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## **The Role of the Creative Industries: Translating Identities on Stages and Visuals**

**Alessandra Rizzo<sup>1a</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Drawing on research on narrative theory (Baker, 2006, 2014) in translation and interpretation studies, on the interdisciplinary relationship between translation studies and the visual and performing arts, and on the principal diversities between media discourse representations and aesthetic constructions on the topic of the migration crisis, this study addresses the issue of transferring cultural difference and language diversity within public and digital spaces through the telling and visualization of authentic stories belonging to migrant people, which contribute to the reversal of anti-refugee media discourses. Against the lens of a political reframing of migrant communities in the arts, translation, in collaboration with the aesthetics of migration, is scrutinised from a non-mainstream perspective that involves acts of interventionism and resistance, collaboration and solidarity, adaptation and performance. Evidence is given by the scrutiny of a corpus composed of visual and performing arts, which includes *Queens of Syria*, *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, *Project#RefugeeCameras*, and *Porto M*.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD, Email: [alessandra.rizzo@unipa.it](mailto:alessandra.rizzo@unipa.it)

Tel: +39-23897011

<sup>a</sup> University of Palermo, Italy

## 1. Introduction

In order to fight back we must connect, we must communicate, we need to learn solidarity, we must translate in more ways than just verbal translation, we must attempt a translation of the streets, a deep translation. Collectively we must move on to somewhere new. (Rizk, 2015)

Translation as a mode of communication that favours mediation and exchange between global cultures has considerably expanded and grown in the area of the creative industries. The study of translation has also evolved in its multimodal survey of the ways by means of which words, sounds and images are adapted and re-interpreted within cultural frameworks and digital platforms (Mostert, Lsney, Maroko, & Kaschula, 2017). Translation has thus remarkably acquired a crucial role in aesthetic discourse as a multimodal tool that involves a variety of fields, such as the visual and performing arts, as spheres belonging to the creative cultural sector.

The interest of scholars, filmmakers, and artists in the relationship between translation and creativity within aesthetic discourse has unexpectedly increased, and the attention has focused upon the exploration of the modes and genres that make translation an expedient for the re-framing of migrant identities from contexts of crisis in contrast to the stereotypical representations in media discourse. Contemporary artistic forms of communication provide numerous levels of comprehension of the complex issues surrounding the nature of modern warfare and the continuing state of emergency in which we all live today. While representing contemporary conflict through first- and second-hand experiences, stories narrated through aesthetic discourse offer alternative viewpoints, not always reflected in mainstream media. By ‘reversing the anti-refugee discourse with art’ (Shabi, 2016), the creative and cultural industries are willing to translate the real voices of migrant identities by the creation of public spaces, where translation becomes the linking element between the arts and society. The ever growing potential of translation in both metaphorical and practical terms is thus strengthened by the spread of artistic narrative forms, where

migrant subjectivities can speak through the process of transmutation of their identities as subjects of power, while abandoning their identification as numbers of death and nameless bodies.

Within the international cultural framework that bears witness to the effects of translation on the growing diffusion of visual and performing artistic experiments on the migration crisis, I argue that numerous aesthetic narratives of migration are transformed into counter-narratives of dissent and protest, where refugees and migrant people act through modes of ‘translation as re-narration’ (Baker 2014). Narratives of personal stories across public platforms open up new challenging procedures of translation as resistance where, as Mona Baker’s (2016) recent research sheds light on, translation emerges in its political role, encourages “discursive and non-discursive interventions in the political arena” (p. 17), and can be considered in both its broad and narrow sense, producing acts that allow different types of activists – artists, scholars, citizens, and migrants – to think about both the challenges and limitations that encompass the phenomenon of translation as a political and social practice.

By looking at the production of artistic narratives of migration not as an end in itself, I also claim that the generation of public stories circulating across artistic circuits has recently contributed to transforming the experiences of the migrants from ‘adaptors’ and ‘performers’ on screens and stages into ‘intercultural translators’. Stage and screen have turned out to be the favourite locations of translation, and the dynamics of translation, adaptation, and performance have produced forms of linguistic hybridisations and cultural blends. To conclude, I argue that translation in its dialogue with adaptation and performance mechanisms has also acquired a significance of transcreation (which goes beyond the literal application of the concept to the area of advertising), from which I borrow its meaning in terms of creativity and innovation. Transcreation in the aesthetic narratives of migration gives voice to distant cultural realities and promotes new linguistic forms.

Migrant narratives are presented in a wide corpus of creative genres ranging from

documentary films and theatrical pieces to museum exhibitions and photo-textual installations, whose literature in the field has grown and increased exponentially (Bond, Bonsaver, & Faloppa, 2015; Chanan, 2007; Demos, 2013; Mazzara, 2016; Moslund, 2015). The corpus functions as a form of translation of the self and bears witness to 'performative' acts (i.e., performance and performativity), and to procedures of adaptation as resistance that, as such, act in opposition to domesticating modes of translation. Beginning with a theoretical survey of the interdisciplinary connections between translation and adaptation studies, and the performing and visual arts, attention is afterwards drawn on the role of the creative cultural industries in relation to translation practices as forms of transcreation in host countries. If, on the one hand, the creative process of translation involves the transfer of migrant people's authentic selves on screen and the stage to contexts of arrival, on the other hand, the audience participates in a transcreating process, which consists in the upsetting of migrant identities who, from a swarm of people in media discourse, are turned into individuals in aesthetic forms (Rizzo, in press, 2018).

