

Reading Family Heirlooms, Spelling Public Memory: Cultural Translation and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America¹

Yiorgos Anagnostou

This article develops the notion of ethnicity-as-translation as a strategy to make immigrant and transnational pasts relevant in the present. My point of departure is a museum exhibit - displayed in the space of a Greek-American festival - entitled "Women's Fabric Arts in Greek America, 1894-1994." I analyze the production of meanings associated with this exhibit in terms of the social processes converging to its making: American multiculturalism, ethnic preservation, ethnography, and the "cultural activism" of intellectuals. I argue that the idea of ethnicity as cultural translation offers itself to various constituencies - museum curators, scholars, artists, and cultural producers in general - interested in the preservation of Greek heritage. Translating ethnicity results in the proliferation of competing interpretations of Greek pasts in diaspora and elsewhere.

In the contemporary cross-cultural "traffic in meaning" (Pratt), translations are not mere abstractions or processes specific to professional practitioners. As Ellen Basso reminds us, intercultural communication entails a "series of concrete events involving real people working under specific constraints in particular times and settings" (6). This is a point worth emphasizing, as translation entails more than the production and circulation of texts, whether literary or ethnographic. In facilitating dialogue across cultures or generations, translation holds the potential to affect social life.

It is this capacity of translation to mediate between cultural domains and affect social life that compels me to explore the usefulness of the idea of translation in the analysis of Greek America. This approach resonates

1. I would like to thank Gregory Jusdanis and Eric Ball for their careful reading of this essay and their valuable insights.

with my larger interest in examining the social processes reconfiguring Greek America's past into relevant values and practices today. I approach cultural translation as an effective methodology to fashion idioms that would render temporally - and culturally - distant social realities comprehensible as well as relevant in the present. Clifford Geertz eloquently captures this dynamic. Translation for Geertz entails "the imaginative production of other peoples - predecessors, ancestors, or distant cousins" (45), a construction intrinsically capable of socially transforming "something we merely know to exist or have existed, somewhere or other, to something which is properly ours, a working force in our common consciousness" (47). This potential of cultural translation is the main inspiration of my essay.

My point of departure to analyze "the imaginative production" of Greek America is a community exhibit on Greek-American traditions. Curated by scholar and community member Artemis Leontis, the exhibit "Women's Fabric Arts in Greek America, 1894-1994" was held during the annual Greek Festival, September 1-5, in the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Columbus, Ohio. On display were "100 hand-embroidered, lace, and woven items of museum quality that a diverse group of Greek women made or brought with them to America" (Exhibit Promotional). Tablecloths, pillowcases, curtains, woven rugs, towels, wall hangings and other trousseau items made for the bulk of the exhibited material. The exhibit was sponsored by the local Hellenic Heritage Foundation and was partially funded by grants from The Ohio Arts Council, Traditional Arts Program, and the Department of Near Eastern, Judaic, and Hellenic Languages, the Ohio State University. Numerous community members, Ohio State University folklorists and Modern Greek Program faculty, as well as the individuals who contributed items for the exhibit collaborated with the curator in the making of the exhibit.

My analysis of the exhibit is based on a number of texts shaping its meanings for diverse audiences. The catalog distributed to the exhibit visitors, "Women's Fabric Arts in Greek America, 1894-1994" (Leontis) is one such text. It defines the scope and aims of the exhibit as it situates the material on display in their socio-historical context. An integral component of this text is narratives, recorded by the curator, on the significance of the exhibited material for their owners. Two scholarly publications target different, yet potentially overlapping audiences. The article "Women's Fabric Arts in Greek America" (Leontis), published in the popularly accessible, yet scholarly journal *Laografia*, presents a narrative account of the circumstances culminating in the making of the exhibit. It also draws attention to the value of women's fabric arts "as a remarkable tool for retelling histories"

