Pertini hospital – just like Lahiri's characters "a fare una passeggiata come foss[i] [la] parent[e] di un ricoverato" (86), feeling utterly out of place. This feeling contributed to my understanding of the book, it underlined the estrangement that I have been addressing throughout this whole thesis.

I was disappointed I did not get to do this project together with the filmmaker, and it was also inconvenient, as he did not only have the right experience and sound and video registration equipment (which would have avoided my shaky iPhone images and the unbearable sound of wind blowing directly into an unprotected microphone – who knew Rome was so windy), but also a 'motorino', a scooter: perhaps the only perfect way to go from A to B in this city. In the end, however, I am glad I went alone. Not only did it make me realize the difficulty of movement in the city, as mentioned before, it also made me highly uncomfortable, especially with filming and registering sound. When you are with two, it is less scary. I was grateful to be alone because the discomfort I experienced made me ask questions about the gaze that Lahiri also plays with in her book. Was I allowed to film people while they did not know it? I was not sure and did not always feel comfortable asking, so I decided to film places instead of people. Was I allowed to film places when there happened to be people inside them, if I did not make them the focal point of my film? And was I allowed to record voices? Recording sound was possible to do in a more anonymous way than recording image – which did make it feel, to describe it in academic terms, sneaky. However, recording sound felt less like trespassing, than recording image. I think I would have asked myself less all these questions if I would not have been alone in this kind of 'voyeur' role. I went to a school in Portuense where I thought "I bigliettini" might have taken place – although I later realized this was a high school, and in the *racconto* it is a primary school – and when I was filming it from a distance, some teenagers who happened to be sitting in front of it noticed this and started to scream at me: "Signora! Signora! Perché ci sta prendendo la foto?" Their tone was harsh, but they were right. In the moment, however, I startled and walked away without responding. They screamed after me: "Risponde! Risponde! Perché non risponde?!" This experience resonated uncannily with the unkind children at the school in "I bigliettini". But I was still wondering if I did something ethically unjust. In the evening, half joking, I texted a friend about it: "Am I a bad person?"

I decided that I wanted the soundscape/film to consist of three parts. Lahiri's book also has three sections – inspired by Dante's *Divina Commedia* – so I was certainly inspired by this, but my three sections do not follow hers. Instead, they are structured in terms of space. The first part called "fuori" weaves together all the places in Lahiri's book that are marginal to or outside of the city: Bracciano, the mountains, Ostia, Via Appia Antica, Trigoria, Casaletto, Pietralata, etc. The second part called "tras" takes mostly part in Trastevere, including its parks and importantly the Scalea del Tamburino, intervened by images and sounds of the sea, according to the fluid way *Racconti romani*'s characters imagine it. The third part called "dentro" switches back and forth between Portuense and the city center. Between the various parts, flows the always present river, as a blue thread.

A friend who is a professional documentary maker gave me tips on a software to do the editing: Da Vinci Resolve. It is a great software; it allows you to layer sounds on top of each other, while also combining this with images. Using it on my computer which has very limited abilities, however, was a nightmare. With every action the system lagged or got stuck, and the exporting took many hours. Because of this, I was forced to work more efficiently than I would have wanted: I would have loved to experiment a lot with various sound and image combinations, but the program almost did not allow me to play a preview (or pre-sound), so instead of starting with sound and then combining this soundscape with image, for the sake of efficiency I made the video first and then layered various audio files underneath. What was, however, interesting in this process in which I was often out of control of my device, was that unexpected sonic entanglements occurred in the end product which I had not noticed during the making.

The whole creative process has confirmed for me that creativity inside academia can be an extremely fruitful way of producing knowledge, as it cracks open rigid forms of knowing and fixed procedures of getting to that knowledge. One of the ways it does this, is by taking away the distance we tend to think is necessary to be scientific, towards the (creative) object under analysis. By engaging with *Racconti romani* creatively, I believe that I have become intimate with these narratives; and this intimacy has given me access to new ways of knowing it, and new ways of knowing the city. Indeed, I have come to the understanding that *Racconti romani* – like any book – is entangled with the place where it is set, but that how this entanglement is experienced changes from person to person. The listener of the following soundscape will hear the book and the city through my ears.

