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Minorness Translated, Minorness Translating

This issue of *TTR* brings together eight contributions from scholars who presented their work during the "Translation and Minority" series of international conferences organized at the University of Ottawa's School of Translation and Interpretation in late 2016 and 2017. Three years later or so, the topic of minorness is as relevant as it has ever been, stirring productive debate, for instance, in the "Translating Minorities and Conflict" conference jointly run by the Universidad de Córdoba and Università degli Studi di Trieste in June 2020, and in a recent issue of *TTR* guest-edited by Denise Merkle and Gillian Lane-Mercier, "Minorité, migration et rencontres interculturelles : du binarisme à la complexité/Minority and Migrant Intercultural Encounters: From Binarisms to Complexity."

Besides the huge research potential that so-called "minor" contexts present and the fact that they have started to gain ground only in the recent history of the discipline, there are two other reasons, I argue, for this continued interest in minorness. First, the use of a biased, dichotomous qualifier like "minor" continues undeterred in Translation Studies (TS). Sometimes language fails us and we settle for a certain word for lack of a better one. It is the case of "minor," "minority," "minoritized," and "minorness," which have been questioned by translation scholars and practitioners over the years—and rightfully so. Various other phrases have been proposed, such as "small"/"lesser used"/"lesser translated"/"local" languages and cultures (Folaron, 2015; Branchadell and West, 2005; Lane-Mercier, 2014) or even "languages spoken by few," suggested by Icelandic neo-surrealist poet Sjón when talking about the threat of English over an isolated language like Icelandic. Sjón also notes that "[i]f the *Divine Comedy*

can be translated into Faroese, then the Faroese language is big enough to accommodate it—proving to be as big as Dante's Italian" (cited in Billey, n.d., n.p.). Second, translation is no longer seen as a gap in value, but as a gap in resources (Cronin, 2013), a gap that we become aware of due to today's increased mobility. Unlike cultural stability, being culturally mobile (or a nomad) is a precarious state in itself. Away from "home," translators take stock of the novelty of other contexts and strive to bring such novelty to their own cultures. A precariousness in means asks for translation in order to close the gap; as such, translation departs from precarious contexts and is fueled by precarious states. Understood as a desire for change, precariousness is paramount for establishing positive relationships with other cultures and energizing the local scenes, rather than simply reflecting a "minor" mode of existence in the global economic and geopolitical arenas.

Before presenting each of the eight contributions that made possible this issue, I will provide an overview of the concept of "minor language/culture" in TS and emphasize the way in which it has reshaped the discipline over the past few years. I will place the discussion within a complexity framework that sees translation as an inter- and intracultural transfer process (Espagne and Werner, 1988) that is very sensitive to its initial conditions of production and reliant on its translator's agency, thus highly non-linear (Marais, 2015; Marais and Meylaerts, 2018). The multifaceted roles played by translators in any given culture, the manifold relationships cultures may establish among them, and the granulated social reality of the new millennium invite a vision of translation beyond binary thought, as an act that is essentially simultaneously and irreducibly linguistic, cultural, and social, but also individual and collective, material and virtual, online and offline.

Translation Studies and its History of Binaries

Translation Studies is one of the most open and most interdisciplinary areas of academic inquiry and is "bound to expand" (van Doorslaer, 2018b). Yet, translation historiography has not taken into account the social aspects related to the production of translations until only recently and ostensibly has shown interest in constructing a translation theory, rather than examining more thoroughly how various translational phenomena took shape. However, generating a theory needs "one origin that engenders them, justifies their existence and lends them a logical sequence in the historical narrative" (Hanna, 2016, p. 68). As a result, several reductionist theories have been built

around a slew of dichotomous notions, such as domestication vs. for-eignization, self vs. other, or product vs. process, which seems to have concurred with the development of a binary mode of thinking across the discipline (Gouanvic, 2006). The use of such notions in pairs has long been doubled by a series of spatial metaphors, which place the act of translation between two points: a source and a target, in-between, the West and the Rest. Even translation itself used to be part of such dichotomy, since it would be compared to the original.

