Tongues with no Mother
Lost and Found Belongings
in the "New" Languages of Storytelling

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1. Introduction

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldùa posited her own experience as exemplary of a way of being that has become more and more frequent in recent times. "Ethnic identity, she stated, is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language" (Anzaldúa 1987, 59). When claiming the right to accept and speak Chicano, Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, all of them as her mother tongues and consequently the right to write bilingually, she was (and is) standing for a kind of freedom to communicate that is essential for cultural identity. On this topic, she beautifully commented that this was the only way to "overcome the tradition of silence" (60). A few years later, in his *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy offered a broader theoretical framework for understanding linguistic belonging in a world where relying on fixed notions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class rules out a whole set of identities whose sense of belonging is uncertain, and it shows in their linguistic choices (Gilroy 2000, 5-7). As it appears, language is a cornerstone of personal and collective identity. It becomes a complex tool to manage when the profiles at stake – being cross-breds, exiles, refugee seekers or nomadic subjects in any possible sense of the

Nicoletta Vallorani, *Tongues with no Mother. Lost and Found Belongings in the "New" Languages of Storytelling*, NuBE, 6 (2025), pp. 23-39.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13136/2724-4202/1703 ISSN: 2724-4202

word – find themselves navigating a liminal space between different belongings. In most cases, they are denied even the possibility to identify their own mother tongues as markers of identity. The feeling of being "torn between ways" (Anzaldúa 1987, 100) may become an artistic resource and a political tool aimed at acknowledging (and accepting) the lack of purity as a form of power. Therefore, their art deliberately shows fractures and breaks, and translation – intended globally as the operation of switching from one culture/tradition/language to another – is seen as a multi-layered process involving physical and symbolic border crossings as well as linguistic and cultural hybridity.

Precisely for these reasons, though related to translation, my work here does not focus on the simple code-switching that can make a text or a person understandable across borders. I want to focus on the journey as a process of reshaping oneself in order to adapt to a culture that crucially differs from one's own. Migration places the ones who migrate in the condition of leaving behind everything they had and were and learn a new way of being. If it is true that exile suggests an irreparable loss and fractures never to be healed, it is also undeniable that something new and valuable is often learnt.

In current times, mobility has produced multicultural and multilingual identities (Walkowitz 2015). For the ones who are forcibly dislocated, reasons for translation are often not strictly linguistic: they need being able to explain what pushed them far from their homeland, and they also need the privileged ones – in Europe or everywhere – to be able to grasp what they had to go through to reach what was supposed to be a safe place. Within this frame, language is a perfect tool, and code-switching tends to become something more than a "simple" translation, as widely testified by the recent critical debate on this topic (Bertacco & Vallorani 2020, 23-28). It easily becomes a way to declare a form of belonging, an instrument to give depth to some themes, a political gesture or an act of love.

My work samples some case studies from the fields of music, photography and filmmaking, art and theatre. I want to show that the shifting boundaries of identity, language and representation, though disrupting the traditional linguistic and

cultural continuity, may also produce a new space for artistic creation, a *terra incognita* where different codes interlace, each of them serving a very specific purpose and raising some highly urgent issues. The aesthetic practice may consequently become a form of political and cultural resistance.

In developing my argument on the multiple use of translation, both linguistic and cultural, I select my case studies with a specific ratio. Much attention is devoted to two artists – Saint Levant and Shirin Neshat – who navigate between two or more worlds, creating intermedial narratives that switch from one code to another, allowing their personal experiences to take on a universal flavour. In the final part of my article, I focus on how recent narratives of migration tried to translate the journey exploiting some traditional forms of storytelling or ancient Greek myths. Giacomo Sferlazzo reinterprets the Sicilian *cuntu* and composes songs in the specific brand of Sicilian spoken in his island to tell stories of contemporary migrations from the Northern coasts of Africa to Lampedusa. Mounira al Sohl revisits the Greek Myth of Europa to recover female agency in the Middle Eastern tradition. They both engage with complex contemporary issues and artistically describe what is in fact a process of lost and found belongings.

