
Interpreting Violence Against Migrant and Refugee Women: Feminist Approaches to Transcultural Mediation in Italy

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Abstract

For migrant and refugee women who survive violence, factors such as irregular administrative status, lack of a support system and scarce knowledge of the language of the host country can lead to increased vulnerability (Toledano Buendía 2022). Linguistic assistance provided by community interpreters and transcultural mediators is thus fundamental to grant access to anti-violence centres and break the cycle of violence. To work in these contexts, interpreters and mediators need specific knowledge about violence against women and its implications, the role of gender in societies (Toledano Buendía *et al.* 2015), know how to manage emotions and trauma and help to create trust (Abril Martí 2015). In Italy, transcultural mediation developed in the Nineties to answer the communicative needs of newly-arrived migrants (Albertini & Capitani 2010); however, mediators are a recent addition to the staff of anti-violence centres (D.i.Re 2020), which have been welcoming a growing number of women with a migratory background in the past years. In these places, a specific gender-sensitive feminist methodology is followed to build trust and support women. Considering the specific needs of survivors of violence with a migratory background, growing efforts are being made in Italy to provide mediators with the specific knowledge needed to work with survivors of violence. Acknowledging that mediators are a crucial communicative bridge for women who, without interpreting, would be exposed to secondary victimisation due to misinformation and lack of access to services caused by language barriers (Toledano Buendía 2021), this contribution will deal with the specifics of mediation and interpreting in contexts of violence against women. After retracing the origins of anti-violence centres in Italy and describing their work methodology, this chapter will focus on the encounter between these spaces and transcultural mediation. Some training courses aimed at educating mediators from a gendered and feminist perspective will be described. To conclude, some considerations on what is referred to in recent literature as Feminist interpreting will be made, highlighting how this approach can be a tool to uphold survivors rights.

Keywords: transcultural mediation, feminist interpreting, violence against women, anti-violence centres, migration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migrant and refugee women who survive violence against women¹ face a series of obstacles such as irregular administrative status, possible isolation, lack of a support system and economic dependency on their partners (Arnosó Martínez *et al.* 2012: 170). These, together with a lack of knowledge of the language of the host country can lead to increased vulnerability and become a deterrent to their seeking help and accessing psychological support, healthcare assistance, legal aid, anti-violence centres and women shelters (Toledano Buendía 2022: 34). Different studies have in fact highlighted how various obstacles, including language barriers and sociocultural background (Rossoni *et al.* 2018: 29; Tinti *et al.* 2024: 22) hinder migrant women survivors' access to timely healthcare and psychological aid (Oram *et al.* 2016: 1078).

For migrants and refugees, access to services is inevitably shaped by the ability to speak the country's language. Language plays in fact a central role in the possibility of survivors to find a way out of violence and towards safety (Huelgo *et al.* 2006: 5). Language barriers often become obstacles that contribute to a victim's feeling of isolation and impotence (Toledano Buendía *et al.* 2015: 5) and create a dead end for many women who try to access social services (Lee 2013: 1356). If for the migrant population in general language barriers hamper the exercise of personal autonomy (Gutiérrez Palacios *et al.* 2010: 62), in the specific case of women who suffer abuse this difficulty also becomes an aggravating factor in their situation of dependence and isolation, which reinforces their vulnerability (Relaño Pastor & Soriano Miras 2006: 87). On the path of breaking the cycle of violence, linguistic assistance provided by community interpreters and transcultural mediators² is thus fundamental for these women to access support and enjoy their rights through accessible and understandable services (OIM, UNHCR & UNICEF 2020: 20).

¹ Violence against women is defined by the Istanbul Convention as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women. The expression *violence against women* covers various forms of gender-based violence against women and refers to violence directed against women because they are women or violence affecting them disproportionately, including domestic violence.

