

INTRODUCTION

Translation in the Service of (De)colonisation

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In his most recent book, *El Polaco (The Pole)*, J. M. Coetzee unsettles the dominance of English and the Global North. He draws attention to a plurality of languages that should co-exist, without one overriding the other. By implication, he also promotes the importance of translation. He does this by resisting first publication of the book in what he sees as dreary and oppressive global English. *The Pole* was written in English but did not get published in that language until 2023 (along with some other stories in July for the UK (2023a), and as a short novel in September for the USA (2023b)). 2022 had been the year of the book's very first publication, in translated form as a novella, by Spanish-language translator Mariana Dimópulos for the Argentinian publisher El Hilo de Ariadna, in the kind of writing that Rebecca Walkowitz had earlier (2015) famously termed 'born translated' literature. *The Pole* explores unrequited love, language, constant misunderstandings, how English as a common language infringes on relationships and intimacy, and music as another mode of communication. Coetzee's two protagonists (a septuagenarian Polish pianist and a woman in her late forties from Barcelona) establish and maintain their relationship through English, although neither of them is a native speaker. This common language is one of many impediments to their love affair thriving. Coetzee not only delayed the first publication of his book in English and intentionally chose to publish it first in the Global South, but he also countered the received view of the easy translatability, communicability, and connectivity of languages in general, and English in particular. In an interview promoting his work at the Welsh Hay Festival of Literature & Arts, he was quoted as saying:

I do not like the way in which [English] crushes the minor languages that it finds in its path. I don't like its universalist pretensions, by which I mean

its uninterrogated belief that the world is as it seems to be in the mirror of the English language. I don't like the arrogance that this situation breeds in its native speakers. Therefore, I do what little I can to resist the hegemony of the English language.

(Coetzee, qtd. in Marshall, 2022, n.p.)

Our book, *Translation and Decolonisation: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, comprising diverse and inspiring chapter contributions, seeks to take a further and more radical step. Moving towards an understanding of language, translation, and translating across power differentials, the volume investigates how translation itself can become a vehicle for intervention and of decolonisation. There is a growing willingness to reckon with race and coloniality in academia, museums, and the media. As many jump on the decolonisation bandwagon, however, the concept itself has recently become overused and inflated. It is sometimes even used merely as a metaphor, as criticised, for example, by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012). The decolonisation of disciplines, knowledge systems, and institutions can be understood, in its simplest form, as 'an ongoing process of identifying and challenging the legacy of colonial structures and associated inherited prejudices of research and teaching' (Demir, 2023, 106). The present collection contributes to ongoing discussions in the UK and internationally about this process of decolonisation. While the decolonising idea sparks heated debate, it also underscores the imperative of addressing the lasting consequences of European colonial history. What is needed, we submit, is active alignment with marginalised communities to work towards a decolonised translation studies.

In the book, our attention thus turns to how translation, having been an instrument of colonisation, can itself become a vehicle for decolonising and undermining imperial frameworks and their related biases and systems. The collection makes an important incursion into the fields of both translation studies and decolonial and postcolonial studies by examining the role translation plays in decolonisation. We see the postcolonial and decolonial traditions as being interlinked, despite their intellectual genealogies emerging from different contexts. Each school of thought arose from European colonial settings. Postcolonialism emerged in the context of British and French colonialism and thus tends to relate to South Asia, Africa, the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean, and the Middle East. By contrast, decoloniality came out of Latin American contexts, especially those of former Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Given that both movements pivot on challenging European colonialism and Eurocentrism, they are similar in their radical and transformation potentials and demands. For too long existing in separate silos, postcolonial and decolonial scholars are now engaging increasingly in productive conversations, as also exemplified by some of the chapters in this book.

