Article

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RÉSUMÉ

L'article explore les dynamiques des représentations culturelles dans les médias, en mettant l'accent sur la traduction de traits culturels qui apparaissent au cinéma et à la télévision. En nous appuyant sur plusieurs films et publicités télévisées diffusées en Italie pendant environ cinq ans et présentant des traductions diverses et stratifiées de l'Inde, nous essayons de définir et d'explorer les différentes formes que peut prendre la traduction lorsque l'objet du transfert n'est pas seulement la langue, et pas simplement la communication. Nous discuterons ici des transformations dans l'utilisation et le transfert de traits culturels indiens vers les médias italiens en termes de traduction, de transcréation et de transreprésentation.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of cultural representation through the media, making special reference to the translation of cultural traits that occur in the cinema and television. By taking into account several films and television commercials which were broadcast in Italy over a five-year span, featuring variously complex and stratified translations of India, an attempt is made to define and explore the different guises which translation can take when the object of transfer is not merely language and its purpose is not merely communication. The transformations which have been identified in the use and transfer of Indian cultural traits through the Italian media are here discussed in terms of translation, transcreation and transrepresentation.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

transcreation, transrepresentation, cultural traits, TV advertising

In recent years, translation studies have witnessed enormous expansion in scope. Spurred by the ground-breaking work of scholars in the early 90s, they have become a truly interdisciplinary field.[1] This trend has been bolstered by a number of factors, above all by increasing attention to the processes of socio-cultural interaction that are made possible and also enhanced by translation.

Within the hectic cultural traffic generated by globalizing trends and globalized communication, translation has also come to encompass a host of new practices, largely determined by the increasing importance of the media and, more specifically, of audiovisual communication in our daily lives. If the quick and global dissemination of audiovisual texts allows for an unprecedented, worldwide sharing of images and sounds, it also urges people to come to grips with cultural difference and, at the same time, redefine their own identity through new or repeated contacts with once

remote communities. On the whole, it seems plausible to say that cultural interaction, taking place in real life or represented through the media, constantly evokes translation as a means of bridging linguistic, technological and socio-cultural gaps, drawing people closer while also highlighting their differences and, on the whole, fostering processes of social and cultural exchange.

Drawing inspiration from the socio-cultural and technological revolution which has hit translation studies over the past years, this paper sets out to explore the role and treatment of visual and verbal elements in audiovisual texts across distant cultures. The focus will be on films and TV commercials featuring India which have been broadcast in Italy between 2001 and 2005. As for films, a twofold point of view will be offered, by looking at productions from India as well as from half-Indian, half-Western directors or producers who tell stories from memories and from outside India. With reference to TV advertising, two TV commercials centred upon some remote images of Indian culture will be briefly analysed, in an attempt to provide a thorough overview of its audiovisual representations which have recently been offered to Italian viewers.

Taking into account such a variety of texts and strategies, culminating in the TV commercials which feature a faint "idea of India" (Khilnani 1997), the multiple passages of images and words from and about India will become more difficult to grasp, blurred and extreme, urging for a diluted, wide-ranging, flexible concept of translation.

In the following paragraphs, we will first of all attempt to define a new set of terms to classify instances of translation which involve the transit of visual and verbal traits across distant cultures. Subsequently, we will move on to analyse examples from the audiovisual texts presented above, with a view to grasping the impact of these texts on the shaping – and reshaping – of cultural encounters between Italy and India.

1. New encounters, new concepts, new terminologies

As Mary Snell-Hornby rightly advocates in *The Turns of Translation Studies*, "the concept of 'translation proper' has changed through the [last] century" (2006: 155), a boost to such changes having been recorded particularly from the end of the 1980s. As already mentioned, a thorough revision of the concept of translation has been imposed by the growing influence of sociocultural factors on linguistic theories and, more significantly, by the need to come to grips with new technologies and account for audiovisual texts, their worldwide dissemination through translation and their increasingly strong power to mould public opinion. As they both have a bearing on the analysis here undertaken, let us attempt to evaluate in some more detail the impact of these two, very different thrusts upon translational activity as well as upon its study.

The increasing interpenetration of facts of translation with broader sociocultural issues has led to multiple points of contact between cultural studies and translation studies, a proof of which can be found in the partial terminological overlap between the two disciplines: if translation has been defined as an act of domestication (Venuti 1992 and 1995), rewriting (Lefevere 1990), cannibalization (De Campos 1986; Trivedi 1996) but also standardization (Mukherjee 2004), cultures have been said to be

translated (Hallam and Street), rewritten (Niranjana 2002), reinterpreted (Behl 2002) or standardized (Said 1978) in processes of cross-cultural exchange. Interestingly enough, as can be inferred from the names quoted above, a broadening of the scope of translation studies has also been enhanced by the increasing contribution of new voices from countries which were, in the past, mainly passive receivers rather than active participants in an increasingly globalized discourse on facts and acts of translation, especially from India.

Besides this conspicuous broadening of the theoretical spectrum, the study of translation has undergone radical changes with the advent of new technologies and their role in disseminating new texts and textualities. At the core of these changes lies the multimedia revolution of the last decades, which has brought about the need to account for – and find the best ways to transpose – increasingly popular texts where verbal elements are inextricably mingled with visuals. In TV productions and commercials, in films and animated products, words acquire meaning by their juxtaposition with images and images are defined by words, thus making it difficult to isolate their individual role and impact.

