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‘Everything is translatable, nothing is translatable’: the migrant as translated/translator in Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*

Daniela Vitolo

1 The new millennium has witnessed the appearance of Pakistani Anglophone fiction on a local and global scene. Around the turn of the century, indeed, a first distinct group of Pakistani authors writing in English has highlighted the complex nature of Pakistani society while writing for a variegated audience composed of Pakistanis living at home and abroad, the children of Pakistani diaspora as well as anglophone readers from around the world. In this literary production the collective identity crisis Pakistani society deals with is discussed from different perspectives and is articulated in ways that consider how historical events and political and social dynamics affect the formation of personal and collective identity. A shared characteristic of such narratives is the choice of characters standing at the margins of the reality they live in, usually for gender, class, or faith reasons. However, while in some cases the writer’s attention is focused on dynamics that take place within Pakistan’s local context, in other cases the narrative investigates the experiences of characters living in the West and, thus, finding themselves in-between two societies and cultures. It is not rare that the authors writing about the experience of Pakistanis living in the West - be they migrants, second generations or people temporarily established outside their motherland - are themselves living abroad or between a Western country and Pakistan. Thus, they write from a composite background that allows them to have a good understanding of both Pakistani and Western society as they offer a perspective on issues of local and global relevance regarding the processes of identity construction in multicultural contexts. These narratives interrogate how identity is constructed when the characters find themselves in need of negotiating between different cultural contexts as they live in The United States or Great Britain. If most works belonging to this group focus on the consequences the 9/11 terrorist attack has had on the lives of Pakistanis living in the

West, others look at the life of diaspora representing the challenges that the migrants and their children face when torn between the will and desire to keep and pass on the culture of origin and the need to open out to the culture of the country they have moved to.

2 In the introduction to the essay *Pakistan and its Diaspora* published in 2011 by Marta Bolognani and Stephen Lyon, the authors discuss the complex transnational dynamics that define the relationships between the members of the Pakistani diaspora and Pakistanis living in their homeland highlighting that:

> Pakistanis and diaspora are not simple reflections of one-another [they] continue to be simultaneously one aggregated population with strong flows of information, resources, and people within as well as highly differentiated disaggregated groups with very independent political, social, economic, and cultural goals and trajectories (Bolognani and Lyon, 2011:5).

3 Furthermore, in her studies conducted on Pakistani communities based in the United Kingdom, Pnina Werbner states that historically the relocation of migrants has been characterised by the coexistence of two paradoxes. The first paradox is that when migrants establish in the United Kingdom, in order to address a need to put down new roots, they are inclined to form cohesive communities whose members tend to have limited interactions with the rest of the society where they have migrated. The second paradox concerns the translocation of Pakistani cultural practices. In fact, Werbner maintains that each member of the community can establish a diverse relationship with the culture of origin and that of arrival: there can be conflict between the two, a complete closure to one of them, or a tendency to hybridisation. However, the ways in which individuals relate to their culture of origin is what defines the roles that each member has within the community. As a consequence, those who comply with the rituals and social rules peculiar to the community are recognised a role within it and can retain more social power.

4 Published in 2004, *Maps for Lost Lovers* is the second of six novels written by Nadeem Aslam, also author of *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), and *The Golden Legend* (2017). Born in Gujranwala in 1966 and migrated to the United Kingdom with his family as a teenager, Nadeem Aslam is a writer belonging to the Pakistani diaspora. Only when he moved to England did he start learning English, the language he later chose for composing fiction. Through the eyes of one of the characters, the old man Shamas, *Maps for Lost Lovers* investigates the life of a Pakistani community settled in England for more than forty years. Focusing on the lives of Shamas and his wife Kaukab, the novel narrates what happens from the moment of the disappearance of Jugnu, Shamas' brother, and Chanda, two contrasted lovers that had openly challenged the rules of the community living together outside of wedlock. This central story allows Aslam to take his readers on a journey in the heart of the Asian community as he narrates about the relationships that the characters establish with each other, on the one hand, and with the motherland and the West on the other. Among the elements that participate in creating the rich picture depicted by the author are: the extramarital relationship between Shamas and the young woman Suraya; the contrasted love story between the Sikh Kiran and Kaukab's brother that is revived twenty years after it had been repressed; the vicissitudes of young women forced into arranged marriages. The story ends one year later when Chanda's brothers are convicted for the honour killing of the wayward couple. As the novel focuses on the ways in which the characters establish a relationship with two languages and cultures,

