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Introduction: emancipation, secret histories, and the language of hegemony

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Translation and Politics: setting the stage

A Soviet joke claims that Karl Radek (1885-1939), a leading figure of the Communist International (Comintern) and a well-known polyglot, was once asked by a visiting delegate how he was able to interpret and translate so fluently between several languages. Slightly surprised, Radek answered, 'I just know what people here are allowed to say' (Lewis 2008: 60). Although probably apocryphal, the anecdote has the power to illuminate to what extent 'translation' and 'politics' have interacted through history; in just one punch line, multiple questions can be raised about communication within multilingual organisations and empires, the impact of direct and indirect censorship, or the evolution and transformation of political ideologies across languages and cultures.

For many years, the strength of this longstanding bond and mutual dependency between 'translation' and 'politics' was subject to a peculiar academic contradiction: while interest on the political role of translation grew across disciplines like social movements studies, history, sociology, diplomacy, and international politics, it was palpable that these disciplines were not necessarily engaging with the field of translation studies, and that translation Studies was, conversely, not always very receptive to a dialogue with them. Thankfully, the tide seems to be changing, and this *Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics*, which brings together scholars from a great diversity of fields, aims to make a decisive contribution to this momentum.

Locating the spaces of interaction between 'politics' and 'translation' is, however, no easy task. For a start, defining 'politics' has been considered a political act in itself (Leftwich 2004: 2). Like any definition, this definition will be dependent on an understanding of what

its content and limits are and should be: for example, while certain approaches restrict politics to the act of governing (Peters 2004), others argue that 'politics is everywhere', since 'no realm of life is immune to relations of conflict and power' (Squires 2004: 119). As will be seen in this handbook, different objects of study favour different understandings of politics: the study of policies, for instance, has received more attention in a relatively institutionalised field like Audiovisual Translation (see Gottlieb, this volume) than in an all-encompassing way of life and protest such as Feminism (see Castro and Ergun, this volume). In spite of this, we feel that a working definition of 'politics' could be set out by adopting Jacques Rancière's understanding of 'the political' (2004: 112-113) as a site of tensions between 'police' (i.e. the process of governing and organising humans in communities subject to hierarchies and power relations) and 'emancipation' (the set of practices aimed at asserting and exerting equality between individuals). 'Politics' is, therefore, a space of oppositions between systems and individuals, hierarchy and equality, police and emancipation that is always subject to contestation and expansion.

Similarly, 'translation' is also a disputed concept. Firstly, it is frequently used to encompass two related practices: 'translation' and 'interpreting', as we will do in this introduction for convenience. At a deeper level, both researchers and ordinary users seem to be expanding the concept beyond a purely 'linguistic' sense to a wide understanding that also involves the translation of practices, ideologies, concepts, and values (see below and in Ban, Doerr, Liu, Xie, and Marais, among others, this volume).

Both in a restricted and an expanded sense, the interaction between 'translation' and 'politics' has been a constant throughout history, which this Handbook tries to capture through the combination of historical and contemporary approaches. Following the Rancierian understanding of 'police' and 'emancipation', it could be argued that two main lines cut across this area of study: on the one hand, how translation has contributed to the evolution and

transformation of political practices (what could be properly called the 'translation of politics'); on the other, the place of translation within political structures ('politics of translation'), as both a political means and a politicised object. It should also be taken into account that these lines of analysis are not mutually exclusive: a political praxis largely shaped by translation, such as Marxism (Boothman 2010), can eventually evolve into a political structure that impacts and shapes translation (see Ertürk and Serin 2016 for an excellent overview; and Lacorte, Lygo, Luong, Popa, and Wang, this volume, for specific case studies). Our aim in this introduction is to consider existing work on the political nature of translation and the uses of 'translation' as a concept in political science and praxis, in order to set the stage for the discussions of translation and politics in this volume.

