

# ACTIVIST TRANSLATIONS IN ITALY A Paratextual Analysis of Five Feminist and Queer Editorial Projects

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**Abstract** – After being widely debated in the Anglophone world, the issue of diversity in the publishing industry has been recently introduced in Italy as well, calling for greater gender, ethnic, sexual, and class equality. As pointed out by Helen Vassallo (2023), the agents involved in the publication of a book – translators, editors, publishers – are pivotal in the promotion of inclusivity. In particular, some small publishing houses play a key role in this regard thanks to their overtly activist mission. This paper deals with a selection of small Italian activist publishers and their efforts to counteract mainstream narratives about diversity and promote intersectional feminist and queer culture on a transnational level through translation. The paratexts of five translations whose source text is already part of an activist project are analysed through Kathryn Batchelor’s (2018) framework to demonstrate that they are a complementary form of activism in which the publishing industry agents can further their political and activist agendas and comment on the texts and the linguistic choices their translation required.

**Keywords:** activism; translation; Italian publishing houses; Black feminism; queer rights.

*Nel promuovere una molteplicità di voci,  
quel che si vuole, sopra ogni cosa,  
è rompere col discorso autorizzato e unico,  
che si pretende universale.  
Si cerca qui, soprattutto, di lottare per rompere  
con il regime di autorizzazione discorsiva.  
(D. Ribeiro “Il luogo della parola”, 2020,  
It. trans., p. 49).*

## 1. Introduction

In a world where white cisgender male authors still benefit from a larger visibility, many are the concerns about the underrepresentation of diversity in the publishing industry. One of the first denunciations in an Anglophone country was made by Zora Neale Hurston back in 1950 in *What White Publishers Won't Print*, where she claimed that in the United States stories by Black writers were not usually published and – when they were – they had to

conform to a set of stereotypes on the ‘Black experience’ white people wanted to read about. Although the situation has improved since then, it has not changed as much as it should have.<sup>1</sup>

Following the absence of Black, Asian, or other minority writers in the 2016 World Book Night list, in 2015 *The Guardian* asked 13 writers and 6 industry figures (publishers, editors, critics, etc.) the following question: “How do we stop UK publishing being so posh and white?” The results of this call for action and accountability were analysed by Arifa Akbar (2017), who deemed the improvement “promising” but still insufficient. Furthermore, a 2020 *New York Times* survey of fiction books written in English between 1950 and 2018 found out that “[o]f the 7,124 books for which [...] the author’s race [was identified], 95 percent were written by white people” (So, Wezerek 2020). As pointed out in the Lee & Low Books survey of the same year, this is complemented by a higher percentage of white people in the publishing industry: “76 percent of publishing staff, review journal staff, and literary agents are White” (Lee & Low Books 2020).

Diversity continues to be the key word in press or academic inquiries and reports about the Anglophone publishing industry (Saha, van Lente 2020, Tager, Rosaz Shariyf 2022; see also Mann 2022, Smith 2023, Spalding 2022, Spencer 2023), but it is becoming more and more relevant in Italy as well. This paper aims to offer a glimpse into how diversity is promoted transnationally by Italian activist publishers through the use of translation and the paratext as sites of activism. In order to do so, five Italian small publishing houses were identified, and five translations were selected from their catalogues on the basis that their source texts were already part of militant projects intersecting Black feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights.<sup>2</sup> Prefaces, introductions, translators’ or publishers’ notes in the target texts offer a space where authors, editors, translators, and scholars can further comment on the topics of the books and reflect on language and the practice of translation. The paratexts – analysed according to Kathryn Batchelor’s (2018) framework – are thus considered as a complementary level of activism in which the agents involved in the publishing industry acknowledge that “[t]ranslation enables [activist] groups to elaborate their alternative narratives

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a similar problem surfaces in the 2020 survey *Rethinking ‘Diversity’ in Publishing*: “[a]uthors of color are not only damned if they tell stories that white gatekeepers wrongly believe they’ve already read – they’re also damned if they don’t tell stereotypical stories that white publishers actually have already read and expect. Various interviewees described an authorial straitjacket whereby publishers seek to capitalize on the proven successes of writers of color, but only in a circumscribed way: If a story worked once, tell it again” (Saha, von Lente 2020, p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> For space constraints, this paper does not allow for a thorough discussion of these topics but limits itself to show how intersectional feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights are given visibility through activist translation.

across national and linguistic boundaries, to create an international community bound by a similar vision of the world and unhindered by linguistic frontiers” (Baker 2010, p. 40).

## 2. State of the art

Since the development of translation studies as a discipline, scholars have questioned the source (original) and target (derivative) text dichotomy. Rather than being ‘copies’ of their source texts or merely linguistic practices of meaning transfer, translations are now conceived as new and different texts and as complex – and creative – processes of mediation between cultures. The research branches of feminist and postcolonial translation studies have further emphasised the relevance of the translator’s choices in the construction of the target text. In 1991, for instance, Luise von Flotow coined three strategies that can be employed by a feminist translator, who “has given herself permission to make her work visible, discuss the creative process she is engaged in, collude with and challenge the writers she translates” (von Flotow 1991, p. 74). As intersectional feminist and queer studies continue to demonstrate (see Baer, Kaindl 2018; Castro, Ergun 2017; von Flotow, Kamal 2020), supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking are ways in which translators may counteract the patriarchal and heteronormative values embedded in the source text. Moreover, within postcolonial studies it is postulated that also the non-translation of a text reveals what is (and is not) allowed to enter the target culture system (Tymoczko 2006, p. 448).