(11) of families' migrations. Here the author alerts audiences to the capacity of the women's narratives to bestow "new uses and meanings to Greek women's handiwork" and their value as tools to "awaken memories" (11) about an uncharted past. The wish to expand knowledge about or even rewrite the past is supplemented with an interest in defining a new role for academics connected with Greek America in yet another article entitled "The Intellectual in Greek America" (Leontis). Here Leontis coins the term "cultural activism" as a means to merge her curatorial and scholarly interests and subsequently "to find links between the efforts to preserve and display Greek America and the efforts to cultivate Greek learning" (103). Interpreting the significance of the exhibit to diverse audiences, these "exhibit-texts" provide important insights about the multiple translations that are at work in this exhibit.

My aim in this essay is to consider the manner by which the exhibit translates aspects of the immigrant past into an idiom relevant with the ethnic present. I locate my project within a cultural studies approach to translation (see Bassnett), asking the following questions: what are the criteria for selecting the translation of one set of traditional values and practices over another? What are the conditions facilitating the production and dissemination of a particular translation? What is the location of the translators? What are the power relations enabling particular cultural translations?

My approach to the exhibit as a translation pays particular attention to the social processes converging to its making. My concern here is to trace the links connecting the ideologies and practices mediating the production of the exhibit, the social location of the translators, and the institutions enabling the exhibit. This attention to linkages and their specific convergence resonates with new approaches to cultural translation as an activity defined by connections rather than cultural differences. In this instance, the analysis of translation as a zone of interaction between radically different - or even incommensurable - cultures, is countered by a focus on connections - colonization, processes of globalization, diaspora, cultural affinities - which interfere in creating cross - cultural associations. Mary Louise Pratt, building on Clifford Geertz, appropriately writes:

The translator is always already in some way connected to the imaginative production to be translated: some relation across (historical or cultural) distance has brought the original into the translator's purview, into the space of the translator's desire. The scene of translation already possesses a meaning or meanings (glosses) in the translator's world. (30)

In this formulation, cultural and historical processes and power relations create cross-cultural entanglements that a translation seeking absolute difference can ignore only at its own peril. Contacts between cultural worlds create conditions whose mediation is an inherent component of the translation process. Therefore, the analysis of these conditions - and the converging meanings they generate - becomes an analytical priority. As Clifford Geertz suggests: “[B]ut we do so [genuinely comprehend a historical period] not by looking *behind* the interfering glosses that connect us to it but *through* them” (44). Here, then, the emphasis lays not so much in translating meanings of otherness, but in attending to the processes that generate resonant meanings at the point where cultures intersect.

In the case of the exhibit “Women’s Fabric Arts in Greek America, 1894-1994” we could imagine at work a constellation of processes contributing to the public presentation of the Greek immigrant past. Multiculturalism, as an ideology of inclusion, is one among the “interfering glosses” attaching meaning to the immigrant past and facilitating the transportation of fabric-heirlooms from the inner depths of a Greek immigrant trunk to the American public. The social location of the curator within Greek-American women’s social circles, as well as the university, creates a network of affiliations converging, as I will argue, to connect the domestic sociability associated with handiwork, academic theories on travel and diaspora and the museum-like display. Changing gender and ethnic ideologies intersect to create meanings distancing women from as well as connecting them with the immigrant past. To examine the exhibit as translation is to account for this crisscrossing web of historical intersections producing the meanings of the past for contemporary Greek America.

I argue that the analysis of the exhibit through the idea of ethnicity as translation is particularly useful in elucidating the entanglements leading to the re-signification of the immigrant past. In doing so, my analysis points to a methodology useful in the politics of cultural preservation. Since, as I show, ethnic translations of a similar tradition could produce multiple meanings, the practice of ethnicity as translation provides the discursive space which enables translators to promote their own - or other collective - interests. Thus, this methodology could serve as a tool to all those constituencies - preservation societies, museums, scholars, cultural activists, state organizations - interested in cultural (re)production and re-signification of established categories.²

2. See, for example, Karen Van Dyck, who employs the problematic of translation in her analysis of Greek diasporic literature.