If until the late 1980s—and still even well into the 1990s—the majority of TS scholars talked about translation as a process, being interested in how meaning was transferred from the source lan-guage into the target language (Berman, 1985; Venuti, 1998a) and focusing mostly on translations from/into languages of international circulation such as English, French, and German—, in the early 1990s their interest shifted towards translation as a product, as a result of the culture in which it was created (Niranjana, 1992). What we call the "cultural turn" of the 1990s was introduced by André Lefevere's *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook* (1992), which proposed approaching translation from a cultural perspective. Authors such as Lefevere were the first to sideline the interest in translation as text only, thus shifting researchers' attention to matters pertaining to the historical, cultural, and political environment of translations. In her book *Translation Studies*, Susan Bassnett argues that the history of TS "should not be approached from a narrowly fixed position" and mentions Carlo Emilio Gadda's words with reference to a work "that has barely been begun" (2002 [1991], p. 80):

> We therefore think of every system as an infinite entwining, an inex-tricable knot or mesh of relations: the summit can be seen from many altitudes; and every system is referable to infinite coordinated axes: it presents itself in infinite ways. (*ibid.*, p. 81)

Bassnett called for more documentation to be produced, more infor-mation about changing concepts to be examined, and for the setting up of an international venture on translation history. "By understanding more about the changing face of Translation Studies and the changing status of the translated text," she argues, "we are better equipped to tackle the problems as they arise within our own contexts" (*ibid.*, p. 137).

Therefore, the discipline acquired a strong culturalist orientation, one which has placed it under the sign of "cultural translation" and of its intrinsic power asymmetries. The crisis of representation in ethno-

graphy, mirrored by the "writing culture debate" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), has had enormous effects on translation as representation of the Other. However, the reparatory standpoint of postcolonialism was not without fault: turning towards the Other, an "other" who had been neglected and misrepresented for so long, postcolonial scholarship failed to account for the diversity of the West, most notably for the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe, treating the said "West," no matter how obviously general and ambiguous the term, as a uniform entity (Cronin, 1995; Cronin, 2010 [1998]). A series of new dichotomies gained momentum: the self vs. the Other, European vs. non-European, Western vs. non-European, etc. As Michaela Wolf aptly notes, the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 was the starting point for an attitude of hostility towards Europe, perceived in "an alleged uniqueness of the region's cultural tradition and a consequent *disparagement* of the culture of the 'other'" (2014, p. 228; emphasis mine).

Although scholars realized that translation is a field in which interactions and relations are vital, reductionism has not lagged behind. The whole system theory was built on the grounds of yet another binarism, via Itamar Even-Zohar's second condition for translations to have a central role in a host-literature—that is, when that literature is either peripheral and/or "weak" and the need for new literary forms is strongly felt in its repertoire (Even-Zohar, 1992). Thus, the new binary pair was center vs. periphery, a geographically informed distinction which offered the small nations of Europe as an example of peripheral literatures. Embracing post-colonial peripheries has resulted in implicitly creating other peripheries in academia, most notably exemplified by "the other Europe." Postcolonial scholars were the first to tackle the crisis of representation, by setting out to explore race and/or nationality from a feminist, "subaltern" perspective (Spivak, 1988; Flotow, 1997), to examine such concepts as hybridity, otherness, or marginality (Bhabha, 1994), and to generally "change the terms" of the discourse (Simon and St-Pierre, 2000), seeing translation as "a site for investigating intercultural contact" (*ibid.*, p. 11) and seeking "to recount the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages" (Niranjana, 1992, p. 1). Postcolonial TS has focused on formerly colonized sites, such as India, Africa, Ireland, and China, aiming at adding a global dimension to research and understanding the dynamics of power relations and alterity worldwide:

> For Translation Studies and literary study in general, adopting a post-colonial frame means enlarging the map which has traditionally bound literary and cultural studies. It means moving beyond the boundaries of Europe and North America, and following more expansive itineraries, moving into new territories. (Simon, 2000, p. 13)

But in doing so, in broaching the crisis of representation, postcolonial scholars became victims of an imperialist attitude similar to the one they were trying to do away with:

> [The] […] failure to account for the linguistic and translational complexity of Europe in part stems from the tendency by post-colonial critics to reduce Europe to two languages, English and French, and to two countries, England and France. Thus, the critique of imperialism becomes itself imperialist in ignoring or marginalizing the historical and translation experience of most European languages. (Cronin, 1995, pp. 85-86)

From Bias to (Another) Bias: the Major vs. Minor Dichotomy and its Many Shapes and Forms