Translation as Political Activity

Translation is political as it affects the interactions among groups and communities (in relation to both Rancière's notions of 'police' and 'emancipation'), as well as between states and in supranational organisations such as the European Union. Like most human actions, translation can have intended and unintended effects on other people and the environment, and what was not intentionally political can have political effects. In addition, translation and interpreting are used in many situations that are explicitly political, from state visits (where heads of state meet and use interpreters) to war (e.g. the use of interpreters by occupying forces), as well as on a daily basis in organisations like the United Nations or European Parliament. While we cannot cover every possible example of the ways in which translation has political effects in this section, we aim to demonstrate some ways in which the act of translation is political.

One of the key ways in which translation intersects with politics is by providing increased accessibility to information and services. In England, for instance, doctors'

surgeries often provide information in languages other than English for people whose home language is not English (often those who are immigrants to England). This allows access to health information and can improve quality of life. The decision to provide such translated materials is political, however, as it intersects with debates about immigration policy and questions of multiculturalism. Not only that, but the decisions over which languages and services to offer (as it would cost too much to offer all possible ones) mean that, while some groups have improved access, others do not (or have to learn English to receive it). In different circumstances, the translation into another language of official documents and webpages, and even road signs, can affect a sense of national or local identity (see Cronin 2006). For instance, many official documents in England and Wales are available in English and Welsh, recognising the standing of Welsh as a national language. In Ireland, there is institutional support for Irish Gaelic, including the dual presentation of road signs in English and Irish. In other instances, translation is used to make areas accessible to travellers or immigrants. In Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, for instance, signage now tends to be available in French, English and Chinese, while the metro in Shanghai is signposted in Chinese and English. These examples demonstrate how translation policy cannot be fully separated out from other forms of language policy (see González Núñez and Meylaerts 2017) and research on multilingual states (e.g. Wolf 2015, Meylaerts this volume) has demonstrated the complex interplay between languages and translation in such states. Given the complexity of global demographics, with high volumes of movement of people, the political importance of translating (or not translating) for speakers of languages other than the local, national one can only grow.

While translation can serve to include, it can also exclude. Translators can exclude material that they deem ‘unfit’ and thus stop target language readers accessing aspects of a text. An example is Howard M. Parshley’s translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième*

sexe/The Second Sex, which cut over ten per cent of the work, including a chapter on married women (Simons 1983). This has had an effect on the understanding of this work in Anglophone academia due to the omissions made (Moi 2002). Translation can also obscure the specificity of cultures in different locales by eliding the differences between them (Mignolo 2000: 1). This may take place in any number of ways. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, argues that there is a risk that translation can make all non-Western writers sound the same, with differences between genders, statuses and ethnicities erased (Spivak 2012: 315). Emily Apter (2013) puts forward a similar critique of the discipline of world literature (where texts from around the world are generally read in translation), arguing that it can elide the differences between texts and cultures. While Spivak and Apter are dealing with literature, Eric Cheyfitz (1991) demonstrates how translating concepts of property in the North American context allowed European settlers to appropriate land, erasing Native American concepts of land use, which were not exclusive in the same way as 'property' is understood in English terms (Cheyfitz 1991: 57). Other postcolonial translation scholars (e.g. Niranjana 1992, Rafael 1988) have also demonstrated the potential for translation to be used as a tool of colonial rule by excluding local populations from the colonial discourse unless translated into the language of the colonizer.

One way of approaching the point between inclusion and exclusion is the idea that translation performs 'bordering.' This term is used by Naoki Sakai (2009: 83) to discuss the way in which translation creates borders between languages and people. Translation effectively posits that one language is different from another (see Evans and Ringrow 2017: 5); translating implies that one language is not intelligible by speakers of another. The effect of this is double edged: it can increase access to texts through making them available in translation, but the necessity of translation can have the effect of separating out and distinguishing speakers of another language. This is especially important given the

connection found so often between national language and national identity (Sakai 2009: 73), where speakers of other languages become excluded from the national public sphere or placed in a subordinate position in it. So, translation can effectively cross borders, but at the same time it can create borders. The same action can both include and exclude.