generating different processes of definition and redefinition of their identity as Pakistani migrants, the essay discusses how the author represents the relationship between translation – which is at the same time physical, linguistic and cultural – and the construction of the migrant’s identity and points out that the novel suggests to look at migrants’ identity construction as a translation process in which something is lost and something is gained while translators always need to deal with a dimension of untranslatability that belongs to any translation. The author also appears to propose that identity construction can result in a more or less successful process depending on the individual and collective ability to move between two cultures and to recognize the limits and risks associated to refusing to be open towards the new culture while sticking to a traditionalist interpretation of the original culture, this being presented by the author as the main reason behind translation failure in the diasporic community the novel depicts.

5 Thus, the essay is thought of as a contribution to the debate around the representation of identity in this novel whose charatcters are Muslim migrants living in the North of England. To the debate participate, among others, Amina Yaqin who interrogates how the representation of honour killing in the novel can both provide an ‘insider’ perspective to the British reader and reiterate a stereotyped representation of the Muslim community in Britain (Yaqin: 2012), David Waterman who discusses the migrants’ construction of identity highlighting how when the memory of the past, and thus tradition, is not used correctly it can cause a collision between different cultural identities (Waterman: 2010), and Linsdey Moore who reads Aslam’s novel against the background of the war on terror as she looks for new ways of responding to the social and cultural consequences on 9/11 (Moore: 2009).

6 The most common meaning that we give to the term ‘translation’ is that of a movement through which an oral or written text, or a sentence or a single word, is transposed from one language into another. The aim of the process is usually that of producing a new text as faithful as possible to the original, both in the meaning and in the form. Nevertheless, such a rendering is never a simple one and the awareness of the dynamics that characterise the translation process has induced scholars to develop a critical discourse on the issue. All the discussions around this question move from a common assumption: given the nature of the processes through which meanings are produced within a linguistic system, a text cannot be perfectly transposed from one language to another without losing or altering part of its form and meaning. Therefore, a translation is never the perfect equivalent of the original text because during the translation process something gets unavoidably lost while something else is acquired. In *The Translation Zone* Emily Apter organises her discourse on translation, conducted in the field of comparative literature, moving between two extreme positions: nothing is translatable, everything is translatable. Thus, she reviews the theories of scholars that have supported one of the two thesis among which are Alain Badiou, who states that translating means unavoidably facing a disaster, and Walter Benjamin for whom any text can be translated as long as we accept the fact that any version will always contain in itself a dimension of failure. As Emily Apter writes:

> Something is always lost in translation. Unless one knows the language of the original, the exact nature and substance of what is lost will be always impossible to ascertain; even if one has access to the language of the original, there remains an x-factor of untranslatability that renders every translation an impossible world or faux regime of semantic and phonic equivalence (Apter : 2006, 210).

7 Therefore, translators do not carry out a mechanical activity, consisting in a sort of transposition of words or sentences from one language to another to create a precise copy of the original in another language. On the contrary, they carry out an active process of language and content manipulation that implies that they appropriate the text through its interpretation and rewriting.

8 Such an understanding of the translation process has been appropriated by diverse theoretical fields of study. The feminist discourse, for example, has emphasised that a translation is a productive, rather than a re-productive, process through which is possible to put in practice acts of resistance to the dominant patriarchal discourse (Spivak: 1993; Venuti: 2000). Scholars like Lawrence Venuti maintain that as a productive act translation allows to react and resist unequal power relations, as is the case of colonial and postcolonial relations. In Postcolonial Studies, the issue emerges both when a parallel is individuated between the binary oppositions Europe/colony and original/translation, and in discussions that deal with the role retained by textual translations in the context of cultural policies pursued in the colonial and postcolonial era. Such an understanding of translation means conceiving it as an open process, that is never completed, and that implies that the subjects involved in it have the power of agency. It is Walter Benjamin that moves away from a conception of translation as a mechanism based on identity and similarity defining translation as a process that “passes through continua of transformation” (On language: 1996, 70). According to Benjamin, such a transformative procedure inevitably alters and usurps the original work but at the same time allows it to survive: “for a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life” (The Task: 1996, 254).

