

# On the Challenges of Transnational Feminist Translation Studies

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## Article abstract

The term “transnational” developed over the 20th century to describe cosmopolitan, multicultural societies that stem from migration; the concept of transnational feminist translation studies adds references to postcolonial feminisms to this term, offering new collaborative avenues of research and publication. This article reports on the challenges such collaborations pose, and how they have impacted an early attempt to produce an anthology of scholarly texts in the area of transnational feminist translation studies (Flotow and Farahzad, 2017). It develops a number of specific areas of difficulty: the “hegemony” of English in academic publishing and how this affects the circulation of feminist texts from beyond the Anglo-American Eurozone; the issue of power relations between editors and authors, cultures, and languages; questions of inclusion and exclusion, especially as different religious/cultural backgrounds affect scholarly discussion; and the importance of women’s/feminist diversity as well as the risks/benefits of a universalizing discourse. While the article is concerned with “challenges”, it ends with a call for more such collaborative transnational work to re-energize and promote the field of feminist translation studies worldwide.

# On the Challenges of Transnational Feminist Translation Studies

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## Abstract

The term “transnational” developed over the 20th century to describe cosmopolitan, multicultural societies that stem from migration; the concept of transnational feminist translation studies adds references to postcolonial feminisms to this term, offering new collaborative avenues of research and publication. This article reports on the challenges such collaborations pose, and how they have impacted an early attempt to produce an anthology of scholarly texts in the area of transnational feminist translation studies (Flotow and Farahzad, 2017). It develops a number of specific areas of difficulty: the “hegemony” of English in academic publishing and how this affects the circulation of feminist texts from beyond the Anglo-American Eurozone; the issue of power relations between editors and authors, cultures, and languages; questions of inclusion and exclusion, especially as different religious/cultural backgrounds affect scholarly discussion; and the importance of women’s/feminist diversity as well as the risks/benefits of a universalizing discourse. While the article is concerned with “challenges”, it ends with a call for more such collaborative transnational work to re-energize and promote the field of feminist translation studies worldwide.

**Keywords:** transnational feminist translation studies, “hegemony” of English, power relations, inclusion/exclusion, women’s/feminist diversity in translation

## Résumé

Le terme « transnational » s’est développé au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle pour décrire les sociétés cosmopolites et multiculturelles qui émanent des mouvements de migration. Dans le champ de la traductologie, les approches féministes transnationales sont venues y ajouter une référence aux féminismes postcoloniaux, ouvrant la voie à de nouvelles collaborations de recherche et de publication. Le présent article fait état des défis que posent ces collaborations et des répercussions qu’ils ont eues sur une première ébauche de projet d’anthologie de textes consacrés aux approches féministes transnationales en traductologie (Flotow et Farahzad, 2017). L’article aborde des questions telles que l’« hégémonie » de l’anglais dans les publications universitaires et ses conséquences sur la diffusion des écrits féministes produits en dehors de la sphère anglo-américaine ou de la zone

euro; les rapports de force qui s'exercent entre éditeurs, auteurs, cultures et langues; les questions d'inclusion et d'exclusion, particulièrement lorsque des enjeux religieux ou culturels interviennent dans les discussions universitaires; l'importance de la diversité des femmes et des féministes de même que les risques et bénéfices d'un discours universalisant. Bien que l'article mette en lumière les « défis » que pose la collaboration transnationale, il se conclut sur une invitation à accroître cette forme de collaboration dans le champ des approches féministes de la traductologie, de façon à le ré-énergiser et à favoriser son essor à l'échelle mondiale.

**Mots-clés :** approches féministes transnationales en traductologie; « hégémonie » de l'anglais; rapports de force; inclusion/exclusion; diversité des femmes et des féministes en traduction

A number of voices—scholars, translators, critics—has for years been calling for *international* work in translation studies, and this includes feminist translation studies, as will be discussed in this article. Here is one such insistent voice. In her 2009 article arguing for internationalizing translation studies, Maria Tymoczko writes:

I do not envision merely increased associations of individuals or groups, good as that is, but a process in which we as scholars, teachers and translators move beyond our enclosed mental worlds to look beyond the boundaries of our own cultures, to see what we can learn conceptually and practically about translation from the world at large. (2009, p. 404)

“Our enclosed mental worlds” here evokes the traditions and conventions with which Anglo-American/Eurocentric cultures conceptualize translation, and which rule their approaches to translation studies. Tymoczko views these as strongly impacted by the changes to print technologies in the late Middle Ages, where highly political questions about Bible translation surfaced, creating and maintaining unfulfillable demands for equivalence<sup>1</sup> (Emmerich, 2016), and which other cultures may not share.