The corpus includes the *Queens of Syria* project (Paget & Fedda, 2014; King & Lafferty, 2016) and the *Odisseo Arriving Alone* project (Palermo Council, Biondo Theatre, & Latif Jaralla, 2016; ITAstra, Unipa, & Cipolla, 2016). Attention is also paid to the photo-textual installation *Project#RefugeeCameras* (McElvaney, 2015), which was exhibited on the occasion of the second edition of the Palermo Festival of Migrant Literatures in 2016, and to *Porto M*, a permanent anti-museum installation (Askavusa Collective, 2013), sited on the island of Lampedusa, where the uncommon display of material objects belonging to migrant 'arrivants' has enhanced spaces of transcreation in terms of activism and resistance.

While exploring the traumas the migrants had gone through during the crossing of borders, the artistic interventions as a part of this corpus have turned into forms of translations as adaptation of ancient plays, and into translations in terms of acts of (re)-narration of life experiences on the stage, screen, and in

museum exhibitions. As already remarked, the advancement in the art of telling stories has encouraged the growth of creative modes of narration, where the concept of stories has become crucial to the development of new modalities, functions, and all sorts of translation reversing the anti-refugee politics and the media discourse's prevailing interest in the spectacular and sensationalist aspects of the migration crisis (Bond et al., 2015; Shabi, 2016).

The four artistic works taken as cases in point have been chosen to explore and understand how contemporary migratory movements have come to reshape the role of the creative cultural sectors, and how translation has been transformed into a collaborative instrument and privileged activity for the dissemination of cultural memory in contemporary societies. The interdisciplinary perspective, where translation dialogues with the visual and performing arts, and also with adaptation and performance studies in their application to the aesthetics of migration, stimulates mechanisms of self-mediation that sensitise citizens to the urgent topic of human migration. The contexts of the migration crisis have stimulated the proliferation of creative forms of unquestionably global translation of personal narratives as adaptations of ancient myth on screen and performances on the stage. I argue that these narratives, conceived as acts of translations, imply processes of rewriting, reinvention, reinterpretation, and relocation, which construct translation not in terms of binary oppositions, where creative freedom acts against linguistic confinement, or piracy against faithfulness, instead, as a transcreating 'movement' by means of which intimate experiences are re-interpreted by target audiences who bear witness to human stories in mythological terms.

It is by means of audiovisual translation that the protagonists of the new mythological stories can resist linguistic domestication, while maintaining the opportunity to adapt their experiences to ancient texts and producing original performances on an international scale. Indeed, the denial of the traditional notion of translating stories in English *lingua franca* imposes the 'foreignness of the language' on the stage or screen, stimulates the spectators to a sort of

displacement from the “familiarity of the canonical text” (Marinetti, 2013a, p. 35), and also reinforces practices of intercultural negotiation that occurs thanks to the intervention of English subtitles and surtitles. In brief, the non-acceptance of English lingua franca implies a “refusal of translation” as a form of assimilation into the target culture. As a result, the act of resistance gives birth to a transcreational act that resides in the transformation of an original product (the ancient plays) from the perspective of the actors in host countries. At the same time, the filter of audiovisual translation modes provides the target audience with new versions of transcreated mythological sources. On some occasions, as cultural texts integrated into the performance, the surtitles in *Queens of Syria* are transformed into “creative tools”, which add new meanings and readings that can be “generated through the different sign systems at work in the performance” (Laudocer, 2013, p. 352).

It goes without saying that in contexts of crisis translation has acquired a powerful political significance, which also involves the preservation of migrants’ cultural memory. In *Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, migrant people act as political translators and their performing settings are physically and metaphorically the locations where ancient myth is revisited, re-narrated into ‘human’ words across geographical spaces and translating decisions are taken. Baker (2007) defines “translational choices not merely as local linguistic challenges but also as contributing directly to the narratives that shape our social world” (p. 157). The framing and reframing of things, people and events, the act of naming, renaming and labelling objects and facts, intervene in the deconstruction of universal rules and are instrumental in the process of negotiation and reconstruction of predefined concepts, ideas, and perceptions. The act of translating protest through a variety of narratives of dissent which, as Baker (2016) points out, can range from literary works and traditional folk tales to individual and collective stories, films, press, and digital texts, is thus implicitly a tool that limits and reduces dominant powers, and also strengthens resistance via translational means within aesthetic discourse: the “interplay between dominance and resistance allows us to

elaborate a more complex picture of the positioning of translators and to embed them in concrete political reality” (Baker, 2007, p. 167).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The role of translation in shaping contexts of protest occupies interdisciplinary spaces that range from the visual arts and narrative theory in translation studies to adaptation and performance studies. The dialogue between translation studies and the visual arts is reinforced by strategies of adaptation and performance in translation practices, which encourage scholars to venture into territories that can give voice to innovative discoveries (Bigliuzzi, Kofler, & Ambrosi, 2013; Krebs, 2014). Translation is thus considered in relation to adaptation and performance as a technique and mode through which migrant experiences can be rendered through artistic and creative forms. This allows the re-articulation or a rethinking of the interdisciplinary relations between translation and other sectors in the humanities, in which the leading role of migrant narratives/stories within the socio-political dimension of translation and the performative nature of cultures is brought to the fore.

