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## Translation as artistic communication in the aesthetics of migration: From non-fiction to the visual arts

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### Abstract

*In an increasingly globalized and digitalized world, where the advancement of technologies and media constructions oversimplify and manipulate public beliefs and shared knowledge, the artistic sector seems to provide new networks of solidarity, collaboration and interaction that challenge a world dominated by conflicts and cultural shocks. Against this backdrop, acts of translation within the arts bear witness to humanity and become the ultimate ground for subjective expression and fundamental reflections upon individualist attitudes against migration issues.*

*By putting emphasis on the role of translation in its political transfer of migration into the arts, this investigation draws attention to a recent corpus of works of art that testifies to the modalities by means of which the creative cultural industries are contributing to giving voice to migration not just as transruption and memory, but as an inclusive form of movement and communication. In Notes on the Exodus by Richard Flanagan, with illustrations by Ben Quilty (2016), and in the arts installations Call Me By My Name and All I Left Behind. All I Will Discover (London, 2017), translation intervenes as an instrument of cross-cultural collaboration and solidarity, resistance and dissent, and also demonstrates to what extent stories of migration can interact within art forms and be performed as acts of translation involving processes of (re)narration and (re)framing of identities.*

### Introduction

According to Mark Deuze, “Artists, citizens and amateurs are getting more and more involved with the creation, distribution and diffusion of contents referring to migration for individual or collective reconstitution” (Deuze, 2006, p. 66). From Mona Baker’s point of view, narratives of war and social issues occur “in and through acts of translation and interpreting in the media, literature, scholarly articles, documentary film, political reports and websites” (Baker, 2011, p. 46). Furthermore, Luis Pérez-González defines translating procedures such as audiovisual translation, subtitling and interpreting as “re-territorializing forces”, which have the potential to create “spaces of participation and collaboration” (Pérez-González, 2014a, p. 61). These three critical perspectives

are all inclusive of the concept of translation as a dynamic act that is able to construct migration in the aesthetic discourse.

Mobility, which has become a central element in people's everyday lives, implicitly and explicitly moulds translation, migration and aesthetics, and provides the three concepts with a significance that encompasses activism and encourages the dissemination of narratives. Transformations as a result of migration processes do not simply address economic, political and historical changes, but also involve cultural and social alterations that have turned out to be vital to the formation of new "moving" societies, new individualities and collectivities. Migratory movements translated into the arts have also become familiar with the concept of accommodation, which has been recently investigated within the context of literary translation by Leon Burnett and Emily Lygo. Despite its application to the field of literary translation, the idea of "accommodating a new text by a host culture" (Burnett *et al.*, 2013, p. 2) also describes the process by which migrant experiences (as oral narratives) are adapted to the artistic genre and, in particular, to the visual arts. The trope of accommodation becomes an expedient for the fusion of adaptation and reception, and performance and reception, within the cultural circuits of translation in its construction of an aesthetics of migration.

The spread of cultural networks and forms of collaboration across a variety of modes, genres and modalities, as well as the growth of globally multidirectional spaces within the sector of the creative cultural industries are the result of vital artistic trajectories that originated in the attention to "liminal cities" (Duester, 2013, p. 107) and contexts as part of a "global art world" (*ibid.*). These works challenge the stereotypical understanding of migration in media discourse and also give it a shape and position within new geographical and cultural spaces, where home cities and individual and collective experiences are included not in terms of loss but as relational spaces, facts and shared knowledge.

The concept of artistic mobility that is taken into account in this study is examined from the perspective of the dissemination of a variety of artistic forms produced not only by and for migrants, but also by non-migrant artists/writers. Against this backdrop, translation has been given a central role in its increasingly current use as a metaphor within and across disciplines, with the purpose to immortalize migrant movements and experiences across networks and spaces by means of which knowledge can be generated and publicly shared. When knowledge enters new cultural circuits, translation is thus expected to give voice to narrative accounts that make it not only a practice of collaboration but also of dissent, and an instrument of re-narration of the selves.