The relationship between translation and colonisation is well established. Douglas Robinson, for example, placed colonialism at the heart of translation, noting that ‘translation has always been an indispensable channel of imperial conquest and occupation’ (1997, 10). Lawrence Venuti underlined how ‘[t]he colonization of the Americas, Asia, and Africa could not have occurred without interpreters, both native and colonial, nor without the translations of effective texts, religious, legal, educational’ (2002, 158). Tejaswini Niranjana (1990, 1992) and Eric Cheyfitz (1991) uncovered how ethnographic translation has been a central vehicle for domination. Niranjana resonantly declared: ‘Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism’ (1990, 773). Along with Gauri Viswanathan (1989), she critically examined the supposedly civilising role of the English language in India. The British parliamentarian Thomas B. Macaulay had in 1835 made English language instruction and the training of translators in India central, revealing the link between translation, domination, and empire. He notoriously asseverated:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be *interpreters* between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to *refine the vernacular dialects* of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

(Macaulay, 1995/1835, 428–430; emphasis added)

Here Macaulay blends the literal act of translation or interpretation with the metaphor of moulding Indians into culturally transformed, English-speaking intermediaries. Fascinatingly, though, Rashmi Sadana (2012, 23) shows that in twenty-first century India, the Dalit activist Chandrabhan Prasad has been provocatively championing Macaulay’s Anglicisation. Prasad views English as a neutral language for the scheduled castes because it does not carry the weight of brahminical oppression. Meanwhile, Cheyfitz uncovered some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European translations of the New World, establishing yet again how translation has been a crucial instrument of colonisation. Additionally, Michael Cronin (1996) has highlighted how translation continued to be fraught in Ireland, long after the country achieved independence from the United Kingdom.

While the role of translation in decolonisation was being uncovered, the study of world literature itself took a ‘translation turn’, largely in the first decade or so of the twenty-first century. Whereas postcolonial literary studies centre around European languages and, to a lesser extent, the tongues of

countries previously ruled over by the British Empire, contemporary world literature scholarship scrutinises works in translation from any language, including non-European and non-colonised ones. For prominent scholars such as Pascale Casanova (2007/1999), David Damrosch (2003), and Franco Moretti (2005), world literature distinguishes itself from postcolonial studies in the lack of spatial or temporal restrictions imposed by the experience of colonialism. World literature encompasses a multitude of languages, yet it often appears to overlook colonialism's ongoing political fallout, thereby failing to fully heed the lessons elucidated by postcolonial theorists of the 1980s and 1990s (Pravinchandra and Chambers, 2018). Despite its foundations in the asymmetric field of translation, many world literature critics do not adequately emphasise the impact of (neo)colonialism.

What is more, as Nicholas Harrison argues in a 2014 article, Damrosch's vague claims in his influential book *What Is World Literature?* (2003) regarding the supposed gains in translation from which world literature benefits are grossly inflated. Himself a professor of French and postcolonial studies, Harrison stresses those losses that inevitably happen in translation but which are played down by Damrosch and his fellow travellers. Harrison also bewails the loss of linguistic competence and political edge he believes to have been caused by the translation turn. When he writes of world literature's 'vast menu of texts' (2014, 412), Harrison gestures towards depoliticised smorgasbords of books being served up shorn from their contexts in the cafeteria of global capital. David Bellos (2011) contrastingly posits that nothing is truly untranslatable for a skilled linguist. However, he equally recognises that a translation remains distinct from and falls short of the original. Finally, Emily Apter has emphasised the untranslatable and the losses incurred during translation in her seminal work *Against World Literature* (2013).

Our volume's authors take a cue from world literature scholars in scrutinising works in (and outside of) translation from both non-European and European languages. In terms of linguistic areas, there is significant diversity without a claim to complete coverage. Languages discussed include, but are not limited to, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dari, English, Farsi, French, German, Gikūyū, Gujarati, Hindi, Kiswahili, Pahari, Turkish, and Urdu. However, a certain invisibility of the work of translation – and of other languages as languages, tied up in particular worldviews – can be found in world literature criticism. This is something to which the present collection provides a corrective. Our book also foregrounds the impact of (neo)colonialism more prominently than world literature critics tend to do. World literature's neglect of politics is surprising, particularly given the movement's foundations in the unequal field of translation.