The perspective of adaptation that is taken into account arises and develops in contrast to the standard concept of adaptation as manipulation, and fosters, instead, the production and diffusion of migrant narratives on the stage and screen, where native languages (i.e., Arabic or African dialects) and cultures (i.e., Arab and African customs and everyday habits) are preserved, and translation as adaptation in the arts becomes an act of resistance. Meanwhile, the use of audiovisual translation modes involves the angle of the internationalisation of migrant narratives as stimuli for community involvement, solidarity, and collaboration in the aesthetic promotion of predominantly visual narratives (i.e., text-objects, photo-texts in museums, and installations) and visual-textual narratives (i.e., documentaries and theatrical performances) against mainstream media diffusion. This opens up thoughts about how appropriate representation is, how faithful and transparent the relation between depiction and reality is, not simply measuring these aspects, but

through the revelation of the historical power of films, videos, arts, and, within them, of theatrical performances, sculptures, paintings, drawings, installations, and of a variety of artistic forms, by means of which cultures, languages, and modes of expression are seen to be in conversation.

Moving from the position according to which translating migration through the arts is a significant challenge to the preservation of stereotypes and an instrument through which it is possible to deconstruct prejudices and cross socio-political boundaries, I would like to start by considering Sandro Mezzadra's definition of migration as a "*fait social total*" (2005, p. 794), which deserves to be explored not only through the canonised lens of scholarly disciplines, but also by means of narration and everyday visualisation of images. Accordingly, artistic practices can become active forms of expression of 'travelling' migrant cultures, interested in the production of wandering texts and travelling objects. It is against this framework, where the visual arts engage in dialogue with translation and migration studies, that a larger theoretical universe, including narrative theory, audiovisual translation studies, adaptation and performance studies, can become collaborative and supportive of methods of research based on activism and solidarity.

Against the concept of culture as a 'text', as understood in Clifford Geertz's (1973) terms, or in Lotman and Uspensky's (1978) semiotic system, the interpretation of art as event, which was rooted in the 1960s, has grown during the years and encouraged the understanding of culture as performance and stimulated the development of an "aesthetics of performativity" (Schechner, 2002, p. 21), where the physical co-presence of actors and audience has increased (Fischer-Lichte, 2008), and the dynamic response between the parts. From this viewpoint, the act of translating migrant stories can be looked at "*as performance and in performance*" and "implies a dynamic process of (re)signification integrated with the overall event in its various phases of production" (Bigliuzzi et al., 2013, p. 2). In the relationship between translation and performance, the actors become translators while blurring, as cultural promoters, the boundaries between translation, adaptation,

and performance within the category of "cultural (re)creation of meaning(s)" (p. 2).

Oral narratives (stories from the migrants) and written texts (ancient plays) are translated from a double perspective: on the one hand, translation involves a linguistic transfer from an oral verbal experience to a written verbal one and, on the other hand, translation regards the adaptation of verbal experiences to performing acts. These translating mechanisms are connected with and dependent on the principles of narrative theory, where the telling of stories is pivotal to human communication and interaction. Accordingly, scholarly research on translation has confirmed a wide interest in favour of the "exuberance of the performance and of the performance (as text)", where the field of the translator has slowly "shifted from the verbal to the polysystemic and culturally determined semiotic event, opening up areas of investigation concerning the relationship between text and performance, translators and directors, and the co-participation of audiences" (Bigliuzzi et al., 2013, p. 2). It goes without saying that the performative turn has influenced translation studies and also given centrality to translation as both a linguistic and a performative act to be viewed as a specific activity on the stage and in everyday narratives. Similarly, Katja Krebs (2014), who has significantly contributed to investigating the connection between translation and adaptation, claims that:

Translation and adaptation – as both practices and products – are an integral and intrinsic part of our global and local political and cultural experiences, activities and agendas. Translation is pivotal to our understanding of ideologies, politics as well as cultures, as it is simultaneously constructed and reflects positions taken. Similarly, adaptation offers insights into, as well as helps to establish, cultural and political hegemonies. (p. 1)

The spaces of translation, interpretation, and subtitling within the political dissemination of migrant stories across artistic productions, while covering a range of modalities and types of interaction, themes, and questions arising out of the concrete experiences of activist

artists (i.e., Askavusa Collective, 2013; McElvaney (2015), can be regarded as concrete tools of mediation and interaction that support the migrants in their positioning as full participants within the political debate. A variety of theoretical approaches can help investigate the political framework and the cultural and linguistic features of a migrant story in its process of circulation as a form of (re)-narration of memories, past experiences, and present expectations across open spaces and digital platforms.

According to Baker's (2006; 2014) narrative theory in translation and interpretation studies, narratives have social existences and, as such, can be disseminated as forms of knowledge across mainstream and popular cultural circuits and digitalised systems through a wide range of translational practices. Functional approaches in translation studies, such as Christiane Nord's (1997) focus on the communicative event, register, and language users, and Gunther Kress's and Theo van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal discourse analysis, encourage the investigation of language use in self-mediated narratives and, at the same time, contribute to dismantling the strategies of oversimplification, manipulation, and omission which the language of news stories is based on. While building networks of solidarity and collaboration across linguacultural, national and international boundaries, translational activism reverses power structures and, by means of translation, migrant stories are likely to be shaped by interventionist mechanisms, and to exploit multimodal expedients as instruments of resistance to mainstream modalities of transmission of knowledge.

The dialogue of translation with other disciplines reinforces its social and cultural dimension. The interdisciplinary aspect of translation (Pym, 1998) fosters intellectual development and allows new lines of communication between translation and adaptation studies, whose encounter, in turn, strengthens the relationship between translation and the visual and performing arts. The openness of translation studies endows it with the status of an autonomous discipline (Holmes, 1988/1975; Snell-Hornby, 1992), but also that of an 'interdiscipline' (Pym, 1998) in the way in which it deals with the visual and

performing arts in metaphorical and practical terms.