Undoing Gender Violence through the Violence of Translation

Numerous affiliations frame the transportation of family heirlooms to the public space of the exhibit. In an autobiographical reminiscence, the curator points to her early connection with the practices she later documented. She situates her experience of the meaning of handiwork within the context of Greek-American women's sociability:

As a girl I occasionally witnessed the following scene in our mid-western household. Admiring friends would prompt my mother to pull out the handwork she had collected. As my mother would show and tell, visitors would comment on the pieces' materials, techniques, and travels. This scene repeated itself in other homes. Everywhere, it seemed, handwork generated stories about women's education, rites of passage, relatives in other lands, and the trials of immigration or the challenges of growing up in America. From this I surmised that handwork was not only an essential frill in Greek American homes, but also a swift key to memory retrieval. (Leontis, *Women's Fabric Arts* 5)

The early exposure of the curator to women's patterns of sociability in Greek-American households points to a social world where the personal and the communal intersect. Trousseau items are pulled out from family trunks to open display. In this transfer, they generate community narratives. "Immigrant histories" Leontis writes, "are community narratives, never just personal stories of private lives" (*Women's Fabric Arts* 6). The curator's first-hand experience here mediates the translation of the diasporic past. On the one hand, this knowledge becomes the organizing principle of the exhibit, to elicit narratives about the travel routes of the handiworks and the social significance they hold for their makers and owners. On the other hand, the propensity of the owners to make their material public to their guests resonates with the curatorial act to extend their display beyond family, kinship and ethnic networks, to the most public spaces of all, an exhibit. A practice routinely taking place within the domestic immigrant/ethnic sphere is linked with an institutional act of heritage preservation in the present.

Yet the exhibit does not claim an uncomplicated continuity between the immigrant past and the ethnic present. In narratives about the significance of the exhibited material for their owners, women point to tradition as constraining, even oppressive. Excerpts from interviews direct attention to the making of fabrics as mechanisms that control spatial and socioeconomic movement. Alexandra, for example, associates the making of embroideries with gender-specific restrictions: "Girls didn't go out. They weren't allowed

to. They had to do something to pass the time, *ti na kanoun* 'what could they do'? So they embroidered and their mothers helped them" (in Leontis, *Women's Fabric Arts, Exhibition Catalog* 54).

As many anthropologists and ethno-historians of rural and urban Greece have shown, the making of trousseau in the past embodied women's expected behavior, which was linked to virtue, honor and modesty. Salamone and Stanton suggest that needlework in traditional Greek society served as a means of disciplining spatial movement and the use of leisure time. Time spent away from *kendima*, triggered negative community reaction: "young women are constantly admonished to work on handicrafts [...] from the time they leave school until their actual marriage" (111). The making of trousseau acquired particular significance in urban contexts when the dissolution of rural mechanisms of monitoring women's behavior, intensified the need for gender-specific "management and manipulation of time" (Sant Cassia 101). As products of women's domestic labor, handiwork served as an index of their virtue, discipline and skill necessary for household management. The process of making embroideries reproduced social mechanisms sanctioning female restrictions.

Women's narratives about their family's immigrant past generate a disquieting sense of intergenerational divide. The cultural past they evoke seems to puzzle these women as it confronts them with gender-specific practices at odds with contemporary gender sensibilities. For these women the social values circumscribing the making of embroideries come to represent the past as a foreign country, to paraphrase David Lowenthal in a different context. In this sense the past would rather remain buried in the *baoulo* (trunk) of history, not to be circulated as a translation seeking a contemporary equivalent of past practices.

Yet, as Leontis observes, the perceived oppressiveness of the tradition does not lead to an all-encompassing rejection of practices associated with the production of embroideries. Rather, some of the women interviewees felt "deeply ambivalent about what their mother's world could offer them. They tried hard to transcend the limits that had held their mothers while giving them a framework for their artistry" ("The Intellectual" 99).