Strategies of translation in the creative sector are based on discursive and non-discursive choices and uses that are applied to different genres and modalities, among which are documentaries,

narratives in videos and interviews, arts installations and museum exhibitions, wall art narratives, autobiographies, and non-fictional books. These discursive and non-discursive interventions, both textual and visual, can be mediated by acts of translation, such as subtitling and interpreting, or by the very act of re-narrating the self, which can be viewed as a translating technique that echoes Chantal Zabus's concept of "relexification" as a means of translation from suppressed languages and cultures into colonising European languages (Zabus 1995). The process of relexification in textual and visual artistic forms relating to migration issues involves acts of language and culture that mark mother tongue linguistic and cultural elements in the translated texts or in the process of translation into visual items. Such acts occupy the crossing point of discourse and power and, while affecting all networks of words, images and sounds, make translation a political act of negotiation within the spaces between cultures and languages, the local and global, the translatable and untranslatable.

By drawing attention to a recent corpus of works of art, I argue that the artistic sector provides networks of solidarity, collaboration and interaction that challenge a world dominated by conflicts and cultural shocks, where, on the contrary, the arts can bear witness to humanity and be the ultimate ground for subjective expression and fundamental questions about individualist practices. By putting emphasis on the role of translation in its political transfer of migration into the arts as having a responsibility more crucial than ever within contemporary political debate, I claim that the creative cultural industries are contributing to giving voice to migration not just as transruption and memory, but as an inclusive form of movement and communication, where borders are broken down and transcended, and multiple places are connected up. In the creative artistic products that are here examined as cases in point, I maintain that translation intervenes as an instrument of cross-cultural collaboration through which migrant cultures are brought together with the aim to create something new in the arts, and, in particular, that all acts of translation are intimately connected with the formations of the self and the development of issues concerning individual and cultural identity. Migration therefore is viewed from an angle which sheds light on the process of the reinvigoration of cultures in their passage into the arts, which brings to mind James Clifford's concept of "transculturation", according to which cultures are connected, merge through mobility, give birth to zones of exchange, and a location becomes "a series of encounters and translations" (Clifford, 1997, p. 11) involving activism. As stressed by Nanna Heidenreich, the relationship between migration and the arts depends on the level of activism they contain, which, in turn, is transformed into forms of translation that map, assume, exhibit and activate new migratory perspectives (Heidenreich, 2015, p. 105).

The transfer of migration into the arts puts into question the borders of every political community and shows that the intervention of translation in migratory aesthetics consists of putting

“the narrative and metaphorical ways of speaking” of migration (Moslund, 2015, p. 10) into images, words and views, which enlarge the “possibility to rethink the political and to challenge existing images and perspectives” (Moslund, 2015, p. 10). Images translate migration, give it “a format”, which implies that “any attempt to work with the question of migration [...] should be done with and in audiovisual media, that activism and artistic practices should be involved with one another” (Heidenreich, 2015, p. 105). The cross-border method in migratory aesthetics, which permits different artistic forms to interact, is ruled by transnational and transcultural movements that expand across geographical sites and, while representing real-life migrant tragedies, bring new audiences to see the European world from a diversity of perspectives by means of translation.

### **Mapping the context**

This study aims to describe the modalities of linguistic and rhetorical depiction of migration in a variety of textual and visual aesthetic forms from the perspective of translation as artistic communication, and of the translator as artistic mediator and narrator. Moving from a brief survey of the theoretical framework on translation and the arts, the aim is to demonstrate how the level of representation of migration can shift from a dramatic and sensational tone in printed and online press to a creative and collaborative mode that involves the construction of identities in an aesthetic discourse, which includes non-fiction and the visual and performing arts.

The growing interest in translation as a process that encourages the dissemination of knowledge and cultural exchanges derives from the recent attention that has been given to the metaphorical use of translation. Translation as a metaphor relates to the strategies by which knowledge is distributed across territories and against cultural and political barriers, while implying the transfer of ideas and beliefs in contrast to mainstream discourse and in favour of the narration of stories in aesthetic discourse. Some of these stories, which are narrated through the arts and categorized within the aesthetics of migration, have become politically and culturally relevant to the development of new contemporary societies. If these narratives give an account of migrant facts, events and experiences, translation becomes, at the same time, an instrument of exaltation of truths that, otherwise, would remain hidden and unspoken in mainstream media discourse.