Tymoczko began developing these arguments in an earlier publication in which she proposed to “look ahead” into the future of translation studies. After commenting on the increasing involvement of “other cultures” in the discipline, due in part to the rise of English as a global means of communication, she turns to some of the less attractive aspects of this phenomenon, seeing the spread of English-

1. See Karen Emmerich's recent *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals* (2016) for a sustained and very sharp criticism and rejection of the dogma of equivalence, faithfulness, fidelity and the like in literary translation.

language translation studies as “a form of intellectual hegemony” (Tymozcko, 2005, p. 1087), where

The reliance on and promulgation of Westernized perspectives in a field dedicated to intercultural communication and in a field becoming increasingly internationalized is clearly an unstable situation. (*ibid.*)

While “international” voices in the field have doubtless increased in the thirteen years since Tymozcko’s article was published<sup>2</sup>, in feminist translation studies such voices have only recently begun to emerge. And over this time, the language has changed somewhat: while Tymozcko calls for more “international” translation studies, feminist networks are using the term “transnational.” The term *international* seems to imply largely official, diplomatic channels and international organisms, while *transnational* evokes concerned usefulness, helpfulness, shared and collaborative communication across and despite borders and languages to promote mutual interests.

Recent texts on the term “transnational” seem to agree on these points, seeing it as referring to the movement beyond borders and solely national concerns on the one hand, and mobilizing a sense of collaboration, support and understanding. In regard to the disregard for national borders, for example, Pierre-Yves Saunier describes early 20th century uses of the term “transnationalism” in the USA as coining “the sense of belonging that would go beyond existing nationalisms, and amount to world citizenship” (2009, p. 2) and describes scholars of European origin by the 1970s “using the term [transnational] to underline a host of non-governmental activities, from terrorism to religious or political activities [since] they felt it stressed their difference from interstate actors much more than ‘international’ did” (*ibid.*, p. 5). In regard to the “trans” prefix more generally in academic work in English, Saunier points to terms such as “translocality”, “translocal”, “transnations”, invented in anthropology and the social sciences in the 1980s, which also “flirted along with “transnational”, “transnationalism”, and “transnationals” (*ibid.*, p. 6). This terminology proliferated in cultural studies, and was used liberally in a journal entitled *Public Culture* that became the platform for interdisciplinary researchers, “many with Indian origins” (*ibid.*) who investigated cosmopolitan

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2. An indication of this internationalization, at least within Europe, is an article which studies the English abstracts of Translation Studies articles published in Spanish, pointing to the need to produce coherent versions summaries for international readers (Linder, 2014).

cultures. The collaborative, supportive nuances of the “transnational” are emphasized in recent work on migration by Joachim Schroeder where “transnationalisation” refers to the increasing “movement of goods, people and information across national boundaries” (2009, p. 1) which is then seen as leading to “feelings of belonging together, common cultural roots, interlinking in communication, and working relationships” (Pries, 2008, p. 44 et seq., cited in Schroeder, 2009, p. 1). From this “trans”-perspective, migration may lead to the formation of “close-knit stable *social spaces and social structures*, going beyond the borders of national states” (Schroeder, 2009, p. 1; emphasis in original). Both Saunier and Schroeder show how the terminology around “transnational” moves the discussion beyond political borders, and both ascribe certain connotations of cooperation and sharing to it—but they also note contradictions: Saunier points to a right-wing discourse that sees “transnational progressives” undermining national interests and governance (2009, p. 8), and Schroeder notes criticisms in terms of un-addressed social inequalities, gender issues, education of migrants and their successful integration in host cultures. It seems there are also darker sides to the “transnational”.

In what follows, I present and discuss the challenges that can arise in a rather broad sweep toward transnational feminist translation studies. I will refer in particular to one early attempt to develop such a transnational academic discourse—the production of *Translating Women. Different Voices and New Horizons* (Flotow and Farahzad, 2017). This project, which I initiated and co-edited, began in 2012 and took over four years to complete. Mutual *feminist* interests drove the work, and principles of collaborative knowledge production and knowledge exchange were pursued in order to undermine what has come to be seen as the major “West to East” or “North to South” vectors of feminist knowledge flows (basically from the Anglo-American Eurozone to the rest of the world). The goal of the project was to trigger, attract, collect and publish the work of scholars from around the world who work with feminist initiatives and on feminist ideas, as they apply to and work in feminist translation studies. A very small number of academics beyond the Anglo-American Eurozone seemed to be publishing in the field when the project started—Hala Kamal in Egypt and Min Dongchau in China are two of the rare references encountered at the time—and the texts that existed were dispersed in socio-

linguistics, women's studies, or cultural studies journals. Very little was available in languages other than English.