Translation can also have a significant effect on how communities are represented and, consequently, understood. The question of representation has been addressed by many scholars not working directly on translation (e.g. Hall 1997, Said 1978), but there is also work within translation studies on the ways in which translation can affect the representation of communities (e.g. Cronin 2006). A particularly politically focussed approach can be found in Mona Baker's *Translation and Conflict* (2006). Baker uses narrative theory as developed in the social sciences (as opposed to narratology, the study of narrative forms) to explore how understandings of the world are created, maintained and contested. Translating texts can alter narratives about specific communities in other communities as well as the narratives communities tell about themselves, thus affecting the ways in which people understand situations and act. This is the case for non-political texts as much as political texts, as they all contribute to a narrative understanding of a community or group.

The political potential of translation is recognised by the expanding body of work on activist translation (Boéri and Maier 2010, Tymoczko 2010, Baker 2016, among others), feminist translation (e.g. Simon 1996, von Flotow 1997, Castro and Ergun 2017, von Flotow and Farahzad 2016, among others), as well as the practices of translation in political institutions such as the European Union (Wagner, Bech and Martínez 2002; Koskinen 2008), the United Nations (Baigorri-Jalón 2004), and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Schäffner, Taciuc and Tesseur 2014). In the next section, we shall review the work in translation studies on the politics of translation.¹

A Secret History of Translation Studies

There is a rich body of work on the relationship between translation and politics, yet it tends to belong to a ‘secret history’ of translation studies. This term comes from Greil Marcus’s *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (1989), where Marcus uses it to discuss the history of artistic and political movements throughout the twentieth century that coalesce in punk rock. The history is ‘secret’ as it is not obvious: it forms, in some ways a counter-history to the standard histories of the twentieth century (although, arguably, Marcus’s history has now been incorporated into more mainstream history). The study of political aspects of translation is also a secret history that is often submerged in overviews of the discipline, but still present. By thinking of it as a ‘secret history’, we posit its continuity and avoid the sense of it as a new ‘turn’ in translation studies (see Snell Hornby 2006). It is impossible to survey all the work on translation and politics (the BITRA translation bibliography lists over 600 items); what follows focuses on presenting key ideas and moments rather than aiming to be comprehensive.

There is a great deal of writing on translation from before the twentieth century (see Robinson 1997 for a selection from the European tradition; Cheung 2006 offers a selection of the Chinese tradition). Some of this discourse is written by diplomats, missionaries, and other politically active individuals and deals with political aspects of translation. However, more sustained theoretical work on translation begins in the mid-twentieth century, after the Second World War, and is strongly interwoven with political events. Wartime interests in code-breaking and in the relationship between language and power affected the nascent discipline of translation studies (Tymoczko 2007: 21). Supranational organisations like the United Nations (founded 1945) and the European Economic Community (the future European Union, created in 1957) also brought a renewed interest in translation, as such organisations, which are multilingual in nature, require translation and interpreting to

function (see Schäffner this volume). At the end of the 1940s, the use of interpreters during the Nuremberg trials (1945-46) and the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal (1946-48) – both war crimes tribunals following the Second World War – greatly contributed to the development of conference interpreting as a profession (see Gaiba 1998 on the Nuremberg Trials; Takeda 2010 on the Tokyo War Crime Tribunal). At the same time, Area Studies was developing as a subject in American academia (Rafael 2016: 149-161). Area studies trained students in languages and cultures, in order to provide area specialists for the military and intelligence services (although these cultural and linguistic skills were and are also useful for businesses, trade and diplomacy).