In this book, we are mindful of the slippage that frequently occurs around the notion of translation. Often the practical business of conveying one

language into another gets metaphorised (Guldin, 2016) as an analogy for reading (Harrison, 2014, 412), migration or diaspora (Rushdie, 1984/1983; Demir, 2022), or anthropology (in the form of ‘cultural translation’; see Asad and Dixon, 1985; Asad, 1986; Bhabha, 1994, 226–229). Translation has even been mobilised as an image for interdisciplinarity (McCormack, 2005; Guldin, 2016, 110–114), such as the kind of work in which we are engaged. As is made clear in the chapters, we and our contributors are not opposed to translation being used as a metaphor, and we do not think that language can or ought to be policed. However, we do advocate an awareness and interrogation of the blurred lines between practical translation and the concept’s figuration of other phenomena, for example, in the chapters offered by Gargi Binju and Peiyu Yang involving cultural translation (Asad, 1986).

It should not escape our notice that in the process of carrying a text across to another language, this text is sometimes transformed to the point of being almost unrecognisable. This might be seen as a creative process, or even as an art other than translation. Indeed, the term ‘transcreation’ gained purchase with the work of Brazilian translator and poet Haroldo de Campos (2007/1958) and later the publication of Indian critic P. Lal’s study *Transcreation: Two Essays* (1972). Lal used the word to describe his process when conveying the *Mahabharata* and *Upanishads* into English. He not only translated the sacred texts but also reconstructed them using a simplified language, making them easily understandable for modern readers. Lal’s re-interpretation of the term in a collection of seven essays (1996) sparked a renewed fascination with transcreation. So too did Pakistani author Qurrat-ulain Hyder’s use of the verb ‘transcreate’ to describe her decades-long translation and thorough edit of her own Urdu novel *Ag ka darya* (2003/1959) into the English volume *River of Fire* (1998); Else Ribeiro Pires Viera’s discussion of Brazilian transcreation in Susan Bassnett’s and Harish Trivedi’s essay collection *Post-Colonial Translation* (1999, 95–113); and, most recently, Isabel Gomez’s deployment of the term in *Cannibal Translation* (2023). De Campos’s, Bassnett’s and Trivedi’s, and Gomez’s ideas are discussed by Claire Chambers in her chapter for this book (for Lal and Hyder, see Chambers, 2015).

Much recent cultural and social theory has tried to come to terms with having forgotten about or played down the issue of colonialism. Our edited collection accordingly redirects the critical gaze onto uncovering whether and how translation has been, is, or can be a vehicle for decolonisation. In ‘Translation, Community, Utopia’, Venuti writes: ‘translating is . . . utopian. The domestic inscription is made with the very intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text – although in translation’ (2000, 485). We take this idea of community formation as a model. At

this twenty-first century decolonial or ‘post-postcolonial’ juncture (see Bandia in this volume), we therefore ask: can translation be a tool for resisting colonisation? Can ‘a practice of translation that is speculative, provisional and interventionist’ focus attention on difference and resist erasure (Niranjana, 1992, 173)? Could misconceptions and mistranslations in the Spanish conversion of the Tagalogs in the Philippines be interpreted as resistance and decolonisation (Rafael, 1993)? What is the potential for a ‘decolonized translation practice’ (Batchelor, 2009)? Can translation be thought of as a ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 2007) or, conversely, the contact zone be constructed as a place where translation can also aid decolonisation itself? To what extent might Antoine Berman’s and Lawrence Venuti’s (2000) elaborations of foreignisation be considered a strategy of decolonisation? How does Abdelkébir Khatibi’s notion of a ‘professional stranger’ (1990/1983), travelling through and navigating multiple worldviews, languages, and civilisations, help to challenge ethnocentrism and nationalism (Rice, 2020)? What examples of translation as a resistance tool against colonisation are there, in a similar vein to the strategies developed by Sarah Winnemucca (Sorisio, 2012)? For example, can we cherish certain moments of ‘not understanding’ as opening up a ‘space for learning’ (White, 1995) but some others as a form of decolonial resistance? What are the links between translation and resistance in postcolonial times (Bandia, 2008)? Can feminist translational strategies of footnoting, supplementing, prefacing and hijacking (von Flotow, 1991; Simon, 1996), or queering translation (Basile, 2017) be used to understand and expand decolonial translation? Can a focus on decolonisation and South-to-South solidarities itself avoid falling into the trap of ‘reifying the power of the dominator to a degree that the agency of non-Western cultures is reduced to a single possibility [of] resistance’ (Liu, 1995, xv; xvi)? Can South–South translations, and the refusal to go via the Global North, be construed as a form of decolonisation? Even though the book does not have full answers to all these questions, the various chapters explore them from multiple angles while mapping routes towards new understandings.