The transnational aspect of feminist scholarship in translation studies is not without its challenges, and the problem of English as global language is one of them. Tymoczko may write in 2005 that "[t]he rise of English as a world language has contributed to [...] (e)xciting trends in translation studies reflecting the increased internationalization" of the field (p. 1086), but this rise of English is also viewed as an absolute menace. One of the more vociferous recent feminist voices on this point is that of Quebec academic, Francine Descarries (2014). In the special issue of *Signs* devoted to "Translation, Feminist Scholarship and the Hegemony of English" she attacks the current situation where she claims "Anglo-Saxon countries exert a virtual monopoly on knowledge dissemination and its evaluation" (Descarries, 2014, p. 564). This situation, largely due to the enormous amount of scholarly publishing produced in English, has the following consequences, according to Descarries:

- The marginalization of large segments of feminist thought worldwide;
- The isolation of those researchers who work on/in national or linguistic peripheries;
- The requirement for researchers from other languages and cultures to rely on and work in "structures outside their social framework" (*ibid.*, p. 565) in order to read and publish;
- Gatekeeping functions of English-publishing, which not only privilege materials written by English-language researchers but control the form and content (themes and topics) to be published;
- The tendency for unilingual anglophone scholars to feel their unilingualism relieves them of any "obligation to know about others' work" (*ibid.*, p. 566), which causes them not to see the need (or be unable to) open up to "other perspectives and cultural realities" (*ibid.*, p. 568), which is a major impediment to transnational work.

Descarries is not the only one who sees a major source of the problems listed above in academic publishing today<sup>3</sup>, where the lan-

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3. Other recent authors who have studied the challenges related to English-language academic publishing include Ken Hyland (2016) and Linus Salö (2017).

guage of scholarly discourse “merge[s] almost entirely with that of [...] English-speaking science and scholarship” (*ibid.*, p. 565). The reasons for this rise of English in international communications of all kinds are, of course, various, and have been described by David Crystal in *English as a Global Language* (2003, pp. 29-122). They have come out of geographical/historical and socio-cultural developments of the last 200 years and derive among other things from the effects of British colonialism, the English industrial revolution, the growth of the USA in the early 20th century, its enormous media influence, and the powerful anglophone presence in the internet since the early 1990s. While the question of scholarly publishing is just one, significant, aspect of this global impact, the problem is now being accentuated by the language of search engines and indexing, as authors who publish in languages other than English are systematically missed, ignored, or left out by automated search mechanisms, that have been developed largely in and for English (Tatsuya, González-Varo and Sutherland, 2016)<sup>4</sup>.

The dominance of English in women’s studies, feminist work, and translation studies cannot help but irritate those who are not part of the “dominant voice” and may therefore be perceived or see themselves as “specific, or culturally distinct” (Descarries, 2014, p. 564). This is a particularly sensitive issue in regard to feminist thinking, where the binary opposition of “dominant” male sex and “other” (second) female sex was emphatically pointed out in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe* (1949). For post-Beauvoir feminisms to fall into the same trap of first/second, or dominant/other, or North/South, West/East is to repeat a nefarious pattern—as has been documented by numerous theorists and critics from Chandra Mohanty in 2003 to María Reimóndez, who published in 2017 an (English-language) article on this topic of English

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4. The number of English-language periodicals compared to those produced in other languages are an indication of the overwhelming global power of English in academia. Descarries evokes the problem with regard to women’s studies (2014, p. 565), but it applies across the board. Relatively recent studies show, for example, that enormous gaps exist in numbers of publications: where there were 28,100 academic journals available in English in 2008, there were 6,800 in German, 4,000 in Mandarin, 3,500 in Spanish, and 3,000 in French (Lobachev, 2008). These figures have doubtless changed, and statistics show that English is even more predominant in “hard sciences” than in the humanities or “soft sciences” (Research Trends/Elsevier), but they unquestionably help maintain the dominance of English in academic work.

hegemony in the other recent book on transnational feminist translation studies, *Feminist Translation Studies* (Castro and Ergun, 2017).

### **Translating Feminist Academic Work**

One of the questions that arises is whether, and if so how, translation can address or moderate some of the anxieties and resentments that develop from the apparent dominance of English. Can the translation of academic (feminist) texts facilitate and democratize communication and impact? Can translation support reciprocal interests and mutual benefits of transnational feminist work, thereby annulling the “colonialist” power of English and allowing scholars to publish in their own languages? While there are translation projects underway to make some French women-focused academic work available in English<sup>5</sup>, the effects or impact of such translation is in no way clear.