With the advent of globalization, this biased pair gains more ground in the discourse of TS: we talk about major and minor cultures, where "major" seems to be in direct relation to the political and economic power of certain nations and "minor," related to all the others. This decontextualizing and objectifying qualifier (Kant, 1998) is regrettable for two reasons. First, it implies a biased, subjective comparison: while "small" refers to a limited size, "minor" means lesser, oftentimes even lower in rank. The second reason is related to this discipline's insistence on a nationalist paradigm (notably via the polysystem theory and postcolonialism), which other fields such as literary studies have escaped by embracing transnationalism, by challenging the historical and geographical boundaries of traditional practices (Hayles, 1990; Jay, 2010). The sociological turn of the 2000s appears to have strengthened the bias: translation seen as an unequal exchange between dominating and dominated cultures takes place in a world that is highly hierarchical (Heilbron, 1999; Casanova, 2004; Heilbron and Sapiro, 2008), although Pierre Bourdieu's praxeological mode of knowledge—one professing a dialectical relationship between various governing social structures and translators' dispositions—presents the perfect opportunity for overcoming reductionism. A large number of contributions in TS focused at the beginning of the millennium on global translation flows, a preoccupation coming from the field of

comparative literature. It is only recently that we have started to look more consistently at how translation happens and, more importantly, at who is responsible for the things that happen (Buzelin, 2005; Chesterman, 2009), as well as at small languages that were placed at the periphery of the field by those studies dealing with global translation flows (Chalvin, Lange and Monticelli, 2011; Folaron, 2015).

The notion of minor language/literature/culture is perhaps one of the concepts that most entertains the antithetical and monolithic positions in TS. And it is an odd situation, especially given the difficulty faced by various scholars when trying to offer a proper definition of minor languages. The complication lies in coming up with a suitable definition of "smallness": "The criteria based on norms, writing, literature, etc. cannot be applied to the majority of languages and thus cannot provide a general definition of a minor language" (Wildgen, 2003, p. 154). Wolfgang Wildgen notes that "minor has connotations of negative value, including irrelevant, bad, without power, etc. As a relational value, it requires a frame or a norm (average)" (*ibid.*). With respect to a weighted index of minorness, the Romanian language, for instance, is neither statistically, nor geographically, nor historically minor: it has approximately 25 million speakers, its literary language map has clear contours, and it dates as far back as the 16th century. It is not minor in relation to a set of social domains or in relation to cultural representation, as it has a written form and functions as the language of the national media and of the government, for example.

The introduction written by Joel Sherzer and Thomas Stolz to the volume *Minor Languages. Approaches, Definitions, Controversies […]* (2003) complicates things even further, as it suggests equivalence between "minor languages" and "minority languages." Sherzer and Stolz first note that "[f]rom the point of view of the world as a whole, a national language may be a major or a minor language. […] Minority languages are languages of sociological minorities within particular countries" (2003, p. viii). Later on, they posit that "[m]inor languages also typically share certain sociolinguistic characteristics, including lack of written register, no legal recognition, and confinement to restricted domains of use" (*ibid.*, p. ix), even if the characteristics they enumerate pertain to what is commonly referred to as "minority" languages. However, they aptly observe that "[i]n general, minor languages are more diverse as a group typologically than major languages" (*ibid.*) which should make them more interesting for our field of inquiry, since they are "translation cultures par excellence" (Cronin, 2009, p. 170).

Besides the above references in the field of linguistics, other attempts at classifying languages as major and minor prove to be equally strenuous. While the French spoken in Canada clearly falls in the category of minority languages (Bertrand and Gauvin, 2003), things are not that clear in the case of a language like Romanian, for example. In *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (2015), Alexander Beecroft proposes a classification that draws on Dutch sociologist Abram De Swaan's work, according to whom English is a "hyper-central" language, followed by twelve languages seen as "super-central" (among which German, French, Spanish, Chinese, in no particular order), and approximately 130 "central" languages, defined as those languages whose speakers "link peripheral languages through communities of bilingual speakers" (Beecroft, 2015, p. 250). While Romanian does not make the top 25 languages classified by their number of speakers, it ranks 25th in terms of source languages for literary translation and 24th as a target language for literary translations according to UNESCO. The great discrepancy between the number of titles translated from Romanian (5,318) and the number of titles translated into Romanian (17,966) is a relevant instantiation of why the study of the role played by various small nations is so important for the field, at least just as important as the issues related to the centrality of certain prominent languages.

De Swaan's work (2010) and the UNESCO statistics also set the grounds for Johan Heilbron's essay on the world system of translations (2000), in which he examines the international flow of translated books, basing his analysis on the prominence of source languages. Heilbron borrows De Swaan's term "hyper-central" for categorizing English, but uses three different terms for categorizing the others— German and French as "central"; Spanish, Italian and Russian as "semi-central"; and all the others as "peripheral." His entire argument is built on a core-periphery structure, which serves the purpose of a macro-overview of the global translation flows, but implicitly reduces the role of small countries, no matter how important a role translation plays in those cultures. All these rankings demonstrate the relativity of such terms and classifications: if we take the example of Romanian, according to De Swaan it is a central language, according to Beecroft it is a major national language, while according to Heilbron it is a peripheral language.