Despite this early connection of language learning and language services with political ends, work on translation in the 1960s (e.g. Mounin 1963; Catford 1965) often excludes the political, focusing instead on formal linguistic issues. Eugene Nida's (1964) work, in contrast, while drawing on linguistics, is based within a missionary tradition of bible translation and the politics of that drive many of his recommendations: 'dynamic equivalence,' for example, is designed in many ways to make texts readable and understandable by new readers in order to convert them to Christianity (see Liu this volume for a discussion of the politics of missionary translation). In another example of the way in which political viewpoint influences theorising about translation, Anthony Pym points out that the sorts of translation strategies proposed by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1958) posit a world in which languages are separate and where the translator's role is to maintain such separation through avoiding 'interference' (Pym 2016: 243). While Vinay and Darbelnet's position is not strictly political, Pym highlights an overlooked political aspect to the perception of the relationships between languages and cultures. As Pym (2016: 244) goes on to note, relationships between cultures and languages currently tend to be understood as

‘asymmetrical,’ meaning that those earlier strategies for avoiding interference may no longer be functional.

Analysis of the link between translation and politics increases significantly in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the discipline of translation studies expands and develops. Three main areas where this development comes are ideology, postcolonial studies and minority languages (in reality, there is significant overlap between these topics but we have divided them here for clarity).

Translation has frequently been connected to politics through the concept of ideology. Ideology, as Ian Mason defines it, is ‘the set of beliefs and values which inform an individual’s or institution’s view of the world and assist their interpretation of events, facts and other aspects of experience’ (Mason 2010: 86). Mason’s definition is very open and differs somewhat from the definition in political theory (see e.g. Althusser 1971; Žižek 1989), but also suggests that ideology can include politics, religion and other grand narratives, all of which can affect how a translation is written and received. André Lefevere’s elaboration of the notions of patronage and ideology in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992) develops an understanding of how external factors influence translations, both through financial and other forms of support (patronage) and through the ideological position of translators and other agents in the production of translation (publishers, editors, etc.). These may lead to (self-) censorship in explicit or implicit forms (see Merkle this volume). Also published in 1992, *Rethinking Translation*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, aimed to bring questions of ideology into the discussion of translation, focusing on ideas of gender, postcoloniality and alterity (all key ideas in critical theory). These concepts have continued to be of strong interest in translation studies and all of them deal with the political nature of translation. Indeed, a powerful strand of politically engaged feminist translation studies develops in the same period (see Castro and Ergun, this volume).

Edited collections such as *Translation Power Subversion* (Álvarez and Vidal 1996) and *Translation and Power* (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002) continued the analysis of ideology and politics in translation, bringing in questions of how power in various forms affects translation and how translators can resist it. Sonia Cunico and Jeremy Munday (2007: 141) criticised early work on translation and ideology for being focused on literature, while the study of ideology in other domains has much to offer translation studies (and has developed to some extent since their comments). While ideology is an umbrella term for political stances in translation, there is more specific work on different aspects of political translation.

Postcolonial approaches to translation, that is, those that study the effects of colonialism and its legacies on translation practice and, to a lesser extent, the role of translation in colonial practices and processes of decolonisation, also developed rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Importantly, many of the pioneering scholars in this area worked in other disciplines than translation studies (e.g. anthropology, history, literature), though their impact has been clearly felt in translation studies. Talal Asad's essay 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology' (1986) is an influential early study that focuses on the asymmetries of power in anthropology, especially in terms of representing and speaking for the cultures under study. Asad does not deal specifically with translation in the written sense of one text translating another one in a different language, but the issues of representation and power that he highlights are equally important for interlingual translation. Books by Vicente Rafael (1998), Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) and Eric Cheyfitz (1991) offered nuanced and theoretically sophisticated approaches to translation as part of colonialism in, respectively, the Philippines, India and North America. They were complemented by investigations by scholars such as Samia Mehrez (1992) and Richard Jacquemond (1992), both working on the North African Arabic context, as well as Gayatri Spivak (2012, first published 1993), who combines feminist and postcolonial approaches.

Anthologies from the late 1990s and turn of the century, such as *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999) and *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era* (Simon and St. Pierre 2000) helped to cement the importance of research on postcolonial aspects of translation in mainstream translation studies.