Previous scholars paid attention to translation and language in order to reveal hierarchies and problems to do with communication, incommensurability, and cultural interaction arising from European expansion and colonisation. In this edited collection, we turn the tables and reveal if and how translation has been a vehicle or even an instigator of decolonisation, as in the instigation of South-to-South conversations. Translation often makes the familiar ‘strange’ and renders the strange ‘familiar’. Its role in decolonising therefore warrants close scrutiny. In the last decade, particularly since the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by a serving police officer in 2020, there has been increased interest and focus on decolonising. More specifically, there has been a decolonial

turn in many sections of the social sciences and humanities, challenging the epistemic violence of modernity and disciplines of the Global North. Edward Said (1978), Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), Ramón Grosfoguel (2006), Gurminder Bhambra (2007), Walter Dignolo (2007), María Lugones (2008), Homi Bhabha (1994), and many others had already reconceptualised existing understandings of modernity, coloniality, and power in previous decades. They provided renewed understandings of these subjects which reframed and shifted how we understand them today, taking analysis in postcolonialism and decoloniality further.

In this book, we thus start from the premise that translation can be and has been productively disruptive, and proceed to unfurl this in relation to challenges to coloniality. By drawing from theories of postcolonialism and decoloniality as well as translation theory, but also considering specific case studies, the book reveals and scrutinises new relationships between decolonisation and translation. Its chapters deal with these issues theoretically, conceptually, and even practically (see, for example, Maureen Freely's chapter from the perspective of a prominent translator). We have sought to commission work which interrogates how translation, including cultural translation, has been able to or has the potential to counter colonial imaginaries, glory, institutions, or practices. We have also solicited chapters which conceptually unpack the relationship between translation, decolonisation, and postcoloniality (for example, those by Paul F. Bandia, Kathryn Batchelor, and Claire Chambers). A unique marker of the book is its attempt to decolonise translation studies further. In other words, the collection connects translation studies with the recent decolonial turn in the social sciences and humanities while also bringing translation to studies of decolonisation itself in the way, for example, Esperança Bielsa (2023) has brought translation to sociology. The volume exposes how translation has opposed colonial imaginaries, institutions, and practices in the past as well as the present.

Another distinctive feature of the book is its interdisciplinarity. Piotr Blumczynski (2016) and Edwin Gentzler (2017) had already pointed in this direction, but as monographs, their works understandably could not incorporate the range of disciplinary perspectives and languages this collection can encompass. We, the editors, are academics from the disciplines of sociology (Demir) and literature (Chambers). We have carried out (inter)disciplinary research into decolonisation as well as translation. The present book has allowed us to centre attention on two interdisciplinary fields, namely translation studies and decolonial and postcolonial studies, to think of ways they can be made to speak to one another. Our contributors include literary critics, cultural theorists, migration scholars, social and political theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, experts in various languages, translation practitioners, and others. This has further gains, as the chapters achieve the

larger aim through the medium, approaches, and tools of various other disciplines and fields, such as literature, international relations, cultural studies, human rights studies, migration and diaspora studies, women's and sexuality studies, and sociology. As such, the book opens various dialogues and conversations across many academic fields and disciplines.