This is an example of the way in which the sociology of translation centered its discourse on the power relations inherent in the encounter

of cultures, which ordinarily have significant consequences on the production and reception of translations. Aware of their Eurocentric roots and biases (Trivedi, 2006; Tymoczko, 2007), TS started to aim at becoming more international. One of the most vocal author in signaling the setbacks of the increasing hegemony of English as language of international communication, science, and scholarship in TS is Mary Snell-Hornby, who posits that English as a global lingua franca is not a solution for "sophisticated academic discourse dealing with complex acts of communication across potentially all languages and cultures as in Translation Studies" (2010, p. 98). Snell-Hornby also emphasizes the danger for English to become, besides a means of communication, the sole object of discussion, thus "defeating the very purpose of Translation Studies as international and cross-cultural communication" (*ibid.*, p. 99), and proposes the use of bridge languages other than English that would give access to the work of scholars coming from countries with lesser-known languages.[1] The predominance of English with the advent of globalization has been qualified by authors like Karen Bennett as "epistemicide" (2007), "first-class burial" of any other language. Snell-Hornby's concerns had already been expressed by Sherry Simon in postcolonial and trans-national context:

> Transnational culture studies have tended to operate entirely in English, at the expense of a concern for the diversity of languages in the world. The focus on translation within the global context is necessary to draw attention to language issues in cultural exchange. (2000, p. 12)

In spite of all these, until very recently there has been an ongoing debate on universalism (entirely built on the European/Western tradition) vs. internationalism in TS. In a recent dialogue published in the journal *Translation Studies* between Andrew Chesterman and Șebnem Susam-Sarajeva, the latter argues that

> both Western and non-Western scholars should be encouraged in their efforts in widening and diversifying their understanding of "translation," not chastised because the very tenets of their arguments are fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented. (Susam-Sarajeva, 2014, p. 337)

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1. We acknowledge the need to move towards underrepresented languages in TS, but we believe that changes should start at the institutional level. Until academic publishers change their paradigm and promote writing in languages spoken by few, the only opportunity for researchers working in such languages to make their work known remains writing in English, French, or Spanish.

However, other scholars, like Peter Flynn, caution against such an attitude imposing a fashionable research agenda in academia and question "what is meant by (outmoded) Western or European translation models" (2013, p. 46). Flynn criticizes Tymoczko's use of "Western" or "Eurocentric" as "everything obsolete, narrowly linguistic and deserving of rejection" (*ibid.*), especially since Tymoczko herself notes that geographic positioning is not without fault: "[a]t this point in time, [...] when Western ideas have permeated the world and there is widespread interpenetration of cultures everywhere, the terms east and west become increasingly problematic" (Tymoczko, 2005, p. 1). Flynn aptly notes that concepts and theories change once they leave a certain culture and join a new one:

> In this sense, one might ask what indeed remains of "Western" or "Eurocentric" concepts once im/exported elsewhere? Can we always assume that, in a similar vein to the ghost of corporate capitalism perhaps, they propagate and maintain some sort of nefarious skeletal cognitive superstructure that continues to frame local transformations? Could they not, perhaps paradoxically, also help fire resistant transformations and hence unintentionally subvert themselves? (2013, p. 48)

Instead of simply qualifying former theories as "Western" and eagerly turning to new, more "exotic" ones, Flynn proposes an ethnographic approach that allows us to examine translators "in their plurality" (*ibid.*, p. 56). He offers the example of a study he carried out on twelve Dutch translators, a study whose results showed a plethora of different views on translation. Ironically, a considerable number of these views were associated with the notion of "cannibalism," typically connected with translation theory and practice in Brazil. Flynn calls his case study

> an attempt […] to illustrate briefly how many other translators operating below the horizon of academic visibility have equally insightful things to say about their practices and to share with translation scholars. Like the translators who have become visible to the discipline, they, too, are worth listening to. (*ibid.*, p. 45)

Even before authors like Flynn and Wolf pointed out the overuse of "Eurocentrism" as a counter-concept that serves a number of research ends, sanctioning a certain discourse as part of a fashionable research agenda that is meant to legitimize a new generation of scholars, Michael Boyden stressed the overuse of this term in relation to identity matters as a counter-reaction to various hegemonic structures, which may lead to "linguistic paternalism" (2011, p. 174).