2. Paris, Gaza, Algiers, Los Angeles and Casablanca: Music in Between Worlds

In a 2024 song titled *5am in Paris* (2024), artist and musician Saint Levant expresses his struggle to belong blending the languages that he has been using since his birth. The English from the title crops up here and there throughout the lyrics, though some lines are in French and some in Palestinian Arabic. The line “Mon corps à Paris, mon cœur à Gaza” (“My body in Paris, my heart in Gaza”) captures a sense of being torn between the East and the West. This is followed by “Mon âme à Algiers, mon ex à Casa” (“My soul in Algiers, my ex-fiancée in Casablanca”), a line that brings soul and love into the picture, anchoring them in distinct geographical locations. When evoking the need to be comforted – “Ma

meuf à LA me prend dans ses bras" ("My girlfriend hugs me in Los Angeles") – he realizes that he does not belong anywhere: "Je me sens chez moi nulle part" ("I don't feel at home anywhere"). The stanza ends with some lines in Arabic, starting with "My family is in the East/My friends are in the West".

What Saint Levant offers in this song, like in many others, is a reflection on his own life. Born in Jerusalem as Marwan Abdelhamid, the artist is the son of a French/Algerian mother and a Palestinian/Serbian father. He was raised in Gaza, where he enjoyed a happy childhood and was surrounded by love: the best moment in his life, as he remembers it. During the Second Intifada (2000-2005), he and his family had to move to Jordan. At this point, relocated to Hamman and uprooted from his birthplace, Saint Levant was already trilingual: he used French at home, English at school, and Arabic in Gaza and at the Palestinian refugee camp of Al-Wehdat, in Jordan. To complete his education, he moved to Santa Barbara, in California, and there he started writing songs, devising an original brand of hip hop, R&B, and rap lyrics. In terms of linguistic choices, his music blends English, French, and Arabic to express themes of identity, diaspora, and resilience. His texts openly challenge stereotypes and political narratives, offering a personal yet globally resonant voice. As an artist of mixed genealogy, he exploits his multilingualism to create a connection between each issue and a specific code. For each topic, he needs to choose not only the word, but also the language that would add depth and articulate the meaning of his statements. As Martina Multisanti explains in her close analysis of Saint Levant's songs, English serves to address a global public, French is the language for love and emotion, and Arab primarily express a political stance, highlighting the sharp divide between the East and the West. Saint Levant translates his message by exploiting code-switching as a tool to shift between topics and to emphasize these transitions rather than hide them. The very act of making a choice among his multiple mother tongues is loaded with meanings that go beyond words (Multisanti 2024, 86-110).

In essence, Saint Levant exploits this artistic strategy to tap into music's potential as a symbolic and political language, ideally suited to a redefined concept of

"imagined community" (Anderson 2006), one that is global, less rooted in blood ties, and profoundly informed by the experiences of displacement and exile. As Georgina Born claims, music can bring imagined communities to life, gathering the members of the audience into groups – virtual and actual – forming them around new hybrid identities overcoming the national ones (Born 2011, 378). Now that the experiences of exile and dislocation are widely shared, this form of belonging may be deeply reassuring for people that otherwise would not belong anywhere.

Though privileged, Saint Levant is an exile. His position resonates with the condition of natural-born migrants, those who, from an early age, understand that they will not be allowed to grow up and grow old in the place where they were born. In migrating, they become people translated into another world. Language is only one side of what can be described as an existential condition that is lived in profoundly diverse ways (Bertacco & Vallorani 2021, 15). In the context of the Middle East, and more specifically the contested region between Israel and Palestine, diaspora began in 1948 (Peteet 2007, 627-629), with the so called *al-Nakba* ("the catastrophe" in English). The word *ghurbah*, meaning "exile", describes the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands from their homes (Pitner 1992, 61), a process that, in various forms, has been going on till today (Multisanti 2024, 88-89). Hybrid identities like that of Saint Levant emerge from this ongoing history. They belong to a homeland that no longer exist.

Any narrative of exile, relocation, or migration is inevitably tied to the need or the obligation to translate oneself into another culture. As Said notes, "exile is a condition of terminal loss" (Said 1984, 137). It deprives the displaced subject of the fundamental right to belong. Saint Levant gives form to this condition by blending various languages in a highly original mix, a motherless tongue that has multiple lands of origin. Vicente Rafael introduces this issue in a volume entitled, in fact, *Motherless Tongues*. There he explores the aporias of translation that keep emerging when one communicates primarily in a language that is not his/her mother tongue. In such cases, what is frequently experienced is a persistent difficulty in

finding the *right* word. It stems from an unclear and fragmented sense of linguistic – and not only linguistic – belonging. This results in what Rafael describes as “a kind of semantic *bouleversement*, the sense of upheaval whereby the endlessly enfolded meanings of particular events will always make any discourse feel unfinished and incomplete” (Rafael 2016, 18).