In these interdisciplinary connections, the role that translation has taken as "a means of negotiation of cultural contact in theatre practice" and, in particular, as "a site for the construction and dissemination of images of foreignness and otherness" (Marinetti, 2013b, p. 309), has acquired challenging results. The challenge derives from the fact that such a relationship goes beyond the process of translation of personal narratives and adaptation of dramatic texts. It also entails everyday translation and interpretation procedures in multicultural events and contexts of crisis (e.g., refugee camps), as well as in multimodal media settings, where an increased number of artistic productions in foreign language are required to circulate across networked platforms through surtitles and subtitles, and interpreting as cultural mediation. The relationship between translation and performance, translation and adaptation, and translation and the visual arts, is therefore based on the localisation of translation at the meeting point of a plurality of textual productions (oral and written) and their reproductions, which echoes what André Lefevere (1992) identified in terms of rewriting as functioning in a given society and in a given way.

Artistic forms become models of translation, which involve a socially governed activity, or actions as performances, which permit cultures and cultural phenomena to be known and understood as participative and 'in performance'. *Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, as types of translations of personal experiences and sufferings performed on the stage and screen, are adaptation of ancient texts. These forms of translation become performative acts, to put it in Richard Schechner's (2002) terms, since they involve a process according to which cultural signs are not mediated but transmitted through mechanisms of construction "in action, interaction and relation" (p. 24). Indeed, what marks the significance of the relationship between the visual and performing arts and translation is the advantage that the concept of translation as performativity implies. It places

originals and translations, source and

target texts, dramatic texts and performances on the same cline, where what counts is no more the degree of distance from an ontological original but the effect that the reconfigured text (as performance) has on the receiving culture and its networks of transmission and reception. (Marinetti, 2013b, p. 302)

The adaptation and performance procedures applied to the artistic products under scrutiny, therefore, result in the transfer of originals to translations that have different contexts and modes of expression and construction. Indeed, the countries of departure, in the form of translations into the visual arts, are embedded in extensive socio-political dissatisfaction, economic uncertainty, and large-scale migration. As such, contexts of origin conveyed in aesthetic discourse within a European artistic framework have given rise to collective experiences of conflict and dislocation. These have assumed new roles based on empowerment and emancipation, endowing translation with a dynamic vein of creativity and artistic interest in dealing with settings of crisis. In the performative turn in cultural studies towards an aesthetics of performativity, Richard Schechner (2002) claims that “during the last third of the twentieth century”, the world changed its configuration and “no longer appeared as a book to be read but as a performance to participate in” (p. 21).

### 3. The Corpus

#### 3.1. Queens of Syria and Odisseo Arriving Alone

*Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone* are rooted in the heroic tales narrated by Euripides in *The Trojan Women* myth and Homer in his *Odyssey* respectively. They are based on adaptations of ancient texts to migrants’ accounts on screen and stage. The audiovisual translation devices offer variants or simplified versions of the Arabic and multilingual spoken narratives, since the target audience may be unfamiliar with the source language used to narrate the stories of exile and homesickness within the field of aesthetic discourse. The two works present cases in which “interlingual translation does not only occur in the dramatic text but in the

performance itself” (Marinetti, 2013b, p. 314), and where a performative understanding of translation involves productive transformations at the level of the target reception. In *Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, the Syrian refugee women living in Jordan and the African migrants living in Sicily reflect upon their experiences before and after fleeing from their home countries, upon the passage across international boundaries and the Mediterranean Sea, and upon the condition of living in territories as illegal foreigners. Original times and places in ancient works are necessarily shifted to new ages and locations. This recalls David Lane’s (2010) thoughts of the concept of re-contextualisation as a form of adaptation, which he defines “as the act of taking an existing book, play text or screenplay and transposing it to another context” (p. 157). By redisplaying Greek myths alongside contemporary experiences of migration, truths, and human stories are reactivated and reshaped, rewritten, and relocated.

##### 3.1.1. *Queens of Syria*

As a theatrical performance and documentary film, *Queens of Syria* has a long history of rewriting rooted in screen and stage belonging to the same wide artistic project *Developing artists present Refugee Productions*, which was divided into different parts. First staged in Amman in 2013 with Syrian director Omar Abusaada, the work was then adapted to the visual arts and transformed into a documentary film in 2014, eventually culminating in a UK theatrical tour in 2016.

In 2014, Syrian filmmaker Yasmin Fedda produced a documentary version of *Queens of Syria*, which the artist described as a documentary about a drama theatre workshop that also took place in Jordan (see Eagar, 2014). What is shown in the documentary is a group of almost sixty women involved in creative workshops to put on a play, where they would interpret and adapt *The Trojan Women* to their own stories. Three years after the first stage production, *Developing Artists*, together with *Refuge Productions*, rewrote a new version in Jordan, directed by British filmmaker Zoe Lafferty, which led to the UK national tour. It brought thirteen Syrian refugee women living in Jordan to the UK in order to adapt an Arabic performance of

Euripides's anti-war tragedy, *The Trojan Women*: "They are the voiceless voiced. This is made clear from the opening moments when they clap their hands over their mouths, then shout, in unison, lines from Euripides' fierce tragedy *The Trojan Women*" (Bano, 2016). These women had never acted before. Unprotected stories, made inaccessible due to conflict, occupation, and censorship, have as protagonists a group of Syrian women, female refugees who, distant from their husbands, exiled in Jordan creating an extraordinary modern retelling of *The Trojan Women*. As in the documentary film, the women scrutinise parallels on stage between the ancient Greek tragedy and today's civil war in Syria.