Questioning the heuristic value of the reductionist major vs. minor dichotomy is perhaps all the more legitimate since the term "minor" in relation to literatures appears to be the result of inaccurate translation. In *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), Pascale Casanova explains that the American curricula and the field of cultural studies were heavily influenced by various recent French philosophers, of which Deleuze and Guattari and their "highly ambiguous notion of 'minor literature'" (2004, p. 203) are of particular interest. This notion stemmed from the concept of "small" literature in the sense used by Kafka, the author the French philosophers were translating from at the time. Casanova notes that the term used by Kafka in the German original was "klein" ("small"), with an alternative rendition as "minor" in one of the translations of the book, by Marthe Robert. In note 56 to her chapter titled "Small Literatures," Casanova mentions the fact that another translator of Kafka's, Bernard Lortholary, had qualified the term "minor" as "inexact and tendentious." (*ibid*., p. 383). However inexact and tendentious, these are the words that set the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari's theory—criticized by Casanova as "a crude and anachronistic interpretation" (*ibid*., p. 203) that deforms Kafka's meaning and as a misunderstanding that led the two French thinkers "astray" (Larose and Lapidus, 2002; Grutman, 2016):

> Minor literature is not the literature of a minor language but *the literature a minority makes in a major language*. But the primary characteristic of a minor literature involves all the ways in which the language is affected by a strong coefficient of deterritorialization. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 16; emphasis mine)

This first characteristic, a "literature a minority makes in a major language," refers to literatures such as the one of Quebec or Wallonia (Bertrand and Gauvin, 2003), for example, or that of colonial India writing in English or colonial Vietnam writing in French, or Native-Indigenous literature in English. The second feature refers to the highly politicized nature of minor literatures which, unlike great literatures, cannot afford to treat themes related to the individual. The third characteristic of minor literatures according to Deleuze and Guattari is that "everything has a collective value" (1986, p. 17). Deleuze and Guattari's "minor" literatures refer to what TS commonly refers to as "minority" literatures. As Albert Branchadell notes, the field does not provide a definition of its own for "minority languages," but borrows it from sociolinguistics. According to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, these are

languages that are both (i) traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population and (ii) different from the official language(s) of that state, on the understanding that such definition (iii) does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the state or the languages of migrants. According to this definition, the term "minority language" is not to be confused with "minor language," as it is used (for instance) in the journal *MTM. Minor Translating Major – Major Translating Minor – Minor Translating Minor*. (Branchadell, 2011, p. 97)

Although the difference between "minority" and "minor" should be clear, these terms are still politically charged, economically biased, and even used interchangeably.[2]

In 2020 the biased comparative paradigm is still operational in TS and we, the editors, believe it is essential to change this paradigm. Although the position of translated literature is less central in countries with a significant cultural production (Heilbron, 1999), our eyes are still eagerly turned towards such countries instead of the small or less central ones, in which translations and translators have a more visible positioning. Countries like the United States, where translations account for less than 3% of the total yearly book production, are referred to in the literature as major cultures, while countries like Canada, where translation has been a modus vivendi for many generations, or Romania, where translations occupy a significant place in its literature, most often fall in the category of minor cultures. So how are we to escape this major vs. minor conundrum? One valid way, I suggest, is to recognize that translators' connectionist minds refashion the world into micro-centers, which are intimately imbricated and mutually dependent. Acknowledging the complexity of such relationships starts by *actually talking about these micro-centers*—and that is the very purpose of this issue of *TTR*. Another condition for escaping the ineffable of geo-political mapping is to understand that precariousness fuels translation. Whereas "'at-homeness' is often claimed to be the necessary condition for a robust cultural identity" (Greenblatt, 2009, p. 4), one that will necessarily translate less, the precarity of unstable political contexts, of shifting economies, of en-

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2. In the introduction to the special issue of *The Translator* dedicated to "Translation & Minority," Lawrence Venuti states that "*[m]inor* cultures are coincident with new translation strategies, new translation theories, and new syntheses of the diverse methodologies that constitute the discipline of translation studies" (1998b, pp. 135-136; emphasis mine).

dangered languages, and of cultures that are perpetually in motion will turn the image of translation and of translators from "forgotten, neglected, or repressed" (Venuti, 1998b, p. 135) to one that is essential for cultural survival and progress.

Embracing the precariousness of micro-centers

In the field of Cultural Studies, Doris Bachmann-Medick called for overcoming the monolingual condition in the study of culture, largely Anglo-American, and for recognizing the merits of localization in theory formation:

> Even in times of global overlapping and mixing, processes of localization seem more important than ever—in order to stem hegemonic tendencies, in order to emphasize diversity, and in order to allow a multi-local production of theory. (2014, pp. 8-9)

Overcoming the monolingual condition translates into a "postmono-lingual condition" (Yildiz, 2012) that takes distance from the idea of nationhood. The indeterminacy of nations and languages (Solomon, 2014) translates into a focus on agency and practices, into mapping the world multipolarly rather than according to the logic of a center-periphery model.