CONCLUSION

The city of Rome is a palimpsestic text, of which we become a co-author once we move through it – I have been arguing throughout this thesis, along the lines of reasoning of Michel de Certeau, Serenella Iovino and Andreas Huyssen. Indeed, the metaphor of the palimpsest is quite popular in scholarly and cultural narratives about the city, particularly in relation to the idea of the 'eternal'. It is a narrative that is mostly based on images that give us the suggestion of continuity and stability – the ruins from antiquity, the churches from the middle ages, the fascist buildings; they are all still here and will probably remain long into the future. This image of the 'eternal city', however, suppresses some elements that are inherently part of Rome but not part of its common imaginary, and it moreover suppresses the idea that fundamental change takes place here, continuously, like in any city.

If we move away from this 'ocularcentrist' (Mieszkowski) narrative of Rome that is so integrated in academia as well as in society itself, and *listen* to instead of *look* at her, new noises spring to our attention. All around us there is a 'hum' (Kramer) that turns into sound once we guide our attention to it. What sound is, thus, has everything to do with what kind of attention we give to it. Sound is a deeply subjective but crucial part of the ways in which we know the city. Like the city, we also tend to look at literature as a silent medium, instead of listening to it. Just like urban sound studies counters the ocularcentrist bias of thinking about the city, literary sound studies does so for the way we think about literature. My research positions itself there where urban and literary sound studies meet. Building on William R. Paulson's claim that literature is "the noise of culture" – a marginal and often unintelligible but crucial part of our society – I argue that some literatures produce noise inside the city, inserting themselves into its soundscape.

In this thesis, I have shown that 'resonance' is an adequate theoretical concept and tool to use in a research that analyzes literature and the city in relation to each other, because resonance is a sonic phenomenon that demonstrates the entangled and contagious nature of sound. Accordingly, the sounds in urban space and the sounds produced by text can evoke each other and resonate along with each other, entangling themselves in a vibrating assemblage (Bennett). I mean this in a metaphorical as well as in a material way, and moreover argue that in this context the binary opposition between metaphor and matter breaks down. Rather, 'resonance' can be applied to various degrees of sonic-ness on a spectrum between the metaphorical and the material. For example, it can be used as a term to signify intertextuality. In this case, 'resonance' seems almost entirely metaphorical, but as I have argued, it is not fully, because essentially all language, even when written, *is* sound, and we form a soundscape in our head of any text we read, based on both linguistic sound and descriptions of sound.

Thus, I argue that in principle 'resonance' as a theoretical concept can be applied to any text, because any text sounds and no text exists in isolation; all texts stand in resonant relation to other texts and to extratextual things beyond the confines of their own pages, which they resonate with, and which resonate along with them. Some texts, however, are more explicitly overtly sounding than others. The Italian genre

of the *racconto*, as I have pointed out in my research, is inherently sonic. Therefore, the term of 'resonance' is all the more applicable. It is a genre that is noisy, recalcitrant, 'controcorrente', with an intuitive style and a narrator who is telling – rather than writing – a story, often directly addressing a listener, I claim in accordance with Jhumpa Lahiri's explanation of the genre (*Penguin*). I argue that *racconti* should be listened to, and moreover that any analysis of a *racconto* that does not attend to its spoken nature, is incomplete.

In this research, I have engaged with the methodology that I have called 'diffractive listening', inspired by Pauline Oliveros's 'deep listening' and Karen Barad's 'diffractive reading'. My approach adds two things to Barad's. First, it is more focused on sound. I argue that the phenomenon of diffraction is relevant when talking about sound, because sound consists of waves, and diffraction has to do with the superposition of waves. Second, I have applied Barad's ideas on diffractive reading, a method she mainly applies to texts from different academic fields, to literary texts. I claim this extrapolation of Barad's method is justified, because like academic texts, also literary texts should be read *through* each other, instead of *against*. Often, when two literary texts are compared, they are juxtaposed oppositely from each other, as if both texts produce meaning completely separately from each other. That is, of course, not true: not only do texts stand in entangled, intertextual relation to each other; moreover, our reading of one text inevitably influences our interpretation of one we read afterwards, so it is simply impossible to read literary texts as separate entities.

