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## TRANSLATING THE POSTCOLONIAL IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS: DISRUPTIVE TRANSFERS ON THE BORDERS

*Judith MISRAHI-BARAK and Srilata RAVI*

Postcolonial scholarship has been primarily concerned with cultural translation, that is, translation understood figuratively as movement between cultures, and has had less regard for language issues, while translation studies has emphasized the complexity of translation as a linguistic practice that involves intercultural mediation. The time has come for dialogue between these two strands of thought, and for recognition of the importance of translation as not only a fundamental aspect of contemporary communication, but also a major shaping force in literary history around the world. (Bassnett 2013)

Translation is the fundamental fabric that weaves global postcolonial cultures together. Susan Bassnett's insightful statement quoted above is reflected in the growing number of publications that have brought together two different academic strands, namely postcolonial studies and translation studies, in creative ways across several geographical regions, linguistic contexts and historical circumstances.

It will be useful to note here that while the French word for translation, '*traduire*' has kept to the meaning of the old Latin root until the beginning of the 19th century ('*traducere*', *i. e.* '*trans-ducere*', or '*conduire au-delà, faire passer*', leading to a place beyond), the English word, originating from the old French '*translater*' (from the Latin '*translatum*', past participle of '*transferre*'), has retained both meanings, *i. e.*, *translation* of bodies and *transfer* of languages. In the modern postcolonial context of multiple migrations, traumatic relocations and forced

adjustments to new linguistic locales, one can then certainly understand Salman Rushdie's formulation, 'Having been borne across the world, we are translated men' (17).<sup>1</sup> A postcolonial text, therefore, typically *embodies* several histories of language travel in a space where cultural transfers (or the impossibility of transfer), *i. e.*, the idea of translatability (or untranslatability) can be interrogated. These transfers (whether fully or partially complete or incomplete) are inextricably linked to relationships of power which support acts of translation in all stages (*i. e.*, in the choice of source texts, target languages, translators and publication outlets). These relationships have been framed for the most part in binary terms of metropolitan centre versus resisting periphery, or of superior cosmopolitan versus inferior vernacular languages. However, the notions of cultural and literary transactions cannot be examined effectively if we do not consider the heterogeneity of language practice in postcolonial societies. 'Postcolonial writers, often bi- or trilingual, constantly negotiate their use of the metropolitan literary language by drawing on the rich substratum of their other linguistic knowledge, in a process of semantic widening' (Orsini and Srivatsava 2013: 325).

Arguing for a new understanding of postcoloniality in translation studies, Paul Bandia (2014) focuses on the multiple modes of translation and intercultural communication within postcolonial space, 'one that reaches beyond the dichotomous framework based on an oppositional discourse, pitting the West against the East, to look at class and power differentials within the postcolony' (420). But does this linguistic heteroglossia within the source culture impact on the act of translation

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1. In the *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 'traduire' refers to the act of 'mener d'un endroit dans un autre; par extens., transformer,' thus keeping to the Latin root of *traducere* (*i. e.* *trans-ducere*), or 'conduire au-delà, faire passer'. It is interesting to note that the English 'to translate' instead comes from the old French 'translater', which derives from the Latin 'translatum', past participle of 'transferre'. The first five editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (from 1694 to 1798) also refer to 'traduire' as the act of the transfer of bodies—'*Transférer d'un lieu à un autre. Il ne se dit que des personnes.*' This kind of transfer occurred during the 18th century, when slavery was at its most violent peak. In French, the meaning of 'traduire' as referring to the transfer from one language to another only emerges as the dominant definition in the 1835 edition of the *Dictionnaire*, and the previous meaning disappears from usage. In the English language, however, both meanings are contained in the word 'translate'. In the Oxford English Dictionary the word 'translate' first refers to the following meanings: 'to bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport', but also 'to undergo a translational motion', and 'to turn from one language into another'; 'to change into another language retaining the sense'; 'to render; also, to express in other words, to paraphrase.'

in similar ways across history and across geo-cultural zones? Does translation as a process of power operate under comparable conditions across different linguistic spaces? How do translated selves and self-translators negotiate meaning simultaneously across multiple linguistic borders? How does the heterogeneity of language practice involved in the act of literal and cultural translations impact production and circulation of 'translated' bodies (both texts and selves) in postcolonial contexts? The present collection addresses these questions that link linguistic heterogeneity, postcolonial resistance and border identities within Translation Studies. For the sake of cohesion, we have limited the geopolitical zones of translational contact to two colonial/European languages, namely French and English.