Other scholars, like Liz Medendorp (2013), have started to re-assess the effectiveness of notions like periphery, margin or of other metaphors related to social and cultural situatedness. She notes that the ubiquity and essentialism of translation nowadays beg the question of nuancing a whole series of spatial metaphors, emphasizing the fact that translators should be now seen in their ideological dimension, rather than in their belonging to one culture or another. By the same token, in a world in which small cultures translate more, associating them with the periphery invites a more critical treatment. In the same vein, Paul Jay argues that the emergence of a new form of agency calls for a reconsideration of the center-periphery model:

> what we have increasingly come to recognize about the locations we study is that they are not fixed, static or unchanging. We create the locations we study, and this recognition ought to encourage us to continue to remap the geographies of literary and cultural forms. (2010, p. 4)

A first step in discovering underexplored sources that are bound to remain obscure if we continue to resort to subjective comparative binarisms is to look at the world as a huge interconnected network

and access it through new points of entry. In order to be able to map theories (in the plural!) of a field as open as TS, I suggest, one productive avenue of research is to rethink and re-conceptualize the series of schismatic dichotomies that very often create a gap between theory and praxis or even propagate an erroneous understanding of the underlying concepts. I have argued that the major/minor dichotomy, along with others such as Western/non-Western and Eurocentric/non-Eurocentric, global-local are fuzzy at best (Cronin, 1997; Apter, 2013)—even if their intention is to draw clear-cut categories that favor formerly un-favored cultures—and do not seem to lead to anything but a chain of entrenched distinctions that clearly miss all essential complications (Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts, 2018). These essential complications—such as those arising from complex cultural transfers—will certainly prove more useful to TS than any reductionist stance. Instead of constantly vacillating between a center and a periphery, between a process by which people make sense of the world and strive to control it (centering) and an entropy concept related to the process of change (peripheralizing), a balance act is needed in order to account for the complexity of translation.

A bird's-eye view of translation grounded in the assimilationist paradigm of macro-modernity that has been prevailing for the past two hundred years can never be sufficient. As Cronin (2012) argues, the difference between cultures has always been seen as oppositional, and all phenomena—including the translation-related ones—have mostly been approached from a comparative cartographic perspective, as physical spaces and boundaries usually invite dichotomous paradigms. Influenced by the inescapable globalization, macro-modernity tried to explain most social and cultural events by building large-scale models meant to compress time and space, to shrink the world and make it more accessible, instead of dwelling on local phenomena in themselves and situating them in the larger picture only after properly describing and understanding them in their complexity. This is what Cronin proposes through his "micro-modernity" (2006), a notion grounded in the possibilities of the local and meant to expand our understanding of the world. The advantage of the micro-modernity's stance is that it offers hopes of preserving their uniqueness to even the smallest communities ever imagined. Cronin's concept favors the processes that underpin any association of human beings and emphasizes the webs of connectivity that permeate their existence. In micro-modernity,

translation and translators can be seen in their becoming, as agents crafting a "cultural complexity which remains constant from the micro to the macro scale" (Cronin, 2006, p. 15).

In non-hegemonic contexts, precariousness is embedded in the very fiber the groups are made of (*ibid.*). To be in a precarious state refers to finding oneself in a situation that is beyond control, unstable, uncertain, and insecure. In complexity theory, precariousness is the condition for a system to survive and is reflected by a state commonly referred to as "at the edge of chaos," between certainty and uncertainty, between stability and instability. The precarious state, a transition stage between order and disorder, is thus a condition for life, for the dynamics of a system, and for its evolution, which means that no system is purely chaotic or utterly ordered, otherwise it would be extinct. Ultimately, precariousness is what maintains life and pushes the system to evolve through adaptation.

Precariousness also fuels our perception of the act of translation as a resource gap in the translating culture, as opposed to a gap in value. Translators' agency is thus grounded in their need to find resources they do not otherwise have in their proximity and translation is a reparatory act rather than a second-rate product. And it is within a small country that literary translators, for instance, are bound to act more according to their own circumstances and literary preferences and less according to some well-defined policies drawn up by publishing companies.

Precariousness is also the tenet that underpins Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage thinking in general and the "lines of flight" embarked upon by the body without organs in particular:[3]

> Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and *connect with other multiplicities*. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. The line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the *impossibility* of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions. (1980, pp. 9-10; emphasis mine)

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3. The notion of "body without organs" has been used in organizational theory "as a spontaneous, experimental and creative force of embodiment that challenges organized ways of life" (Thanem, 2004, p. 203).