Performativity is the main property translation has in relation to activism as it acts in a specific time and place as a form of resistance against the narratives it wishes to contest. The increasing interest in the political and transformative aspect of translation has led to what Michaela Wolf (2014) defines “activist turn” in translation studies. Writing about translation and resistance, Maria Tymoczko emphasises the “potentially radical and activist edge” (2010, p. 19) that a translated text assumes in the encounter with another culture in times of peace or war – as a matter of fact, activist discourses are often interwoven with conflict narratives (see Baker 2006). Identifying the time and place in which a translation is undertaken is fundamental to understand the translator’s motives and overcome the ‘myth’ of the translator’s neutrality. In this regard, Mona Baker (2013) postulates that everyone is constantly part of and agent in the narrative they choose to stand for; hence, the act of translation “constructs cultural realities, and it does so by intervening in the processes of narration and renarration that constitutes all encounters, and that essentially construct the world for us” (Baker 2013, p. 24).

Scholarly interest in the field of activism and translation is increasing, as demonstrated by recent contributions such as the *Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism* (2020), edited by Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian, and *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing* (2023) by Helen Vassallo. In particular, the latter underlines the relevance of the manifold actors (translators, publishers, editors, etc.) involved in the dissemination of activist ideas through the publication of a translated text. The scholar maintains that in the Anglophone world the main agents of change are small publishing houses that actively try to counteract mainstream narratives about diversity. Moreover, as noted by Maria Tymoczko, “[a]t times activist translators amplify translated texts, providing elaborate commentaries and paratextual materials that serve as a guide for political or ideological readings” (Tymoczko 2010, p. 230). Indeed, prefaces, introductions, and notes can all be exploited to boast the political and activist agenda of those involved in the publishing industry.

### 3. Theoretical and methodological background

The paratext offers a space where translators (but also publishers, editors, and scholars) can “fram[e] a translation and explai[n] how it should be read, what inferences should be drawn, and what ideological import the translation has in the receptor context” (Tymoczko 2010, p. 234). Luise von Flotow includes paratextual practices among the strategies feminist translators may employ, while Chiara Elefante regards paratexts as “spazi di importanza fondamentale nel passaggio che la traduzione consente da una cultura all’altra, perché, nella loro pluralità, sono spazi ibridi, soglie che, al pari del processo traduttivo, consentono di superare il concetto stesso di frontiera”<sup>3</sup> (Elefante 2013, p. 11). Many translation studies scholars have taken on the analysis of the paratext as a threshold after *Seuils*, the seminal work Gérard Genette published in 1987. The French theorist, however, posits that translations are part of the paratext of their source text and that their paratexts are not ‘authorial’, i.e. written by the author of the (source) text, unless they are self-reflexive, i.e. they comment on the translated text. This authorial concept presents a set of problems: can the translator be considered a co-author of the target text? How much is the translator responsible for the translated text? What happens when

<sup>3</sup> [spaces of crucial importance in the passage from one culture to another that translation makes possible, since in their plurality paratexts are hybrid spaces, thresholds which, like the translation process itself, allow us to go beyond the very concept of frontier].

there are different prefaces or forewords written by the source text author and/or the translator?

These ambiguities have led to several revisions of Genette's paradigm within translation studies (see Armstrong 2007, Belle, Hosington 2018, Gürçağlar 2002, Kovala 1996, Smith, Wilson 2011). In particular, Kathryn Batchelor (2018) has outlined a framework that revises the five main features of Genette's model, namely 'space', 'substance', 'time', 'senders and addressees', 'functions' (Batchelor 2018, pp. 153-161). The spatial distinction regards the collocation of the paratext in relation to the text it refers to. Except for the digital and audiovisual domains, Genette's distinction between 'peritexts' (elements located in the same space as the text they refer to) and 'epitexts' (elements located outside the text they refer to) is still widely used. The substantial category deals with the mode of expression of the paratext (e.g. words or images), its medium of expression (e.g. digital or print), the medium through which the text is materialised (e.g. digital or print book), the medium through which the text is accessed (e.g. e-reading devices or paper books), the medium through which the text is discovered (e.g. search engines, websites, and catalogues). The temporal category classifies paratexts based on whether they are written in relation to the source text (pre-, with-, or post-ST) or in relation to the target text (pre-, with-, or post-TT). The 'senders and addressees' feature entails a pragmatic distinction between the writer(s) of the paratext (translators, authors, other senders) and the readers (source or target culture audiences). As for Genette's fifth feature, i.e. 'functions', Batchelor adapts Annika Rockenberger's (2014) model with minimal variations and lists the following 14 functions:

- The referential f. establishes the legal and discursive fingerprint of the work.
- The self-referential f. draws attention to the paratext itself.
- The ornamental f. serves as a decoration.
- The generic f. categorises the work and indicates its genre.
- The meta-communicative f. reflects on the conditions of mediated communication and includes either reflections on translation in general or on the translation process of the work in particular.
- The informative f. clarifies the properties of the work, reveals intentions, removes epistemic obstacles for the reader.
- The hermeneutical f. mediates relevant contexts and instructs the understanding or interpretation of the text.
- The ideological f. promotes or takes distances from a certain viewpoint.
- The evaluative f. claims or demands value and cultural significance.
- The commercial f. advertises, praises, sells, recommends other products.

- The legal f. informs about legal entitlements or establishes legal rights and obligations.
- The pedagogical f. establishes standards for behaviour.
- The instructive f. guides the reception and use of the text.
- The ‘personalisation’ f. applies only to interactive paratexts and temporarily adjusts their elements to personal needs.