Gayatri Spivak’s 1992 article, “Politics of Translation”, was among the first to address the less helpful aspects of translation in regard to feminist work, pointing out post-colonial weaknesses in certain translation practices that simplified texts for “easy reading” and disregarded the differences between women writers and their political stances—thus levelling differences between the cultures from which work was imported, and serving reductionist thinking. And scholars continue to remark on how women’s texts from other cultures are (mis)-appropriated through translation for various, usually easy-reading, purposes: Marilyn Booth (2017), for example, has detailed how her translation of the Saudi novel *Girls of Riyadh* was adapted by the publisher and the author of the Arabic text to make it “work” according to their purposes in English; Mengying Jiang (2017) recently discussed how Gladys Yang’s 1980s English translations of Chinese women’s texts from the People’s Republic of China were given a deliberately feminist slant by Virago publisher in London; and Caroline Summers (2017) has studied how Christa Wolf’s novel *Kassandra* (1985) was instrumentalized into an iconic work of American feminism through its translation and reception in feminist academic circles in the USA. Descarries, for her part, does not consider translation—from English into other

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5. The women’s history journal *Clio* was selected for translation into English, and funded by the CNRS. Personal interview with editor of English translations, Sian Reynolds, June 2018.



languages or from other languages into English—a solution for the unequal communications she describes. She writes:

While translation makes it possible to disseminate ideas to a certain extent, there are nevertheless few concepts or models of interpretation that can be shared among different cultures in a completely analogous fashion. (Descarries, 2014, p. 566)

Most translation studies scholars would agree that translation “in a completely analogous fashion” is hardly likely, and virtually any comparative study of translated feminist texts would confirm this finding. Translation changes a text.

Nevertheless, translation continues, and translation studies continue to pay attention to questions of feminism, women’s work, gender critique, and sexual difference. Indeed, the need for feminist translation studies is seen as pressing. Various scholars confirm that the “problematic of translation has become an important domain for feminist contention” (Costa and Alvarez, 2014, p. 558), and a recent book on the translational contacts and communicational misfirings between US Latina and Latin American feminists explores this problematic, although in largely metaphorical terms, where “translation” is a term for intercultural contact of all kinds (Alvarez *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, East European studies of the rush of translations produced in the 1990s with funding from organisms such as the Soros and Ford Foundations have focused on the effects of this work, and shown that not only do these translations sometimes fall short of expectations (Barchunova, 2006), they also seriously change and confuse the issues they set out to make available (Slavova, 2014). As translation studies scholars know, the “travels of discourses and practices across geopolitical, disciplinary, and other borders encounter formidable roadblocks and migratory checkpoints” (Costa and Alvarez, 2014, p. 558), and because documents relating to women, feminism, gender, sexual difference are almost always culturally sensitive, they are likely to encounter rather larger roadblocks (Flotow and Scott, 2016).

A highly-visible publishing and translation project brings these two issues—diverging feminist knowledge and English-language “hegemony”—together in noteworthy ways: Barbara Cassin’s 2004 *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* sets up “languages” as one of the most urgent problems posed by Europe, and proposes two possible solutions:

choisir une langue dominante, dans laquelle se feront désormais les échanges – un anglo-américain mondialisé; ou bien jouer le maintien de la pluralité, en rendant manifestes à chaque fois le sens et l'intérêt des différences, seule manière de faciliter réellement la communication entre les langues et les cultures. (Cassin, 2004, p. 1).

we could choose a dominant language in which exchanges will take place from now on, a *globalized Anglo-American*. Or we could gamble on the retention of many languages, making clear on every occasion the meaning and the interest of the differences—the only way of really facilitating communication between languages and cultures. (Cassin, 2014, p. xvii; my emphasis).

Again, the “Anglo-American” looms large as a spectre threatening Europe; the second solution to this threat, which refuses the “globalized Anglo-American”, is the one the CNRS, the French government funding body that supported the enormous project that ensued, evidently privileged. The *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* ended up as a huge compendium of terms from many different languages of European philosophical writings, with lengthy and erudite discussions about the different entries and diachronic descriptions of the changes in meaning an individual term has undergone as it has been deployed in other European languages. It emphasizes the many differences in meaning that are not only due to the traditions of the source language and culture but that accrue over time and with use, showing, once again, that there is no such thing as a final translation. Unfortunately, Cassin interprets this as “untranslatability” when it could, more positively, also be considered “serial translatability”, a term that would recognize the relativity of translation and the iterability of texts.

The *feminist* interest in this project arises in the English “translated” version of this book on so-called untranslatables, the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Cassin, 2014), where even more differences were added, in particular in regard to the terms “sex” and “gender”—terminology that is central to feminist concerns. The English-language editors “felt compelled to do more with the cluster of semes associated with “sex” and “gender” and were able “to turn this word grouping into a site of critical cross-examination” (*ibid.*, p. xi; my emphasis). And so, not only was the French entry on the term “gender” translated into English, but Judith Butler wrote an additional three pages explaining and exploring “gender trouble” for the American publication. Similarly, the entry on “le sexe” was

translated from the French, but Stella Sandford added an extra page on the term “sex” for the English book, expounding on the French de-sexing of “sexual difference in English” (*ibid.*, p. xi). The editors’ intention to “do more” in regard to these two terms, meant creating lengthy adaptations for Anglo-American contexts. Feminist writing, and writing about feminism, in other words, seems to require considerable adaptation, interpretation, culturally sensitive re-writing; it has become a domain of competing and potentially hostile interests with intersections that threaten to undermine attempts at more collaborative and mutually supportive transnational work.