Furthermore, the perception of images and words in audiovisual texts acquires a very special meaning and becomes more complex to analyse when these texts are vehicles of cultural representations. Nowadays, the – often – wide dissemination of such texts has a major role in the shaping and re-shaping of cultural identities and, as we shall see through the examples discussed in the following pages, also in redefining cultural spaces.

All the theoretical and technical issues mentioned above have undoubtedly brought about a revolution in research on translation, reinforcing the need for a revision of its definition in practical and theoretical terms. As a matter of fact, can we still talk about translation with reference to the adaptation of audiovisual texts, especially those containing the representation of a "distant" culture to be viewed and enjoyed by members of another? And, more in general, where can we trace the boundaries between translation proper and more complex phenomena which involve interlingual transfer only as one, often secondary stage in a wider process?

These and other questions cannot be ignored when taking into account complex audiovisual texts like those which will be analysed in the following paragraphs, whereby two cultures are drawn closer through processes of transfer which cannot be simply labelled as 'translations.'

Before moving on to discuss the Indian-centred films and TV commercials distributed in Italy between 2001 and 2005, let us attempt to redefine the large, multifarious space of translational processes connected to these texts, to subsequently advance some new terminology to be applied to the multiple instances of transfer they generate.

Always bearing in mind the interpenetration of visual and verbal elements as a determining factor for these texts, we will use three different terms to define different processes of transfer where two languages, two cultures and two societies come into contact, on a large or small screen. First of all, we shall recover the term 'translation' and give it a renewed specificity, which we will attempt to observe making reference to the first of the Indian-centred films here under scrutiny. Thus, 'translation' will refer only to the transposition of verbal elements from one linguistic code to another and, due to the nature of the texts here observed, to the support provided

by images to the perception of the translated text by target viewers. Subsequently, we shall abandon the focus on linguistic transfer to consider wider phenomena, where the complexities inherent in audiovisual texts, their international distribution and the cultural movements which they generate will be brought closer together under the definition of 'transcreation.' Finally, these processes will be examined closely by discussing two very special audiovisual texts where no linguistic adaptation is directly involved. Looking at two TV commercials broadcast in Italy depicting a very interesting representation – *trans*representation – of India, we shall try to give account of a very special kind of transfer of visual and verbal references, generated by a twofold adaptation of cultural traits that results in yet another space of contact between the two cultures.

On the whole, looking at the multiple instances of transfer to be found in these, Indo-centric audiovisual texts, we shall attempt to define how cultural spaces are multiplied and re-located as a consequence of the media-generated cultural traffic that has brought India to Italy. In so doing, we shall try to grasp the nature of the "third dimension" (De Campos 1986) or "third space" (Michael and Pile 2002) which they create and, above all, determine the impact they have on the intercultural relationships between Italy and India.

2. From India to Italy through translation: the case of Lagaan

Having broadened and dissected the concept of translation to subsequently redefine it, with a new specificity, let us now apply it to the analysis of *Lagaan*, the only Indian film to be dubbed in Italian and distributed in cinemas as well as in the form of home video at the date of writing this paper.

Let us begin the analysis with a few words about the film itself. With a budget of over six million dollars, *Lagaan* stands out as one of the greatest Indian productions in recent years, written by writer and director Ashutosh Gowariker and produced by Aamir Khan. The story takes place in 1893, at the time of the British Raj. It revolves around a cricket match featuring a group of Indian peasants in the Awadhi village of Champaner doing their best to learn how to play this game, in order to defeat the British officers who rule over the province and avoid paying their onerous taxes (*lagaan*). The outcome is a rather predictable victory of the peasants over the British officers, with the ensuing celebrations and moments of joy for the villagers. In its 215 minutes of fascinating scenes and beautiful songs, *Lagaan* nonetheless fails to fully exploit "the rich thematic possibilities of the story in favour of melodramatic indulgences and showcasing the heroic,"[2] thus opting to appeal to Indian but also to non-Indian audiences through its powerful imagery, simple dialogues and momentous songs. The film was released in India in 2001, in the United Kingdom in 2002, and finally reached Italy in 2003. The Italian version was produced and distributed by Columbia Tristar, but the rights for this film were soon sold to another company which has gone bankrupt, making it impossible to obtain any information on translation strategies and distribution choices.

While this analysis focuses on the process of linguistic transfer and the role of supporting images, it cannot be done in total isolation from socio-cultural considerations, especially since the most significant instances of losses and compensations in the translation of *Lagaan* occur with reference to culturally-loaded verbal and visual

references. Thus, before proceeding with the analysis, it may be worth referring to Michael Cronin's brilliant illustration of what occurs in processes of translation where language and culture are inevitably, strongly mingled. In point of fact, the excerpt below outlines two attitudes which can be easily identified in our case-study:

> On the one hand, there is the evolutionary logic of the tool which dictates the standardized, the normative, the homogenized and the universal, and on the other, the claims of the cultural which point to the specific, the anomalous, the exceptional and the local. Translation occupies a very particular space in this set of conflicting aspirations. At one level, translation's *raison d'être* is its implicit ability to universalize, its capacity to take a text from one spatially bound language and culture. At another, it is translation which makes readers even more aware of the specific nature and depth of a particular culture. (2003: 32)

The translation of *Lagaan* for Italian viewers seems to be well in line with the two attitudes described by Cronin. On the one hand, being the first major Indian film to be brought to the attention of the Italian audience, *Lagaan* reveals the need to homogenize and standardize a considerable amount of references, bringing the film closer to a target audience which is not deemed ready to appreciate excessively foreignizing audiovisual texts. By contrast, interest in distributing the film in Italy and, obviously, in earning profit from it, certainly arises from its being 'culturally different,' and this cultural specificity is at times strongly signalled by translational choices, especially by means of occasional additions or expansions.