A paratextual analysis based on Batchelor’s model may focus on one or more of the above-mentioned categories and functions. Moreover, a distinction can be made between paratexts as ‘metatexts’, when comments on the specific translation are included, and paratexts as ‘metadiscourses’, when the comments are on translation in general (Batchelor 2018, pp. 151-152).

#### 4. Case study outline

The 2020 *New York Times* inquiry about diversity in the publishing industry has impacted Italy as well. For example, in the *Giornale della Libreria* article *Di cosa parliamo quando parliamo di ‘diversity’ in editoria* (2020), Samuele Cafasso notes that “[u]na riflessione sulla presenza di autori di etnia diversa ai vertici delle case editrici e tra gli scrittori non è stata ancora avviata in larga scala nel nostro Paese”<sup>4</sup>. Such reflection, he adds, should not only focus on ethnicity but also include gender disparity. Indeed, the 2020-2022 reports by the Italian Publishers Association (AIE – Associazione Italiana Editori) on the status of the Italian publishing industry and by the Statistics National Institute (ISTAT – Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) on book reading and production<sup>5</sup> mention neither the gender nor the ethnicity of the authors and the agents in the industry. The AIE reports<sup>6</sup> are not concerned with translation, while the ISTAT ones<sup>7</sup> show that in 2020 more than 1/3 of young adult books (34.8%) were translated from a foreign language, mostly English (20.0%), while the percentage of translated texts was lower for the miscellaneous category (16.3%). In 2021 the data were similar: almost 1/3 of young adult books (31.4%) were translated from a foreign language, mostly English (15.7%) and French (8.4%), with a lower percentage in the miscellaneous section (17.9%). The same information is not available in the 2022 report. The reason for the major incidence of translations in the young

<sup>4</sup> [in our country, a reflection on the presence of authors from different ethnic backgrounds at the top of the publishing industry and among writers has not been started on a large scale yet].

<sup>5</sup> As of January 2024, the data for 2023 are not available, except for a glimpse into the first nine months included in the AIE 2022 report.

<sup>6</sup> See AIE 2021, 2022, 2023a, 2023b.

<sup>7</sup> See ISTAT 2022a, 2022b, 2023.

adult category may be related to the demographic gap in the reading habits of Italians, as females between the age of 11 and 24 are the most avid readers. Moreover, the 2018 report by the Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters (AITI – Associazione Italiana Traduttori e Interpreti)<sup>8</sup> shows that Italian translators (and interpreters) are also chiefly women (85.95%).

Although there are data on the gender of readers and translators, there do not seem to be reports on the gender and ethnicity of authors and other agents in the industry. Nonetheless, many small publishing houses are putting marginalised voices at the centre of discourse and urging for a more diverse industry. The ISTAT reports present an increasing number of ‘micro-publishers’ (with a circulation of 5,000 copies maximum) and ‘small publishers’ (with a circulation between 5,001 and 10,000 copies maximum).<sup>9</sup> Its 2020 report also signals that micro- and small publishers display a greater thematic specialisation and target a selected set of readers. Small and micro-publishing houses are often the main promoters of activist ideas. Among them, five are exemplificatory for their social commitment to foster gender equality, inclusivity, and intersectionality: Settenove, Somara! Edizioni, Capovolte, Asterisco Edizioni, and Le Plurali.

Founded in 2013 by Monica Martinelli, Settenove is “il primo progetto editoriale italiano interamente dedicato alla prevenzione della discriminazione e della violenza di genere”<sup>10</sup> (Settenove n.d.). Specialising in children literature and young adult books, the publisher aims to fight against stereotypes by educating children and getting women *and* men involved in the project. The name, literally ‘Seven nine’, refers to the year 1979, when the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Loredana Rotondo, Maria Grazia Belmonti, Anna Carini, Rony Daopulo, Paola De Martis and Annabella Miscuglio’s *Processo per stupro (A Trial for Rape)* was broadcast by RAI, the Italian public broadcasting service, and the Chamber of Deputies elected its first woman president, Nilde Iotti.

The Sentieri Sterrati association launched Somara! Edizioni in 2018 as their own editorial project. Its ironic name was inspired by Virginia Woolf’s affectionate nickname for Vita Sackville West (Somara! Edizioni 2024). The non-profit publishing house follows the association’s aim of spreading both past and present stories and works by women who have been silenced and

<sup>8</sup> The 2018 AITI report covers the 2014-2018 period (see AITI 2018). As of January 2024, the 2023 report (including the 2019-2023 period) has not been published yet.

<sup>9</sup> According to the report, the percentage of ‘micro-publishers’ was 53.0% in 2020, 53.4% in 2021, and 51.7% in 2022. In the case of ‘small publishers’, it was 38.1% in 2020, 37.4% in 2021, and 39.4% in 2022.

<sup>10</sup>[the first Italian editorial project entirely devoted to the prevention of gender violence and discrimination].

erased from the pages of history, mainly through the translation of unpublished works (Sentieri Sterrati 2024).

Capovolte and Asterisco Edizioni were founded in 2019, the former by Ilaria Leccardi and the latter by Marta Capesciotti, Marta Cotta Ramosino, and Mauro Muscio. Capovolte is an overtly anti-racist and transfeminist publisher (Capovolte 2019a), originating from Leccardi's experience as an activist writer and her wish to publish stories about and for women (Affricot 2020). The editorial collective of Asterisco Edizioni stems from intersectional feminism and includes works on gender, sexuality, and education. They accept and encourage external suggestions in order to find out-of-catalogue and untranslated texts (Asterisco Edizioni 2024b). Similarly, Beatrice Gnassi, Clara Stella, Hanna Suni, and Valentina Torrini founded Le Plurali with four key concepts in mind: feminism, independence, intersectionality, and curiosity. Their manifesto states that they publish only women's works, especially those unpublished and untranslated in Italy (Le Plurali n.d.).