In view of the potential criticism that both translation into English and translation studies in English can expect for reasons elaborated above, it is perhaps foolhardy to further pursue such work in English. It is just too hegemonic! However, Lola Sanchez, a Spanish academic writing in English, provides some encouragement (2017). She investigates an example of a Spanish contribution to transnational feminist work in translation in her study of the Spanish *Feminismos* series, a collection that sought to make known and circulate diverse feminist works in that language. Her findings show that English source materials were very important for this project which translated numerous Anglo-American texts into Spanish; and while translations of work from the Middle East and beyond were included, nothing at all was brought in from Latin America, which would not even have required translation. She ascribes this to hegemonic colonialist thinking, which is not exclusive to English-language academia. The questions Sanchez raises about academic feminism as a result of this study apply broadly in assessing the transnational aspects of any translation or translation studies project:

Which women appear [in the “cartography” of translations], and which ones do not? Where are they from? Which feminist currents, positions, spaces or situated knowledges do they represent? (Sanchez, 2017, p. 65).

In her conclusion, she recommends that given the ongoing imbalance in translation flows, “western feminists should acknowledge the epistemic violence that underlies and undergirds the biases that translation imposes upon our ‘global’ dialogues” (*ibid.*, p. 67)—and find ways to work towards a broader politics of translation.

In the research and publishing project that produced *Translating Women. Different Voices and New Horizons* (Flotow and Farahzad,

2017), a first stab at an academic discussion of “translating women” from beyond the Anglo-American Eurozone, the major issues (beyond the use of English) challenging the development of such a broader politics were at least threefold: power relations, mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, and the representation of women’s diversity. I address them below. First, however, it is important to state why such a project was considered necessary and useful at this point, and in English.

The original idea was to collect material in feminist translation studies from beyond the Anglo-American Eurozone, thereby developing knowledge of what was being done in other feminist environments around questions of translation. The call for articles and ideas would further stimulate such work, and an anthology would provide space to publish as well as a readership. The reasons underlying this were several: the intense focus on “gender” and “sexual orientation” in Anglo-American humanities and cultural studies had impacted feminist, “sexual difference” approaches, labelling these as “essentialist”, at least in some quarters, and discouraging further work (Flotow and Scott, 2016). Moreover, a publication that set out to “write about women again” in translation studies (Flotow, 2011) was criticized as being “so ethnocentric”, i.e. presenting work only on Anglo-American and European authors/translators. It was clearly time to reach further afield, to re-energize the focus on women as an always special segment of any population, and on their importance in the field of translation anywhere. Reaching out beyond the ethnocentricity of the Anglo-American Eurozone would encourage new writers and scholars, bring in new ideas, enable new discussions, and re-kindle a feminist approach to translation studies. Compiled in Canada, co-edited in Iran, published in New York/London, the book includes work from twelve different parts of the world, researched and written up by scholars who overwhelmingly use English as their second or third language. It thus participates in the dreaded “hegemony of English”, but makes new work available to a perhaps tired English environment, provides space for non-English academics to publish in an English-language anthology and thus gain visibility, and seeks to re-energize the field on a global scale.

### **Power Relations**

The decision to seek out, commission, and then compile a selection of texts for such a transnational anthology of feminist translation

studies implies the power to do so. However, this also means work: the time to research what already exists, who is working in the field, and who might collaborate. It means not only circulating calls for submissions in many different ways, where internet and other communications systems may be different or hard to access, but also proactively seeking out informants, writers, and co-editors. It involves strong communicative capacities (functional internet, functional languages beyond English), and finding a publisher who is willing to look beyond the confines of Canada<sup>6</sup>. Then, it means hard, detail-focused work, in inviting and assessing text proposals, negotiating with and contracting authors, editing every detail of the texts as they go into rigorous enough academic English, for unapologetic broadest dissemination, in English. It requires scholarly initiative and entrepreneurship, and the confidence that such a project can be brought to a fruitful conclusion—with a publisher that will distribute the final product, worldwide. This “power” can, obviously, be criticized (as some of the voices evoked earlier will do), for excluding certain participants, or favouring a certain theorization/approach to a subject or publishing in a hegemonic language. However, it can also serve to make voices heard that would otherwise hardly register outside a local context, and render translation projects visible that would otherwise be ignored or set aside. Publishing feminist work in English can bring ideas from everywhere into the “conversation”.