² In the Italian context, the term *mediazione* (mediation) refers to practices that, in Anglophone and Northern European contexts, fall under the expressions 'community interpreting' and 'public service interpreting' (Baraldi & Gavioli 2012). Mediation can either be qualified as *mediazione linguistica e culturale* ("language and cultural mediation") *mediazione interculturale* ("intercultural mediation") or, more recently, as *mediazione transculturale* ("transcultural mediation"). Mediators play an intermediary role between institutions and non-Italian speakers which closely resembles the role of the community interpreter (Rudvin & Spinzi 2014) but are also called to perform a broader and proactive role of preventing conflicts and misunderstandings (Merlini 2009; Rudvin & Pesare 2015; Cavallari 2025). In Spanish-speaking contexts, the expression *interpretación en los servicios públicos* refers to a form of communication between public services and people who don't speak the language (Abril Martí 2006). Despite their roles not being completely overlapping, community interpreters and mediators work in similar socio-occupational settings and have similar tasks. Throughout this article "mediator" will be used when referring specifically to the Italian context, as this is the denomination given to the professionals who work with survivors of violence in community settings in the country.

Migrant women who survive violence suffer different and intersecting forms of discrimination and stigmatisation. Their encounters with service providers and interpreters are characterised by power relations rooted in social constructions of gender and race, which seep into the communicative exchange and interpreting itself (Marey-Castro & Del Pozo Triviño 2020: 68). Moreover, in countries such as Italy, asylum regulations and the reception system often reproduce essentialising and stereotyping logics of pre-established and depoliticised notions of victimhood and vulnerability (Magarelli 2025: 26). In this sense, mediation can challenge dominant linguistic regimes (*Ibid.*), especially if professionals apply a gender and decolonial perspective which can help identify these notions and biases and improve the quality of their work (Toledano Buendía *et al.* 2015; Toledano Buendía & Del Pozo Triviño 2015; Del Pozo Triviño 2017; Toledano Buendía 2019).

In the past few years, the number of migrant and refugee women turning to anti-violence centres in Italy has increased, leading to implementing the use of transcultural mediation in these spaces, to facilitate communication. According to data collected in 2023 in 112 anti-violence centres of the D.i.Re network³, one in four women who sought support was of foreign nationality (26%). A total of 129 migrant or refugee women accessed anti-violence centres and 29 were hosted in a shelter; most of these women accessed the shelter for the first time. Among them, 75% were asylum seekers (compared to 72% in 2022) and 22% were refugees (23% in 2022) (D.i.Re 2024: 21).

Transcultural mediation made its debut on the Italian scene in the 1990s but it is only in the past few years that mediators started working in anti-violence centres. Acknowledging the centrality of transcultural mediators as communicative bridges for women who, without interpreting, would be exposed to secondary victimisation due to misinformation and lack of access to services (Toledano Buendía 2021: 180), this contribution will deal with the specifics of mediation and interpreting in contexts of violence against women. After describing the characteristics of the subdiscipline of interpreting with survivors of violence, this chapter will delve into the foundations of anti-violence centres in Italy and describe their work methodology. Later, it will focus on the encounter between these spaces and transcultural mediation and the specific training needs of community interpreters and mediators who work with survivors, suggesting this training to be informed by feminism. Some training courses aimed at educating mediators from a gendered and feminist perspective will then be described. To conclude, some considerations about what is referred to in recent literature as Feminist interpreting will be made, highlighting how this approach can be a tool to reframe interpreters' and mediators' role, uphold survivors' rights and make their voice heard.

³ D.i.Re – Donne in Rete contro la violenza is an Italian association founded in 2008. The association aims to conduct research and raise awareness about violence against women. It comprises 88 organisations in the country, which manage 117 anti-violence centres, and more than 66 women shelters, giving support to around 23 thousand women every year. <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/chi-siamo/>

2. INTERPRETING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: WORK SETTINGS, CHARACTERISTICS AND EMERGENCE OF THE SUBDISCIPLINE