Translation seems to play a primary role for each of these publishers. On their websites, Settenove often mentions international books, while Somara! Edizioni, Asterisco Edizioni, and Le Plurali refer more specifically to translation and untranslated texts. The percentage of translations in their catalogues is 23.26%, 33.33%, 19.35%, and 35.29% respectively. Capovolte, the only publisher whose website does not provide any indications about translated texts, has the highest percentage with 40.00%.<sup>11</sup> For these publishing houses, translation is indeed a tool to convey and spread the ideas they promote.

## 5. Paratextual analysis

Two main criteria were outlined in the selection of the translations analysed in this section: 1) they must display some sort of metatextual comment; 2) their source texts must be part of a militant project, offering as such a double level of activism between the publishers of both source and target texts. As of January 2024, two translations by Capovolte and three by Asterisco Edizioni have met these criteria. The former deal with Black feminism, while the latter with LGBTQIA+ rights. By sharing the same values of inclusivity and intersectionality, Capovolte and Asterisco Edizioni truly embody the idea that "small presses are pioneers for activism in translation" (Castro, Vassallo 2020, p. 428).

The following paratextual analysis takes into account Batchelor's (2018) temporal and pragmatic categories and functions. For what concerns

<sup>11</sup> The percentages here reported refer to the catalogues as of January 2024.



‘space’, each paratext is a peritext. As for ‘substance’, the medium through which the texts were discovered is the two publishers’ websites, and their medium of expression is written words. The medium through which the texts are materialised is digital books for Capovolte and print books for Asterisco Edizioni; hence, the medium through which the texts were accessed is an e-reading device in the former case and paperbacks in the latter.

### 5.1. Capovolte: *Black feminism in translation*

There are two translations by Capovolte whose source text is already part of a militant project: *Il luogo della parola* (2020) by Brazilian philosopher Djamila Ribeiro, originally published in 2020 as *Lugar de fala*, and *Memorie della piantagione. Episodi di razzismo quotidiano* (2021) by Portuguese writer Grada Kilomba, originally published in 2016 as *Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism*. The former is translated from Portuguese, the latter from English. They are both published in the Intersezioni [Intersections] series, which was created to welcome feminist voices from all over the world, especially those who are still barely known in Italy (Capovolte 2019b). In both cases, the names of the translators do not appear on the cover but in the colophon.

#### 5.1.1. *Il luogo della parola by Djamila Ribeiro*

Translated by Monica Paes and revised by Maria Terruzzi and Agnese Gazzera, *Il luogo della parola* is framed by several paratextual elements: the acknowledgements, an epigraph, an introduction to the target text editorial series, a translator’s note, an introduction to the source text editorial series, an afterword to the target text. Three of them are translated paratexts classifiable as ‘with-ST’, with the author of the source text addressing the source text readers, while the remaining three are ‘with-TT’, with the publisher, the translator, and scholar Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz addressing the target text audience.

The source text publishing house, Editora Jandaíra, was founded in 2014 as Pólen Livros by Lizandra Magon de Almeida, who wished to represent as much as possible “a maior diversidade dos múltiplos universos femininos”<sup>12</sup> (Editora Jandaíra n.d.). Wishing to offer a female perspective on society and the world, she created a catalogue made of works mostly written by and for women (Editora Jandaíra n.d.). *Feminismos Plurais* [Plural Feminisms] is an editorial series directed by Djamila Ribeiro and presented for the first time in the introduction to *Lugar de fala*. The author employs the

<sup>12</sup>[the greatest diversity of the many feminine universes].

paratext to underline the mission statement of the series, which is a reflection on Black feminism aimed at the popularisation of Black women intellectuals as active subjects of resistance.

The Italian translation of the book contains a presentation of the target text editorial series, where Leccardi points out that *Intersezioni* gives a space to intersectional feminist voices, “soprattutto a quelle che in Italia non sono tradotte”<sup>13</sup> (Leccardi 2020, p. 8) because “[t]roppo poco nel nostro Paese è stato tradotto e offerto al dibattito pubblico”<sup>14</sup> (Leccardi 2020, p. 9). This opinion is shared by scholar Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz in her afterword, where she welcomes the book “nel panorama Italiano, in cui sono pochi i volumi tradotti del dibattito latinoamericano e caraibico sulla colonialità del sapere, e sono assenti le voci femministe che invece vi hanno avuto un ruolo centrale, anche di critica del suo impianto androcentrico”<sup>15</sup> (Ribeiro Corossacz 2020, p. 65). Both Leccardi and Ribeiro Corossacz emphasise the importance of the role of the translator as a cultural mediator who contributes to the dissemination of feminist ideas and the promotion of a more inclusive international debate.

Monica Paes identifies this role in the translator’s note and points out that many works cited by Djamilia Ribeiro have not been translated into Italian yet, hence the decision to translate the Portuguese and English titles into Italian to make them comprehensible to an Italian reader (Paes 2020, p. 10). She also discusses the complexity of the translation of the title *Lugar de fala*, which alludes to an extensive philosophical debate in Brazil about the concept of ‘place of speech’. In the end, along with the other women who contributed to the Italian edition, she chose *luogo* (‘place’) – instead of *spazio* (‘space’) or *posto* (‘site’) – for two main reasons: on the one hand, Ribeiro herself refers to the notion of *social locus*, while on the other, in Italian *luogo* has a similar sociopolitical connotation (Paes 2020, p. 10). Moreover, Paes informs the reader of the addition of footnotes and glosses within the main text to explain the meaning of some words, expressions, and references to Brazilian culture (Paes 2020, p. 10). Quite strikingly, the translator is visible from the very first pages of the paratext as she inserts some notes in the acknowledgements to clarify the meaning of the Yoruba word *Ori* and in the epigraph to let the reader know that the word *infans* was written in Latin in the source text.