If, on the one hand, media discourse has the aim to reinforce a public sense of either negativity or compassion in relation to what the process of migration itself implies, on the other hand, the creative industries, and the arts in general, have acquired a determinant role in the reshaping of migration through the support of translation as a reterritorializing force. In this sense, translation occurs in the arts as a practice that counteracts perceptions of refugees as either threatening masses trying to invade European countries, or sad victims with no agency.

The system of narratives provides translation with the power of (re)narration of migrant stories, which are told in and through the arts. The act of telling stories belonging to experiences of migration transforms the visual and performing arts – through which the migrants have their own voice – into public frameworks and spaces, where individual and collective stories express feelings of resilience and anger, but also of hope and integration. It is not by chance that a huge number of web documentaries, arts installations, museum exhibitions, street art, theatrical performances and books have migrant people as their protagonists who, from nameless and wordless human beings, have become subjects of power.

It is today recognized and accepted that the accelerated “mobility of people and populations has brought about substantial changes in international communication, and has led to an increasing demand for translation for greater intercultural understanding, which in turn has resulted in the proliferation” (Bassnett, 2014, p. 125) of an immense number of translators, mediators and interpreters. Apart from its technological growth across digital platforms with an accompanied expansion of research in fields such as assisted translating programmes, internet translation, translation and globalization, translation has also acquired a considerable importance as an artistic and creative tool used to react against the homogenization and annihilation resulting from the migration crisis and its diffusion in the media. The anti-refugee discourse expressed in the individual and collective experiences of conflict and dislocation is recounted against the normative background of either English as lingua franca (Guido 2012; Catenaccio, 2015) or Standard English. Anti-refugee discourse exploits translation that, while transcending its purely representational function, shifts to a more constructive and political dimension that implies the reshaping and relocation of nameless identities by forcing European readers and viewers to rethink migration and bring about changes.

### **Theoretical frameworks on translation and the arts**

As mentioned by Omar Robert Hamilton in his contribution to Mona Baker’s volume *Translating Dissent* (2016), “If there is a speech, it has to be of something new, something that still has no language for the reality that it might create” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 244).

Drawing on recent and relevant theories on the role of translation in the construction of migration, and on the spread of migratory fluxes in a global and digital age, the central topic of this survey is to shed light on how migration is constructed in the aesthetic discourse – also known as the aesthetics of migration – through acts of translation that can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but whose main function is to reverse representational forms in media discourse through the creation of narratives, which construct and conceptualize dislocation as a form of life experience. Numerous types of translation are connected with the concept of reversing media discourse, among which are

translation as solidarity, translation as collaboration, translation as (re)narration, translation of the selves, and translation as intervention (Baker 2014; Nicholau *et al.*, 2008; Munday 2008), which imply that translation provides a pro-active and constructive response to the persecution of the migrants crossing the globe. Scholars in the fields of translation and migration studies, and of the visual and performing arts, such as Mona Baker, Susan Bassnett, Moira Inghilleri, Luis Pérez-González, Sten P. Moslund and T.J. Demos, to list but a few, have been inspiring resources to critically develop an approach to the construction of migration within the aesthetic discourse through translation procedures.

Translation as collaboration and solidarity is developed in Mona Baker's outlook on the concept of translating dissent, where the significance of solidarity implies a process that can "raise awareness among the wider public, challenge and expose the arbitrariness and lack of imagination of those in power, and provide a further platform for connecting individual activists and groups and hence expanding the network of protest" (Baker, 2016, p. 5). Baker also refers to the importance of "translation, interpreting, subtitling and other forms of mediation" as fundamental linguocultural mechanisms that need to "be brought to the centre of the political arena" (Baker, 2016, p. 2).