Community interpreting in contexts of violence against women can be described as a subdiscipline (Toledano Buendía 2015) with its own specific characteristic. On their path to break the cycle of violence, migrant and refugee women engage with many services and professionals: healthcare and social services, legal aid, police forces—among others. Survivors of violence who don't speak the language of the host country have specific communicative needs that must be met by specialised professionals who can handle complex emotions (Hale 2011). Although interpreters play a crucial role in supporting survivors in interactions with professionals from different settings, their role is often unrecognised and complicated by inadequate working conditions (Del Pozo Triviño *et al.* 2023: 251), which lead interpreters to perform precarious and underpaid work and compromise the smooth running of the profession and ongoing training (*Ibid.*). Given the diversity of work settings, interpreters must have specialised knowledge about the procedures followed in different environments, know what violence against women is and how to work with a gender-sensitive perspective (Abril Martí *et al.* 2015: 86). This gender-sensitive approach entails an understanding that violence against women is rooted in gender discrimination, power imbalances and inequality. Working with survivors involves conversations in which emotions run high: survivors of traumatic events often feel a complex emotional state of fear, mistrust, shame and regret that can condition how they express themselves and their ability to establish a relationship with the interpreter and service providers (Abril Martí 2015: 87-88). To work with survivors, interpreters need to acquire specific knowledge about how to support victims of violence, to collaborate at best with service providers, handle emotions and traumatic content, and manage professional boundaries, which are not always clearly defined (Sullivan *et al.* 2023: 6).

Despite these requirements, existing literature on community interpreting and mediation in contexts of violence against women shows that non-professional interpreters are often employed to work with survivors, and no specific training is required (Del Pozo Triviño & Blasco 2015: 15). While this is always problematic, it becomes especially severe when working with survivors, where inaccuracies, lack of role neutrality and breaches of confidentiality can have serious and life-threatening consequences (Polzin 2007: 23). Using non-professional interpreters denies survivors' right to access justice and ultimately deprives them of their voice. On the contrary, interpreters trained with a gender perspective can learn to recognise their biases, engage with survivors in ways that avoid causing feelings of guilt and blame, normalise, justify or belittle violence, while ensuring that information is adequately conveyed (Toledano Buendía 2019: 178).

Other than employing non-professional and untrained interpreters or mediators, work with survivors of violence is often characterised by structural shortcomings such as the absence of separate spaces dedicated to interviewing survivors, the use of multiple

interpreters along the way, and a general lack of quality services and respect of ethical standards (Del Pozo Triviño & Toledano Buendía 2016: 199), gaps in terminology, and insufficient tools to face the emotional impact of working with survivors (Lázaro Gutiérrez 2018a; 2018b; Del Pozo Triviño *et al.* 2020). Moreover, service providers may be uninformed about the role of interpreters (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez 2016: 71) and how to work with them (Borja Albí 2015; Valero-Garcés *et al.* 2015), which puts interpreters under considerable stress.

2.1. Interpreting violence against women in Italy: transcultural mediation and anti-violence centres

In Italy, transcultural mediation developed in the early 1990s to respond to the communicative needs of the growing migrant community (Albertini & Capitani 2010). At first employed to work in schools and public services, in the past few years mediators have started collaborating with women shelters and anti-violence centres, working hand in hand with case workers on every step taken by survivors to break the cycle of violence.

The growing number of accesses to anti-violence centres by women with different migratory background requires centres and shelters to adapt to the specific needs of migrant and refugee women, starting from making these spaces linguistically accessible. Anti-violence services can often be unaware of migrant women specific needs and lack awareness of migrants' rights, which means that it is forgotten that translators and mediators need to be involved (Troisi *et al.* 2022: 288). In recent years, a greater awareness of how language barriers limit the access of migrant and refugee women to anti-violence centres has led to closer cooperation between anti-violence centres and transcultural mediators, true bridging figures between the linguistic and cultural codes of women with a migratory background and (mostly Italian) case workers. This rather new (D.i.Re 2020: 46) addition to the staff of anti-violence centres raises a few considerations: first off, traditionally, anti-violence centres operate according to a very specific feminist methodology, initially conceived to address native Italian women. By applying an intersectional lens to the concept of violence against women, how can this methodology adapt to the specific needs of women with a different background, considering their specific needs?