9 Cultural studies have approached the issue of translation going back to the etymology of the term, which comes from the Latin *translatio*, meaning ‘to carry across’. As Harish Trivedi writes, what has happened to the term is that it has been “translated back to its literal, etymological meaning, of human migration” (Trivedi : 2007, 287). A translation is not only a transposition of linguistic meanings but also a bridge between different cultures that can thus try to understand each other. Such a reflection on the processes through which cultural translations are realised through linguistic translation, has promoted an investigation of the ways in which the migrant translates himself, and his original culture, in the context he moves to, that is the place he reaches after a physical translation from one country to the other. Having moved across physical and political boundaries, migrants are to Salman Rushdie “translated men” (2010, 17). Homi Bhabha discusses translation as survival deriving the concept from Jacques Derrida, who reads it as *sur-vivre*, or living on the margins, and from Rushdie for whom, Bhabha says, translation is the migrant’s dream for survival (Bhabha, 1994: 324). According to Rushdie the migrant, in order not to succumb in the new context, needs to understand and try to be understood by the world around him and this involves also going through an individual transformation.

10 As the characters in Jumpa Lahiri’s novels are translators “insofar they must make sense of the foreign to survive” (Lahiri : 2000, 120), also the characters that inhabit the story narrated in *Maps for Lost Lovers* need to engage with the West translating the new context to themselves and themselves to the new context. Translation as comprehension can be seen as related to the processes of identity construction because

for the subjects to be able to define themselves they need to understand themselves as part of the social and cultural context they live in. For the migrant this means finding an answer to the question ‘who am I in relation to the two social and cultural contexts I relate to?’. In *Maps for Lost Lovers* the investigation on the relationship between migration and translation shows that while the migrant can learn a new language and find a way to deal with another culture, he cannot avoid facing the limits inherent to any translation. They emerge in relation to those elements, like customs and traditions, that do not have an equivalent in the culture of arrival. Thus, the migrant learns the irresolvable nature of the limits inherent to translation:

> caught in-between a ‘nativist’, even nationalist, atavism and a postcolonial metropolitan assimilation, the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem that Walter Benjamin has described as the irresolution, or liminality, of ‘translation’, the element of resistance in the process of transformation (Bhabha, 1994: 321).

11 In the novel, the characters find themselves in what Bhabha calls a ‘third space’, suspended at the interstices of cultural difference, caught in an ambivalent process of scission and hybridisation (Bhabha, 1994: 321). Although in different ways, all the characters experience the relationship between migration, translation, and survival. Even when translation fails completely, still it affects the definition and redefinition of the subject’s identity. Indeed, the relationship that the individual establishes with translation, as Emily Apter writes, becomes a means through which identity can be reformed, the subject can find its new place in the world, and, consequently, political change can be generated:

> Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements. [...] Translation failure demarcates intersubjective limits, even as it highlights that “eureka” spot where consciousness crosses over to a rough zone of equivalency or crystallizes around an idea that belongs to no one language or nation in particular. Translation is a significant medium of subject reformation and political change (Apter, 2006: 6).

12 A recurring element throughout the novel is the reference to the relationship that the characters establish with two languages, English and Urdu, which is accompanied by reflections on the potentialities and limits of one or both languages. The reference to the two languages and, thus, to linguistic translation, is stressed throughout the text also through metalinguistic comments and the use of paratextual devices. The title of the novel introduces the idea of a map. It can be interpreted as a tool to help the reader to move inside the area inhabited by the community, discovering its nature and understanding the relationships among its people while trying to learn what happened to the couple of lost lovers. Thus, the novel is introduced as a research connected to the concept of mapping a territory and hence a space. In addition, the novel opens with a quotation by Octavio Paz – “A human being is never what he is but the self he seeks” – which suggests that the story about the contrasted lovers, characteristic of Urdu literature, is a pretext to talk about a research that is related to the construction of individual identity. Moving from the analysis of the etymological meaning of the words ‘map’ – from the latin noun *mappa*, which means napkin or cloth – and ‘text’ – from the latin term *textus*, textile – it is possible to consider a map as a text as well as a text as a map. A person who draws or uses a map moves across an unknown or little-known

space, crosses its borders, and takes the risk of exposing oneself to what is new and foreign and, by doing so, has the opportunity to meet the other. In the novel the encounter of two worlds is rendered through some linguistic observations as the following thought attributed to Kaukab, who feels hopeless about the possibility of becoming familiar with the English language:

> She had to practice her English in the mirror. And it too was hopeless: what was a person to do when even *things* in England spoke a different language than the one they did in Pakistan? In England the heart said *boom boom* instead of *dhak dhak*; a gun said bang! Instead of *thah!*; things fell with a ‘thud’ not a *dharam*, small bells said ‘jingle’ instead of *chaan-chaan*; the train said ‘choo choo’ instead of *chuk chuk* (35).

13 The novel is also peppered with references to Urdu-English literary translation. This element gives a poetic flavour to the work and is used to establish a connection between a work produced in English and the literary traditions that have inspired it while representing a fundamental way to convey the idea that migration implies a painful separation from home that produces suffering. Thus, in a scene set at the local bookstore *Safeena*, two characters discuss the Urdu translation of Joyce’s *Ulysses* “Jugnu had come in [...] to ask if there was an Urdu-language *Ulysses*: ‘a moth circles in the light in the brothel sequence. I wonder which Urdu word for moth they use – *parvana* or the more prosaic *patanga*?’” (236). However, the most relevant aspect of the way in which Aslam introduces literary translation in his work lies in the fact that, as Amina Yaqin suggests, he uses frequent references to the works of Faiz Ahmad Faiz – the Urdu poet who has sung the condition of the exile – to highlight that migration is a form of exile and, as such, it is always a painful condition. The unidentified place where the Asian community lives is called *Dasht-e-Tanhaii* and the name is derived from the poem *Yad* (Memory), that the poet wrote in 1952, and which metaphorically describes the suffering of a lover who is far from his loved one. In opposition to *Dasht-e-Tanhaii* the house where the family lived in Pakistan is named *Sohni Dharti*, marvellous land, after the title of a famous Pakistani patriotic song. Moreover, the local bookstore, *Safeena*, derives its name from the poem *Subh-e Azadi* (Down of Freedom) where Faiz expresses his feelings about the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. Aslam suggests that like the exile, the migrant suffers because of the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” whose consequence is that “its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said : 2001, 173). The author uses references to Urdu poetry to show that the migrant experiences a sense of lack and loss that is characteristic of the translation process.

14 As the book is divided into four parts, which correspond to the four seasons, the structure suggests that the story develops over one year. What is more, there are sentences that link the beginning of the novel to its end. When, Shamas is introduced in the first pages of the book, he is pictured at the entrance of his house catching the falling snow in his hand: “a habit as old as his arrival in this country, he has always greeted the season’s first snow in this manner, the flakes losing their whiteness on the palm of his hand to become clear wafers of ice before melting to water – crystals of snow transformed into a monsoon raindrop” (5). This scene is described in an identical way at the end of the novel when, a year later, snow falls again on the British town. This time the sentence is followed by a thought that comes to Shamas about Suraya, the woman with whom he has had a clandestine relationship: “and now he hopes she *has* become pregnant by him during the summer” (367). Such a sentence might be useful to

explain a metaphor that appears in the first pages and which seems to be out of place as it refers to Kiran, an old unmarried woman who is childless: "With that umbrella she is a riddle personified: the solution being *a foetus attached to a placenta by the umbilical cord*" (5)". Through these literary devices, the author creates a circular text that suspends the time of the community, placing it in a temporality which is, according to Bhabha, simultaneously the mysterious time of cultural dislocation and the space of the untranslatable. Thus, the time and space of the life of the community are suspended and in such a dimension takes place the encounter with otherness.

15 The space of hybridity where translation is both possible and impossible is the neighbourhood of the English town where the streets are renamed by each group of migrants:

> As in Lahore, a road in this town is named after Goethe. There is a Park Street here as in Calcutta, a Malabar Hill as in Bombay, and a Naag Tolla Hill as in Dhaka. Because it was difficult to pronounce the English names, the man who arrived in this town in the 1950s had re-christened everything they saw before them. They had come from across the Subcontinent, lived together ten to a room, and the name that one of them happened to give to a street or landmark was taken up by the others, regardless of where they themselves were from. But over the decades, as more and more people came, the various nationalities of the Subcontinent have changed the names according to the specific country they themselves are from – Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan. Only one name has been accepted by every group, remaining unchanged. It's the name of the town itself. Dasht-e-Tanhaii. The Wilderness of Solitude. The Desert of Loneliness (29).