In defining two diverse senses of translation within contexts of conflict, Baker points out that the narrow sense of translation "involves rendering fully articulated stretches of textual material from one language into another, and encompasses various modalities such as written translation, subtitling and oral interpreting [...] from the written translation of statements and campaigns by groups [...] to the subtitling of videos by collectives" (Baker, 2016, p. 6). Instead, the broad sense of translation – which occurs in the corpus of works of art taken into account in this investigation –, "involves the mediation of diffuse symbols, experiences, narratives and linguistic signs of varying lengths across modalities (words into image, lived experience into words), levels and varieties of language (Standard Written Arabic and spoken Egyptian, for example), and cultural spaces" (Baker, 2016, p. 7). This kind of translation includes the use of European languages (in the cases examined here, the European language is English) in writings and visuals about the topic of migration, and "in addressing regional audiences, as well as the journey of visual and musical artefacts across social and national boundaries" (Baker, 2016, p. 7).

Both the narrow and broad senses of translation permeate the personal experience of artists – writers, filmmakers, painters, street arts, web producers – and citizens, including migrant people, who are turned into individual/collective activists promoting political change through the arts. As a case in point, Richard Flanagan's *Notes on the Exodus*, with illustrations by Ben Quilty (2016), which will be examined in the practical section, demonstrates how Baker's broad sense of translation is put into practice. The same sense of translation is present in the artistic works exhibited on the occasion of



the *London Refugee Week* (June 2017). Nevertheless, the complexities of translating lived experiences into words also reveal the narrow sense of translation, which is given by the participation of migrant people in eyewitness oral accounts of the conflicts, which are transcribed from oral native languages into written English. In brief, the broad sense of translation entails forms of transaction, encounter and exchange. It also serves numerous functions for the protection of a variety of rights of individuals and minor communities, and provides translation with communicative duties that involve a sense of responsibility and intercultural awareness for listening to and interpreting others' stories of political enactment (Inghilleri 2017). Translation as political enactment is a concept fully developed by Luis Pérez-González's idea of translation as a reterritorializing force, which originates from the "growing mobility of individuals, either motivated by forced dispersal or voluntary displacement, immigrant and diasporic communities" (Pérez-González, 2014a, p. 61), and which contributes to the creation of "collaborative technologies", "spaces of participation and collaboration", and to the re-definition of the "traditional boundaries of nation-based cultural and linguistic constituencies" (ibid.).

By means of acts of translation and a variety of artistic modes and genres, artists, citizens and amateurs have collaborated with the distribution and diffusion of media content on migration and stimulated "individual or collective reconstitution" (Deuze, 2006, p. 66). At the same time, this has altered the forms of manipulation, misrepresentation and oversimplification through which information is divulged and consumed worldwide. Migrant identities can therefore give voice to individual or collective stories, "publicly disseminated representations" (Baker, 2006, p. 3), which may be categorized as intended stories – since they implicitly evoke feelings of dissent, protest, resistance and communality – thus, definable as discursively marked narratives.

Among the numerous roles of translation in the production of discursively marked narratives, the concepts of intervention and collaboration apply to non-fiction and arts installations, both of which are part of the corpus that will be surveyed in this study. In particular, translation as intervention shapes the migrant context as a space of protest, offers first-hand experiences, stories, objects and materials, stimulates political activism in the arts, and engages the politics of intralingual, interlingual and visual mediation. At the same time, the notion of collaboration in translation strengthens global interconnections through "the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction" (Wellman, 2002, p. 11), which allows migrants and artists to "become active members of transnational, geographically dispersed collectivities seeking to promote shared cultural values and practices" (Pérez-González, 2014b, p. 202) by means of new "networked mediascapes" (ibid.) and physical spaces of distribution of cultures (e.g. museums, theatres, and cinemas).

The concept of translation as activism in the arts embraces Pérez-González's approach to

“activist collectivity” as “communities mainly consisting of engaged citizens without formal training in translation, who don’t identify themselves as translators, and who publish (translated) reportage and translations of certain types of material to effect political change” (Pérez-González, 2014b, p. 205). Similarly, the artists and the group of migrant people who are taken into account here are part of a type of collectiveness that uses translation in the arts as a metaphorical instrument aiming at the deconstruction and renewal of the political attitude of Europe towards the migration crisis.