This was precisely the purpose of the anthology: to not only revive feminism in translation studies but to open up the field to that transnational “everywhere”. This required not only the shared editorship, in two very distant locations, currently with rather strained political relations, but also a number of research assistants with linguistic competencies in Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, and French, to finally assemble an anthology that includes work from China and Hong Kong, Morocco, Mexico, Turkey and Sri Lanka, as well as Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Japan and Serbia.

This diversity made necessary and possible a number of those much-desired and lengthy “conversations” across multiple borders, at least between editors, researchers and writers. It empowered them all in a complex and heady project.

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6. Academic publishing in Canada is severely affected by funding issues that restrict support to Canadian citizens or permanent residents. Transnational feminism, by definition, moves beyond those borders.

## **Mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion**

One of the most compelling and potentially destructive conversations had to do with an article entitled “Negotiating Western and Muslim Feminine Identities through Translation: Western Female Converts Translating the Quran,” by Rim Hassen (2017). This will serve to illustrate here the issue of inclusion and sensitive East-West relations despite all transnational idealism.

Hassen produced a comparative study of three recent Quran translations by western women converts, in which she raised the issue of cultural translation when Muslims who do not speak/read Arabic “translate” or interpret the Quran. In the first draft of her text, Hassen included a lengthy reference to the Somali activist Hirsi Ali and the film *Submission* she made with Theo van Gogh (2004), a film in which Quranic texts written across a woman’s bare shoulder and uttered aloud are deployed to criticize Islam. These texts evoke the types of beatings the main female figure has suffered, and imply that the details of how to beat a woman actually stem from the Quran. Hassen used this excerpt as an example of a non-scholarly, textually un-informed, abusive interpretation of Quranic texts that contrasts sharply with the actual translation work she was discussing. She wrote:

In this text, Hirsi Ali intermixes the woman’s voice with the translation of verse 4:34 in order to blur the boundary between the original and the translation, the sacred and the ordinary. This, however, allows her to mask the fact that the information contained in the deleted section is not part of the Quran, even though it is presented as such. In reality such forms of beating do not occur in verse 4:34 or anywhere in the Quran, which raises the question why were these forms of beatings inserted in the translation? [...] Hirsi Ali, like millions of Muslims, does not read or speak Arabic; she may therefore have relied on a secondary source to read the Sacred Text. Another possibility could be that Hirsi Ali has intentionally inserted these elements and presented them as part of the original text for specific ideological reasons. (Hassen, 2016, n.p.)

Ali’s misrepresentation of Quranic text is at issue here, but Hassen does not push the question further. She simply points it out, and surmises that there are “ideological reasons”. She then contrasts this version with the actual Quran translations produced by convert women.

The question of inclusion arose when it turned out that regardless of Hassen's critique of Hirsi Ali's work, the Iranian co-editor of this project could not in any way be associated with a book in which Hirsi Ali appeared. Such association could cost her her university position, her passport, and perhaps other rights and freedoms, already rather restricted in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and even more so for women. Either Hirsi Ali or the entire article by Rim Hassen had to be excluded, or the co-editor would have to remove herself and the article she had contributed. Luckily, the author Hassen was fully cognizant of the difficulties the co-editor might face in Iran, and therefore willing and able to find another excellent example of the many ways the Quran has been willfully and deliberately translated and interpreted "against" women. This, after all, was an important point of her article.

This example is also in regard to verse 4:34, and is taken from the English translation by Colin Turner of a textual exegesis of the Quran by Shi'a cleric Mohammad Baqir Behbudi and entitled *The Quran: A New Interpretation*. It reads as follows:

Men are the protectors of their women, for they surpass them in strength, intellectual acumen and social skills. A male doctor is better than a female doctor, a male laborer is better than a female laborer, and so on. Furthermore, men are the protectors and maintainers of their women, for it is the men who provide dowries and support their women financially throughout their married life. Therefore it is incumbent on righteous women that they obey their husbands. And when their husbands are absent they must, with God as their aid, strive to protect their reputations and do nothing to shame them. As for those women whose righteousness is open to question, and whose obedience and loyalty you doubt—whether their husbands are present or not—admonish them in the first instance; if their disobedience continues, refuse to sleep with them; if their disobedience continues further, beat them. If they see reason and obey, do not chastise them any further. (Turner, 1997, p. 46)

In the final and published version of her article, Hassen comments rather circumspectly that it is difficult to ignore the implication in this text that men are superior to women. She contrasts it with the translation produced by Laleh Bakhtiar, one of the western women converts, and also with a more conservative version by Umm Mohammad: here is Bakhtiar's text, in which the (f) refers to (and emphasizes) the feminine form of the pronouns/nouns in Arabic, an aspect that English cannot reflect:



Men are supporters of wives  
Because God has given some of them an advantage  
Over others  
And because they spend of their wealth  
So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality  
Are the ones (f) who are morally obligated,  
The ones (f) who guard the unseen  
Of what God has kept safe.  
But those (f) whose resistance you fear,  
Then admonish them (f)  
And abandon them (f) in their sleeping place  
Then go away from them (f)  
And if they (f) obey you  
Surely look not for any way against them (f).  
(Bakhtiar, 2007, p. 94)

A further comment by Hassen points out how in comparing the two texts one notes that the first text moves far beyond the source material in describing women's inferiority (i.e. "a male labourer is better than a female labourer") and shifts the attention to "husbands" by repeating the word three times, when in the original Quranic verse (as in Bakhtiar's translation) the term does not occur even once. Further, it is noteworthy that perhaps unwittingly, a strange situation arises whereby the male "you", who is addressed in the second part of the text, is exhorted to refuse to sleep with the wives "whether the husbands are present or not."

The *exclusion* of Hirsi Ali from this article, and this book, led to the *inclusion* of a different, but equally strong, demonstration of how an ancient text can be deliberately misrepresented. More importantly, for questions of feminist inclusion or exclusion, this incident also cast an important light on much broader transnational "geo-political" issues that arise when "west" (in this case, a Canadian academic) sets out to work with "east" (here, an Iranian academic). The risks of life in a theocracy such as the Islamic Republic of Iran are not something western academics encounter or face on a regular basis, and the effects that these risks have on colleagues working under them are difficult to know or understand. They can lead to research on less immediate, less pressing questions—on the ancient history of Persia, for example—themes that may be of less interest to contemporary Anglo-American feminisms and therefore less publishable for feminist purposes. This can, in turn, raise accusations that



“an Anglo-Euro-centric epistemology is privileged over other kinds of knowledge” (Reimóndez, 2017, p. 45). The inclusion of work from well beyond the purview of Anglo-American translation studies thus brings with it difficulties that reach well beyond the usual academic issues about a coherent corpus, research methodology, or proper theoretical underpinnings, let alone rigorous academic writing in English.

A second article, on “The Translation of Islamic Feminism at CERFI in Morocco” (Laghzali, 2017), presented other challenges. The first was triggered by the juxtaposition of “Islamic” and “feminism” in the abstract. This set off a flurry of research on a topic that was also beyond the purview of the usual translation studies of Anglo-American, Canadian or Iranian academia. However, the article’s insistence on the need to mobilize translation in order to “mitigate clichéd ideas about women in Islam” (*ibid.*, p. 210) for non-Muslim audiences on the one hand, and to dispel preconceptions that local Arabic-speaking communities might have about the role of Muslim women on the other (due to misogynist interpretations of the ancient texts, as seen in the Beghbudi/Turner example above), soon placed this text squarely into the range of materials the anthology was seeking. The decision to include it led to extensive further research on the topic so that the text could be reviewed, revised, and rewritten to make it accessible to a general academic English-language reading public<sup>7</sup>. This required many hours of work, and transnational communications. However, Laghzali’s concluding segment on the practical translation problems that stymie efforts to produce text that might nourish Islamic feminism revealed another interestingly ethnocentric obstacle worthy of all the work invested: she writes, “many religious scholars specializing in religious sciences in Morocco do not master languages other than Arabic, which may make them less open to new ideas about religious issues” and therefore other terminology. In such an environment, any introduction of other perspectives can be “perceived as writing that serves the Western agenda and threatens Muslim identity” (*ibid.*, p. 218). This comment resonates with Anglo-American “hegemony”, where academics are accused of knowing only English and excluding all else. In some re-

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7. The question of revision and rewriting into English academic form is another sore point: from the perspective of those who object to Anglo-American “hegemony”, rewriting can wipe out the idiosyncracies and creativeness of the original work. From the perspective of the English-language editor, it helps produce readable text.

spects, it also relativizes hegemony. The decision to include this text on translation as an instrument that promotes “Islamic feminism” in the anthology addressed both types of hegemony.

### **Representation of women’s diversity**

The distrust and rejection of ideas deemed “western” came up in numerous articles/abstracts submitted for inclusion in the book. They helped to further mitigate the notion that ethnocentricity resides primarily in the Anglo-American-Eurozone. Other cultures, too, assert their specificity, their exclusivity, their difference. In the articles published in *Translating Women*, however, translation often serves to undermine nationalistic or other cultural rigidities. This occurs through demonstrations and discussions of the many different ways women’s work in translation is related, yet different—carried out under the most various circumstances, and in situations that require great presence of mind and creativity.