Despite the wealth of literature, explored previously, that evaluates the coercive origins and broader impact of translation, little of this work reveals the overlaps and intersections between and across the usually discrete and compartmentalised arenas of literary or cultural studies analysis and sociologically informed academic discourse. Furthermore, some valuable academic work which tackles translation apropos of questions of race and (neo)colonialism has nonetheless tended to be compartmentalised within one or other of these broad and at times varied disciplinary bases (for some other examples, see Cronin, 2003, 2006; Polezzi, 2012; Bubb, 2022). The contributions in this book offer an original and necessary disruption by bringing together these highly intersecting spheres of interest, the literary and the sociological. This is predominantly due to the skillsets of the two editors – one a sociologist who has 'raided' translation studies in her work (Demir, 2022) and the other a sociologically minded literary critic (Chambers, 2011; Phillips et al., 2021) – whose respective work has already made inroads into developing fused and hybrid texts. The interdisciplinary space afforded by this book is reflected not only in its editors being situated in different disciplines, with different languages (Turkish for Demir, and Hindi and Urdu for Chambers) as well as English, but also via the polyvocal contributors from various disciplines and the Global North and Global South.

In the chapters to come, readers of this book will be taken on what we hope is a wide-ranging and educational journey, exploring the complexity of translation and decolonisation around the world and at different historical moments. A variety of locations are embraced, including Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Germany, Palestine, China, and East Africa, while historical periods encompass the high noon of the British Empire, the cold war, and the present day. The contributions provide conceptual, general and practical frameworks (chapters by Paul F. Bandia, Kathryn Batchelor, Claire Chambers, Maureen Freely, Abdelmajid Hannoum, Tejaswini Niranjana, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o). Other chapters discuss the dynamics of translation in relation to war, migration, and refugees (chapters by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Sara de Jong). Some others rethink South–South conversations and cultural translations as forms of decolonising translation (Haider Shahbaz, Peiyu Yang, and Gargi Binju).

The contributions not only open up conceptual, philosophical, and general pathways for understanding the relationship between decoloniality,

postcoloniality, and translation but also for rethinking the role of the English language. Spivak and Ngũgĩ engage in critical conversations about the role of English, feeding off similar concerns. Spivak argues that translators must try to understand the original writer's assumptions, especially in the context of English's global dominance, highlighting the complexity of translating non-European languages. Her chapter emphasises the need for translators to surrender themselves to the host language's worldview, as she calls translation 'the most intimate act of reading' (16). In his chapter, Ngũgĩ reflects on his transition from English to Gikũyũ, advocating for the revitalisation of African languages and the crucialness of language policies and investment in African-language literature. He emphasises the role of academics and writers in championing African languages for cultural and intellectual enrichment, foreseeing a positive impact on Africa and the world. Offering different solutions – an abstract, inward relationship between the translator and their acquired language for Spivak and a practical one of finances and infrastructure for Ngũgĩ – these two giants of postcolonial and decolonial literature nonetheless take a similar line on the need to persevere with translation despite its colonial inheritances.

Batchelor's offering, on the other hand, unpicks the frictions and affinities between decolonial and postcolonial scholarship on translation, critically examining attempts to brand decoloniality as completely distinct from postcoloniality. Batchelor not only challenges the claim regarding the radical break of decolonial translation practices but, in our view, decolonises such claims and perspectives via close readings of postcolonial theorists' work on translation. Chambers's chapter analyses two contemporary novels which advance decolonising interpretations of language, translation, and power. This chapter's contribution lies in demonstrating how the 'forked tongue' of translation can be both a tool for exploitation and a path to decolonisation. Bandia also expands the borders of decolonial translation through a discussion of multilingualism as a decolonial practice and its overlaps with translation, plotting an avenue for repaired translation as a form of decolonising. Bandia's notion of reparative translation is informed by African oral traditions, yet also illustrated through an engagement with postcolonial migrant literature, its artistry and aesthetic forms of resistance.