Translation is looked at as a metaphorical and pragmatic tool of connection between migration and the arts, and of construction of “forms of life capable of inspiring hope and belief in a better world to come” (Demos 2013, p. xxii). This conceptual perspective has its political basis and leads to “ambitious constructions that are deployed against political regimes that otherwise admit no creative alternatives” (ibid.). Indeed, the artistic practices that construct imaginative possibilities by means of migratory aesthetics are interested in the potential realization of the narrated and visualized discourse, but also draw on the “power to mobilize the energy that will help bring about reinvented possibilities” (ibid.).

From a displaced position that locates migration in relation to illegality and victimhood in media discourse, interventionism and collaboration in the arts encourage the depiction of migrant “names” who, apart from their tragic experiences, have the potential to become useful and adaptable workers. This form of resistance, which is built against media discourse and the political constructions of the migration crisis, has the purpose of divulging new forms of knowledge of migration landscapes.

### **The data and the practical analysis**

The practical analysis of this study is based on a survey of a corpus of works of art that range from non-fiction to the visual arts. The focus is on two art exhibitions that took place on the occasion of the *London Refugee Week*, entitled *CALL ME BY MY NAME. Stories from Calais and beyond* (“Migration Museum London”, 2017) and *ALL I LEFT BEHIND. ALL I WILL DISCOVER - Young refugees share their stories through art* (supported by the British Red Cross, and performed at the OXO Tower Wharf in London’s Southbank, 2017). Under scrutiny is also *Notes on the Exodus* by Richard Flanagan, with illustrations by Ben Quilty (2016), which testifies to what extent stories of migration can interact within an art form and are subsequently performed as acts of translation that involve (re)narration and intervention, collaboration and solidarity.

The practical analysis puts emphasis on the intersection of linguistic approaches to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice, and of communication mechanisms in terms of the textual, aural, linguistic, spatial and visual modes that are strategically adopted in order



to compose messages. Critical discourse analysis and multimodality, which rely on Michael Halliday's metafunctions (2004), also Dell Hyme's Ethnopoetics (2003) and William Labov's and Waletzki's autobiographical narrations (1967), have contributed to extrapolating the textual and visual techniques that support the (re)narration of migrant experiences through aesthetic discourse. Essential components of this investigation are the syntactic constructions of the enunciations and the lexical variants and images as crucial features to the final rendering of the artistic products. Semiotic choices in language and images – implying the combination of linguistic and visual elements – are dependent on the implicit meanings that are related to underlying beliefs.

In *Call Me by My Name, All I Left behind* and *Notes on the Exodus*, the non-native English narrators tell their stories in their mother tongues and decide themselves what to say and what to keep unsaid. The narrators are all participants in the different stories that compose the works of art. This implies that the participants are all implicitly translated, but, at the same time, they are also the translators of their own narratives, since their (re)narrations, which initially begin as acts of resistance, are eventually transformed into forms of collaboration and solidarity.

The structure of *Notes on the Exodus* reflects Hyme's ethnopoetic method, which is based on the identification of those stories or parts of stories that the narrators themselves consider important or essential to be said. Among the elements that Hymes (2003, p. 26) considers vital to his ethnopoetic approach are the understanding of the grammar, which is implicit in the narrated discourse in its culturally localized form, and the rhetorical strategies signalling the presence of discursive forms interested in the construction of individual or collective identities or in claiming the right to articulate. According to Hymes (1996), the transcriptions of oral stories have the potential to explore the poetic structures within speech, where patterns of words and word use, following patterned artistic forms, can originate narratives in the world. These narratives may be able to convey important knowledge and ways of thinking and viewing others. Being translation the framework that connects the narratives that compose *Notes* – where enunciations, dialogues, monologues are first of all acts of translation – the composition of migrant identities in Flanagan's non-fiction is examined through Hyme's model, which is divided into eight parts: "Setting and scene", "Participants", "Ends", "Act sequence", "Key", "Instrumentalities", "Norms" and "Genres".