Women re-evaluated the *paliá prágmata* 'old things.' The post-civil rights interest in roots and the subsequent legitimation of ethnicity in the rewriting of America as a multicultural society creates the larger sociopolitical framework enabling the expression of a renewed sense of connection - an interfering gloss - among second generation women with the immigrant past. One of Leontis's interlocutors, Despina, evaluated her family's heirlooms in terms of pride in heritage, enduring familial bonds, and the aesthetic

appreciation of the material. This sense of appreciation and respect about materials of the past is also evident in the statements of Anna, another contributor to the exhibit. This time the admiration of “old things” acknowledges the knowledge and the care invested in their making.

She knew the entire art [of silk making ...] She was a very meticulous person. She was as precise in her thinking and her story-telling as she was in all her needlework. She had a *kofteró* “cutting” mind. Everything had its place. (in Leontis, *Women’s Fabric Arts, Exhibition Catalog* 21)

The criteria women employ to re-evaluate *paliá prágmata* today are not totally dissimilar from those employed to assess the value of trousseau in the past. The cultivation of deep emotional bonds between mother and daughter was nurtured in the past around practices of trousseau making (Salamone and Stanton). Aesthetic appreciation and competitive pride in the artistry and skill of the material were central in women’s social interaction centered on the display of handiwork. And the inter-generational passing of a family’s handiwork entailed in the past and still entails, as many interviewees testified, a deep-rooted, memory-sustaining tradition in the Greek world (see Hirschon).

Women then connect selectively with aspects of tradition. They dismantle practices associated with the preparation of trousseau and they isolate those aspects meaningful to them. The artistry of their mothers, the emotional bond nurtured by these items is treasured while practices confining women are rebuked. The fragmentation of the past enables selective preservation and the articulation of a new relationship with tradition. The reflective dialogue with the past retrieves and circulates selective signs (artistry, emotional bonds, family inheritance) in an idiom contemporary women find relevant to their lives. In this cultural work of reevaluating the past, it could be said that women act as translators. They perform the “translator’s starting point” in the translation process as articulated by Octavio Paz:

The translator’s starting point is not the language in movement that provides the poet’s raw material, but the fixed language of the poem. A language congealed, yet living. His procedure is the inverse of the poet’s: he is not constructing an unalterable text from mobile characters; instead he is dismantling the elements of the text, freeing the signs into circulation, then returning them to language. (159-60)

The analogy I draw here between literary and cultural translation is not perfect. The poem to be translated is textually fixed (though of course its

meaning is not), while the cultural past comprises a dynamic, diverse terrain of social practices. Yet, I would not like this lack of equivalence to obscure an important point of convergence between the work of a literary and cultural translator. The key point here is that a cultural translator could dismantle past practices, release its signs into circulation and then reassemble them in new configurations.

The returning of the dismantled signs into the target language furnishes a new cultural grammar and in turn generates new meanings. Since the translation of the past takes place in the intersection between social discourses and the particular location of the subjects doing the translating, the dismantling could produce multiple translations, as I show later. This proliferation of usable pasts entails an imaginative dimension, diverging from the task of a literary translator. While in the second phase of the translation process the literary translator "must compose a poem analogous to the original" (Paz 159), the cultural translators I discuss are not preoccupied with such restrictions. On the contrary, composing a discontinuous continuity with the past seems to be their primary interest.

Far from seeking to transpose cultural *patterns* of the past into equivalent structures in the present, the exhibit imaginatively re-signifies a tradition associated with oppressive male regulation of women's sexuality and sociopolitical mobility into a cultural resource resonating with interests of contemporary women. The dissolution of the past and its reconfiguration in new contexts in the present entails a dimension of violence, an integral component of translation. Lawrence Venuti makes this point effectively:

the violence of translation resides in its very purpose and activity: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts. (209)

While translation's violence has been often thought in a negative light in the context of colonial representations of colonizers, in the case of Greek-American women, culture is fragmented to purposefully produce (mis)translations serving the interests of the translators themselves. Greek-American women's translations assault the original cultural whole, dismantling it into signs which they selectively appropriate as part of their own histories and subjectivities.