The regional languages involved cover postcolonial, cultural spaces where Mauritian, Haitian, Reunionese and Louisianian Creole, Gikuyu, Wolof, Swahili and Arabic are spoken. This collection further contributes to scholarship already published within this particular intercultural landscape (Batchelor and Bisdorff; Kippur) through its specific emphasis on linguistic heteroglossia. The different examples of literal and figurative translations analysed reveal that the very process of translating activates the untranslatable and responds to fluctuations in geopolitics. As one of the volume's contributors Jean Anderson observes in her chapter, 'no two postcolonial literatures—and potentially no two postcolonial texts—, should be automatically treated the same.' The division of the volume into four sections respects the historical and cultural significance of different literary and textual contexts while at the same time underscoring geo-political connectedness (and disconnectedness) through acts of translation.

Islands in history and in representation can be seen as spaces of isolation and of relation. This is what provides the first section of the volume, entitled *Translating Islands*, with its main focus and raison d'être. Contained by tight geographical limits and yet openly exposed to oceanic expanses, islands as marine thresholds are translation zones of in-betweenness par excellence. Scholars in Island studies privileging marine space over territorial space have emphasized unrootedness, flux and mobility of island identities. New scholarship foregrounds islands, long considered as centre-dependent outposts, as 'specific locations generating their own potentially self-reflective colonial metaphors' (Edmond and Smith 2003: 6). How do translators, and more specifically remote island writers, negotiate meaning making processes for global

audiences? How are postcolonial island histories imagined in acts of translations? How does islandness impact trajectories of translation? These are some of the issues raised in the essays in this section. Jean Anderson's chapter analyses the translation of English- and French-language indigenous-authored texts from New Zealand and Tahiti where multiple histories of colonization have produced heterogeneous source cultures in the Pacific island region. Tymoscko (1999) claims that the 'culture or tradition of a post-colonial writer acts as a metatext which is rewritten—explicitly and implicitly, as both background and foreground—in the act of literary creation' (21). Translators and post-colonial writers are caught in the dilemma between producing texts containing significant amounts of opaque information and offering a large amount of explanatory material. In the case of postcolonial Pacific Islands the act of translation demands a negotiation of diversity and fragmentation without denying commonalities between island cultures. This, Jean Anderson argues, necessitates a certain amount of paratextual 'intervention' on the part of the translator. One can of course wonder whether such an approach does not run the risk of making the reader forget that a certain dose of opacity and heterogeneity will always remain. Yet, Anderson suggests that such a paratextual strategy will, and should, lead to the creation of an informed 'community of readers' within the Polynesian Pacific triangle. That islands even if geographically isolated remain culturally and politically connected on global, regional and transnational scales is exemplified in the case of Haitian literatures. Making a case for translation as a metaphor for 'transnation', and referring to the writings of Lyonel Trouillot, Edwidge Danticat, Dany Laferrière and Marie-Célie Agnant, Yolaine Parisot argues that the Haitian novel translates between the written languages of high culture, French, English, the language of popular oral Haitian cultures (island writing as '*littérature de l'intérieur*') and diasporic writing. In another exploration of islands in translation, Julia Waters traces the transcolonial trajectory of an Indian ocean island novel from Mauritius to India *via* France; and from French to English, with incursions of Creole and Hindi through an analysis of Ananda Devi's self-translation. Waters argues that Ananda Devi's rewriting of her own text, *Pagli*, is a resistant rescripting of the island of Mauritius's slave and indenture past within the geo-political space of the Indian. While an independent island of Mauritius can negotiate its island identity within regional dynamics, the post-departmental island of Reunion continues to remain in hegemonic relation with the European metropole even as it is anchored

precariously in local Creole cultures. Linguistic heterogeneity is as much about linguistic plurality as it is about linguistic impermanence. Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's interest in literatures from the Reunion island is centred around the basic postcolonial question of linguistic precariousness of the Creole language: can translation have meaning when the source language is continually changing? How does one translate language that is haunted by the broken memories of other languages that constitute it? Using self-translation and bilingual writing as case studies Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo defines translation as the cohabitation of memories in a plural and hybrid insular space. The postcolonial writer as translator of other texts or as self translator makes us all the more aware on the one hand, of the resisting potential of language, and on the other, the latent incompleteness of the process. Translation empowers relocation and redefinition of the source culture as well as of the target culture.