Australian novelist Richard Flanagan and Australian artist Ben Quilty went to visit Lebanon, Greece and Serbia in order to metaphorically smell, taste and listen to real accounts on the migration crisis from the perspective of Syrian refugees and people still in a state of conflict and homesickness. The book is accompanied by drawings that Quilty produced in order to record the emotional state of the migrants during and after the exodus. These drawings provide the text and the project itself with a strong artistic sense of reality. Truths on human conditions, economic inequalities and political

abuses, such as the state of refugees as “bargaining chips”, emerge through the stories about the plight of five million Syrians fleeing their country that Flanagan collected and Quilty illustrated.

What follows is the analysis of Yasmin’s story, which is considered from the perspective of Hyme’s eight sections. Some significant parts in the narrative have been selected and scrutinized.

1. The “Setting and scene” section refers to the time and place of a speech act and, in general, to the physical circumstances of characters and environments. [“Yesterday was the funeral,” Ramadan says. “It was very cold. We make sure Yasmin always has family around her.”]

The opening enunciations in direct speech give no specific details about time and place, though the adverb of time “Yesterday” indicates that a recent event has occurred, and the whole sentence describes a high level of complicity between narrators and audiences (inside and outside the story). The use of the lexical item “funeral” and the syntagm “family around her” implicitly embody the concept of a domestic environment in mourning.

2. The “Participants” section comprehends both the speaker and audience. The participation involves complicity between the protagonists and audiences in the narrative. Furthermore, the external public is fundamental to the dissemination of the “other side” of the story that is being told. [Yasmin wears a red scarf, maroon jumper and blue jeans. She is small and slight. Her face seems unable to assemble itself into any form of meaning. Nothing shapes it. Her eyes are terrible to behold. Blank and pitiless. Yet, in the bare backstreet apartment in Mytilini on the Greek island of Lesbos in which we meet on a sub-zero winter’s night, she is the centre of the room, physically, emotionally, spiritually. The large extended family gathered around Yasmin – a dozen or more brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, her mother and her father, Ramadan, an aged carpenter – seem to spin around her.]

This second extract is an extension of the “Setting” section. It includes elements concerning the location, such as “bare backstreet apartment in Mytilini on the Greek island of Lesbos”, and also a presentation of the participants in the narrative. The participants are all intimate to Yasmin, since they are “brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, her mother and her father, Ramadan”. In terms of the connotations of the lexis, the vocabulary that is used in the story is a very informal one. Scholars in language use and communication have long observed the technique of adopting conversational style to bring a sense of informality to the conversational mix (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991; Bell & van Leeuwen, 1994). What emerges in the quoted narrative is a conversational style that suggests a type of dialogue between equals, a deep sense of family union and reciprocal help. There are no signs of tragedies, compassion and victimization, but a deep sense of human dignity that encourages solidarity and collaboration. Nostalgic references to an idealized family life are also stressed by the presence of different members of the family in the room.

3. The “Ends” section refers to the identification of purposes, goals and outcomes. [Yasmin’s family has come from Bassouta, an ancient Kurdish town in Afrin, near Aleppo, and joined the great exodus of our age, that of five million Syrians fleeing their country to anywhere they can find sanctuary. Old Testament in its stories, epic in scale, inconceivable until you witness it, that great river of refugees spills into neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and the overflow – to date more than a million people – washes into Europe across the fatal waters of the Aegean Sea.]

The story evolves a narrative of sorrows and pains, exile and homesickness, even though details concerning human suffering express feelings of hope. Purposes, goals and outcomes have a beginning, which corresponds to the start of the exodus for the Syrian population. The search of peace and escape from war are the goals of Syrians’ long journeys, whose outcomes are, in most cases, devastating, such as the destiny in the “fatal waters of the Aegean Sea”.

4. The “Act sequence” section is about forming and ordering the event/events that are told. [“We were three hours in a black rubber boat,” Ramadan says. “There were 50 people. We were all on top of each other.” The family show me. They entwine limbs and contort torsos in strange and terrible poses. Yasmin’s nine months pregnant sister, Hanna, says that people were lying on top of her. I am told how Yasmin was on her knees holding her four-year-old son, Ramo, above her. The air temperature just above freezing, the boat was soon half sunk, and Yasmin wet through. But if she didn’t continue holding Ramo up he might have been crushed to death or drowned beneath the compressed mass of desperate people. Then something happened. Ramadan looks up. He seems 70 but is 54. “We lost track of where the children were,” Ramadan says.]