16 Renaming becomes a way to try to make familiar places that are unfamiliar by giving them names which refer to streets located in faraway homelands. The naming process is an expression of power as it implies exerting an authority over what is named by giving it an identity. Those who employ this power over the physical places that constitute the neighbourhood enact a process of cultural appropriation by attributing them an Asian identity and so translating their original British nature into something new that is, indeed, hybrid. Furthermore, giving new names to places, these people attempt a sort of translation by which the streets of Lahore, Bombay or Dhaka symbolically cross a border as migrants do. "Naming" writes Bill Ashcroft "is a form of translation because it inserts the named object or location – translates it – into a particular cultural narrative" (Ashcroft : 2011, 29). Thus, language can exercise a power that is both transformational and productive of meaning, making physical places part of the process through which the migrant's identity is shaped. The identity of the place is in itself modified as it becomes an interstitial place where the original British identity of the streets is transformed through the translation performed by the migrants.

17 However, it is beyond the borders of the community, which is almost coincidental with the limits of the neighbourhood where the migrants live, that the encounter with otherness takes place. Kaukab and her children can be regarded as representative of two different ways of defining oneself through the relationship with others. More than any other character, Kaukab makes the reader think about resistance in translation as she is both unable to translate and refuses such a possibility. To her, English is the impenetrable language of otherness that will remain distant and incomprehensible despite her attempts to learn it:

18 she filled a whole notebook with the things she overheard, words whose meaning she didn't know, proverbs jumbled up, sayings mistakenly glued to other sayings:

> The grass is always green with envy on the other side.
> Love is in the air but is blind as a bat.
> Blood is thicker than water through thick and thin.
> It will be a cold day in Hell when Hell freezes over.
> A friend indeed is a friend, indeed.
> Heaven is other people (32).

19 Her difficulty in speaking English appears in the rare contacts that the woman has with people from outside the community as well as when she tries to use the language to reduce the distance between herself and her children who grew up in England. This is made clear in passages like the following one: "She wants to use the English expression 'the sooner, the better' but wonders whether it isn't actually 'the better, the sooner'; she decides not to risk looking foolish in his eyes" (293). The difficulty she has when using English is probably the most evident sign of the hurdle that the woman faces every time she tries to communicate with people around her, as made clear by the relationships she has with all the members of her family. Being a migrant and lacking an education, Kaukab is Gayatri Spivak's subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" who finds it difficult to express her subjectivity even through her mother tongue and consequently she remains completely trapped by the resistance that a language always opposes to a speaker, even when this is the mother tongue. As Derrida has discussed in *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, any speaker must confront the inexpressibility inherent to any language even when he tries to express his own subjectivity through the mother tongue. Even in this case, indeed, the person is not the owner of the language but he is being hosted by it. Given such a condition, the speaker needs to find a way to use language as a means of expression, whilst accepting the fact that even the mother tongue imposes insurmountable limits that can make it difficult to convey personal identity through language. However, Kaukab is unable to find in the language a space of negotiation which would allow her to render her subjectivity through words. Being unable to enact such a process, she is helpless to express herself and the consequence is that there is always a discrepancy between what she wants to communicate and what she actually says. For this reason, more than any other character, she allows translation to be thought of in terms of a need to make sense as well as in terms of a relationship with the incomprehensible. The unintelligible is to Bhabha an element that characterizes the life of the postcolonial metropolis, which is permeated by the anxiety that derives from the impossibility of finding a solution to the migrant's double identity. Kaukab tackles this condition by retreating from any contact with others, thus adding her inability and refusal to communicate with the culture she has found in England to her original inability to communicate successfully in her mother tongue. For this reason, the woman's reaction is in contrast to the idea expressed by Bhabha who states that in the postcolonial city the migrant can inhabit the hybrid condition generated by the encounter of different cultures.