The discussion on her translation choices turns the translator’s note into a metatext and fulfils the meta-communicative and the self-referential

<sup>13</sup> [especially to those which have not been translated in Italy].

<sup>14</sup> [in our country, too little has been translated and offered to public debate].

<sup>15</sup> [in the Italian editorial panorama, which lacks enough translated books about the Latin American and Caribbean debate on the coloniality of knowledge and shuns the feminist voices that were central in this debate and in the critique of its androcentrism].

functions by drawing attention to other elements of the paratext (i.e. the footnotes and the glosses). Both the translator's note and her notes to the translation present the informative function and clarify culture-specific references. All the paratextual elements of the target text share the generic function, as they define the status of the text as a translation. Besides the commercial one, which can be found only in Ribeiro's introduction when she mentions the affordable price of the book aimed to facilitate the circulation of the series, the other functions are shared by both the afterword and the introductions to the two editorial series. As a matter of fact, they all locate the work within a broader discourse on Black feminism for both source and target readers (referential f.) and as such offer an interpretation of the text (hermeneutical f.), promote its ideological stance (ideological f.), and direct its reception (instructive f.). Moreover, they all seem to implicitly underline the cultural significance of the text and the series in their source and target cultures (evaluative f.).

### 5.1.2. Memorie della piantagione. Episodi di razzismo quotidiano by Grada Kilomba

Despite being Portuguese, Grada Kilomba wrote *Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism* in English as the book was born out of the PhD project she pursued in Germany. The publishing house, Unrast Verlag, was established in 1989 with the aim of giving voice to the revolutionary 'restlessness' (hence the name *Unrast*) of its founders (Unrast Verlag 2022). As its very first publications – *Antifaschistische Taschenkalender* [Antifascist Pocket Calendar] and the Feminist Science Series – testify to, its activism stems from antifascism, intersectional feminism, and antiracism.

The Italian translation was made by Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau and Marie Moïse. The paratext of the translated text contains the author's note to the translated (Portuguese) edition and a short 'with-TT' note by the Italian publisher, in which Leccardi justifies the decision of employing the schwa (ə) in the translation as an effort towards a more inclusive language (Leccardi 2021, p. 20). The author's note is classifiable as 'post-ST' as it was written for the Portuguese edition and then translated into Italian. In it, not only does Kilomba explain the genesis of the book but also comments on the Portuguese translation because the passage from one language to the other reveals "una profonda mancanza di riflessione e teorizzazione della storia e dell'eredità coloniale e patriarcale, così presente nella stessa lingua portoghese"<sup>16</sup> as some terms "continuano ad essere ancorati a un discorso

<sup>16</sup> [a deep lack of reflections on and theorisation of history and the colonial and patriarchal legacy, which is very much part of the Portuguese language itself].

coloniale e patriarcale, fatto che li rende estremamente problematici”<sup>17</sup> (Kilomba 2021, p. 10).

As pointed out by the translators, the Italian language faces the same thorny issues. Kilomba admits she started writing footnotes for her English translation of some Portuguese terms that ended up being included in the source text. These choices are then explained in detail in the author’s note, which is largely made of a glossary illustrating the following words: *subject*, *object*, *other*, *Black*, *n-word*, *m-words* (*Mischling* and *mulatto*), *c-word* (the specifically Portuguese term *cabrita/o*), *enslaved*, *subaltern*. The author is fully aware of how the political dimension of language can both create and reinforce hegemonies and power inequalities. As a matter of fact, she concludes her note with a call to action for the creation of a new language with an inclusive vocabulary (Kilomba 2021, p. 18).

A reflection on language is indeed necessary not only in the case of Portuguese but also Italian. The peculiarity of the translated author’s note is that it contains ‘with-TT’ elements, i.e. short notes on the Italian translation of each of the following terms discussed by Kilomba: *soggettə*, *oggettə*, *Altrə*, *Nerə*, *n.*, *m.*, *schiaivizzata*, *subalternə*. Like Portuguese, Italian is a grammatically gendered language, which entails a choice between masculine and feminine morphemes for nouns, adjectives, and past participles that English does not specify. In order to go beyond gender binarism and avoid androcentrism (according to which the masculine is the norm and the feminine its deviation), the translators – in agreement with the publisher – employ the neutral schwa (Ghebremariam Tesfai, Moïse 2021, p. 12).

The paratexts of *Memorie della piantagione* are also a metatext where the Italian translation is commented on. The author’s, translators’ and publisher’s notes present the following functions:

	Author’s note	Translators’ notes	Publisher’s note
Referential f.	x		
Self-referential f.			x
Generic f.	x	x	x
Meta-communicative f.	x	x	x
Informative f.	x	x	
Hermeneutical f.	x	x	
Ideological f.	x	x	X
Instructive f.	x		

Table 1  
The paratextual functions in *Memorie della piantagione*.

<sup>17</sup> [keep on being rooted in colonial and patriarchal discourse, which makes them extremely problematic].

Kilomba locates her text in a specific cultural and political context, revealing in which discourse it is situated (referential f.) and establishing how she wishes it to be read (instructive f.). The author moved from Lisbon to Berlin, from a place she believed still denied (and even celebrated) its colonial past to a completely different environment, where the colonial and nazi-fascist past rather caused guilt and even shame (Kilomba 2021, p. 8). She shares that in Germany she was able to express herself and reflect freely on her condition as a Black woman, facilitated and driven by the connection with groups of Black, feminist, and LGBTQIA+ intellectuals.