Secondly, case workers employed in anti-violence centres have specific training on how to work with a feminist approach to violence, which is not a requirement for mediators who interpret for survivors. What solutions, if any, have been found to provide mediators with such training at regional or national level? These questions inform the collaboration of anti-violence centres with mediators, with the goal of providing the best support to migrant and refugee women. To better explain the role of mediators in these anti-violence centres and women shelters, the next section will delve into the origins of anti-violence centres in Italy and describe their work methodology and organisation at national level.

3. ANTI-VIOLENCE CENTRES IN ITALY: FOUNDATIONS AND WORK METHODOLOGY

It was at the end of the 1970s that the first anti-violence centres were set up in Italy, thanks to the growing efforts of the feminist movement. In the 1990s, there were about 70 anti-violence centres in the country, which gathered for the first time in the city of Ravenna in 1996, with the goal of gaining visibility and sharing knowledge. Since the beginning, anti-violence centres were set up as spaces to support survivors of violence through different services, but also as places for political action and change, through awareness-raising and everyday practice (Adami *et al.* 2000: 111). Today, there are more than 400 centres in the country.

Anti-violence centres, since their foundation, have developed a feminist methodology to support women and their children, which was formalised in 2006. That year, a group of anti-violence centres, under the coordination of Rete D.i.Re (Donne in rete contro la violenza/Network of women against violence) published the *Carta della Rete Nazionale dei Centri antiviolenza e delle Case delle donne*,⁴ a document listing the goals and shared principles of the associations, cooperatives and groups that manage anti-violence centres and women shelters in Italy. According to the principles outlined in the Charter, anti-violence centres operate with a gender perspective, recognising violence as a structural phenomenon whose roots lie in power inequality between genders (Porcu 2016: 88). Women case workers follow a specific feminist methodology based on building a strong relationship between women, with the aim of creating a path to break out of the abuse through non-judgmental mutual listening. According to the national Charter, every woman working in the centres must attend a training course to learn the methodology to support women who survive domestic violence and any other form of violence (economic, physical, psychological, sexual, stalking, trafficking). The centres manage the reception and hospitality of women and their children and offer support tailored to each survivor's needs, respecting each personal experience, and considering how culture, race, class, sexual orientation and dis/ability affects and is affected by violence. Case workers maintain secrecy and anonymity and act only with the woman's consent.

In line with CEDAW recommendations,⁵ anti-violence centres provide a series of services to women, including one-on-one interviews between survivors and case workers to create a path for the woman to break the cycle of violence; specialised psychological support; free legal aid; support to find work, housing and help in accessing services; mutual and self-help groups; hospitality in shelters; support to survivors' children. All these services are accompanied by transcultural mediation for women who don't speak the country's language. According to the minimum national requirements for

⁴ *Carta della Rete Nazionale dei Centri antiviolenza e delle Case delle donne* https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Carta_della_Rete_Nazionale_dei_Centri_antiviolenza_e_delle_Case_delle_donne.pdf

⁵ <https://dspace.ceid.org.tr/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1/512/ekutuphane2.3.1.4.3.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

anti-violence centres and shelters, as of April 2023 there were 399 anti-violence centres in the country⁶. Some of these are united under Rete D.i.Re, a national anti-violence network that comprises 87 organisations, 106 anti-violence centres and 62 shelters.

Anti-violence centres staff is usually composed by case workers, psychologists and lawyers who are specifically trained about how to support survivors of violence against women with a feminist and gender-sensitive perspective. Since violence against women is often perpetrated by men, support services opt for all female staff, and mediators are often women as well (Nakajima 2005: 65), as also recommended by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2008).

4. FEMINIST TRAINING FOR INTERPRETERS AND MEDIATORS WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As already mentioned, to properly assist survivors in their encounters with different professionals, interpreters need specific training about how to work in contexts of violence against women (Abril Martí *et al.* 2015), to learn about violence against women, acquire specific terminology, handle complex emotions and manage their role among sometimes conflicting expectations.