Translating as Curator and Scholar

What additional entanglements factor in the exhibit's re-signification of women's handiwork as a "working force in our common consciousness" (Geertz 47)? What kinds of negotiations mediate the re-routing of immigrant practices into ethnographic objects in display? Once again, the idea of ethnicity as translation could help us elucidate this process. In her capacity as a curator, Artemis Leontis functions as a cultural producer-translator when she reveals an intimate familiarity with the cultural intricacies of the target culture and their significance in mediating the production of her exhibit. She writes: "[T]he ideology of multiculturalism served me well as I tried to find out not only an audience but also public funds for my exhibit of women's handiwork" ("The Intellectual" 96). Here, the curator-translator-fundraiser operates within the political and cultural economy of multiculturalism privileging the public circulation of particular kinds of texts. "It is no accident that my argument that women, handiwork, and Greek America are 'underrepresented groups' found sympathy in the panel of experts who were judging the state arts councils grant application," she writes (96). Making the case of Greek America as an underrepresented cultural minority proves an indispensable condition in soliciting state funds. In this initial phase of the translation process, the translator primarily operates as a producer of culture, navigating the cultural terrain of the host society and negotiating the circulation of her "texts" in alignment with the terms underwritten by the latter. Fluency in the "language" employed by cultural and economic gatekeepers - "experts who were judging the state arts council grant application" (96) - becomes a necessary condition in this case for initiating the public circulation of ethnic translations and their subsequent accessibility to wide audiences.

Hence, I should reiterate a commonplace, yet crucial point, in relation to cultural translation: the translator does not operate in a cultural vacuum. Rather, she is positioned within a particular political and cultural economy that includes previous representations of the source culture. As the following quotes make it clear, the circulation of earlier representations (translations?) of otherness sanctioned by the target culture interferes - it may even carry a constitutive effect - on the reception of new translations:

They [the expert judges] supported the idea of linking an exhibit of women's handiwork to a local ethnic festival, citing the "Greek community's" solid reputation and for its good organization and authentic self-representation. "The Greeks are well organized and

united,” I heard them comment in their public review of my application. (96)

Note here that an ethnic festival promoting itself around the rhetoric of access to authentic tradition (Anagnostou “Ethnic Boundaries”) is also evaluated on the basis of modern criteria such as effective organization. The success of ethnic representations is evaluated according to the values (ethnic reputation, unity, organization) of the target culture. Cultural translations such as the exhibit do not circulate independently from dominant scripts of otherness in the target culture.

Mainstream notions of festivals as legitimate showcases of otherness facilitate further production of ethnic translations. This represents yet another instance whereas the values of the host culture mediate cross-cultural entanglements. As early as the early 1940s, before multiculturalism took roots in American society, festivals had been seen as the primary sites of ethnic performances and dialogue leading to cross-cultural understanding and the public’s appreciation of difference (Davis-Dubois). Currently, they are also regarded as events humanizing ethnic subjects and facilitating cross-cultural familiarity. (Anagnostou *Hellenism*). Festivals legitimize cultural diversity, translating difference according to the dictates of “liberal multiculturalism,” privileging non-threatening interests in ethnic roots, values and the circulation of de-politicized difference (Jusdanis).

Making itself part of the festival, the exhibit capitalizes on available entanglements between ethnicity and American society. Yet the accommodating institution of the festival does not necessarily assimilate new translations into its pre-existing cultural logic. This is evident in that the exhibit’s translation of the past stands in contrast to the numerous uses of tradition within the festival space. The rhetoric of authenticity - a trope central in the marketing of ethnicity in America (Ween) - is ubiquitous in festival self-representations, while absent as an organizing principle of the exhibit. Furthermore, the museum-like fashioned exhibit contrasts with the performative and consumptive practices - dance and food correspondingly - of tradition, which are abundantly evident within the boundaries of the festival. More importantly for my purposes here, the exhibit consciously distances itself from alternative uses of traditional women’s handiwork exhibited elsewhere in the festival.