The role of visual elements very often seems to back up the perception of the film as shaped by the translated dialogues, especially in smoothing out the references which are – sometimes arguably – deemed too specific by the Italian translators. In other words, when traces of cultural specificity are eliminated in the Italian translation, images simply support the neutralized dialogues but do not provide any additional specificity of their own, whereas in the case of an enhancement of the foreignizing effect through additions or emphasis, the images do not hamper it but simply function as a sort of "plausible backdrop."

In linguistic terms, these two seemingly conflicting attitudes can both be identified through a number of choices made by the Italian translators of *Lagaan*, as we shall attempt to prove by means of the following excerpts. To this purpose, we will mainly rely on the filtering role of the English language, which clearly reveals losses as well as additions with respect to the original Hindi scripts and which has clearly influenced the translation into Italian.

The most interesting instances of homogenizing, neutralizing translation are to be found in the treatment of common and proper Hindi nouns, which are often left in the English subtitled version of the film but almost completely eliminated in Italian. The rather striking factor which emerges from a comparison of the English and Italian versions is that all nouns that were deleted from the latter could have been easily contextualized and understood by viewers, through the images as well as the linguistic context. Moreover, even though the decoding process for these foreign words is perhaps more difficult when they must be read in subtitles – due to viewers' reading speed and overall perception – the Italian dubbed version bears almost no trace of the Hindi language. This choice points to the wish to smooth out the auditory – and visual – perception as much as possible, since the loss of direct verbal reference to the Indian culture is not compensated by the visuals.

By way of example, let us focus on a brief line uttered by the protagonist Bhuvan to tell his mother about the stakes in the cricket match. The comparison of the English version with the Italian dialogue shows two interesting examples of neutralization which recur throughout the film:

Bhuvan: the white *sahib* said that *lagaan* may be cancelled for three years
Bhuvan: quell'inglese che mi ha sfidato ha detto 'non pagherete le tasse per tre anni'
[the Englishman who challenged me said 'you won't pay taxes for three years']

The word 'sahib,' loaded with socio-cultural connotations and often used in Hindi to refer to British and Western people holding some authority, disappears in Italian to be replaced by 'l'inglese' [the Englishman], showing the need to identify a secondary, much closer Other and, above all, to avoid any foreignizing auditory effect. This neutralizing tendency also appears in the translation of the word 'lagaan' as 'tasse' [taxes] all through the film, with a considerable loss of internal coherence which the Hindi word certainly helps to establish. Given that it is the title of the film and the motif which runs through the whole story, this word is highly significant and could have been left unchanged without any excessive displacement of perception. By the same token, leaving the word 'sahib' in the Italian dialogues might have helped viewers to better perceive and classify the relationships between characters in the film, especially between the Indian and the British. On the visual level, no compensation is provided for this loss of specificity, therefore the effect sought by the linguistic neutralization is not hampered by the images.

The tendency to eliminate Hindi words is so strong that it applies to a large number of other common nouns, such as 'abba' used for 'father' or 'bhura' for 'ball.' In both cases, the Hindi words might have been easily understood by Italian viewers through the verbal context as well as through the images, even though the latter do not provide any specificity of their own and therefore do not compensate for the loss of these occasional direct references to the narrated culture.

On a few occasions, even proper nouns are avoided and replaced by other words, as in the following line uttered by the protagonist who is addressing his friend Isar, affectionately called 'kaka' [brother/sister]:

Bhuvan: Isar, *kaka*, three months is time enough.
Bhuvan: Datemi ascolto, tre mesi basteranno per imparare.
[Listen to me, three months will be enough to learn]

In this case, the erasure of the proper noun and of a direct reference to Isar seems to clash with the images, which rather clearly display Bhuvan addressing one person in particular.

If we now shift to one level above the lexical choices, we can observe a certain homogenizing tendency in the construction of phrases and sentences for the Italian version. For instance, a conspicuous number of metaphorical expressions used by the Indian peasants – obviously reflecting their religious beliefs and social attitudes – are smoothed out, thereby affecting the overall register used by the main characters in the dubbed version. Thus, when talking about the Rahja and his duty to protect his people, one of the village heads uses a suggestive metaphorical expression which totally disappears in the Italian translation:

> **Village chief:** It is the duty of a tree to shelter
>
> **Capo villaggio:** Noi ci siamo spezzati la schiena per lui
> [We broke our back for him]

Later in the film, Captain Russell, the British officer who has challenged the villagers of Champaner, hits one Indian peasant and offends him. As can be read in the excerpt from the English subtitles, the man replies with an indirect, powerful metaphor which aims to emphasise the Indian people's lack of impulsivity and their innate wisdom. The excerpt from the Italian dubbed version is once again smoothed out:

> **Arjan:**   However thick your sole
>   may be, sahib…
>   …it wears out.
>   Then the nails begin to prick.