Precariousness is therefore present in the multiplicity's lack of effectiveness in filling all the dimensions of reality, is caused by the multiplicities' belonging to wider webs of connection, and eventually leads to evolution, to "a supplementary dimension," to infinite possibilities of escaping. Both lines of flight and precariousness facilitate an understanding of how things connect rather than how things are. They both are concerned with how things become. The line of flight is the elusive moment when change happens, therefore it too takes place at the edge of chaos. As far as translators' agency is concerned, the line of flight happens when precariousness, when the need for resources, is acknowledged. This is when precariousness becomes translation.

Precariousness resemble "exploration," Bruno Latour's sequential factor in any network (2005). It is only by exploration, thus by a permanent state of being mobile, that the permanent modification of the boundaries and of the reticulated structure of the network allows for the continuation of the collective, for continuous formations of new associations. Latour's network acknowledges the precarious dynamic of collectives, as almost all assemblages are built on precarious socio material relations. Both Latour and Deleuze reject singular modes of existence and see precariousness as the fueling force of any association or assemblage. This is an idea beautifully explored in this issue from a more ethnographic and post-colonial angle by José Dávila-Montes, Gabriel González Núñez, and Francisco Guajardo, for whom Spanish speakers in the region of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas "do not fit comfortably in the traditional majority/minority dichotomy," although "the strong tradition of Spanish as a heritage language is strengthened by steady contact with neighboring Mexico and by a constant infusion of Mexican-born residents."

By the same token, I would like to propose that precariousness offers a vantage point to TS. First of all, the "peripheral" status of small countries should make them more visible in this field, since they bring new practices and new approaches that are more defining of decentralized systems. In smaller countries, perhaps more so than in others, translators do belong both to the literary and the translation fields, with many of them active in the academic one as well. Most of the time these three fields intertwine and offer translators lines of flight or modes of exploration that differ radically from what is generally described under the nation-bound paradigm of cultural fields and institutional power. Precariousness may turn out to be an auspicious angle for referencing self-reliant translators as agents of literary

change and translation as essentially both a personal and collaborative act. It is also the driving force behind migration and migrants' need to communicate with their culture of adoption. Examples abound.

Reconceptualizing translation in micro-modernity from a complexity perspective triggers the need for revamped methodologies. Researchers are more and more aware of the networked reality in which any cultural transfer happens and of the need to adapt their approaches to extremely varied patterns of cultural interaction. The complexity of multilingualism in Belgium and of language brokering by migrants in urban contexts has been tackled by Peter Flynn and Luc van Doorslaer (2016) via Jan Blommaert's nano-sociolingustic approach (2013). Examining the German minority in Belgium, van Doorslaer also uses the conceptual framework developed by Belgian philosopher Philippe van Parijs, who uses the notion of "maxi-min language," that is "the language of the maximal minimal competence," meant to "minimize exclusion and thus linguistic discrimination in order to achieve maximally effective communication." (van Parijs cited in van Doorslaer, 2018a, p. 48). Recent research into translators' agency now probes the multifaceted nature of social relationships via social network analysis (Blakesley, 2018; Ashrafi, 2019; Tanasescu, 2019; Tanasescu and Tanasescu, 2019). We can only hope that such efforts will continue, since it is only by addressing the minute details of translation that one may turn the invisible translator and their underappreciated work into visible agents engaged in deeply creative acts. Outside academia, important translation journals such as *Asymptote* are committed to a fairer representation of languages: their 25 issues to date host an impressive "eclectic platter" of literary translations from a whopping 121 countries and 103 languages.

About this Issue

In addressing the topic of minorness, this issue of *TTR* shifts the focus from language as engendering spatial and cultural dichotomies to language creating spatial and identity multicenters. The eight articles that we present zoom in on various so-called minor/peripheral/minoritized/minority contexts and take stock of the complex nature of cultural transfers that involve translation. None of the authors is actually concerned with borders or with the nation-state, which fade away against the more urgent issue of linguistic and cultural diversity, and all embrace precariousness, be it in language status or in terms of non-conformity with socially assigned gender.

José Dávila-Montes, Gabriel González Núñez, and Francisco Guajardo approach the thorny issue of linguistic justice in the south of the U.S. state of Texas—a region with "variegated lectal and diglossic landscapes," where Spanish has been spoken by the majority of the population but has historically received the treatment of an immigrant minority language. They depart from the troubled history of the region, explaining how language policies have served local power relations in public education, and present the steps taken at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley to reflect this bilingual reality in their operations, from localizing their website to becoming fully "bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate." This is a concrete example of how a language can be productively and justly un-minoritized.