Here I refer to a festival tradition, the exhibit of Greek traditional culture called “*Horiatiko Spiti*” (Village Home). Involving decorations “to resemble a typical village type home,” or in another design as “a reproduction of a comfortable home on a Greek island in the 1980s” (Greek Festival Com-

memorative Album 52), the *Horiatiko Spiti* features women's embroideries as part of a naturalistic setting. The embroideries contribute to the realistic effect of the exhibit, presented as decorative items or as products of a woman's household activities. Women's domestic labor is often displayed in conjunction with the technologies producing the fabrics, evident in the exhibit marked as the "sewing corner of the housewife," and comprised by an "embroidery project" and a Singer sewing machine. This recreation of period rooms is informed by a particular method of exhibiting culture. Defined as "in situ" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet), this approach rests on the premise of reconstructing culture to resemble an authentic original. The ethnographic object, "excised from its physical, social and cultural settings" (389) is enlarged "by expanding its boundaries to include of what was left behind, even if only in replica" (389). The impulse to represent tradition holistically informs a theory of culture as a seamless whole: "Such [in situ] displays [...] appeal to those who argue that cultures are coherent wholes in their own right" (389). Cultural mimesis becomes the guiding principle of "in-situ" exhibits. Here, the translation of the past seeks its absolute equivalent in the present.

The exhibit "Women's Fabric Arts in Greek America, 1894-1994" organizes itself around a distinct methodology which sets the display apart from the mimetic translation at the "*Horiatiko Spiti*." The historical, social and cultural contextualization of each displayed material becomes the guiding principle of the exhibit.

All of the exhibited items will be carefully documented to include information about who made them, where, under what conditions, and to what purpose they were made, and how the particular piece of handiwork found its way from Greece to the U.S. or took shape in the U.S. in an American context. (Leontis *Women's Fabric Arts, Exhibition Catalog 1*)

The concern here is on the "travel" of individual items, and the manner material culture is (re)signified within the specific context of a family's diasporic routes. The emphasis is on the cultural histories of specific items and the narratives they evoke, not on reconstructing authentic cultural wholes. This departure from a mimetic representation of the past is amplified by an interpretive method interested in the proliferation - rather than in fixing meaning. "Have you ever considered the value of hand-made items that once casually adorned so many Greek American homes, or filled trunks in closets, basements, and attics [?]" the curator asks (Exhibit Promotional Pamphlet). In inviting the audience to reflect on the significance of family heirlooms,

the exhibit explicitly engages its audiences to contribute to the meaning of the exhibited material. This approach to exhibiting shares remarkable similarities with what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet defines “in context.” She writes:

The notion of in context, which poses the interpretive problem of theoretical frame of reference, entails particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas. Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, and diagrams, commentary delivered via earphones [. . .] booklets and catalogues, educational programs, and lectures and performances. [. . .] In-context approaches to installation establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection and conservation of the objects on display. There are many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies. (390)

In accommodating multiple interpretations of the past, and enabling reflection between worlds - the immigrant past and the ethnic present - the exhibit works as a translation. Julio Ortega wonderfully captures this point: “Translating is the possibility of constructing a scene of mediation that frames interpretation as a dialogic exercise. Thus, it is the first cultural act that places languages and subjects in crisis, unleashing a redefinition of speakers, a debate over protocols, and a struggle over interpretation. Clearly, translation is a new space of accord and discord” (26). Placing tradition in a crisis shatters the confidence in the stability of meaning certified by cultural mimesis. In a setting mediating cross-cultural and inter-generational dialogue, the exhibit moves away from the mimetic mode of representation to communicate multiple interpretations of the past and their significance in the present.