> **Arjan:**   Se voi inglesi avete deciso di annientare la nostra gente,
>   siate pronti a combattere, perché non sarà cosa facile.
>   [If you, Englishmen, have decided to destroy our people,
>   be ready to fight, as it won't be that easy]

In both cases, the images do not provide any additional information of their own, as no visual element supports the metaphorical expressions. Being figures of speech where use is made of certain words to refer to something that they do not literally denote (*The Linguistics Encyclopedia*: 2004), metaphors work by substitution and obviously not by direct reference.

On the whole, it seems that the tendency to smooth out the perception of Otherness prevails over the attempt to make its peculiarities visible through translational choices. However, we can find a relatively large number of instances which reveal the need to emphasise the exotic, foreign essence of the film and this, at times, seems to clash with the overall neutralizing attitude.

One of the most interesting examples of this second attitude is to be found in the occasional recourse to expansion, a strategy which is employed to make certain references more easily understood or simply more "visible." This is what occurs in the following line uttered by all the villagers who are about to take part in the cricket match. While the original Hindi version and the English subtitles contain a hail to an unspecified god, in the Italian version the exact name is uttered and its association with monkeys is made explicit, even though there are no visual constraints to make this explanation necessary:

> **All:**   Hail, almighty!
> **Tutti:** Saluto a Numan, dio delle scimmie!
>   [Hail to Numan, god of the monkeys]

On the visual level, the verbal additions in the Italian line are in no way supported by the images but, at the same time, the latter do not hamper their perception. A more evident, curious instance of addition in the translated version of *Lagaan* is the introduction of a narrating voice which is superimposed to a sequence of images showing the British headquarters and its occupants. In this case, the voice is used to introduce an explanation for a number of facts which is probably deemed not necessary for Indian – but also English – viewers, and perhaps also to make explicit a few visual references.

So far, through these short excerpts we may seem to be implying that images play a secondary role to that of words and phrases in the translation of *Lagaan*, simply functioning as supporting elements for the protagonists' statements. However, this view could easily be disputed since images are essential in determining every choice on the verbal level and, therefore, act as a primary constraint. These brief reflections serve to reassert the reciprocal influence and the complex bonds between visual and verbal elements in audiovisual texts and in their translation, once again proving that it is impossible to isolate the role played by each one.

The interpenetration and joint function of these two systems of signs in audiovisual texts and, more significantly, in the creation and perception of cultural portraits of India, will be further explored in the following paragraphs where talking about translation in linguistic terms will prove utterly impossible. Thus, in the following two sections a broader approach will be adopted, discarding the term translation and defining new concepts for new, multidimensional instances of cultural transfer and cross-cultural encounters.

3. Practices of transcreation: from ancient Indian texts to films about the diaspora

Seeking to define the processes of transcreation of Indian culture which occur through audiovisual texts, as well as their impact on Italian and international audience, we shall move away from the analysis of translational choices, in order to see how verbal elements combine with images, colours and sounds in the formation of broader cultural units, or 'traits.'[3] To this end, reference will be made to a very peculiar set of films where the narration of India through visual and verbal elements implies, in itself, a process of transformation and audiovisual adaptation which will be defined as 'transcreation.' Having terminological and conceptual roots in the Indian culture itself, transcreation will be discussed in terms of its diachronic evolution, its application to translation studies and finally in analysing a section of the present corpus. We shall see in detail that processes of transcreation seem to characterize, more significantly than any other Indian-centred audiovisual texts, those films where India is evoked neither by Indians nor for Indians, but through a series of indirect, mediated images and words which are evoked in order to translate India into a new, multifarious and dynamic cultural formation brought to life through the experience of the diaspora.

3.1 A short history of transcreation

The origins of the term 'transcreation' hark back to a distant past, at the time of the first translation of Indian sacred texts. In fact, the word seems to have been coined with reference to the very old practice of creative translation from Sanskrit, which sought to bring the Vedic truths close to the minds and feelings of laymen in several parts of India (Gopinathan 2006). This process allowed for a number of even radical changes to the original texts, which went well beyond the concept of 'translation proper' as it was and is still perceived within translation studies. The transcreated text had to be entirely fluent and, most importantly, it had to be fully understandable to its target audience.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the term 'transcreation' was revived by several Indian writers, especially the poet and translator P. Lal (*Transcreation* 1996) who, in line with the very first definition, assumed transcreation to be "readable, not strictly faithful translation" (Kothari 2003: 36) and used it in connection to his own translations of texts such as *Shakuntala* and *Bhradaranyaka Upanishad*. More recently, the concept of transcreation has been applied by Indian scholars to the study of translation from new perspectives, steeped in postcolonialism and sometimes loaded with socio-political connotations. Among these scholars are Sujit Mukherjee, who associated it to the idea of translation as "new writing" (*Translation as Recovery* 2004) and Harish Trivedi who, in several papers, traced the history of Indian translation and transcreation in relation to foreign domination (2005, 2006).