Rafael’s reflection on the issue of translation combines well with the notion of born-translated as introduced by Rebecca Walkowitz. In her critical essay published in 2015, she assembles a corpus of literary works that seem to be “written for translation, in the hope of being translated, but they are also written as translation, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed” (Walkowitz 2015, 4). Although her focus is on texts rather than human beeings, the notion could be applied to real people rather than texts, but this makes things more complex. In this case, translation becomes a metaphor and a process that is at the same time transitional and translational. It relates to exile, relocation and migration, and evokes the hosts of displacement, isolation, exclusion, slavery. Being an Adult Third Culture Kid, as per Pollock and Van Reken definition, Saint Levant has experienced relocation from an early age and has spent most his life in cultures that significantly differ from those of his parents and relatives (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 13-15). The very notion of in-betweennes described by Homi K. Bhabha as the condition of living between two worlds (Bhabha 1983, 18-36) has developed into something more articulated, and Bhabha’s third space is seen as an area where more than two cultures and languages are blended and hybridized. Saint Levant and others like him literally *live in translation*. Their mother tongue is a constantly remixed blend of multiple languages. Their culture draws from a variety of overlapping and sometimes conflicting traditions. This condition calls for a rethinking of the very concept of translation, understood, as Brian Baer suggests, not simply as a linguistic act, but “as a complex generative site of negotiation and world-making” (Baer 2020, 158).

3. Existing in Hybrid Spaces

It may be important to note that viewing translation through an expanded lens should not lead to an unchecked broadening of its semantic scope and theoretical application. The "commonly referred to as 'the translational turn'" (139) hides potential pitfalls that Brian Baer identifies in postcolonial studies particularly in the 1990s (141-145). He goes back to Stuart Hall's and Homi K. Bhabha's contributions on the matter to caution against overextending the metaphor of translation: such usage can result in overly generalized critical approaches that may dilute the specificity of cross-cultural discourse. In short, the "fact of translation" (158) in its entire complexity is to be kept front and centre in any discussion on exile, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

In an interview with Kimberly Bradley published in *Art|Basel* on March 4, 2025, Iranian visual artist, photographer and videomaker Shirin Neshat specifies: "My work isn't fully Iranian or fully Western; it exists in a hybrid space" (Bradley 2025). Like in Saint Levant, this sense of hybridity is deeply intertwined with her personal experience of exile. Born in Iran in 1957, Neshat moved to the US in 1974, a few years before the 1978 Iranian revolution. A student in Berkeley, she experienced the psychological strain of being cut off from her homeland, where the Islamic rule and the war with Iraq were making her return impossible. Her artistic path began to take shape when she relocated in New York, where she currently lives. There she found, in her words, "roots and a community" that provided a sense of belonging and protection (Bradley 2025). At the time and from there onward, she has been a diasporic subject "dwelling-in-displacement" (Clifford 1994, 310), with no permanent roots anywhere and fated to feel a stranger everywhere.

Her first journey back to Iran, in 1990, came after a 12-year absence and more than a decade of artistic inactivity. What she found there, after the Islamic revolution, deeply moved her, to the point that soon after she started the project *Women of Allah*, trying to make sense of what she had seen. When completed, the work resulted extremely controversial. It consisted of 111 photographs each

of them portraying a veiled woman (or a part of her body), a weapon and a text. As Neshat explains, she wanted to focus on the subject of martyrdom as a key concept in the Islamic revolution. By becoming martyrs, men and women were supposed to show their love of God though at the same time choosing extreme violence as a tool. In this context, women female identity is ambiguous, particularly in relation with the veil, that is a symbol of repression – exclusively seen as such in the Western world – but also, for many Iranian women, a free choice showing the rejection of the Western colonial power. The ambiguity is kept in the words accompanying the photographs. They are mostly drawn from two women poets, one of them supporting the Islamic revolution (Tahereh Saffarzadeh) and the other rejecting it (Forough Farrokhzad). The visual vocabulary that Neshat develops in this project is therefore highly articulated, working on images as well as on cultural items that may be read in different ways. The primary addressee of the work is the Western world, and yet the language it employs (Persian) is largely inaccessible to the Western audience. Moreover, following the exhibition of the project, the Iranian government banned Neshat from returning to Iran because *Women of Allah* was perceived as a pointed critique to their regime and ideology.