Not unlike the translation work of the women she interviewed, Leontis dismantles the signs associated with trousseau making (female virtue, inter-generational emotional bonds, cultural transmission, heritage preservation, discipline, uses of leisure time, sociability, the stories they generate) to produce her own translation. While she does showcase the translations of her interlocutors, which privilege aesthetic appreciation and family connections - in fact consenting to them - the curator offers an alternative interpretation. “Although the exhibit displays some of the most beautiful handiwork one can find, the emphasis does not fall on the beauty of the displayed items. Rather it retells the story of these items, their makers and their

collectors" (Leontis "Women's Fabric Arts Exhibit Catalog" 2). Her translation privileges the production of narratives tracing the diasporic travels of material culture and the circulation of knowledge about habitual practices specific to the production, dissemination, and transfer of embroideries.

This specific translation could be located at the intersection of yet another layer of entanglements, this time between the public and the academic world. Ethnicity, for Leontis ("The Intellectual"), is a category richer than a set of attributes assigned to an identity. Her understanding of Greek America explicitly draws from "critical studies of American social groups, [where] one finds a polemical move from reifying discourses of ethnicity, race, and roots to a transnational, intercultural 'discourse of routes: a historical tableau of traversals and criss-crossings signifying upon a vast oceanic surface'" (106).

Here, academic theories frame interpretation. Situated between her scholarly and curatorial positions, Leontis draws upon the former to inform the latter. Yet, this relationship is not unidirectional. Reflecting on the material and interpreting their significance becomes a mutually constituting process. The theory of culture Leontis ("The Intellectual") advances to translate the exhibited material is credited to a particular technique of needlework:

In researching women's handiwork, I have found a ubiquitous lace-making technique that borrows from and elaborates on fishermen's net work, which we call netting. (92)

The translator is "deeply affected"³ by the intricacies and patterns specific to this technique which subsequently serve as her guiding metaphor to theorize culture. "Netting" provides the conceptual framework to formulate an understanding of culture as "a pattern of looped and knotted threads of connection, which form segments of closed and open spaces. No one segment is connected to all the rest and none stands alone, even if it has been created piecemeal" (102). Culture here is not to a holistic entity, "a well-circumscribed plane" (93), but "nodes of activity - some interconnected, some isolated, some few and far between" (93).

This approach to culture is particularly amenable to the idea of cultural

3. Talal Asad's caveat on academic habits of translation is relevant here. Reflecting on conventional translation practices of anthropology, Asad draws from Walter Benjamin to point out that translating a "foreign" language into a discipline's idiom can readily neutralize ambiguities, experiences and knowledge falling outside disciplinary linguistic conventions. Asad cautions against the professional predisposition to preserve the status quo of a discipline's own idiom, which often takes precedence over concerns to allow the host language "to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (157).

translation. “Nodes of activity” offer context-specific sites for the analysis of all sorts of cross-cultural entanglements interfacing two or more worlds. The non-holistic understanding of culture advances a metaphor for cultural change resonating with the notion of translation as the dismantling of the original. “Net-work is nothing without the space between. It never forms a solid plane... If one thread breaks, what is left is more open space, fewer lines of connection, and an altered pattern. One can mend the net, one can add more pieces, but the pattern will never be exactly the same” (92). As the traditional institution of the dowry and the gender-specific practices it engenders fade away, threads connected to it are reassembled in yet another node of activity: the museum exhibit.

The cultural translator then operates in the between of languages and cultures - “that space of translation where the self or one culture encounters and, more importantly, interacts with an ‘other’ or another culture” (Dingwaney 8). Leontis’s betweenness spans a gamut of affiliations: the ethnic community, the Greek diasporic world, the academy, American multiculturalism. As she selectively draws from various intersected spheres among these worlds, her betweenness becomes a “fertile space [. . .] a sphere (or zone) in which one both abandons and assumes associations” (Dingwaney 8). The past is dismantled, resulting in deliberate mistranslations or violations of the patriarchal script traditionally associated with the production of trousseau. The past is reassembled around a specific “node of activity” merging scholarly and preservationist concerns. Turning heirloom materials to objects of public memory means to occupy a location among all those historical entanglements - the multicultural interest on preservation, the Greek diasporic experience in America, the academy and public culture, past and present signification of trousseau material - through which this specific exhibit becomes possible. It means that a cultural translator exhibits an “amphibian mind” - as Chatterjee’s wonderful metaphor has it - to transverse through all those entangled conceptual worlds intersecting in the making of the exhibit.