On the opposite side of the world, the same term has been employed by the famous Brazilian writer and translator Haroldo de Campos in the 1960s. His revolutionary approach to the study of translation had great resonance in translation studies and is still widely employed nowadays. As reported by Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira in her "Readings of *Antropofagia* and Haroldo de Campos' poetics of transcreation" (1999), the Brazilian scholar markedly advocated a renewal of the concept of translation, which he saw as an act of appropriation, recreation and even as transfusion of blood:

> in the space of 'trans' is the notion of 'translation as transfusion of blood' – a more conspicuously anthropophagic metaphor that moves translation beyond the dichotomy source/target and sites original and translation in a third dimension, where each is both a donor and a receiver. (1999: 97)

Among the many terms coined by de Campos to replace 'translation,' a word which could no longer define a complex practice of interpenetration between two cultures and could only be retained in its meaningful prefix 'trans,' are translumination, transparadisation, transluciferation, transtextualization and, most importantly, transcreation.

Interestingly enough, De Campos' idea of transcreation somehow brings us back to the original meaning which the term held in India, as he considered it as a "transformative recreation of inherited traditions" (1999: 97) and referred it to practices of transfer which involve the constitution of new texts and new realities. It is just in this sense that the term is assumed here, with reference to the re-creation of Indian culture which emerges through the – visual and verbal – cultural traits used in films about the Indian diaspora.

Since a large part of the traits involved in this process seem to share a transnational value, and their juxtaposition in trancreations of India occurs well before the act of translation into Italian or into any other language, we shall here only make occasional reference to the Italian versions of the films. Incidentally, let us be reminded that they are always produced in the USA or United Kingdom and shot in English, bearing no trace of Hindi or other Indian languages. When the Italian version is called into play, it will only be to prove that these internationally valid trancreations of India do not require any further adaptation when presented to a specific, secondary audience.

Thus, making reference to two of these cinematic tales about the Indian diaspora, the following paragraph will focus on the constitution of these very special cultural

traits, their often weak relation to Indian culture and their impact on international – and Italian – viewers.

3.2 Transcreations of India in Monsoon Wedding and The Guru

> Deterritorialized by modernity and globalization, people attempt to re-establish a new cultural home wherever they go. These cultural ambitions and activities compose the processes of reterritorialization. […] Fusing imported traditions with resources in the new territory, immigrant groups all over the world create local versions of distant cultures. (Lull 2000: 253)

The search for a new space and a renewed identity defined by Lull, which originates from a state of lingering between a distant home and a new world, is typically reflected in a number of films about Indians who have left their country and sought to reconstruct it through more or less tangible visual and verbal traits, giving life to hybrid representations, to transcreations of India whose popularity worldwide has so far always surpassed the success of authentic Indian films. Contrary to what may seem to be expected from these very special audiovisual texts, the tales of Indian migrants which they contain are far from being dramatic and excessively sentimental. They are, most commonly, animated by positive feelings and humour, often resulting in cheerful comedies.

In a first attempt to classify these films, two overall tendencies can be identified. A large number of them, especially those written or directed by Indians who live abroad, tend to lay emphasis on the collective memory of their homeland, evoked through somewhat crystallized visual and verbal traits which occasionally clash with references to their new 'territory' and lifestyle. Others, instead, tell the stories of those deracinated, deterritorialized Indians focusing on the new, often conflicting relationships which they build within their host society.

These two tendencies are reflected, respectively, in *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), written and directed by Indian-born director Mira Nair and *The Guru* (2002), produced and directed by an all-American team and starring Indian-born actors who live in the USA. Focusing on these two different but also somehow similar productions, we shall observe the visual and verbal elements which make up the cultural traits used in audiovisual transcreations of India.

In *Monsoon Wedding*, directed by Indian-born Mira Nair, produced by the director's own company in New York City and distributed in Italy in 2001, the first of the two tendencies identified above prevails. The film tells the story of an Indian family engaged in the preparations for the pre-arranged marriage of a young girl called Aditi to Hemant, an American-educated engineer who, like many other characters in the film, lives under the combined, often conflicting influence of his homeland and the outside world. The story takes place in Delhi, although this is not at all evident from the opening scenes which show Indians dressed in Western clothes setting up a white canopy for a party in a large, well-kept garden. The context is soon demystified, in a way which is definitely remote from Indian cinematic conventions, by the anchorman of a Western-style TV show who erases any doubt by saying "This is not America, this is India!." Director Nair herself, in an interview featured in the home video version of the film, declares that she aimed to portray modern India, which "has gone very global and 'dot com'".[4] However, rather than offering a portrait

of contemporary life in India, the director seems to be especially willing to draw up an internationally-appealing, transcreated image of her beloved but remote Punjabi culture. To this purpose, Nair employs easily identifiable and enjoyable images and sounds, combined to give life to cultural traits which have a lot in common with other cinematic transcreations of India.

Rather predictably, these images and words are often drawn from overexploited categories, among which an all-important place is occupied by culinary traditions, ingredients and popular dishes. Thus, for instance, in the opening sequence of the film the bride's brother Varun is caught by his mother while watching the preparation of a sumptuous 'coconut curry' on television. The association of an easily identifiable verbal reference (which is more 'Western' than Indian, as the word 'curry' is not used in India for any special dish but rather for a mixture of spices) with the visualization of its preparation on television seems to provide a first, meaningful instance of cultural trait which is specific to transcreated, Western-contaminated portraits of India. The dish is not prepared in a traditional way, nor learnt through the teachings of Varun's mother or grandmother, but watched on a TV screen where a chef in European-style clothes is cooking during a show. In the passage from English to Italian, the reference is obviously left unchanged, not so much for the presence of binding images but rather for its transnational value.