The association with these groups and the ideologies they promote (ideological f.) is also shared by the translators and the publisher of the Italian edition. Each paratextual element fulfils the generic and the meta-communicative functions even though most meta-communicative reflections are made by the author and the Italian translators (informative f. and hermeneutical f.). Indeed, the commentaries on the author's and the translators' terminological choices explain how the text was shaped and clarify some culture-specific references to both source (English) and target (Portuguese and Italian) languages.

## **5.2. Asterisco Edizioni: LGBTQIA+ rights in translation**

The translations by Asterisco Edizioni whose source text is already part of a militant project are: *Rapporto contro la normalità* (2021) by Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire, originally published in 1971 and 2013 as *Rapport contre la normalité*, *Queer Nation Manifesto* (2022) by Queer Nation, originally distributed in 1990 as a leaflet, and *Divine. La storia della donna più bella del mondo (quasi)* (2022) by Spanish writer Álex Ander, originally published in 2020 as *Divine. La historia de la mujer más hermosa del mundo (casi)*. The source languages are French, English, and Spanish respectively. The first two texts belong to the Eresia [Heresy] editorial series, which includes rare and out-of-catalogue texts that are pillars of the feminist and queer movements (Asterisco Edizioni 2024c). *Divine* is part of the Allògene series, which focuses on figures who depart from the norm on a cultural, linguistic and/or political level (Asterisco Edizioni 2024a). The names of the translators appear on the cover of the first two books (in the *Rapporto contro la normalità* cover, Massimo Prearo figures as the editor as well), while in the case of *Divine*, Bea Gusmano's name appears in the colophon.

### 5.2.1. Rapporto contro la normalità by *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire*

*Rapport contre la normalité* was written by French revolutionary movement Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) and first published in 1971 by Champ libre (now éditions ivrea) and then republished in 2013 by GayKitschCamp (GKC), a militant publishing house founded by Patrick Cardon in 1989 for the bicentennial of the French Revolution. The aim of GKC is to disseminate and document the history and literary heritage of the LGBTQIA+ community (GayKitschCamp n.d.). Indeed, the very first book it published was an anonymous pamphlet written during the years of the Revolution, *Les enfants de Sodome à l'Assemblée Nationale* (Besnier 2018).

Massimo Prearo edited the Italian version for Asterisco Edizioni in 2021, revising and integrating the 1972 translation by Virginia Finzi Ghisi and contributing the two paratexts: an introduction – *Lesbiche e froci sul fronte rivoluzionario: studio per un'archeologia politica* [Lesbians and faggots on the revolutionary front: study for a political archaeology] – in which he traces FHAR's history, and a revisor's note – *Note sulla revisione della traduzione* [Notes on the translation revision]. Prearo points out that his work was more extensive than initially expected as “[q]uello che doveva essere inizialmente un ritocco, si è rivelato, in realtà, fin dalle prime pagine, un lavoro profondo di ripresa, di riscrittura, in alcuni casi di nuova traduzione e anche di integrazione di parti mancanti nella prima versione”<sup>18</sup> (Prearo 2021, p. xxvii).

The revisor's note is particularly interesting for its comparison between Finzi Ghisi's and Prearo's translation choices. The reader is informed of the addition of an omitted chapter and the insertion of explanatory notes, while some terms or sentences, whose connotation was altered, misinterpreted, or ennobled (Berman 1985) by Finzi Ghisi, are commented on as follows:

- The term *baiser* was repeatedly translated as ‘fare l'amore’ [to make love] instead of ‘scopare’ [to fuck].
- The insult *sale gouine* was translated as ‘troia’ [whore], removing the insult ‘sporca lesbica’ [filthy lesbian] from the vocabulary of the speaking (and spoken of) subject. Not only does Prearo use the literal Italian expression, but he also includes the French expression in square brackets.

<sup>18</sup> [what was initially meant to be a revision actually ended up being, from the very first pages, a complex process of recovery, rewriting, and in some cases of retranslation and integration of missing parts of the first edition].

- The insult *pédé*, ‘frocio’ [fag/faggot], was often translated as ‘omosessuale’ [homosexual] or ‘finocchio’ [fag/faggot].<sup>19</sup> Since Finzi Ghini mostly employs ‘frocio’, Prearo replaces it with ‘omosessuale’ and ‘finocchio’ to avoid repetitions.
- The insults *pédale* or *tapette* should be translated as ‘frocia’ [fag, but with a feminine suffix] or ‘checca’ [fairy], which already correspond to *folle* or *tante*. Prearo translates them as ‘culattone’ and ‘finocchio’ [fag/faggot]. He does not specify how they are translated by Finzi Ghisi.
- The term *mec*, mainly used in spoken language, was systematically translated as ‘omo’ [homo], altering as such whole sentences because it literally means ‘uomo’ [man] as a type (*le mec*) or as someone who acts manly (*il fait le mec*).
- The sentence *Vous avez raison, les homosexuels de toute race, de tout poil, de tout sexe et de toute classe, doivent sortir du ghetto bourgeois* was translated by Finzi Ghisi as ‘Avete ragione, gli omosessuali di ogni razza devono uscire dal ghetto borghese’. The diversity that now would be defined ‘intersectional’, i.e. intersecting ‘race’, ‘type’, ‘sex’, ‘class’ (Prearo 2021, p. xxix), is conveyed merely by the term ‘race’ in Finzi Ghisi’s version. He employs all the above-mentioned terms instead.

Prearo concludes by stating that he wished to preserve the style of the 1972 translation and that he revised it only where it was absolutely necessary.