Conclusion: Politics of Translation and Cultural Preservation

Cultural translations affect the social world. In introducing new association in the target language, they circulate new ways of thinking about and acting upon the world. The “in context” orientation of the exhibit, for instance, challenges the idea of tradition as a cultural whole amenable to the total representation of the mimetic display. In eschewing the rhetoric of authenticity and mimetic display, the exhibit introduces the idea of tradition

as malleable, subjected to a translator's agency. In doing so, the exhibit generates new meanings on the uses of tradition, contributing to cultural preservation and the making of the festival into a cultural zone of contested meanings.

The exhibit is grounded in ethnography yet it moves beyond it. The exhibit makes visible the women's "resolve to keep alive old materials and habits from another world" (Leontis, "The Intellectual" 89). As such it declares a vision of pluralism, "both ethical and future-oriented" as Michael Fischer (196) has put it. Yet as I have shown, this preservationist ethos reaches beyond the ethnographic representation of the women's point of view. It expects cultural translators to strategically initiate and disseminate translations that project values and interests they themselves advocate.

Leontis ("The Intellectual" 103) addresses the politics of cultural translation when she introduces the concept of "cultural activism." The term allows her "to find links between the efforts to preserve and display Greek America and the efforts to cultivate Greek learning," thus enabling her to occupy a translator's location as a scholar-curator. For my purposes here, "cultural activism" articulates a specific entanglement between the academy - specifically Modern Greek Studies Programs - and Greek cultural preservation in America. It becomes the means *through* which knowledge is translated into an idiom and a practice capable of reaching and inspiring audiences beyond the academic community. In turn, such an idiom may generate and make further learning available to the University. At the same time, "cultural activism" furnishes a framework for translation politics in the future: "Cultural activism works by applying pressure to carefully selected points of sensitivity in order to activate them, to give them a structure, status, and distinctiveness... One of its goals may be to introduce a subject or a field of learning to institutions of culture such as museums, arts and cultural organizations, schools and universities - where it has not appeared before" (103). This formulation opens a discursive space for a future politics of cultural preservation in Greek America as it privileges strategic institutional intervention.

The idea of cultural translation, therefore, may prove useful to the various constituencies - museum curators, cultural activists, scholars, state agencies, artists and producers of culture - interested in the preservation and dissemination of Greek culture in diaspora and elsewhere. This makes for an agonistic proliferation of competing interpretations of the Greek past, since cultural translation inherently entails the production of multiple cultural scripts of the "original," as I have shown in this essay. Yet, a vexing point remains. What is the fate of those concepts and practices widely circulating

in the Greek world yet located outside the cultural interests of gate keeping institutions in the target culture? Are cultural translations sustainable outside an institutional framework? In other words, how do translated practices play out in domains of cross-cultural interaction in which they are unfamiliar, uncharted, and perhaps startlingly foreign? Are there “untranslatable” host practices and what are they? In what manner do specific translations compromise the foreignness of source practices and to what effect? Is it productive, and according to whom, to showcase the foreignness of certain source practices? In what contexts and to what effect? What kinds of translations work in the teaching of Greek culture in target institutions of learning? One might hope that this problematic will generate further translation projects turning the Greek world into a multitude of usable presents. In the spirit of thinking of translation as a series of activities *and* narratives accounting for this process, one could only hope that the proliferation of translations about the Greek world will bring about narratives exploring their applicability, relevance and significance.

The Ohio State University
U.S.A.

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