Similarly, when Varun's mother Pimmi shouts at her maidservant the line below, the easily-identifiable reference to a popular Indian dish is left unchanged even in the Italian version of the film, although the accompanying images do not display any food.

Pimmi: Alice, fry the *pakoras* for the master. Hurry!

The reference to food is here only verbal and not necessarily typical of a transcreation of the narrated culture as intended here, were it not for the images which are made to match the line above. While shouting at her maidservant, Pimmi is walking along the corridor and hastily putting on Western clothes and long earrings. A few shots later, she hides in the bathroom to smoke a cigarette in peace.

On the whole, the transcreation of India which takes shape in *Monsoon Wedding* appears to be the result of a juxtaposition of references to old Indian traditions, to the contemporary lifestyle of an Indian elite and the experiences of those people who, like Mira Nair, talk about India and look at it from a distance. The nature of the cultural traits here employed is definitely multisemiotic, and it is this exclusive combination of images and words which gives rise to a transcreation of India steeped in nostalgic and 'contaminated' memories.

In *The Guru*, the connections with the true, contemporary Indian culture are even more remote, and the transcreation of India which the film offers to international and Italian viewers is more radical. The film was produced and distributed in the USA in 2002, directed by Daisy von Scherler Mayer and almost entirely shot in its country of origin, with only a short sequence featuring a chaotic Indian town at the very beginning of the film.

As it falls within the second of the two tendencies above, rather than focus on more or less nostalgic reconstructions of India the film is centred upon the process of reterritorialization which most Indian migrants have to experience when settling in a Western country. However, *The Guru* does all but treat this delicate issue seriously: its Indian characters are only figurants in a funny comedy, who live through their

"indenture experience" (Nandan 1996: 52) dancing, laughing, serving cheap Indian food and doing whatever they can to survive in America. As stated earlier, the film is an all-American production, entirely shot in English with Indian-born, American-educated actors.

The opening sequence features a typical Bollywood musical in a grandly deco-rated Indian palace, but the camera soon cuts to a shot of a young Indian boy leaving the cinema where the musical is being shown and going back home to watch *Grease*. While the young protagonist is still in India, the film makes use of very common images to evoke Indian culture: it shows elephants adorned with multi-coloured drapes slowly walking along the streets, men with colourful turbans sitting in every corner, old cars decorated with flowers, and the like. However, as the young pro-tagonist leaves his homeland to reach the USA and become a movie star, the film turns into a hilarious, sometimes paradoxical sequence of unfortunate events in which we see young Ramu struggling to survive in the new world.

Using overexploited references to make the humorous tales of the young pro-tagonist and his friends' life in the USA pleasantly perceived by international – and Italian – audiences, the film scriptwriters have made the three young boys work as waiters in a cheap Indian restaurant of Los Angeles, perfectly in line with the most popular clichés which have stemmed out of the 'local version of a distant culture' defined by Lull (see above). Thus, the three guys are shown serving *samosas* and *chutney* and are occasionally mimicked by American customers for their 'excessive' Indian pronunciation of "chicken tikka masala" and other Indian dishes.

To quote but one example from the original English script and focus on its con-tribution to the transcreated portrait of India drawn up in *The Guru*, let us refer to a brief sequence featuring the protagonist Ramu and his two friends. Ramu has just been offered a very short part in an American production which, incidentally, he does not know is a porn film. He is rehearsing in the bedroom which he shares with his friends when Vij and Sanjiv seize the opportunity to make fun of him:

Vij:	Yeah, I know your lines, like your lines in the restaurant: "would you like your chutney with your chapattis or poppadums with your paneer"? [laughter]
Vij:	What role are you playing?
Sanjiv:	Man with a turban working at a gas station?

A number of clichéd visual and verbal references which contribute to the transcre-ation of India can be singled out in the three lines above: the cheap Indian restaurant abroad, its most typical dishes whose taste bears no trace of their origins, Indian men wearing turbans who often end up being employed in gas stations, old-fashioned grocery shops or, as appears in the film a few scenes later, working as taxi drivers.

For this last excerpt, it may be worth taking a look at the Italian version of the exchange above, if only to confirm that cultural traits used in this transcreation of India require virtually no adaptation. As a matter of fact, no gloss is appended to the Italian lines as the correspondence between the two versions is straightforward:

Vij:	Le so io le tue battute, come le tue battute al ristorante: "vuole il chutney col chapati o il poppadum col paneer"? [ridono]
Vij:	Che parte fai?
Sanjiv:	Uomo col turbante che lavora alla pompa di benzina?

To conclude, even though the two tendencies which prevail in various films about the Indian diaspora may seem distant, as in fact are the structure and narrative strategies of the two films here presented, we have seen that many visual and verbal references used to narrate India from a distance do tend to overlap, drawing as they do from recurring categories. Ultimately, they all lead to the creation of cultural traits whose most significant feature is the juxtaposition of Indian memories with experiences of deracination and reterritorialization. Moreover, the examples above should also have highlighted the transnational value of these traits, which might be slightly different and used in various ways in films about the Indian diaspora, but their smooth perception by international viewers is ensured by their being produced neither in India nor for India, thus requiring no neutralization or explanation in processes of interlingual transfer from the original to various source versions.