If community interpreters and mediators are intended as professionals who not only play a linguistic and professional role, but also fulfil a social function (Anderson 2002: 212), their effectiveness relies more on cooperation and integration with other professionals, rather than on exercises of impartiality or neutrality (Tipton 2010; 2017). When working in contexts of violence, interpreters move on the fine line between restrained empathy and detached impartiality, with the goal of giving survivors a voice without undermining their autonomy or taking the provider's responsibility (Bancroft *et al.* 2016: 241). On the one hand, a lack of commitment, neutrality or empathy can cause re-victimisation of women. On the other, intense involvement—which happens especially when interpreters take on functions that don't correspond to them—can raise mistaken expectations in survivors and generate new relations of dependency, hindering their empowerment and agency (Toledano Buendía 2019: 180). Interpreters must then act with the goal of giving women a voice, a subtle moral imperative in which technical neutrality doesn't derive from a detached attitude and must be framed (*Ibid.*).

To reach this goal, some scholars suggest providing interpreters with a feminist education, to better cooperate with other professionals and engage critically in their work, resisting notions of impartiality that reduce the efficacy of contrasting male violence (Norma & Garcia-Caro 2016: 1317). Scholars Lynne Eighinher and Ben Karlin (2011) propose to use the feminist-relational approach as a framework for the work of interpreters. According to them, a feminist education can be a facilitator for interpreters

⁶ <https://www.1522.eu/mappatura-1522/>

to engage more in their work, because of the insight it affords into the lives of women, particularly those facing violence (Norma & Garcia-Caro 2016: 1310). By following feminist principles, violence is not justified, and it is possible to identify and address internalised stereotypes and biases to offer the best possible help (Toledano Buendía 2019: 177). Interpreting in contexts of violence against women requires interpreters to critically reflect on their own beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. In these contexts, technical neutrality is a requirement (i.e. the interpreter doesn't interfere with comments or personal opinions); moral neutrality, however, is not acceptable (Romero 2010: 193), as interpreters who work with survivors must take a stance against violence (Susam-Saraeva *et al.* 2023: 140). The self-awareness afforded by a feminist education can lead interpreters to provide a service grounded in respect and empathy—one that avoids blaming survivors, re-victimising them or culturally excusing the violence (Abril Martí *et al.* 2015). In their encounter with services, survivors can feel re-victimised if interpreters lack a gender perspective and blame them for the abuse. Re-victimisation can also happen when women are not informed about their rights and options, when they are forced to communicate in a language that they don't master and if they are poorly treated by interpreters and case workers (Toledano Buendía 2021: 185). For these reasons, in the past few years a series of courses and initiatives have been created in Italy to properly train transcultural mediators who work with anti-violence centres, to better equip them and other professionals to work with women with a migratory background.

5. TRANSCULTURAL MEDIATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INITIATIVES, PROJECTS AND TRAINING COURSES

A growing awareness of the centrality of mediators in supporting migrant and refugee women who survive violence has led to the creation of projects, materials and training courses specifically addressed to mediators working with anti-violence centres in Italy. In the country, the training and practice of mediators remain fragmented and educational paths are uncoordinated (Cavallari 2025: 574), which makes formal specialised training even more critical.

In 2019, Rete D.i.Re launched the *Leaving Violence. Living Safe* project in collaboration with UNHCR, to assist migrant women who survived violence before and during migration and after arriving in Italy. The aim of the project was twofold: to facilitate migrant, refugee and asylum seekers survivors of violence in accessing anti-violence centres, and to adapt the anti-violence centres' methodology to these women's specific needs. *Leaving Violence. Living Safe* came after the *Samira. Per un'accoglienza competente e tempestiva di donne e ragazze straniere in situazione di violenza e di tratta in arrivo in Italia*⁷ research project. *Samira* was carried out by Rete D.i.Re in partnership with UNHCR in 2016, and was later