Written against the cruel Athenian repression of the independent island of Melos and set during the fall of Troy, the play explores the uncertain future of the Trojan women, while contemplating a life of exile and slavery. The Syrian women were astonished by the parallels to their own real life experiences and could not but identify their existences with the female characters' fate, as depicted in the tragedy. In spite of the numerous problems the Syrian actresses faced, the women were a unified group, encouraged by the discovery of new voices bringing their untold stories to a global audience who wanted to listen to their narratives of loss and exile.

Both the documentary and performance represented a life-changing opportunity for the refugee women themselves, and also an authentic experience for British audiences who heard about the harsh realities of life from the mouths of refugees. The first-hand transmission of Syrian knowledge takes place by physically transferring the actresses from a Jordanian stage to a British one and also by using the original Arabic language on the stage while transferring it to English surtitles. The narrative level intersects with the dimension of translation as adaptation in performance, where an all-female cast of Syrian refugees combines the women's own narratives of war and exile in Syria with Greek stories (Rizzo, in press).

### 3.1.2. *Odisseo Arriving Alone*

*Odisseo Arriving Alone*, a theatrical performance that took place in December

2016, is also a permanent museum exhibition that has arisen from the commitment of a research group coordinated by Mari D'Agostino, and rooted in the *Itastra* School (*Scuola di Italiano per Stranieri*) in the city of Palermo. The play is the dramatization on stage of African memories belonging to the experiences of unaccompanied minors who crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach the Sicilian coasts in search of a life. As in *Queens of Syria*, the characters of *Odisseo* – mainly African men – are inspired by the ancient world and, in particular, by the reading, interpretation, and adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*. The stories of Nausicaa and Polyphemus, Calypso and Telemachus, the island of Phaeacia, and the Cyclops have been translated into various African languages – ranging from *bambara*, *wolof*, *bangla*, and *pular* to English, French, Arabic, and Polish, and published in a volume entitled *Odisseo Arriving Alone*. The process of translation as adaptation of the Homeric narrations to the migrants' journeys across passages of danger and desperation has given birth to a multilingual African 'stage' in Sicily. This polyphony of voices and languages has made the theatre a place where languages become a location of encounters, and where migrant stories can be learned, shared and amplified.

### 3.2. Porto M

Resistance through language, translation, and visual display takes place in *Porto M*, which is an anti-institutional social museum sited on the island of Lampedusa and created by the Askavusa Collective in 2013. It aims to challenge mainstream institutions by producing counter-narratives that depict the lives of the migrants before and after their passage across the Mediterranean Sea. The museum is chiefly conceived as an anti-museum, containing no labels or panels, where the display of everyday objects belonging to the migrants reflects and reproduces their material culture, which is rendered all the more immediate because of the routine nature of the items. This typology of 'museum translation' provides visitors with first-hand experiences and knowledge, offering a radical perspective on migration beyond mere narratives and rhetorical forms, where identities are adapted to a non-standard museum display and performed through

minimalist details. *Porto M* is also on a digital platform that is supported by activist amateur subtitlers and mediators who attempt to favour emerging agents of political intervention in public life and the transnational influx of self-mediated textualities.

### 3.3. Project#RefugeeCameras

Kevin McElvaney's *Project#RefugeeCameras* started in December 2015. In his visual project, the artist gave single-use cameras to refugees he met in Izmir, Lesbos, Athens, and Idomeni. Three months later, seven out of fifteen cameras came back in their prepared envelopes. In 2016, the project was transformed into an artistic photo-textual installation (Festival of Migrant Literatures, Palermo), composed of pictures and short narratives produced in the language of each migrant and, some of them, also containing English translations the migrants chose to provide the viewer with. Texts and images tell the stories and experiences of migration belonging to people from different contexts of crisis. Translation can be viewed in the act of performing identities in the acceptance of taking pictures in order to auto-translate persecution and exile.

## 4. Results

In *Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, "translation as performance and in performance" (Bigliuzzi et al., 2013, p. 320) becomes a "meaning-making" mechanism, and the acts of translation and interpretation are turned into processes that are shaped by dynamic procedures of re-signification. By

investigating both artistic works from Cristina Marinetti's assumptions, *Queens of Syria* and *Odisseo Arriving Alone* consist in acts of performativity, since they transform existing "regimes of signification" (2013b, p. 320), while deconstructing the oversimplifying systems of media mainstream representations. An overall investigation of *Queens of Syria*'s subtitles and surtitles testifies to the mechanisms of reinterpretation and reconstruction of ancient myth and, at the same time, to the challenging perspectives provided by migrant authentic narratives, while reversing media discourse on migration. The analysis, which mainly concentrates on the survey of the production of subtitles and surtitles for *Queens of Syria*, has revealed differences between the ways of conceiving the two modes of audiovisual translation (subtitling and surtitling) for a non-Arabic audience.

As forms of adaptation based on providing the public with a 'transcreated' version of the crisis in Syria from a mythological perspective, the subtitles in the documentary in the respect of space and time constraints can be regarded as cultural texts that summarise the actresses' Arabic monologues, where past experiences contrast with a sad and painful present. Mythological stories are transcreated and transformed into narratives of sorrow and homesickness, where the mythological perspective gains a historical value. The exile of the Syrian women, as shown in Table 1, echoes the exile of the Trojan women who were forced to leave their country after the fall of Troy:

**Table 1**

*Subtitles in Queens of Syria on Screen*

Subtitle 1	You are living a painful present while your soul yearns for a happy past.
Subtitle 2	This part of the play makes me cry a lot.
Subtitle 3	We left our home town, There was a lot of shelling.
Subtitle 4	I want to find a better life for my children.
Subtitle 5	The play talks about something real to us.
Subtitle 6	It's old, but history repeats itself.