The project makes sense in terms of the autobiographical references it contains. As an artist living outside Iran, Neshat experiences a constant feeling of displacement and dislocation that leads her to constantly move across cultural, religious and linguistic borders. According to Brah, this is quite typical of diasporic subjects: after being forced to exile, they tend to relocate somewhere else but never fully succeed, never feel at home in the place of arrival (Brah 1996, 202-205). The “positionality of dispersal” that Brah mentions is their constant way of being (204). A few years after *Women of Allah*, Neshat tried again to produce a reflection on the condition of women in Iran under the Islamic rule. *The Fury* was first exhibited in 2022, after she had been experiencing with filmmaking for some time. *Turbulent* (1998) was her first step in this art: exhibited at Venice Biennale in 1999, it approaches again the issue of women in Iran after the Islamic revolution, with

particular reference to the prohibition to sing in public. Conceived as a two-screen video installation, it barely lasts over 9 minutes and develops around two characters, a man and a woman singing on two different stages. The male singer (Shoja Azari) delivers a traditional love song to an audience, while the woman (Sussam Deyim, an Iranian vocalist and composer) sings totally dressed in black, head covered, in an empty concert hall. *Rapture* (1999) and *Fervor* (2000) completed the trilogy portraying a world radically split into two halves: the men and the women. The use of language that is made in these films seems to deliberately hide verbal meanings. Rapture is totally without words and the whole meaning is relied upon landscape and the setting within which the characters are located. The men occupy a fortress, that seem protected and locked. The women move across the desert towards the sea and they end up by launching small wooden boat supposedly to leave. In *Fervor*, the two protagonists – again a man and a woman – meet before and after an event where a storyteller recites a parable from the Quran. The narrative is delivered in Persian without subtitles. Throughout the film, the protagonists remain silent, so their relation develops only through their gazes. The end credits appear in both English and Arabic. There seem to be a deliberate barrier to direct verbal communication. The responsibility of conveying meanings placed on images, gestures, colours and music. All the films in the trilogy are shot in Morocco, and centre on the condition of women under the Islamic rule.

In *The Fury*,[1] Neshat keeps exploring this topic, though the setting changes. In fact, the film was shot in New York, in June of 2022, when the panic from the COVID pandemics was slowly fading away. Technically, the two-screen video is part of an installation including a series of black and white photographs with hand-inscribed calligraphy of poems by Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad (1934-1967). In this case, the focus is clearly stated and unmistakable: Neshat wants to highlight the sexual exploitation of women held as political prisoners. The opening scenes

[1] The whole video is available here: https://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/1470

of the film portray a woman dancing at the centre of a circle of soldiers. As they watch deadpan, marks, wounds, bruises gradually appear on her body. She seems obliged to go on dancing under the cruel gaze of her torturers. Clearly enough this scene serves as a metaphor for the severe beatings, torture, sexual assault and rape that female prisoners often undergo. At one point, the prisoner is able to escape and finds herself in the neighbourhood of Bushwick, Brooklyn, finally free, yet still haunted by her trauma and unable to stop running. The film is shot in a refined black and white, like most of Neshat's video installations. Initially, the nearly naked former prisoner appears almost ghostlike, but as the sequence progresses, she gradually becomes more and more real.

Metaphorically, Neshat conveys a dual message: the possibility of being saved and the enduring impossibility of forgetting. The woman's gradual emergence into visibility by the end of the film is a political gesture: it calls for awareness and for a deeper understanding of the condition of women under dogmatic Islamic rule. In a poignant twist of fate, both the photographs and the video were made just months before the death of Mahsa Amini, on September 13, 2022, following her arrest by the morality police because she refused to wear the veil. As Neshat herself states, "It's uncanny: this video was pure fiction, but it literally came to life a month later" (Bradley 2025).

Therefore, if her earlier work could be seen as ambiguous in terms of a definite political stance, *The Fury* makes her position unmistakably clear. Meanings are purposefully encoded through the strategic use of different expressive semiotic systems. The violence depicted and the resulting trauma resist verbal expression, so Neshat turns to a powerful mix of imagery, gesture, music and dance. The verbal code appears only during end credits, which, as typical in her work, are bilingual (English and Arabic), displayed on two separate screens. The setting, too, is split into two different parts. During the dance scenes, the woman is in a dilapidated warehouse, completely empty except for the chairs occupied by the soldiers and officers. In contrast, when she runs, she is in the street, gradually drawing people behind her in what becomes a kind of protest.