The story develops and goes to the point. There are sequences logically structured and introduced by one of the participants, Ramadan. There is a sense of collaboration in the act of narration, and a form of participation and solidarity for the narrative of sorrow that is told. All participants are actors who perform their experiences on the stage: [“The family show me. They entwine limbs and contort torsos in strange and terrible poses”.] The act of translation takes place in the (re)narration of facts and events in terms of adaptation and performance.

The intersection between the textual and visual elements occurs through Quilty’s sketches as an instrument of visual strength to the story. Yasmin’s portrait at Lesbos in 2016, in a drawing with pencil on paper, depicts the day after Yasmin’s attendance at the funeral of her four-year-old son, Ramo, who drowned on the boat to Greece (the audience learns about this tragedy at the very end of the story with no signs of spectacularized dramatization.). The portrait translates Quilty’s perception of Yasmin’s state of mind, which is also transferred into her enunciation, “I always imagine my little one”, “I feel I am suffocating. I can’t breathe”.



Hymes's last four sections, "Key", "Instrumentalities", "Norms" and "Genre", refer to the following aspects respectively: "Clues that establish tones, manners, and spirits of the speech act", "Forms and styles of speech", "Social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reactions" and, finally, "The kind of speech act or the kind of story that has been told". In fact, the very last part of the narrative involves Hymes's four sections, since a tragic tone in an informal speech is part of a narration, where all the participants seem to collaborate and be determinant actors to the final performance, and to the creation of a story that functions as an act of translation of human experiences.

The same act of translating experiences as a form of (re)narration happens in the visual arts. In the descriptive label of the work of art *Wanderers* (2017) by Nikiloaj Bendix Skyum Larsen, displayed at the exhibition *Call Me By My Name*, the viewer can read: "*Wanderers* is a sculptural work consisting of more than 300 hand-made human figures that are walking in the same direction. At first glance, they appear to be a homogenous, threatening mass moving through the exhibition space, echoing the dehumanised language that many politicians and media outlets often use to depict migrants. On closer inspection, each figure emerges as a unique individual with its own responsibility".



This work of art has a twofold function and a duality of perspectives. On the one hand, *Wanderers* transmits its translating meaning, which is rooted in the act of (re)narrating experiences belonging not to a horde of people, but to individuals who have objectives and roles in society. On the other hand, the way in which the work itself is built and displayed in the museum space makes *Wanderers* a multimodal object that reverses the media-oriented perspective on the migrant narratives as unhuman stories of nameless peoples. Indeed, if from one visual perspective, the work seems to represent a mass of black corpses, from another visual angle, people on display appear to be individual human beings who walk in search of something.

*Call Me by My Name*, an exhibition at the Migration Museum London, examines the complexity of humanity behind the current migration crisis and welcomes powerful works by emerging artists, refugees, camp residents, volunteers and common citizens. Migrants are turned from nameless groups of people into named individuals, each with a unique story and set of reasons for being in Calais. The dissemination of stories takes place through acts of translation by means of which the migrants tell their own stories (from their native languages into English for those who are not bilingual), and through the interventions from artists who practise translation as collaboration and solidarity towards the Calais camp as one of the most important symbols of Europe's migration crisis. In opposition to the modalities through which the migration crisis has dominated headlines and

interested international political debate, the arts and translation procedures help transform the experiences of the migrants into the lives and stories of individuals. The exhibition is divided into three main thematic areas, which include three sections named “JOURNEYS”, “IDENTITY” and “THE JUNGLE”.