*Queens of Syria* – both on screen and the stage – opens with a chorus that echoes the ancient one. The Arab women act in Arabic and their gestures and movements are able to relocate

the audience into settings of the Arab world. This is particularly significant on the stage, where the chorus plays a significant role in terms of exemplary reiteration of Greek

choruses. The geographical and ‘human’ dimension of Syria emerges from the beginning of the theatrical performance. The ‘Chorus’ testifies to the process of transcreation occurring through the transfer of the passage from a defeated Troy to a burned Syria. Troy is turned into any Syrian city that was persecuted by war, whereas the Trojan women are transformed into Syrian wives forced to exile and solitude. The Arabic opening Chorus on the stage is readable through the surtitles (the audiovisual translation modes for theatrical and alive performances) that scroll on the left and right sides of the stage (with no respect of space restrictions). The terms that have been indicated in bold as cases in point demonstrate to what extent lexical cohesion in theatre surtitles plays a central role in the reinforcement of levels of semantic coherence occurring in mythological transcreations.

Chorus: **Troy** is but a **smoking** city; it has been **sacked** by the **Argive** spear. The sacred groves are desolate and the sanctuaries of gods are awash

**Table 2**  
*Opening Chorus in Queens of Syria on Screen*

Subtitle 1	Oh my sorrows! I am so unhappy.
Subtitle 2	I have reached the end of my sorrows.
Subtitle 3	I shall leave as my city turns to dust.
Subtitle 4	Old legs, carry me as fast you can.
Subtitle 5	So that I can salute my wretched city.

In *Queens of Syria* on the stage, even though the surtitles have a rich narrative level, as demonstrated in the quotation above, the public is more interested in the stage play and in the acting in itself rather than in the reading of the projected visual texts. Numerous are the cases in which the actresses’ ways of gesticulating become vigorous expedients that strengthen the meaning of the written texts. This feature in the performing act creates an ideal harmony between the visual cultural expansion applied through the surtitles and the process of acting on the stage. In one of her monologues, the Arab actress, Fatemeh, while depicting her everyday life in Syria, brings to mind the scent of the flowers and the heat of the sun warming the window in her Syrian home. The surtitles and her gestures evoke feelings of inebriation that symbolise the

with blood. Gold and **Trojan** spoils are being sent to the ships of the **Achaeans**. They are waiting for a fair wind to blow from the stern, so that they can have the joy of looking up on their wives and children. **Scamander** echoes with many a howl from female **captives** as they are allocated their masters. But all **Trojan women** who have not been allocated are in these **tents**. They have been picked out for the foremost men of the **army**.

On screen, the Chorus is slightly different from the one on stage. The parallelisms with the Trojan world – highly remarked in the theatrical performance – are not always the priority in the documentary, where the focus is more on personal beliefs, such as shared sentiments of exasperation by physical and mental pain due to the burning of Syria. The lexicon that is used to portray Syria, such as ‘dust’ and ‘wretched’, is descriptive of the current condition of Syrian cities, and is symbolically evocative of ancient Troy, though the ancient city is not mentioned as it happens in the surtitles for the Chorus.

perfume of the flowers in Syria by means of which the English-speaking public is informed about the benefits that originate from such a sensory pleasure. Fatemeh, whose voice represents the voice of a collectivity deprived of words, affections, and objects, narrates public stories that entail her country and the city she is from, thus also providing the spectator with a private dimension which is made of thoughts produced by memories of smells, tastes, people, and family. In the following surtitles, which implicitly describe aspects of her abandoned home, Fatemeh’s speech testifies to the fact that Syria was not what the war had transformed it into:

Fatemeh: Syria is my country and Homs is my beautiful city, that has all my cherished memories. My warm house is

full of memories of love that have stayed with me all the time. I could not, and I will never forget it. In my house everything is beautiful and the most pleasing thing about it is my small window where I receive the sunlight every morning and I breathe from it (everyone takes a breath), the scent of jasmine; my old country's smell roses and basil.

Euripides's classical work is the first play having a female point of view following a war, containing no signs of acts of revenge. Therefore, the play contextualises the stories of people who had fled from their homes and come to another country, trying to deal peacefully with any sort of repercussion. The stage Chorus' opening words, "Troy is but a smoking city", reinforces the image of Syria as a burning country, and of Aleppo as a city in flames. The portrayal of the high number of women and children exiled and abandoned in refugee camps is adapted to the Chorus'

statements, such as in "all Trojan women who have not been allocated are in these tents".

On screen, the process of overt translation as adaptation of ancient world occurs subsequently to the opening Chorus' speech. In the following subtitles (Table 3), Fatima on screen (Fatemeh for the stage) tells the audience about episodes of her life by comparing her own happy life in Syria to that of Hecuba before the war of Troy. The exaltation of Syria as a country of happiness and stability is also relevant to Fatemeh's monologue on the stage. In Fedda's documentary, the subtitles are cultural texts that provide the public with the re-narration of Fatima's feelings as an expedient to translate myth. Therefore, if, on the one hand, the opening Chorus on screen does not contain any mythological reference, on the other hand, in other English subtitled parts of *Queens of Syria*, there are regular interconnections between present and past, present migratory existences, and mythological contexts.