Both the introduction and the revisor’s note are ‘with-TT’ paratextual elements addressing an Italian readership. The former fulfils the referential and the ideological functions in its positioning the text within French LGBTQIA+ discourse. The latter is a metatext thanks to its several reflections on translation and translation choices (meta-communicative f. and generic f.), in which Prearo clarifies the meaning of French words (informative f.) and explains his decision-making process (hermeneutical f.). The revisor’s note is self-referential as it mentions other parts of the paratext, i.e. the notes added within the text itself. Finally, an instance of the evaluative function occurs when the cultural significance of the first Italian unabridged version of the text is claimed by the translator/revisor: “Questa traduzione è [...] da considerarsi la versione integrale, inedita in italiano, del *Rapporto contro la normalità*”<sup>20</sup> (Prearo 2021, p. xxix).

<sup>19</sup>The translation of derogatory terms like *frocio* or *finocchio* is particularly problematic because there are no literal equivalents in English. Both can be roughly rendered as *fag* or *faggot* even though *frocio* is derived from the Roman dialect, while *finocchio* originated in the varieties spoken in Tuscany. The same problem occurs with other terms like *frocia*, *checca* or *culattone*. The English translations provided in square brackets should thus be considered as an approximation of the socio-pragmatic meaning of the Italian terms.

<sup>20</sup>[This translation is [...] to be considered the first integral version of *Rapport contre la normalité* to be published in Italian].

### 5.2.2. Queer Nation Manifesto *by Queer Nation*

The *Queer Nation Manifesto* is possibly the most militant text among those selected for this article. As Lorenzo Bernini recalls in the preface, Queer Nation was officially born on 20 March 1990 in the midst of the AIDS crisis, when dozens of activists created a group to actively help obtain medical support for AIDS patients, give visibility to ‘sexual minorities’, and defend them against discrimination. A few months after its foundation, its manifesto was handed out during the Gay Pride Day Parade in New York.

The manifesto was first translated into Italian in 2021 by Francesco Brusa and Emma Catherine Gainsforth for the webzine *DinamoPress*, where it figured as “published anonymously by queers” (Bernini *et al.* 2021), before appearing in print version for Asterisco Edizioni. The paratextual apparatus comprehends a publishers’ note, a foreword on inclusive language, and the preface written by scholar Lorenzo Bernini, which was already part of the online edition of the text. The first two paratexts are ‘with-TT’, while the third is both ‘pre-TT’ (as it was written for a previous publication) and ‘with-TT’ (as it appears in the first publication of this edition). All of them address an Italian audience.

A presentation of the translation and a reflection on the *Manifesto* itself is included in the publishers’ note and the preface respectively. In their foreword on inclusive language, Bernini, Brusa, and Gainsforth explain their decision of using both masculine and feminine inflections instead of the asterisk or schwa. On the one hand, they deem it necessary to avoid the generic masculine, but on the other they acknowledge that “di fronte a questioni come la pandemia di AIDS, i ruoli di genere, le alleanze tra soggettività differenti nei movimenti LGBTQIA+, e in senso lato nelle politiche della sessualità, riconoscersi nell’identità maschile o in quella femminile *fa differenza*”<sup>21</sup> (Bernini, Brusa, Gainsforth 2022, p. 8). Since an easy distinction can be made between the sections written by and for male subjects and those by and for female subjects, they point out that the asterisk<sup>22</sup> and the schwa would lead to an excessive neutralisation of the text. Nonetheless, they note that the slash (/) dividing the masculine and the feminine forms must be understood “in un senso massimamente inclusivo, come comprensiv[o] di tutte quelle soggettività che si posizionano tra il maschile e il femminile, oppure altrove”<sup>23</sup> (Bernini, Brusa, Gainsforth 2022,

<sup>21</sup> [when dealing with issues like the AIDS pandemic, gender roles, the alliances between different subjectivities within the LGBTQIA+ movements and, in a broader sense, within sexuality politics, choosing a masculine or feminine identity *produces difference*].

<sup>22</sup> The word ‘trans\*’ is the one case in which the asterisk is used.

<sup>23</sup> [in a completely inclusive sense, as comprehensive of those subjectivities who identify within the masculine and feminine continuum, or elsewhere].



p. 9). The main purpose of the translators is to adopt an inclusive language and to maintain the rhythm, rage, and register of the text.

The foreword is clearly a metatext and fulfils the meta-communicative, hermeneutical, generic, and ideological functions. The last two are found also in the publishers' note and in Bernini's preface, as every agent in the editorial project acknowledges the potential of this translated text to act as "un antidoto contro l'omonormatività e l'omonazionalismo dei nostri tempi complessi"<sup>24</sup> (Bernini 2022, p. 19). The only reference to other parts of the paratext (self-referential f.) is in the publishers' note, where Bernini, Brusa, and Gainsforth are thanked for their commitment as translators and editors and for their comments in the foreword and in the preface. In the latter, Bernini explains the background and impact of the *Manifesto* (referential f. and informative f.) and mentions the significance of its translation and dissemination (evaluative f.).

### 5.2.3. Divine. La storia della donna più bella del mondo (quasi) by *Álex Ander*

Álex Ander published *Divine. La historia de la mujer más hermosa del mundo (casi)* in 2020 for Egales, a Spanish publishing house specialising in LGBTQIA+ culture that was founded by Mili Hernández in 1995 with the aim of giving visibility to gay and lesbian literature in Spain (Egales n.d.-b). The book is part of the G editorial series, which includes essays by LGBTQIA+ authors and queer studies scholars (Egales n.d.-a). The Italian translation was made by Bea Gusmano and does not include any preface or foreword; her presence in the text is revealed only occasionally in the translation of some expressions or titles.