Niranjana's contribution to this volume takes a further step and genders translation. In her chapter, Niranjana discusses the expansion of translation studies in the 1990s, emphasising the need to integrate feminist perspectives and recognise the political dimensions of translation, particularly in the context of culture and gender in India. She argues that incorporating the concept of translation into this discourse sheds light on the evolving landscape of feminism in the region. Through a discussion of the relationship between culture and modernity in the colonial and postcolonial context, her chapter

unpacks the positioning of women in discussions about culture in the Indian subcontinent and Asia more broadly. In so doing, she adds an intersectional feminist perspective to the decolonisation of translation. Hannoum introduces yet another perspective on translation and decolonisation, this time focusing on prefaces of translations and the translation ideology therein. By juxtaposing the prefaces of the translated work of Frantz Fanon, Hannoum reveals how translation prefaces at times reinforce, and at times challenge, inherent translation ideologies. Freely, on the other hand, draws from her own experience of translating Turkish into English (for example, the fiction of Orhan Pamuk) and therefore the difficulties of translating literature from Turkey. Turkey was of course the modern successor of an (Ottoman) empire, yet one which was also embroiled in, and at the mercy of, European empires and colonialisms.

Chapters by Gutiérrez Rodríguez and De Jong examine the dynamics of translation and decolonisation in the context of current migration regimes, wars, and asylum and refugee controls. Through a focus on the voices and discourses of migrant and refugee protests in Germany since the 1990s, Gutiérrez Rodríguez discusses the translatability and untranslatability of human rights, with a particular focus on social justice and refugees. The chapter challenges human rights discourses through vernacular translation and decolonial interpretations, and thus via through and *beyond* human rights. Though her analysis of in-depth interview data with male Afghan interpreters, De Jong identifies three specific decolonial translational challenges and interactions in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan. She analyses how Afghan interpreters who worked for international forces during the military intervention in Afghanistan were not just marked by the logics and violence of coloniality but also confronted and undermined neo-colonial logics and relationships.

The contributions to this book also decolonise translation by examining examples and cases of South-to-South translation, as discussed by Haidar Shahbaz, Peiyu Yang, and Gargi Binju. Through literary analysis, oral history, and archival research, Shahbaz examines *Āwāz* magazine, which resisted dictatorship in Pakistan while promoting solidarity across the 'Third World'. The magazine achieved its aims through anti-imperialist and anti-colonial conversations and solidarities between African and Asian translators, editors, and writers, contributing to the formation of a radical Afro-Asian internationalist and anti-colonial imagination during the cold war. Yang's work embarks on a similar trajectory, both temporally and spatially. She evaluates a travel book by Ghassan Kanafani, the renowned Palestinian author of resistance literature, about his trip to the People's Republic of China in 1965. The chapter provides close textual analysis of Kanafani's work . . . *Then Rose Asia*, arguing that despite the book's solidarity-building drive and ambition, the cultural translation

within it is replete with gendered Orientalist tropes and idealised depictions of Maoism. As such, the chapter paints a complex picture of the use of cultural translation in anti-colonial resistance and solidarity building, as well as its complicity in reproducing colonial tropes. Binju casts her critical eye on cultural translations of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa through an examination of two novels by M. G. Vassanji, *The Gummy Sack* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Vassanji tells stories of South Asians in East Africa who find themselves caught between India/Pakistan, Africa, and British colonialism. Through deploying in-betweenness when analysing these two novels, Binju positions the concept not as a space of celebratory hybridity and cultural mixing, but as a precarious place caught between the coloniser/colonised binary.

The chapters to unfold in this volume thus not only discuss whether and how translation can be a source for decolonisation but also give countless examples of how translation studies itself can make key the idea of decolonisation for understanding translation. As such, we hope the book galvanises many other novel explorations of the relationship between translation and decolonisation.

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