The text from Sri Lanka by Kanchuka Dharmasiri (2017) imagines and puts into motion “creative translational strategies” that are designed to counter a situation where “nationalist discourses too easily dismiss feminist concepts as ‘Western imports’” (p. 175). She sets out to integrate already existing feminist materials from the local culture in a set of parallel “western” texts, thereby demonstrating how ancient local stories can be read as inherently feminist. The materials she proposes take the reader into the texts of Buddhist nuns that date from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. These are juxtaposed with excerpts from Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft, and Dharmasiri proposes translation as a way to “counter the facile dismissal of feminism as an alien entity, explore discourses of women’s liberation situated in South Asia, and to further explore the liberatory aspects present in the *Therīgāthā*” (*ibid.*). In her conclusion, Dharmasiri turns to the question of hegemony: in answer to another academic’s question “If translation is ‘hegemonic’ is it a one-way process necessarily”? she responds: “It does not have to be a one-way process. [...] Rather, a consideration of notions of women’s bodies, gender, and freedom as they appear in different contexts could open up fertile space for dialogue” (*ibid.*, p. 190), the sort of dialogue that works in transnational spaces.

Dharmasiri’s comment invites readers to think about a certain universality in women’s lives and fates (bodies, gender, freedom) and their representation. While differences are important, a rigid focus on difference divides. Her work shows the striking parallels that

translation can reveal between the words of Buddhist nuns from over 2000 years ago and the European writings of 18th-20th century women thinkers. It is through the translation and the comparative juxtaposition of texts and lives that we gain access to diversity in universality, and expand understanding.

In a similar vein, the article from Mexico by Claudia Lucotti and María Antonieta Rosas published in *Translating Women* (2017) reports on a project that connects indigenous women poets from Canada with those in Mexico, and supports the translation of their work between their indigenous languages—Cree, Innu, Huichol, Maya, Purepecha, Triqui, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Zapotec and Zoque. As this project negotiates between the multiple indigenous languages, it also raises questions of “interlocking oppressions” but brings the translation of women’s diversity to a new level, for the translations must pass through one of the old colonial languages—Spanish, French or English—which serve as “pivot” languages. No one translator has yet been found who can translate Cree (an indigenous language in Canada) directly into Tsotsil or Maya (in Mexico). And so, while the colonial languages have done their work of destruction, they are being newly implemented and put to use for creative, reconstructive purposes.

Finally, a question of internal diversity that arose in an article for the *Translating Women* anthology resonated with Alvarez and Costa’s work on Latin American topics. Victoria Tipiani’s study of how translation served to introduce ideas about women’s suffrage to 1930s Colombia through a particularly long-lived women’s magazine entitled *Letras y Encajes*, made the point that all of those involved in the creation and running of this magazine were white. This was left uncontextualized in the first drafts of the article, baffling reviewers. What was the purpose and meaning of this information? The final version of the article explains that issues of social class, power, education and opportunity inherent in the term “white” in Colombia of the 1930s clearly pits the elite, Catholic (white) women of the political class who created and ran the magazine against those (non-whites?) who didn’t, but whom they represented in seeking the vote. In her article, the author, Tipiani is conciliatory: despite the acknowledged differences of race and class, translation served as a political vehicle here, helping “certain women with economic advantages devise strategies to use the voices of others to express their own ideas” (2017, p. 100) in a place and a time where their social class

would normally have prohibited such ideas. Her discussion of the “fluctuating” feminisms of this elite group—and their magazine—which were affected by the political flux of the time, as the Catholic church supported dictatorial right-wing governments, shows how even this apparent advantage could only occasionally be put into action. Many of the women involved in *Letras y Encajes* ended up living in “exile”—in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. Tipiani here recognizes the contentious aspects of social diversity on the one hand, but sees how this can be put to positive use on the other.

In my view, the same applies to power relations and issues of inclusion and exclusion today: just as diversity can be seen negatively or positively in translation or in the study of translations, so does the translation process reveal both power and the problematic of inclusivity/exclusivity as double-edged problems. These are persistent challenges. They can, however, be addressed in ways that eschew angry, resentful victim positions and complaint, and be recognized, addressed and put to constructive use. Indeed, they offer the chance to “utilize power within relationships for transformation and coalition building” (Canales, 2000, p. 19). This involves work as well as the curiosity and interest that can penetrate borders, that inquires and seeks to understand and that does not pit women and their languages against one another in geopolitical ways. In fraught situations like that of transnational feminism, where evident power differentials may meet accumulated resentments, where ancient histories are recycled (or ignored) for new purposes, and where translation is being assigned a rather broad role as “politically and theoretically indispensable to forging feminist, pro-social justice and anti-racist, postcolonial and anti-imperial political alliances and epistemologies” (Costa and Alvarez, 2014, p. 558), feminist translation studies play an important part in helping the different worlds engage in their conversations, conduct meaningful and useful discussions, always aware of the fact that translation is not only approximate and relative but driven (and funded) by specific interests and powers.

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