The paratextual elements of this edition are the 'with-TT' publishers' note and introduction (both addressing an Italian readership) and the 'with-ST' translated prologue (originally meant for Spanish readers). The Italian introduction – *Divine non c'è* [There is no Divine], written by Eleonora Santamaria and Luca Locati Luciani – articulates a more thorough investigation of the term *drag* and the reception of *Divine* in Italy:

Mentre nei Paesi anglofoni il termine ombrello 'drag' non era confinato solo agli ambiti artistici, in Italia nella parola 'travestito' venivano collocate senza una reale distinzione le esperienze di travestitismo, transgenderismo, crossdressing, drag. Solo a partire dagli anni Novanta, in modo ancora embrionale, il termine 'drag' si diffuse in Italia per identificare i corpi spettacolarizzati che indossavano un genere sessuale altro o problematizzavano il concetto di genere. Ma, dilemma linguistico per eccellenza, ha senso parlare di percezione italiana di *Divine* se non siamo riusciti a distinguerla da altre

<sup>24</sup>[an antidote against the homonormativity and homonationalism of our complex times].

esperienze di espressione di genere? Se non abbiamo avuto un modo per chiamarla, è esistita in Italia?<sup>25</sup> (Santamaria, Locati Luciani 2022, p. 9)

The dilemma of whether something exists if it cannot be named introduces a metalinguistic reflection on the definition of gender practices, whose conclusion is hinted at in the title: *There is no Divine*. One cannot confine Divine to one term or the other without failing to understand her and drag culture in general (Santamaria, Locati Luciani 2022, p. 25).

The publishers' note is a metatext fulfilling the meta-communicative function, where the editorial collective comments on their and Bea Guasmano's choice not to alter the style and form of the author, hence not to deconstruct the generic masculine or rewrite fat-phobic sentences (Capacitate, Cotta Ramosino, Muscio 2022, p. 5). In the note, moreover, the translation status of the text is fully acknowledged (generic f.) and Vegas's preface and Santamaria and Locati Luciani's introduction are alluded to (referential f.). The other elements of the paratext are both referential and informative in their positioning the text and Divine's figure both within and without Italian and Spanish culture.

## 6. Conclusion

This brief overview of the translation practices promoted by Italian small activist publishing houses has tried to demonstrate that

[w]ithin the politics of a decolonising world, translation is the glue that catalyses new knowledge that potentially grounds a new political praxis. Thus, when it comes to intellectual activism, honing skills of translation constitutes both an important intellectual challenge and a political necessity. (Collins 2017, pp. xii-xiii)

Translation is used as a form of activism in fostering diversity both in the publishing industry and within books promoting gender, ethnic, sexual, and class equality. By commenting on the books they introduce and by including metalinguistic reflections, the paratexts of these translations act as a further element of activism. The analysis of their ideological and meta-

<sup>25</sup> [While in the Anglophone world the umbrella term 'drag' was not confined only to the arts, in Italy the term 'travestito' referred, without any real distinction, to the experiences of transvestism, transgenderism, crossdressing, dragging. Only from the 1990s onwards, the term 'drag' started being used in Italy to identify spectacularised bodies that 'wore' a different gender or problematised the very concept of gender. However – a linguistic dilemma par excellence – does it make sense to discuss the Italian perception of Divine if we have not been able to distinguish her from other gender expressions? If we did not have a name for her, did she really exist in Italy?].

communicative functions contributed to discerning their purpose. The former is almost expected if we take into account the topics discussed in the books. To some extent, the same applies to the latter: on the one hand, the presence of metatextual comments was a prerequisite for the selection of the translated texts included in this study, on the other, the discourse on intersectional feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights entails a deconstruction of the language of patriarchy, i.e. “the language of universalism [which] is the language of the dominant male subject” (Tissot 2017, p. 32).

The issue of language becomes particularly relevant when translating, especially – but not exclusively – when moving from a language that does not specify grammatical gender to one that does. Alternatives like the schwa, the asterisk, the parallel use of masculine and feminine forms divided (or united) by a slash have been adopted by Capovolte and Asterisco Edizioni. The general agreement seems to be the avoidance of the generic masculine, which is only employed in *Divine*. The readers are informed of its use in the publishers’ note, which is followed by an appeal to use “la lettura del volume per riflettere sull’utilizzo della lingua e del suo potere, per provare a decostruire e riscrivere concetti e prodotti di una cultura figlia del potere e dei suoi meccanismi di segregazione e discriminazione”<sup>26</sup> (Capesciotti, Cotta Ramosino, Muscio 2022, p. 5).

As Vassallo (2023) argues, “we can start to forge a more equal world by beginning with balance of representation” (Vassallo 2023, p. 151), and the publication of books by marginalised writers – either because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or class – is an important step towards diversity enhancement. Although the case studies here presented include books by Capovolte and Asterisco Edizioni only, the other Italian publishers mentioned in this article – Settenove, Somara! Edizioni, Le Plurali – contribute to the dissemination of activist ideas through translation as well. This is confirmed by the high percentage of translated texts in their catalogues, which proves how publishers and translators can truly become agents of change and give visibility to all those ‘subaltern’ voices that, quoting Spivak (1994), could not yet speak.

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<sup>26</sup> [the reading of this volume to reflect on the use of language and its power, to try to deconstruct and rewrite the concepts and products of a culture based on power hierarchies and mechanisms of segregation and discrimination].

international conferences in Italy, Belgium, England, Sweden, India, and Egypt. Her Italian translation of Katherine Philips's *Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus* is currently being revised for publication.

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