If the examples taken from *Monsoon* Wedding and *The Guru* seem to have already brought this paper far enough from the analysis of translation and raised awareness of the important role played by images and words in the shaping of cultural perception through audiovisual texts, we shall now take a further step forward. By referring to Indo-centric TV commercials which have been broadcast in Italy over the past few years, we shall observe how the cultural traits discussed above originated in films about the Indian diaspora can be further transformed and re-created, in turn contributing to a continuous re-definition of the perception of Indian culture by Italian viewers.

4. Transrepresentations

Moving from cinema to TV and from films to advertising, the final section of this paper also implies a shift from transcreations to transrepresentations. As we shall see by focusing on two Italian commercials, the term transrepresentation has been coined to refer to processes of transfer which seem to bring the audiovisual cultural encounters between India and Italy to its extreme, where no place is left for translation.

In the cultural hyperhighway designed by the audiovisual encounters presented in this paper, paved by visual and verbal cultural traits of ever-changing nature, the role played by advertising deserves special attention and reveals a number of similarities but also differences from what has been observed in the context of the cinema. In terms of differences, the TV commercials depicting an idea of India which will be briefly illustrated have been mainly produced in Italy, therefore implying an active role for members of the receiving culture in making transrepresentations of India. In terms of similarities, we shall see that films played a major role in determining the representational choices for the advertisements. This influence, however, does not come directly from Indian cinema but is due exclusively to Western productions like those mentioned above and the transcreations of Indian culture which they contain.

We shall here only make reference to two cases, not focusing on any process of linguistic transfer but on the creation – or *re*-creation – of cultural units made of images, words and ideas for the benefit of the Italian TV audience. In fact, the cultural traits depicted in all Italian commercials which show Indian culture[5] are drawn from previously selected images and words, whose smooth and positive perception is guaranteed by the success enjoyed by the above-mentioned films and many others like *Bend it Like Beckham* or *East is East*. Thus, having to comply with advertising

strategies as well as the needs of a more specific, national audience, the creators of these Italian commercials have helped push even further the degree of adaptation of Indian culture through audiovisual texts, giving life to transrepresentations where any attempt to visually and verbally represent India is the result of a selection of previously filtered elements.

In order to better grasp the nature of the complex processes described and their socio-cultural impact, let us briefly refer to Hall's illustration of the two central elements at stake in cultural representations and their perception (Hall 1997). With a special focus on audiovisual texts, Hall states that ethnographic texts – all texts which contain representations of other cultures, no matter the degree of adaptation – are constructed with a view to being decoded, "to render comprehensible that which is initially unfamiliar" (1997: 166), also by establishing a pre-defined reading. Moreover, Hall points out that "all texts involve an economy of meaning" (1997: 166) and that foregrounding as well as simplifying interpretations allows for maximum economy. In advertising, economy of meaning and assurance of smooth, positive perception are an absolute priority. Therefore, using recurring traits which have already been accepted by the Italian audience to create Indian-flavoured TV commercials seems to be more than justifiable, although certainly not the most effective, straightforward solution to enhance knowledge of Indian culture in Italy.

All these issues can be observed by reference to two interesting commercials, the first of which was inspired by films such as *Monsoon Wedding* and *East is East*, while the second is strictly connected to *The Guru*. The first was conceived to advertise a multipurpose liquid cleaner called Rio Casamia; it was produced in Italy and only broadcast in this country. It features an Indian family in traditional, perhaps exceedingly colourful clothes, on the occasion of meeting the parents of a young Western boy who is bound to marry the Indian family's daughter. The overall situation, as well as the various elements used to bring it to life are strongly inspired by scenes featured in the above-mentioned films, therefore the transrepresentation of Indian culture is the result of a selection made on cinematic transcreations.

The commercial opens with the word *namaste*, uttered by the whole Indian family and accompanied by exaggerated religious gestures, while the Indian mother who talks with a strong Indian accent proudly declares: "incenso purifica casa e vostra mente, ma per casa very very pulita, tutti provato uno solo comprato."[6] In the official press release issued by the advertising firm, this commercial is said to be "in true Bollywood style, on the wave of such films as *Bend it Like Beckham*, *East is East* and *Monsoon Wedding*" and to "feature all the true colours, sounds, and social attitudes of traditional India which, upon encountering Western habits and traditions, gives life to an extravagant, ironical and funny blend."[7] Thus, the creators of the commercial are aware of the mixed nature of the references used to evoke India, but perhaps not of their further re-creation and the loss of touch with Indian reality which these multiple passages imply.