20 Kaukab's refusal of any contact with the local culture implies also that, as she suffers like an exile because of her physical distance from her homeland, she both sticks to behaviours and values that she considers to be peculiar to her tradition and culture, and conceives the relationship between Pakistan and the United Kingdom in an oppositional way. Indeed, she idealises Pakistan imagining it as the depositary of positive values and standards of behaviour that show that her motherland is morally

superior to the Western country where she lives, which is instead regarded as lacking principles and ethics. This is rendered through the opposition between *Sohni Dharti* and *Dasht-e-Tanhaii* that Kaukab makes clear when she tries to imagine what might have happened to Jugnu and Chanda who had disappeared as soon as they had come back from a trip to Pakistan where they had met their families. She thinks that immersing themselves in the cultural context they had found in Pakistan, the two had had the possibility to absorb certain positive values. Therefore, she hypothesizes that becoming aware of the mistake they were making by living together outside wedlock, and thus following a certain Western behaviour, on reaching England Jugnu and Chanda had gone at the girl’s house to ask her family to forgive their faults:

> The decadent and corrupt West had made them forget piety and restrain, but the countless examples in Pakistan had brought home to them the importance and beauty of a life decorously lived according to His rules and injunctions, Pakistan being a country of the pious and the devout, a place where boundaries are respected (63).

21 Other characters show a similar perspective on the relationship between Pakistani and Western culture and this seems to help defining the identity of the community. Its members perceive themselves as part of a group sharing values and customs that are typical of the place they come from and this distinguishes them from the rest of the British society. This supports the process through which the local imagined community is created while the binary opposition between England and Pakistan also concurs to the way in which the Pakistani migrants imagine their homeland. The oppositional perspective on British and Pakistani society explains also why they feel a need to preserve their world from the risk of contamination with ‘the other’. The community’s closure to the outside world emerges, for example, when a woman needs to call 999 thus finding herself in the rare situation of communicating with a person from outside the community:

> someone ran into the blue kitchen [...] to call 999 in rudimentary English, speaking to a white person for the fourth time in her life, wondering whether she should add the word ‘fuck’ into her speech now and then to sound more like a person who belonged to this country” (262).

22 The image of the Western society as corrupt is also rendered through the words of a mother scolding her daughter telling her that she should behave properly “or she’ll be given away to a white person who’ll make her eat pork and drink alcohol and not *wash* her bottom after going to the toilet – forcing her to use *only* toilet paper. The child is disturbed by the horrors disobedience can lead to” (220).

23 However, it is only part of the community that sticks to a vision that both demonises the West and promotes the adherence to certain norms and behaviours, that in some cases are perceived as typically Pakistani but are rather traditionalist, and frequently backward, practices mistaken as culture specific customs. Another part of the community, mainly the younger generations, both faces the consequences of such a worldview and emerges as the representative of an attitude towards hybridisation. Mah-Jabin, Kaukab’s daughter, is taken to Pakistan, when she is sixteen years old, and forced to marry a violent man from whom she later divorces. According to her mother, the girl would have never been allowed to refuse the arranged marriage because this would have dishonoured her family:

> I would have *tied* you up and taken you there [...] And what’s wrong with Pakistan? Many girls from here are sent back to marry and live there, and they are happy there. Only the other month, the matchmaker told me of a woman from here who

> has been divorced by her Pakistani husband by mistake, and she's *still* eager to go back and live with him there. That's what a good and dignified woman is like (112).

24 Other situations present young people as victims of their parents' reproduction of practices that are observed in the specific social context they belong to in Pakistan. While Jugnu and Chanda are killed to preserve the honour of the girl's family, another girl who had refused to be submissive to her parents and husband is killed during an exorcism performed by a self-proclaimed healer who had convinced the girl's parents that her behaviour was unnatural (185). For many of the characters belonging to the second generation of migrants, that in many cases have never been to Pakistan and never had a direct contact with that society, the relationship with Pakistani culture results in resistance to the rules and behaviours that the majority of the members of the community adopts regarding them as typically Pakistani. As a consequence, the younger generation develops a fundamentally negative conception of Pakistani culture, which is mainly associated with backward practices that limit individual freedom, and which appears, again, as opposed to the Western culture. Thus, the ways in which part of the community define and perpetuate its relationship with its original culture appears as an obstacle to the process through which other members of the group of migrants can define their Pakistani identity. For this reason even those characters that see translation as a way to allow two cultures to communicate and are open to define their identity in-between the two contexts, face a kind of failure of the translation process. This happens when they deal with some of the norms of the community and with a certain attitude to refuse translation. If translation is necessary for the migrant's survival, the violent death of some of the characters becomes a metaphor for the failure of translation.