My research has led me to two important insights concerning diffractive listening. First, I have found that listening to two or more texts – *racconti*, in my case – in waving relation to each other, listening to the resonances between them, indeed sometimes can lead to new insights for either text. Second, my diffractive listening method urged me to be aware of the importance of my own subject position. In academia, we are often taught to exclude ourselves as much as possible from the research, to be as objective as possible. When one's research concerns sound, however, this becomes simply impossible: sound is an inherently subjective phenomenon. Barad's book has taught me that actually in every part of science, also (especially) in the natural sciences, the researcher and the research apparatus they use influence the results of the research. By attending to, instead of trying to evade, our own subject position, we do justice to the fact that nothing in the world exists *a priori* and that everything depends on where we look or listen from. In a literary analysis, this means that how a text is read, changes from person to person, and that my results are, therefore, not universal but personal. This was an element that came through in every part of the research, but most importantly in the research-creative part, in which I used my own creative ideas to put together a soundscape that encompasses urban and literary sound. With this project I wanted to say: literature is always (sonically) entangled with place, but what these entanglements consist of, depends on who is listening.

The literary text I have applied my theory of resonance and method of diffractive listening to, is *Racconti romani* by Jhumpa Lahiri. I chose this text, despite its marginal presence in the literary landscape of the city of Rome, because I think it is necessary to attend to alternative narratives that reinscribe the city, listen to

what kind of noise they make to do so and investigate how they possibly contribute to the deconstruction of the image of the 'eternal city'. I have listened to *Racconti romani*'s resonance on three different scales.

First, I have listened to the macro-soundscape of the collection itself, attempting to detect resonances that occur cross-*racconti*. This was not difficult – there were many. One of the findings, was that paradoxically, Lahiri's *racconti* speak of silence. The function of this silence, was almost always to express a sense of exclusion that many of the characters experience both in the private and the public sphere; the first because they feel lonely, the latter because they are not accepted as 'Roman'. In both cases, the silence that they encounter has an isolating effect on them. Then, the book presents a tension between this notion of isolation, and the notion of network, by something that I call an 'almost-touching-but-not-quite' effect. Between *racconti*, many character resonances occur in such a way that the reader often thinks to have read about a character of one story also in a previous one; but in the end the facts never match up, and this effect of disappointment emphasizes for the reader the isolation of the characters. Lastly, in Lahiri's collection the characters are accompanied by an urban more-than-human soundscape that mostly consists of silent trees, screaming birds, breaking glass and water. I have shown how these elements represent both the fragility of having a liminal hybrid identity – as many characters do – but also, especially in the case of water, the hope that comes with this hybridity: the agency to reimagine oneself and reinscribe the city with new stories.

Secondly, I have listened to *Racconti romani* as part of a vibrant assemblage of Italian short stories, inside the Italian literary landscape which Lahiri herself has called an "open system" (*Penguin* xx). Departing from this idea, I have investigated resonant entanglements between Lahiri's *racconti* and other writings in this genre – resonances that, I have argued, also occur between individual *racconti*, separately from their collections. I have claimed that from the twentieth century, *racconti* have rebelled against other written forms of literature, like the novel, and against traditional ideas of Romanness. Also, their style breaks through the aforementioned sense of isolation, because in *racconti* the listener is directly addressed. I have listened to two different currents of *racconti* with which I argue Lahiri's *Racconti romani* is in conversation. On the one hand, I have read Lahiri's stories in relation to Alberto Moravia, Elsa Morante and Pier Paolo Pasolini who form part of a twentieth century current in this genre. All three authors tend to choose marginalized people in society as the characters of their *racconti*. I have found many stylistic and thematic resonances between these writers and Lahiri, recurring themes being amongst other things similar functions of silence and noise; the role of the more-than-human; anonymity, estrangement and isolation; gender; the presence of something I call 'precarious wandering'; and different manifestations of Michel Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia'. On the other hand, I have read Lahiri's stories in relation to Igiaba Scego and Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, whose short stories form part of the more recent movement of 'migration writing' in Italy. These authors engage similarly with style and thematic as the writers above, but go beyond in their deconstruction of the image of the 'eternal city'. Because the characters in their writings are mostly (first or second generation) immigrants who deal with issues of belonging and a sense of displacement, and in their narratives movement, especially beyond borders, plays a big role, these stories