The second, extremely interesting Indian-flavoured commercial was released in 2004, produced in Italy and Spain for the Coca-Cola company. It was created to advertise the worldwide-known American drink by associating it with an idea of India which appears, in this commercial, more remote than in any audiovisual text discussed so far. The story is inspired by *The Guru* and features an Indian waiter who, tired of serving drinks to rich Westerners gathered for a party in a beautiful villa,

throws his tray behind his back, gulps a fresh cola and starts singing and dancing while his white uniform turns into a colourful outfit with a dashing belt and a shocking pink shirt. The looks, the outfit, the dancing style of the Indian protagonist as well as his power to entrance Western women and make them dance happily are certainly inspired by *The Guru*, but all references are here differently juxtaposed to produce a more specific effect and evoke a weaker idea of India. Given that it was an Italo-Spanish co-production, a third language makes its appearance in this Indo-centric audiovisual text, as the middle-aged, Western lady who hosts the party speaks Spanish and her brief lines are dubbed in the Italian version. To imitate a recurring feature of Bollywood musical films, the song by the Indian guru-dancer is provided with subtitles in both the Spanish and the Italian version, but since the two have rather different meanings, it seems likely that the Indian language which has been used is only to function as a sound effect to reinforce the playful exoticism evoked by the commercial. On the whole, the connections with the true Indian culture are here almost totally lost and India has been translated into a colourful, catchy pretext to entertain viewers and possibly make them remember a jingle. With this commercial, the transrepresentation of Indian culture is brought to its extreme and the distance between India and Italy is wider than in any other cinematic encounter so far explored.

5. Conclusion

Having taken into account several texts aimed at Italian viewers, whose common denominator is a focus on Indian culture and its representation through audiovisual media, this paper has attempted to trace at least some of the complex, sinuous paths which have been connecting India and Italy via the large and small screen over the past few years. The different roots of the texts discussed, their various structures, strategies and goals may have given way to a rather puzzling depiction of the cultural traffic which Indo-centric audiovisual texts aimed at the Italian audience have generated. Nevertheless, they have served the purpose of highlighting the multifarious and dynamic flow of words and images which passes through audiovisual media and the limited usefulness of translation if intended in strictly linguistic terms. Besides the difficulties of isolating linguistic reflections from broader, sociocultural issues, the term 'translation' has proven inadequate to account for processes of transfer where verbal and visual language cannot come apart, as images always determine the semantic content and, ultimately, the perception of words.

Shifting from translation to transcreation, verbal language has definitely lost its prominence and words have come together with visual references to form broader cultural units, which are specific to the films about the Indian diaspora and often distant from true, contemporary India. Thus, if transcreations already imply a shift from *true* to *ideal* India, the transrepresentations which are drawn up in Indian-centred Italian commercials almost exclusively rely on pre-constructed cultural traits and fancifully juxtapose them to evoke a charming, exotic background for advertising.

However remote India might appear through these audiovisual translations, transcreations and transrepresentations, they nonetheless help draw attention to what is still a largely unknown culture in Italy, arousing curiosity and perhaps even the

wish to find out more about it. Thus, even though most audiovisual texts discussed in this paper do not establish a straightforward connection between India and Italy, they help create a third space, an ever-changing dimension which is constantly re-designed by new instances of cultural contacts and which benefits just from this continuous flow of images and words.

To further emphasize the complexity, but also the positive impact of all these processes, let us finally refer to the words of Indian-born writer Jhumpa Lahiri. As she gives an account of her own and her parents' life between two cultures, animated by constant processes of translation, Lahiri provides a definition of the latter which seems to support one of the main claims made in this paper. In order to grasp the nature of cultural encounters generated by audiovisual media, translation has to be rethought, expanded, observed from different viewpoints and, above all, it has to be considered as an ongoing cultural process where the meaning of any occurrence of verbal language is defined by the innumerable images which accompany it, in real life as well as through the pages of a book and on a big or small screen:

> In my observation, translation is not only a finite linguistic act but an ongoing cultural one. It is the continuous struggle, on my parents' behalf, to preserve what it means to them to be first and forever Indian, to keep afloat certain familial and communal traditions in a foreign and at times indifferent world. The life my parents have made for themselves here has required a great movement, a long voyage, an uprooting of all things familiar. It has required an endless going back and forth, repeated travelling, urgent telephone calls, decades of sending and receiving letters. Somehow they have conveyed the spirit of their former world to the here and now. Unlike my parents, I translate not so much to survive in the world around me as to create a nonexistent one. Fiction is the foreign land of my choosing, and whether I write as an American or an Indian, about things American or Indian, one thing remains constant: I translate, therefore I am. (2002: 120)

NOTES

1. See, among others, Snell-Hornby, Mary. 1988. *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, and Bassnett, Susan and André Lefevere. 1998. *Constructing Cultures. Essays in Literary Translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
2. <http://www.indiatogether.org/reviews/films/lagaan.htm>.
3. For a description of the nature, development and use of traits in intercultural communication and translation, based on Roland Barthes' *Empire des Signes* (1970), cfr. Di Giovanni, E. (forthcoming) "The Idea of India: Transrepresentations of the Indian Culture in Italian Advertising," in *Betwixt and Between. Place and Cultural Translation*, Cambridge Scholars Press.
4. *Monsoon Wedding*, special contents of the DVD edition distributed in the UK.
5. At least five commercials inspired by the Indian culture have been broadcast in Italy between 2003 and 2005.
6. "Incense purifies house, and your mind, but for house very very clean, all tried only one bought" [my translation, purposefully done to reproduce the awkward structure of the Italian line].
7. Aryadeva, official press release, 2004 [my translation].

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