**Table 3**

*Fatima on Screen*

Subtitle 1	Hecuba is just like me.
Subtitle 2	She was the wife of the King of Troy.
Subtitle 3	Then she lost everything she owned.
Subtitle 4	She lost loved ones and family.
Subtitle 5	It's like us, she was a queen in her home.
Subtitle 6	I met with other Syrian women.
Subtitle 7	Each one is learning about the life of the others.
Subtitle 8	This isn't our home. This isn't our country.

Subtitles and subtitles are not only vital parts both on screen and in the performance, but also intensify the cultural message of the artistic work project by creating contemporary textual connections with mythological narratives. Audiovisual translation devices fortify the union between the heroic tales in ancient plays and the same heroic stories of conflict, persecution, and displacement witnessed in contemporary migration.

Myth is also central to the whole work of *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, where the stories of the migrants evoke the heroic tales of Odysseus. Beyond the words, the young actors translate their experiences into the arts by drawing and painting the beginning of their journeys from their country of origin to the place of arrival. The creative workshop has

reached its climax in the production of a variety of visual and textual forms that have embraced feelings of frustration and desperation, happiness and joy, memory and sadness, and past and future. As an artistic experiment, *Odisseo Arriving Alone* can be viewed as an act of translations of emotions, visually exhibited in the permanent installation that has taken the name of both the theatrical performance and book. In the installation, the characters narrate Odysseus's return journey and his sea adventure when, after leaving the island of Calypso, he was caught by a storm that destroyed the raft on which he was travelling. The journey – which translates the migrants' passage – is told in two canvases (ITAstra, Unipa, & Cipolla, 2016), which are composed of paper strips, where the African migrants' thoughts are visualised by drawing

and depicting their sensations, which depend on the natural alternation of happy and tragic moments in life (see Figure 1 below from the permanent exhibition in Palermo). The experiment has given birth to an intersection of multilingual metaphorical translations transferred to the visual arts (i.e., videos,

drawings, self-portraits, and sculptures in the permanent museum exhibition), in addition to the multilingual theatrical performance that took place in Italian and in the diverse dialectal varieties spoken by the migrant actors.



**Figure 1**

*Odisseo Arriving Alone, “Le Tele di Penelope”, Palermo, 2016*

*Porto M* testifies to the growth of alternative repertoires of action in public and private spaces, where migration is narrated in terms of material culture in contrast to the procedures that have amplified scepticism in traditional practices of political behaviour and patronising forms in mainstream media. The migrants as protagonists of the Lampedusa *Porto M* permanent museum do not physically occupy the space of the museum, do not act, draw or translate. Nevertheless, the objects belonging to the migrants, and which are exhibited in the museum according to criteria that contrast with the norms of museum labelling and panelling, have given them a voice. The exhibition has thus contributed to reconstructing the stories of

the migrants by means of strategies that, while differing from those applied to *Queens of Syria* on screen and stage, or to *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, have the same effect achieved in the Arabic works of art.

In *Porto M*, material objects (e.g., pans, medicines, boots, knives, and forks, sacred books, water containers, trousers, and videotapes) belonging to unidentified migrant masses are exhibited with no labels and panels in order to translate migrant people’s everyday existences within the field of the visual arts, while implicitly stressing what the sea passage meant to them. Figure 2 shows how practices of museum translation can transfer migrant material cultures to contexts of arrival.



**Figure 2**

*Porto M, Museum Exhibition, 2013*

Migrant identities are also constructed through the visual arts in *Project#RefugeeCameras*, as shown in Figure 3, where photos inserted in

notebooks are accompanied by bilingual textual explanations. *Project#RefugeeCameras* as an art installation (McElvaney, 2016) was

based on the display of these notebooks and pictures representing different phases of the experiences of migration belonging to migrant people, mainly coming from Asia and who had crossed razor wires instead of seas (the cases of sea-crossings prevail in *Odisseo Arriving Alone* and *Porto M*). The photographic and textual exhibition captured, on the one hand, the state of desperation of the traumatic journeys and, on the other, put emphasis on

states of hope, joy, and relief, which still bear witness to “the individual behind the anonymous concept of a ‘refugee’”. The personalised notebooks as the principal material elements in McElvaney’s (2015) exhibition characterise the whole textual-visual project, since they contain short descriptive biographies, annotated memories, photographs and images both in the language of the migrant and English as Lingua Franca.



**Figure 3**

*Project#RefugeeCameras, Palermo Exhibition, 2016*

The project, which articulates subjective experiences in both authentic native idioms and European languages as an attempt to reverse the misrepresenting media languages, opens with, what I would like to refer to as McElvaney’s manifesto (2015), where the artist motivates his choice to find an appropriate instrument by means of which unrepresented and unprivileged human beings crossing the globe and risking their lives could have public voices. The *Project#RefugeeCameras* manifesto is an unmistakable textual act of accusation against misleading formulaic expressions used by media language in order to describe the migration crisis in contrast to the other sides of the ‘same story’ that are narrated and depicted in aesthetic discourses:

The refugee ‘crisis’ appears in the media everyday  
 Every day I saw almost the same pictures  
 It always frustrated me  
 As a photographer I asked myself:  
 Can I photograph this in a different way?  
 Will I see exactly this when I am there by myself?  
 Does the coverage miss something or has the wrong focus?  
 [...]

We always decide what is important to say and what is not  
 We always photograph the refugee in their situations  
 We are those who tell the stories  
 [...]  
 Let’s try to give the refugees a voice  
 Let’s try to let them decide what is important to say and what is not  
 Let us see the individual behind the anonymous concept of a “refugee”  
 Let photography be the medium for this.