25 However, if death is an extreme case, the most common risk is that of being overwhelmed by the anxiety generated by the multiplicity of hybridity and from the untranslatability of translation. This is the risk faced by the members of Kaukab's family. Shamas, who is used to crossing the limits of the neighbourhood living also outside it, has the official role of mediating between his community and the world outside it. He is the "director of the Community Relations Council, [...] the person the neighbourhood turns to when unable to negotiate the white world on its own '' (15). Also Charag and his siblings, Mah-Jabin and Ujala, try to mediate between the two contexts they live in although this means that they must face a tense relationship with their mother, which can be seen as representative of the tension that defines such an in-between condition. After divorcing her violent husband, Mah-Jabin comes back to England and starts university, choosing to live far from her neighbourhood. Ujala leaves his family house and the neighbourhood when he finds out that his mother had been administering him bromide, given to her by a religious figure at the local mosque, believing that this would have made the boy obedient to her rules. Charag marries and later divorces the British Stella. The child born from their relationship can be seen as representing the product of the personal journey through which Kaukab's son has placed himself at the interstices of two cultures. Notwithstanding, Kaukab sees Charag's life choices as the signs of his betrayal of his mother as well as of the community he belongs to. Charag's son is the evidence of such a betrayal because, according to Kaukab, the child, born of a mixed couple, will easily forget his father's origin and his Pakistani identity seeing himself as a white British person:

> the little boy would no doubt marry a white girl and his own children would too: *all* trace of modesty and propriety would be bred out of them. Is this how Charag's

> grandchildren would think of Charag? – 'My mother and father are white, and my mother's people are all white. I look a little dark because of one of my grandparents. He was a Paki'" (309).

26 Thus, the three siblings behave in ways that Kaukab cannot understand and condemns as opposed to her worldview. However, notwithstanding Kaukab's interpretation of her children's behaviours, they do not refuse their Pakistani identity, rather they question certain practices that they perceive as restricting their freedom, while trying to successfully place themselves in the interstitial space where they can define themselves as British Pakistani.

27 For the process to be successful the hybrid space where identities meet, and where individuals deal with their divided selves, must be productive of meaning. This can happen through a conscious process that is enacted when individuals find a way to interrogate themselves on how they define their identity in relation to the contexts they interact with and are part of. If all of Kaukab's children appear to be involved in such a process, it seems that it is Charag, the artist, who is given the role of suggesting that artistic expressions can be a medium through which the process can take place. Charag's *The Uncut Self-Portrait,* through which he contests that his circoncision was "the first act of violence done to me in the name of a religious or social system" (320) can be read as an expression of how, through the creative process, the painter has looked at himself from the outside and has posed himself questions about his identity. Through Charag's experience Aslam seems to point out that artistic expressions play a role in helping people deal with the definition of the self at a personal and collective level. The creative process, as well as its result, produce a space of representation, discussion, contestation and reshaping of the divided and hybrid self, a dimension where thought individuates a space of free action at the interstices of translation.

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ABSTRACTS

A translation is always a process and never a simple one or a complete one. The task of the translator is to transpose meanings allowing distant worlds to make sense of each other but this always bears with itself a dimension of failure as nothing can be perfectly transposed from one language to another without losing or altering part of its meaning. If, as Salman Rushdie observes, from an etymological point of view to translate means to carry across, then the migrant is a ‘translated man’. The migrant’s translation implies physical, linguistic and cultural border-

crossings that generate a process that shapes the migrant’s identity. This process is an act of survival, both in the sense of living on the margins and in the sense of the migrant‘s dream for survival (Benjamin, Bhabha, Derrida, Rushdie). The paper proposes a reading of Nadeem Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* that analyses how it represents the relationship between translation and the Pakistani migrants’ processes of identity construction.

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Keywords: Pakistani Anglophone literature; Translation Studies, Postcolonial literature, Pakistani identity, Diaspora studies

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