have a decentralizing effect on our imagination of Italian literature and 'italianità' – as Simone Brioni already argued, but not specifically for the genre of the *racconto* and not for the particular context of the city of Rome. Effectively, I argue that the Roman short stories I discussed that form part of Italian migration literature, stretch what we see as Roman beyond the walls of this city, decentralizing and destabilizing its definition as 'eternal' because of the (implicit) migration movements they contain. Moreover, they insert the city with new voices which cannot be ignored: as argues Fran Tonkiss "the immigrant (...) is audible" and "the city as a polyglot soundscape is a space in which differences remain audible" (305). Lahiri's *racconti* have the same decentralizing and destabilizing effect. They also deal with themes linked to migration, in particular hybridity and liminality, both notions connected to movement, and in doing so Lahiri interacts with this newer current of *racconti*. At the same time, her stories also relate to the more established twentieth century current in which authors made the unlistened-to voices in the city heard as well.

Thirdly, I have listened to how Lahiri's *racconti* entangle themselves with the sites they describe. This chapter departs from the idea that every story takes place somewhere, and that when that is in the city, urban studies should be taken into account to analyze it. It proposes a sonic approach as a fruitful way to explore the common ground between literature and place – especially when, like in my case, the genre under scrutiny is particularly sonic by nature. I argue that the city resonates inside Lahiri's stories. She evokes it in a detailed way: although the sites where these *racconti* take place are almost never explicitly named, the city can precisely and only be Rome. I argue that Lahiri's choice to leave the places anonymous shapes a hybrid audience for these writings: on the one hand, Romans do not need the names because by following the details they immediately know where something should be; and on the other hand the foreigners who read this book, who would have felt excluded if the book would have been full with street names unknown to them, now also can imagine the city vividly. Putting the places on a map has, as Franco Moretti argued, provided me with invaluable insights about the book. Most strikingly, I have found that the majority of the stories take place close to the river. This spatial element accompanies the liminality and hybridity of the characters, who despite their vulnerability reinscribe the city with fluid meaning, literally and symbolically. With my creative project, I have tried to establish a conversation between the city and the texts, which explained their entanglement – through the peculiarity of my ears. During the process I found that asking for help from Romans during the preparational phase was crucial, but that during the registration process itself being alone ended up to be the most interesting, as it made me more consciously aware of my own gaze. I also found, symbolically, that moving through this city is slow and difficult, just like the 'eternal city' is an image that struggles against movement and change. The places where Lahiri's stories took me made me feel estranged many times, similarly to how *Racconti romani*'s characters often feel. Overall, my creative research provided me with findings I would have never come to in a more traditional approach. I propose that research-creation (Manning) is a useful and meaningful addition to the existing sound studies methodologies, because sound is eminently subjective; but it can be applied anywhere in the cultural sciences, as it cracks open existing sometimes limiting ways of making

knowledge, and instead makes space for new hybrid forms of knowledge production. Using this method can create a more intimate relationship to the cultural object under analysis, which does not discard the subjectivity of our interpretation of it.

In short, I have demonstrated how the theoretical concept of 'resonance' has the capacity to move between various scales of analysis and between various degrees of materiality and metaphoricality. The methodology of 'diffractive listening' allowed me to attend to these literary resonances, while reading Lahiri's *racconti* through each other, through other *racconti* and through urban space. Moreover, 'diffractive listening' made my own subjectivity explicit throughout the project, culminating into a creative research. Resonance and diffraction have led me to an understanding of the city, literature, and both together as a layered, vibrant, everchanging assemblage – in the case of Lahiri and Rome, and more broadly. By listening to the assemblage of *racconti* in Rome, I have found that their noise shakes up the city, making the notion of the 'eternal' tremble at its foundation.

Other than the application of research-creation endeavors in similar projects, future research could analyze other types of literary texts that are set in cities, combining urban sound studies and literary sound studies – or in another way listen to the sound of literature and place in relation to each other – to find out if this sonic approach is only relevant for a genre that is as sounding as the *racconto*, or if it can be applied more broadly. It could furthermore explore the possibilities of the theoretical term of 'resonance', possibly but not necessarily in combination with my methodology of 'diffractive listening'. Alternatively, it could also take on the project of investigating a broader corpus of cultural objects – a greater number of *racconti*, but also possibly film, novels, theater, museum exhibitions, etc. – that contribute to the deconstruction of the image of the 'eternal city'. Such a research could take a sound studies approach, but it could also explore other fields of critical thinking about the city through cultural analysis.

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