David Damrosch (2003) argues that world literature is work that 'gains in translation'. Indeed, we need to go beyond the dichotomy foreignization / domestication in acts of translation to view intercultural encounters as multidimensional and hybrid sites of resilience, subversion and complicity. Issues of cultural representativity and strategic negotiations of meaning become even more complicated if we consider the multilingual nature of source cultures that inform 'world' texts. The second section, entitled *Translators' Africa*, that showcases intercultural and intracultural translations of Africa underlines translation as a constellation of points of conjecture and disjuncture where author, text and reader are continually engaged in the transaction of differences within and across linguistic and national limits. A postcolonial text is a world text even before it undergoes translation because it is inflected by histories of transnational affiliations and world-wide institutional recognitions. Jan Steyn compares Condé's *Histoire de la femme cannibale* with its translation by Philcox, *The Story of the Cannibal Woman*, intersectionally with the 2015 Man-Booker International events of the RhodesMustFall movement in Cape Town to investigate the impact of geographies of institutional recognition on translations. Where Jan Steyn's study demonstrates the multi-layered dislocation that occurs in global acts of implicitly and explicitly translating Africa, Tobias Warner examines the multiple journeys of Ousmane Sembène's cinematic expressions of African (Senegalese) postcoloniality to reveal the visibility (audibility) of the untranslated (unspoken). Comparing

the readily available print of Sembène's *Noire de...* with the restored version of the uncut film, Warner argues that the writer/director converts the financial and ideological restraints imposed by French funding sources into meditations on translatability and untranslatability. At the time Sembène could not make a film in which a character speaks in an African language. By making the viewer access the protagonist Diouana's subjectivity through the voice of an Haitian actress, Sembène emphasizes the fact that a translation has indeed taken place and the performance is transformed into a diasporic performance of 'Africa(s)'. If Sembène's cinematic exercise in filming African postcoloniality becomes an act of translating the untranslatable which in turn ends up transcending national boundaries, Charlotte Baker's essay shows that cultural subversion within heterolingual contexts of nation foregrounds lateral untranslatability (between source languages themselves) as norm and not an exception. She studies Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o's preoccupation with the question of language in *Wizard of the Crow* (self-translated from the original *Murogi wa Kagogo* in Gikuyu) and the text's critical status as self-translation. Written in standard English, this multilingual novel includes untranslated passages of Swahili (including Sheng), Arabic, and Hindi, that reflect the nation's linguistic diversity. The resulting texts resist readings that look for consistency, homogeneity and pattern. Translation's unpredictableness and subversive potential notwithstanding, it still contributes to domesticating differences in an attempt to render the unfamiliar (Africa as pain) familiar to a metropolitan / cosmopolitan audience. Jean Anderson has argued in her contribution to this volume on indigenous-authored Pacific island literatures that paratexts are vital instruments to create a community of readers. In the translational process of transforming the local to 'world' texts, paratexts as translation exercise power over the source text, thus maintaining the imbalanced relationship between the metropole and the works of subjects who are perceived as culturally 'other'. Catherine Gilbert in her study of Rwandan women's testimonial literature shows how Rwandan women's published testimonies have undergone a process of cultural translation that focuses on the target culture. In this case paratextual material is used to contextualise, to inform, and to familiarise, to reduce the gap between the experience of the Western reader and the pain of the Rwandan women.