⁷ <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/samira-unaccoglienza-competente-tempestiva-delle-donne-ragazze-situazioni-violenza-tratta-italia/>

followed by the *Ensuring meaningful access to service to asylum seeking and refugee women and girls*⁸ pilot project between 2017 and 2018. Data collected during the *Samira* project with 72 participants who work in healthcare services, NGOs, anti-violence centres, anti-trafficking networks and the reception system, showed that mediators play a key role in helping women receive information and support, establish trust, voice their needs and trauma, translating between languages but also deciphering cultural codes. Participants also criticised a “neutral”—i.e. without a gender perspective—approach and lack of training about violence as an obstacle to catering to survivors’ needs and lamented a scarcity of mediators, which caused women’s isolation and increased vulnerability (Pasquero & Palladino 2017). Setting off from these data, *Leaving Violence. Living Safe* was launched to provide mediators with specific knowledge about how to work with migrant and refugee women survivors of violence. Training courses were designed to share the feminist methodology of the D.i.Re network with mediators; a list of trained mediators was created and a handbook with suggestions and guidelines about how to adapt the methodology of anti-violence centres to the needs of women with a migratory background was published (D.i.Re & UNHCR 2020). The project is still ongoing, offering courses provided by social workers, activists, and lawyers with many years of experience working with feminist associations and anti-violence centres. In these courses, mediators learn about the phenomenon of violence against women; acquire knowledge about local services and available resources for survivors; learn specific terminology; develop the ability to observe details or non-verbal cues that can hide indicators of violence; learn how to manage emotionally charged encounters.

Moreover, to improve connections between anti-violence centres and the migrant reception system, D.i.Re cooperated with ARCI—a non-profit Italian organisation—to create *Juma Map*,⁹ a national map of services for asylum seekers and refugees, available in nineteen languages. In addition, the project includes outreach initiatives for asylum seeker and refugee women, both in organised and informal contexts, done by the case workers and mediators of the anti-violence centres involved in the project, to spread knowledge about the support offered and facilitate contact and access to the centres by women who have suffered or are in situations of violence.

Another example of specific training about violence against women provided to transcultural mediators is the training courses organised every year by *Differenza Donna*,¹⁰ an Italian feminist NGO founded in Rome in 1989 with the goal of raising awareness, prevent and combat male violence against women. Since 2020, *Differenza Donna* manages the Italian national helpline 1522, a public service promoted by the Italian Department of Equal Opportunities. The number is active 24/7 and trained case workers/mediators provide

⁸ <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/en/living-violence-living-safe/>

⁹ <https://www.jumamap.it/it/>

¹⁰ https://www.differenzadonna.org/progetti-nazionali/?_gl=1*16e2kv*_up*MQ.*_ga*MTY2NTIwMjg4MC4xNzQ3OTI5MTAy*_ga_VZ614LJH2X*cZ3NDc5MjkxMDIkbzEkZzEkdDE3NDc5MjkxNjAkajAkbDAkaDAkZE1KZDIKVkZYRm9OdjBGQi13b2ZLaE5IWjB5OHdtWTBYWxc

telephonic assistance in multiple languages (Albanian, Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian). Differenza Donna provides training for 1522 operators, and to future case workers and transcultural mediators who will cooperate with anti-violence centres.

At regional level, the Emilia-Romagna region has launched for two consecutive years, in 2023 and 2024,¹¹ two training courses dedicated to transcultural mediators who work with anti-violence centres and anti-trafficking projects in the region, to boost their knowledge about these phenomena and cooperation with case workers. The training courses were promoted by ANCI (the National Association of Italian Municipalities) in collaboration with the Region, with a gender-sensitive focus. Professionals from feminist associations and anti-violence centres were involved in the organisation of the courses, providing specific knowledge about violence against women and how to support survivors with a transcultural and gender-sensitive approach.