In short, Neshat translates her being between two different cultures primarily rejecting the communicative dominance of verbal language. She avoids subtitling or dubbing Arabic in the films, limiting bilingualism to the end credits. Instead, she turns to alternative sign systems – such as visual imagery, music, gestures – that can at least partially transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. This choice also reflects the complexity of the approached topic – the many sides of the women condition under the Islamic rule – taking a political stance that is clear, though uncomfortable and unsafe. When asked if her work is deliberately political, she meaningfully answers:

> I so wish I could make work that isn't political. It really comes down to where you're born. Do you think it's possible for an artist from somewhere like Palestine or Israel or Iran or any politically volatile culture to distance themselves morally, emotionally, psychologically from political reality? Even if you paint a flower, that is a political statement, isn't it? So the reality for artists like myself, who have unresolved relationships with their countries, is the inability to be muted to what is going on. This always impacts your work, even though in my case it's never direct (Bradley 2025).

4. A Journey Towards Understanding

In most cases, as Judith Woodsworth claims, "Translation is not only a mode of writing but also a way of being, a way of knowing: a practice, a subject, and a trope in literature" (Woodsworth 2017, 2). The definition readily applies to the two artists who conclude my study. Each interprets the migration journey through distinct cultural lenses, finding there the right language to translate what they mean. One draws on themes, imagery, narrative methods and paradigms of the Sicilian/Lampedusan tradition, while the other turns to Greek mythology with a new gaze.

Giacomo Sferlazzo, a musician, performer and artist from Lampedusa, founded the collective Askavusa and more recently the cultural association "I figli di

Abele". In his artistic practice, he often uses the Sicilian dialect spoken in Lampedusa to explore themes that are closely related to the the island's historical and current condition. On the platform where most of his songs are collected (https://giacomosferlazzo.bandcamp.com), albums entirely in Sicilian sit alongside tracks in Italian, English, French. While the use of other languages is primarily a stylistic choice, the Lampedusan dialect responds to a conscious, somehow political decision. The dialect itself is distinctive, as it incorporates elements from various Sicilian idioms, including those from Agrigento, Palermo, Catania, and others. This mix has a particular historical origin. Following the colonial migration from Sicily, intensely encouraged by the Borbons in 1843, people from different areas of the larger island moved to Lampedusa, bringing their dialect with them. Sferlazzo's artistic practice is currently situated within the framework of the initiatives develped at the venue he founded. PortoM – where "the 'M' stands for the multiple dimensions of migration itself: Mediterranean, migrations, militarization, and memory" (Faleschini Lerner 2021, 173) – is a meeting place, cafeteria, puppets theatre and most of all migration museum.

This is where Sferlazzo revives the Sicialian tradition of "teatro dei pupi", a form of theatre featuring large wooden articulated puppets called "pupi". His latest work is firmly grounded in the effort of translating the journey of migration and describes the reflections and choices of the protagonist in relation with the decision to migrate. Amhed – both the name of the protagonist and a part of the play's title – is from a small city in Tunisia and decides to cross the Mediterranean sea in search of a better life. When finding out that this "better life" is an illusion, he decides to go back where he belongs and side with the resistance. *Ahmed di Redeyef* (Ahmed of Redeyef) premiered at PortoM on July 11, 2025 and was made in collaboration with Palermo's Teatro dei Pupi. The marionettes were carved by the young Nino Mancuso and the music were composed by the Tunisian artist Achref Chargui. This cooperative enterprise is currently touring in Italy and Europe.

Also here, the form (*U cunto*) and the language (the Lampedusan dialect) are meaningful choices. Sferlazzo has always been deeply engaged in exploring the Sicilian heritage as inflected in Lampedusa. This has made it almost inevitable that the language "spoken" by that heritage would be the most fitting for his artistic work. Additionally, some idiomatic expressions are hard to translate into Italian or other languages. A song of his in particulare – *Comu na nuci dintra un saccu* –[2] actually compiles a list of Lampedusan idioms. They have a sound tightly related to a certain meaning that would be completely lost in translation across different languages and cultures. Over time, Lampedusan has become Sferlazzo's most natural, almost instinctual choice for storytelling in his music and on stage, and this decision carries a political message. There was a time – he claims – when speaking Sicilian was something to be ashamed of. Currently, his research focuses on the very sound of the Lampedusan dialect, the music it holds. In certain expressions, such as the "canto dei carrettieri" (the carter's song), the dialect resonates with Arabic sounds like the Islamic call to prayer and the flamenco singing. It embodies the voice of Mediterranean people.