Remy Attig investigates the linguistic diversity of Spanish-speaking diaspora and the efforts made by authors such as Matilda Koén-Sarano and Susana Chávez-Silverman to resist linguistic unity in order to preserve peripheral varieties such as Judeo-Spanish and Spanglish. The essay tackles "the challenges facing the translator of transnational, borderland, or so-called 'hybrid' cultures'" and presents several examples of English renditions in which such identities are negotiated via strategies that range from translating into the Judeo-English, to intralingual translation, or no translation at all.

Aiora Jaka Irizar brings to the fore contemporary pop and rock music translations into the Basque language. Spoken by a third of the Basque population, this language and the realities shaped by its minoritized status in North-Eastern Spain and South-Western France have imposed new translation strategies that considerably differ from those typically referred to in the literature: instead of focusing on equivalence, Basque musicians often adapt, manipulate, or even completely replace the lyrics they translate. Placed at the center of a true musical revival period, translation in Basque thus reveals the need to resort to a whole new research methodology, one which relies on intersemiotic translation and which sees the original as hypotext and the translation as hypertext.

Arianna Dagnino offers a contextualized definition of the term "minority language" in relation to literary authorship and self-translation. She departs from the example of Canadian-Italian author Antonio D'Alfonso, a plurilingual writer who opposes the dominance of a language over the other by frequently self-translating his work between English and French, and defines "minority language" from

the vantage point of literary writing as "any language which a bilingual or plurilingual writer perceives as not being the dominant one in the sociocultural and linguistic context in which s/he is creatively active (either by choice, life's circumstances or outer forces) as an author and/or as a (self)translator." In Dagnino's piece, self-translation is an effective means to decentralize a major language, to reassert the pluricentrality of the (literary) world, and to make uprooted— transnational and diasporic—writers feel more at home.

Guillermo Badenes' contribution shifts the focus to queer translation and to the political role played by translators and publishers in the process of publishing queer literature. Using David Levithan's and John Green's young adult novel *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (translated by Argentinian Noemí Sobregués) as an example, Badenes also sets out to identify translation strategies meant to preserve the cultural identity of the characters, as well as any translations problems that fail to do so, with the final objectives of finding "a way to recuperate the voices of cultural protest in the translation of LGBT+ literature" and of continually questioning the appropriateness of the way Latin America at large responds to heterosexism.

Nicole Nolette and **Dominique Louër** turn our attention to queer translation in the Quebec theater context. They examine in detail a translation of Michel Tremblay's play *Hosanna* into English, done in the mid-1970s by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco, and point out the fact that more attention was paid to the translation of the Montreal sociolect *joual* than to aspects related to queer elements. Marked by a constant concern for Quebec's political and linguistic alienation, English-speaking audiences and the theater company influenced the two translators' strategies and downplayed important elements related to sexual self-determination. Nolette and Louër combine translation genealogy and a queer studies approach to conclude that it was the expectations of the English-speaking Canada related to acceptability that "normalized" the gender assertion of the main character.

Julia Constantino complements the previous two contributions on queer translation in that she theoretically questions rigid expectations about translation as a product and as a process, and proposes a theory of translation as a performative act that focuses on readers' and translators' gender sensitivities within the wide context of social and political narrative processes. She rightfully argues that combining performativity with feminist and queer translation strategies offers a solid ground "to critically work with and affect binaries and their

unequal relations." Moreover, Constantino's aim is to take this view of translation beyond the Hispanophone academic milieu—in which queer studies are generally well received—, to create spaces for experimental translation and to gradually "transform the Mexican literary polysystem from a feminist and LGBTIQ+ perspective."

René Lemieux's essay approaches translation complexity from a re-translation and reception studies point of view and in the wider context of the humanities and social sciences. Lemieux starts from the assumption that if an author's work is first translated for reasons related to content, the re-translations will be more concerned with the respective author's language, style, and acquired status in the host culture. He takes as an example the reception of Jacques Derrida's work in the United States and shows that, although almost all his re-translations confirm the initial assumption, a certain choice in re-translating his term *entame* reveals a continued interest of the phenomenological school of thought in Derrida's ideas rather than in his persona many years after the first translation was published.

The multifarious ways in which these contributions engage with minorness in many of its forms are a clear testimony that it is an exciting time to be a translation studies scholar. They arguably show that we are taking more and more distance from dichotomous paradigms and that we are doing so with a clear awareness of translation as a multifaceted, highly-granulated cultural transfer. Complexity thinking in translation studies is definitely under way. However, there is still much work to be done and it will probably take a long time before we paradigmatically acknowledge the full complexity of any translation act. To this end, allowing translators and translation researchers to remap the world irrespective of power differentials in the geo-political arenas and of any leveling socially-acceptable norms needs immediate attention and careful nurturing both in and beyond academia.

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