The transcriptions of the interviews in the different sections were possible thanks to the support of artists and volunteers who took part in the organization of the event. An Afghani mother tells her story without unveiling her identity: [“The Taliban attacked me. They wanted to kill me because they said I was working for the church as a nurse, that I was a Christian, not a Muslim. My husband and three children had to move from home to home hiding from the Taliban. I was terrified for us. We travelled from Afghanistan. We were up to our thighs in water for two days. I had to carry the children and I was seven months pregnant.” BEING HERE IN CALAIS FOR ONE MONTH IN A CARAVAN IS PEACE OF MIND. NOT HAVING TO LIVE IN FEAR. AFGHANI MOTHER]. The broad sense of translation that this story contains (re)narrates and describes an identity that is embedded in a strong sense of individualization/anonymization (i.e. me, I, my husband, three children, we) and of generalization/functionalization (i.e. the Taliban, Christian, Muslim). The Afghani mother depicts her family and herself as participants who take part in the story as individuals in a family group rather than as a collectivity. The nouns referring to the persecutors remain generic as do those terms used to explain the reason of their persecution (i.e. the rivalry between Christians and Muslims). Besides, the representation of the actions is based on the developments of facts and events that express transitivity and material verbal processes. These verbs give voice to concrete actions and have a material consequence, in which the participants are not actors but goals.

In the exhibition *All I Left Behind. All I Will Discover*, the relationship between the arts and translation in the process of construction of migrant stories is explicit both in the works and the accompanying panels. The exhibition, which is the result of hard work by young people in the British Red Cross, offers a glimpse of what being a refugee means, and what pains, trauma and homesickness characterize many of the narrated stories. In the opening label of the exhibition, one can read: “Art helps you pinpoint particular emotions that are often too difficult to articulate”. In the following work, art and translation cohabit as instruments that help reveal stories on migration:





“My artwork is about my journey. Sometime people didn’t understand why I came here, so I chose art to explain my story”.

The textual comment explains that the use of the arts is a way to translate stories that would remain hidden or understandable through other modes or genres. According to the systemic functional-multimodal text and image systems (SF-MDA), the label includes two parallel systems, the textual and visual one – both composed of experiential, interpersonal and textual clauses. The systems are complementary. The textual system transmits three functions. The ideational function testifies to what extent the participant conceptualizes the world he lives in (i.e. the world does not understand why the participant is a migrant, therefore he uses the arts to translate his state of wandering). The interpersonal function demonstrates that the participant makes language his personal medium to express himself to the others (i.e. there is an exchange of information through a declarative statement that conjugates both the illocutionary and perlocutionary act. The sentence involves an illocution as an act of request, which is transformed into a perlocution as an act of persuasion). The textual function shows how the participant makes use of his language to form a cohesive and coherent text, which, eventually, becomes an instrument of communication. Here, the information focus has its own point of departure (i.e. the participant chooses arts forms in order to tell about his journeys) and a consequent conclusion (i.e. the participant chooses the arts as an instrument of narration because people do not understand his stories through other modes and genres).

In the visual system, the three metafunctions interact and highlight the setting or narrative theme, which is a human hand, accompanied by the statement “PEACE”, whose visual effect is rather direct, with nothing happening around except the presence of an infinite number of painted spots that position the material object at the centre of the frame, while providing the audience with a homogenous construction of the parts as a whole. The V sign, which was widely adopted by countercultures as a symbol of peace, but also as a victory sign used in the 1960s, is part of the painted hand and also reinforces the meaning of the sentence at the top of the frame. The sign transmits feelings of peace, collaboration and solidarity within an artistic form that translates migrant stories.

### Concluding remarks

By looking at migration from the perspectives of the creative cultural industries and translation studies, this investigation has surveyed the phenomenon of the mobility of migrants by relying on first-hand experiences that have provided an authentic re-framing of migrant identities. The account of the creative potential of migration as a movement that accelerates multiple networks and creates transnational social spaces permits the migration crisis to be looked at from an anti-media angle and enables migrant cultures to be increasingly fundamental to the identification of global art circuits and non-fiction mainstream. Against this backdrop, translation has been viewed as a political instrument of interconnection between the arts and migration issues, and as a crucial site for the generation of intercultural and transcultural spatial relations, which originate from mechanisms of (re)narration and (re)framing of identities, and forms of collaboration and solidarity.

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