Photography as an artistic form reveals what media coverage is not able to do. McElvaney (2015) reiterates the concept of media coverage as “inadequate” in its focus on the “anonymous concept of a ‘refugee’”. In light of the multivalent nature of translation in its broader sense, the circulation of migrant stories through the arts involves the dissemination of knowledge that encourages the relationship between materiality (i.e., artists’ performances, displayed objects in art installations and exhibitions) and translation (the process itself of transferring cultures to aesthetic forms). Having an impact on aesthetic or socio-political changes, the act of reclaiming public and digital spaces in search

of anti-institutional agendas generates collaboration and contributes to assembling an audience of emotional receptivity (Silverman, 2015).

### 5. Concluding Remarks

Refugee voices portray the “endless motion” that critics and scholars have defined as surrounding and pervading “almost all aspects of contemporary society” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 1). This mechanism has favoured “social encounters and change” and promoted “new aesthetic and cultural phenomena” (Moslund, 2015, p. 1). The role of the arts in dealing with the lives of migrant people is therefore, on the one hand, to spread new information or forms of knowledge about distant cultures and, on the other, to shape identities and reveal how politics and societies act in the specific contexts of crisis.

The works of art that have been taken into account in this scrutiny have provided the reader with new perspectives and images relating to the construction of migrant stories within aesthetic discourse in opposition to the modalities by means of which media discourse reiterates its misinterpretations of the “real actors of the Mediterranean passage” as an “unnamed and anonymous mass of people” (Mazzara, 2015, p. 449). While putting emphasis on the fact that media discourse has based its breaking news on “normative and conventional formulae that allow a recognition and a passive acceptance of certain patterns, considered trustworthy because of their institutionalized status” (p. 451), the “realm of aesthetics” has intervened in the act of giving migrant people their names back and a certain degree of “visibility” to potentially transform them into “subjects of power” (p. 451).

The challenges of aesthetic discourse in the construction of migration are mainly addressed to the media being prone to overused nominalised terms as descriptive and connotative of a determinate typology of people in order to marginalise and victimize them as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, exiles, illegal aliens, illegal migrants, illegal immigrants, economic migrants, and bogus. The vocabulary adopted in British news stories and articles has been classified as linguistically dehumanising and distancing and, certainly,

bluntly pejorative. As a case in point, in reaction to David Cameron’s way of addressing migrant people as a “bunch of migrants” in the BBC news (“PMQs”, 2016), the members of the *Help Refugee* (2016) have created a video asking ‘some of the refugees in Calais what they did for a living before their lives had turned upside down’. In the video these people had a life: they were ‘butchers’, ‘painters’, ‘drivers’, “translators”, ‘software computer programmers’, ‘footballers’, ‘writers’, ‘carpenters’, ‘clinical nurses’ (Sommers, 2016). Cameron’s language was publicly criticised and defined as ‘not appropriate’ or ‘statesmanlike’, ‘offensive, hurtful and divisive’ (Sommers, 2016) (see also Elgot, 2016).

The socio-political perspective of translation in the visual arts and the advanced communication technologies have been highly effective in representing new movements of protest and dissent, and have also testified to a radical developmental change in the identity of people from a “rather passive informational citizenry” to a “rights-based, monitorial and voluntarist citizenry” (Schudson, 1995, p. 27). This study has confirmed that movements of ‘dominance and resistance’ (Baker, 2007) are rooted in forms of contemporary storytelling, which are given voice in textual and visual narratives, such as stories, interviews, documentaries, paintings, and video diaries. These have become re-enactments and re-creations of stories that can be told from varied angles and re-narrated across diverse immigrant communities, social contexts and platforms, and from mother tongues or non-standard English into standard European languages.

In *Queens of Syria*, the linguistic transfer from Arabic to English has taken place through the audiovisual modes of subtitling and surtitling, or, such as in the case of *Odisseo Arriving Alone*, translation has occurred as a written form or through the support of intercultural mediators. In *Project#RefugeeCameras*, the process of translation has represented a form of auto-translation, whereas in *Porto M*, the museum curators have not linguistically translated labels indicating the objects, instead, a visual museum translation has been employed as an instrument of translation of material objects. Language mediation and non-

translation systems are used as devices to re-frame acts of protest and dissent in a globalised world. From the perspective of networks and social groups centred on principles of non-hierarchy and pluralism, cross-language and cross-cultural negotiations, and different forms of mediation that intervene within aesthetic discourse, have given voice to a multitude of people who previously had no voice.

In the creative cultural industries, translation as a means to construct migrant identities has acquired a multivalent nature consisting in different characterizing roles that Silverman (2015) explains by taking into account Phillips and Glass' thoughts (2010). These regard translation as interpretation (Silverman, 2015, p. 4), translation as transformation (implying "revision, alteration, adaptation, appropriation, repurposing") (p. 4), translation as displacement (regarding ways of "de- and re-contextualization") (p. 4), translation as transcreation suggesting, on the one hand, nourishment from the local sources (Vieira, 1992/1994, 1999), based on the act of devouring ancient mythological stories, and, on the other hand, implying the comprehension of the foreign "in relation to the familiar, which is at the heart of not just mediation but also understanding itself" (Katan, 2016, p. 376), and, finally, translation as agency (acknowledging "the power and presence of the object of translation itself" (Silverman, 2015, p. 4). Its multivalent function in the creative sector has rendered translation a collaborative process for the dissemination of knowledge in public spaces and for the visibility of lost identities in contemporary communities from war zones.

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