The exercise of translation occurs in dual and multiple spaces of conjuncture and disjuncture. Megan MacDonald observes, that

the Mediterranean is 'this famously multiple space, one that hovers constantly between translation and untranslatability, borders and nation-states, liquid and solid'. This section, entitled *The Mediterranean as/in translation*, covers North African texts in implicit and explicit cultural interactions with Europe across the Mediterranean where the marine space itself becomes a metaphor of translation. Malika Mokkaïdem's *N'Zid*, MacDonald argues, is a novel requiring translation between desert and sea, North and South Mediterraneans, Arabic and French. She reads the novel in tandem with Frantz Fanon's multilingual passport, located at the Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) archive in Normandy. In her reading of *N'Zid* and Fanon's passport as Mediterranean maps, Fanon's archive becomes a metaphor for Algeria translated back into Normandy/metropolitan France, and the book *N'Zid*, the raft of transnational hauntings borne between North and South Mediterranean shores. While MacDonald's essay looks at the translated body in the figurative sense (the Mediterranean as a body of water) by emphasizing the fluidity of cultural transfers, Delphine Munos looks at a body of texts-retranslations, re-readings and re-writings of *L'Étranger*—to investigate the connections and disconnections between Mediterranean Africa and France. She explores the various English translations of *L'Étranger* and situates them in relation to different epochs of reception of Camus' classic, both in France and abroad. Her readings of the relationship between Camus and his native Algeria can be considered as the continuing 'carrying over' of meanings between North and South Mediterraneans.

Affirming that cultures are situated entirely on the borders Antonio Sousa Ribeiro (2004) argues for translation as a space of meeting and articulation. In this definition of translation as border space or third space, the point of contact between the same and the other reveals the prevalence of a relation of tension between both frames of reference. Ribeiro adds that the act of translation carries over or transgresses limits (linguistic, cultural, academic, media), while at the same time it remains situated on the border 'to occupy the spaces of articulation and to permanently negotiate the conditions of that articulation' (189). Such a view, Ribeiro argues, regards translation not as homogenizing differences but an act that foregrounds difference and brings us to reflect on the inner heterogeneity of cultures. Ribeiro's 'border theory' privileges fragility and instability. It demonstrates that the accepted topoi of a given culture can no longer be considered as presuppositions



in the act of translation (193). Following a 'border theory' of translation, language and culture themselves become objects of contention and argumentation of negotiation as the essays on North American cultures in this section, entitled *Americas in translation*, demonstrate. Lynn Blin reads 'Two Kinds' from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* as the story of two Americas and two Englishes. She examines how the translation of English into English is at the source of misunderstanding and tension and makes a case that in writing about the immigrant experience Tan wants to stress the importance of translation to understand the classic conflict between first and second generation immigrants in U.S. immigrant fiction. In her essay on 19th century Louisianan fiction Anne Malena shows that acts of translation negotiate meaning across external linguistic borders and inner linguistic borders. Reading the complexities of intercultural transfers between, Creoles, Yankees and European immigrants in 19th century Louisianan society in the works by George Washington Cable and German immigrant Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, Malena argues that the authors perform as 'translators' in their novels because of their acquired awareness of languages and their concern for social and political issues in New Orleans at the time. Border writing as translation is constitutive of American writing, present since the Europeans arrived in the earliest of colonies and functions within the limits of the city. Where Ann Malena and Lynn Blin read cultures at the borders within American society in the 19th and 20th centuries, Mai Hussein investigates interstitial aesthetics in 21st century North American theatre. In her essay Hussein asks if writing on the borders between different media could be a form of translation. Does such writing redefine the very act of translation? In her analysis of Lebanese born Québécois playwright Wadji Mouawad's *Seuls*, Hussein reads translation as a bridge between drama techniques, media and languages, that creates a new translational poetics of feeling in postcolonial theatre. This kind of intermedial writing, Hussein argues, becomes the 'third space' of tension/translation between written text, stage, and performing bodies.

As Bassnett and Trivedi observe 'in our age of the valorization of migrancy, exile and diaspora, the word translation has come a full circle and reverted from its figurative literary meaning of an interlingual transaction to its etymological physical meaning of locational disrupture' (12). The essays in this volume demonstrate that as an act which is both transaction and rupture, translation in postcolonial contexts embraces the appropriate and inappropriate, the visible and the invisible, the

evident and the obscure to produce creative semantic tensions—‘disruptive transfers’—on the borders. They all show how translation is multiple and constantly dynamic and creative, ‘a life-sustaining act, a life-empowering moment shared between two generations in an ongoing process of carrying the past into the present’ (Brodzki 2007: 4).

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