6. FEMINIST INTERPRETING

Examples of training courses mentioned in the previous section show a growing awareness of the importance of specific training for mediators working with survivors of violence. Literature shows the key role played by interpreters and mediators in supporting migrant and refugee women who have survived violence, highlighting how these professionals contribute to making services accessible and understandable, and the need for specialised training about how to work in contexts of violence against women (Del Pozo Triviño *et al.* 2014; Del Pozo Triviño *et al.* 2015; Del Pozo Triviño & Toledano Buendía 2016; Del Pozo Triviño 2017; Del Pozo Triviño & Fernandes Del Pozo 2018; Del Pozo Triviño *et al.* 2020; Sullivan *et al.* 2023; Cabeza-Pereiro *et al.* 2024). As mentioned earlier in this article, according to some scholars this training should be informed by a feminist perspective.

A feminist approach to interpreting doesn't only include interpreter training, but also a specific conception of the interpreter's role and ethical stance in the communicative exchange. Scholars Cristina Marey-Castro and María Isabel Del Pozo Triviño (2020) use the expression *Interpretación feminista* (feminist interpreting) to argue for a feminist interpreter training and the need for a decolonial perspective in interpreter education (Susam-Saraeva *et al.* 2023: 138). Abril Martí (2015) also mentions the need to apply a gender perspective to interpreting, especially for mediators who work in contexts where violence against women is discussed. As already mentioned, working with survivors requires technical neutrality, but demands a moral attitude of commitment (Romero 2010: 193). In this sense, a feminist and gender perspective can provide a useful approach to frame the concept of interpreter's role and code of conduct and make technical neutrality compatible with a clear stance against violence.

¹¹ <https://www.anci.emilia-romagna.it/formazione/la-mediazione-culturale-nel-contrasto-alla-violenza-di-genere-cultura-rete-e-mediazione/>

To support this view of feminist interpreting as a useful lens to reframe the community interpreter's role, Norma & Garcia-Caro (2016) set off from Maree Pardy's research with 56 migrant women who had been assisted by interpreters in Melbourne (Pardy 1996) and plead for interpreters' education about gender, gender issues and how to meet communication needs of women who have experienced violence. According to the scholars, interpreting fulfils primarily a social function (Anderson 2002). This view is supported by feminist literature which proposes an understanding of the interpreter's role as "relational" and is based on Eighinger & Karlin (2011) who believe that "the system that best accommodates the diverse factors that interpreters must weigh and manage, including their own ethics and values, is a feminist-relational one". In interpreting, notions of impartiality and neutrality are often influenced by a prescriptive notion of the community interpreter's role which sees empathetic behaviour or involvement as clashing with professionalism and impartiality, and neutrality as "one and the same thing as emotional detachment" (Merlini & Gatti 2015: 155). In settings where violence and sex trafficking are discussed, interpreters' conduct and ethics need to be negotiated considering the human needs of people involved (Rudvin & Pesare 2015: 105). Striking a balance between the empathetic engagement needed to build trust with survivors and professional detachment can be especially challenging for mediators, who are encouraged to take on a proactive role and often share a common country of origin with survivors, which can foster affective relations (Rudvin & Pesare 2015; Baroni 2022; Tessitore *et al.* 2022). True technical neutrality is therefore achievable only through active and critical engagement of interpreters/mediators in their work, which requires a reflective approach and examination of the interpreter's personal beliefs and biases (Toledano Buendía 2019: 177-178). A feminist education can be a facilitator in this sense.

When working in contexts of violence against women, interpreters must be aware of what working with survivors of violence entails, applying the professional codes related to their role, but also being able to flexibly manage them, observing the situation as a whole, taking into account the contextual needs and those of each of the participants in the communication. To this end, interpreters can apply an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989) which considers the multilayered discriminations that migrant and refugee women survivors of violence suffer, and a feminist-relational approach (Lucero García 2015). Lucero García argues that intersectional translation/interpretation conceived from an ethical reflection can be a form of translation oriented toward equality in the hope of facilitating women's access to justice, by assuring them that the interpreter is conscious of the multitude of factors at play in violence against women and is working responsibly and ethically.