In the same mood though exploiting different artistic tools develops the work of another artist, who articulates a reflection on the Mediterranean journey, but using an ancient Greek myth rather than a persisting popular tradition as an artistic grammar and a paradigm. Also in this case, the artist is trying to leave the floor to "dissident histories and voices" and to work on the act of border crossing as a process of change and translation where "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*" (Bhabha 1994, 4). This "presencing" may also take the form of the reimagining of an already existing story, a myth that has been told in different way and now calls for revision.

At the Biennale Arte in Venice, in 2024, Lebanese artist Mounira Al Solh presented a piece entitled *A Dance with Her Myth*. The work was inspired by the

[2] The song can be listened to here: https://giacomosferlazzo.bandcamp.com/album/comu-na-nuci-dintra-un-saccu. The title means "Like a nut inside a sack".

myth of Europe. The story centres around the beautiful daughter of Agenor, the king of Tyre, a Phoenician girl that came from the current borders between Lebanon and Israel and Palestine, as described by Herodotus. According to the myth, the girl was seduced and abducted by Zeus, who took the form of a white bull, and was taken away, never to come back.

Mounira Al Solh dramatically reinterprets the myth in a multimedia installation consisting of more than 40 pieces, in a combination of sculptures, painted panels, tapestries and videos. At the centre of the room, a Phoenician-style boat skeleton anchors the space. A white cloth drapes from its must, serving both as a sail and a screen for a video loop, a montage of sequences, which features drawings, and texts in Arabic and English. Scattered throughout the room, the paintings depict Europa and the white bull, but their roles are reversed from the traditional myth: the girl, depicted in the myth as the victim of abduction, is in truth the master of the beast, apparently stripped of his strength. All around them, menacing masks symbolize the pressures of a conservative regime on female identity. Some details throughout the room evoke the city in Southern Lebanon believed to Europa's point of departure.

In the new version of the myth, she appears to embark on a journey of redemption that could be interpreted as a process of reappropriation of women's identity through solidarity and sisterhood. The video projected onto the sail-screen of a ship recalls both the ancient Phoenician sea voyage and the wreckage of today's migrant crossings. It fuses past and present, weaving myth with contemporary reality. The installation therefore starts on the assumption that by framing Europa's journey as an abduction, European culture has proposed and disseminated a masculine and patriarchal version of history. In response, the artist seeks to retrace the journey, following Europa's path with a different gaze, one that may transform passivity into resilience.

Al Solh cannot use the same language as the colonizers. Therefore, she forges an alternative route, blending multiple expressive codes, many of them non-verbal, to subvert the dominant narrative. Through this process, she reveals a radically

different version of the myth: Europa was not carried away by the white bull, but rather “she held him in a jar, spinning his head with her feet”. This subversive image eventually transforms the victim into an agent of her own destiny. Like the artist herself, she travels by her own decision, aboard a boat that takes centre stage in the installation, a vessel whose sail is also a screen, projecting not just images, but a reimagined story. At some point, the quote appearing in the looping video is, again, a call to acknowledge our shared origins: “I looked for the origins of the name Europa. Erub, according to the Phoenician pronunciation, as some claim”. On the sail-screen, three languages (Phoenician, Arabic and English) interact layering voices across time and space. The multilingual interplay reinforces the work’s central message: history is to be rewoven as to reveal the diverse cultural threads that make for dynamic change and evolution.

Like Saint Levant and Shirin Neshat, Mounira al Sohl is an artist-in-exile. Born in Beirut, she first moved to Syria and later settled in Amsterdam. To tell her stories, she deliberately employs multiple languages rather than offering a more direct, homogeneous, and perhaps more easily accessible narrative. At the same time, the lack of linguistic translation of the sections in Arabic and Phoenician calls for a more attentive, embodied engagement from the viewer. It is in fact an invitation to see and feel the meaning she seeks to convey, beyond words alone. In his *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall argues that cultural identities are not fixed but are dynamic processes that unfold within the realm of representation. Representation, understood as a means of making sense of the world, is inherently unstable, continuously shaped and reshaped, and resistant to any notion of permanence (Hall 1990, 222-224). This is especially true when the identities shift, both synchronically and diachronically, functionally to dislocation in space (the journey of migration) and time (the drawing of new borders). In this fluid landscape, languages and cultures intersect, hybridize, and mutually influence one another. Through this interplay, they give rise to a new motherless tongue, one not rooted in a single origin but emerging as a powerful tool of expression. Thus, tongue may become, in the hands of some artists, a form of translation that honours diversity

of idioms it draws from, weaving them together in ways that foster deeper cultural and linguistic understanding.

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