In the realm of Translation studies much research on the topic of women, gender, feminism and translation has been produced since the 1990s (Castro & Ergun 2018: 125); Interpreting studies seem, on the contrary, to be lagging behind, perhaps as a consequence of those aforementioned notions of impartiality and neutrality that presuppose that interpreters don't have a political stance (Susam-Saraeva *et al.* 2023: 140). Suffice to

say that the SOS-VICS project is, as of today, the only research project explicitly promoting a gender-informed perspective in interpreters' training and that very few interpreting scholars advocate for a feminist perspective applied to interpreting (i.e. Lucero García 2015; Norma & García-Caro 2016; Reimóndez Meilán 2020; Susam-Saraeva *et al.* 2023). From a feminist perspective, however, it is acknowledged that complete impartiality is unachievable, as in every mediated interaction all participants, including the interpreter, bring their own social identities, backgrounds and understanding of the world—in other words—bring *the self* (Angelelli 2003: 16). By acknowledging that interpreters and mediators cannot abide to a *conduit* model of communication, interpreters can better manage their involvement in the communicative exchange, handle the emotional charge of the exchange and expectations from other professionals. Feminist training could lead interpreters to have a better understanding of violence against women as a sociocultural phenomenon, to apply a gender perspective and work in a professional and respectful way with survivors, translating with more accuracy and supporting them in making emancipated and autonomous decisions (Toledano Buendía 2019: 180). By incorporating a feminist view in their work, not only can interpreters correct gender-biased ideas affecting their professional practice but also be inspired to “collectively act in service of the feminist critique of patriarchal sexuality” (Norma & García-Caro 2016: 1312) and take a political stance against violence, starting from their subjectivity and positionality (Susam-Saraeva *et al.* 2023: 148).

7. CONCLUSIONS: FEMINIST INTERPRETING AS ADVOCACY FOR SURVIVORS' RIGHTS

With the increasing number of women with a migratory background approaching anti-violence centres in the past few years, a growing awareness of the specific needs of these survivors has led to reflections on the role played by language barriers in accessing services and the role of interpreters and transcultural mediators. In Italy, mediation first developed in the Nineties, but it is only recently that mediators started working with anti-violence centres, to meet the needs of migrant and refugee women. After retracing the foundation of anti-violence centres by the feminist movement in the 1970s, this contribution delved into the specific feminist methodology followed in these spaces, and how this methodology can change and adapt in the encounter with women with different migratory backgrounds. The chapter later explored the role played by mediators in anti-violence centres and their need of specific training to better deal with survivors' retellings of violence, emotions and trauma. It is the contention of some scholars that this training should be informed by a gender and feminist perspective. By acknowledging that each interpreter takes into the communicative exchange their own self and positioning, a feminist intersectional perspective (Lucero García 2015; Norma & García-Caro 2016) could better equip these professionals not only with specific knowledge about violence against women, but also with tools to take a technically neutral, but morally positioned stance against violence.

With the aim of offering the best support and give voice to survivors, in the past few years training courses have been organised by different Italian associations and NGOs, bringing together different professionals from anti-violence centres and mediators, to boost cooperation and best practices. Existing reports recommend the creation of networks of trained mediators specialised in contrasting violence and sex trafficking and a systematisation of the use of mediators in all services (Pasquero & Palladino 2017).

When migrant women turn to anti-violence centres, transcultural mediation is crucial to translate what is said, but mostly to create a relationship of trust between case workers and survivors. Even though violence against women crosses every social class, race, culture, age, and country of origin, there are some women, e.g. migrant women, asylum seekers and refugees, who, because of specific conditions linked to their status can be subjected to multiple discriminations and institutional isolation (Osservatorio Regionale sulla Violenza di Genere 2024). Interpreting with a feminist approach can help transcultural mediators see themselves as key figures for migrant and refugee women to approach services in an environment of fragile access to rights (Reimóndez Meilán 2020) and to reach the ultimate goal of the interpreter's work: communication under equal conditions (Reimóndez Meilán 2017).

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