One area where postcolonial theory had an immediate influence was the discussion of minority languages and translation. Minority languages —also called by some scholars *minoritized* languages, emphasising the active role of power in their condition— posit an unequal relationship between two (or more) languages spoken in a nation, although the situation is often more complex than this, especially when one or more languages involved are the result of colonialism. The discussion of minority languages begins to gather weight in the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec, where issues of translation were particularly visible. Early work by Annie Brisset (1989) focused on the problem of translating into French for the stage in Quebec. Taking a postcolonial position, the use of metropolitan ('French') French in Quebec was avoided in preference for a more local form of French. The literary politics of Canada are also discussed in early work by Sherry Simon (1990), where she examines the way in which translations are positioned in translators' prefaces. Further work on minority languages expanded the focus to look at relations between Irish and English (Cronin 1995), using a postcolonial perspective to discuss the position of Irish in Ireland and the role of translation into Irish. In other multilingual states, the position of the smaller or less spoken languages and translation is also politically fraught and translation theory increasingly responded to this throughout the 1990s. The special issue of *The Translator* on translation and minority, edited by Lawrence Venuti (1998), contains, for instance, essays on African languages, Catalan, Eastern European languages and other case studies. A shift takes place in the scholarship to reading the political asymmetries of language usage globally, with English seen as the hegemonic language and other languages as having less cultural power; the

ramifications of this for translation are explored in more recent scholarship on English as a lingua franca and translation (e.g. Taviano 2013; for interpreting see e.g. Albl-Mikasa 2013). Other work on minority languages includes studies of language varieties used in audiovisual translation (e.g. Armstrong and Federici 2006), while Michaela Wolf's (2015) research on translation and interpreting in the Habsburg empire gives the question an historical depth.

In the new millennium, translation studies has increasingly dealt with political aspects of translation in the form of translation and conflict. Mona Baker's *Translation and Conflict* (2006), mentioned above, is a significant contribution to this debate. Emily Apter explicitly links her reflections on translation in *The Translation Zone* (2006) to the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks on New York (where terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into the World Trade Centre towers in lower Manhattan). The political scene of the early 2000s was also affected by the war on terror and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These have provided much food for thought for scholars working on translation and interpreting (see e.g. Rafael 2010, 2016; Salama-Carr 2007; Footitt and Kelly, this volume) and have caused a reassessment of the role of translators and interpreters in conflict. As mentioned earlier, research linking translation and activism has also expanded in the last 20 years in the areas of political activism (see Carcelén-Estrada, this volume) and feminism (see Castro and Ergun, this volume).

In parallel to much of this research on politics in translation, scholars working predominantly in other disciplines (such as area studies and comparative literature) have also built up a body of work that examines the political role of translation. Lydia Liu's work examines how translated concepts brought new ideas and terms into Chinese in early twentieth century China (Liu 1995). Her *The Clash of Empires* (Liu 2004) explores the role of translation in the nineteenth century in China, focusing on the translation of international law and its discourse of sovereignty and how this was received in China. Liu's work seldom

engages with mainstream translation studies (as was also the case for early scholars of postcolonial translation), but her writing demonstrates the sorts of critical work that translation can undertake. Naoki Sakai's work on translation investigates its influence on nation building, especially in the context of Japan, where translation from Chinese was used in the eighteenth century to delineate differences between Chinese and Japanese (Sakai 1997: 40-72). Important innovations in Sakai's work include the notion of the 'regime of translation', which Sakai sees as an imaginary symmetry between languages (in Sakai's case, Chinese and Japanese) and which views languages as unities, even when they are heterogeneous and made up of multiple dialects, as both Chinese and Japanese are (Sakai 1997: 51-52). Combined with his 'schema of co-figuration' (Sakai 1997: 52), which posits the way in which languages and cultures construct each other (Sakai's example is how, by discussing Japanese thought, both Japan and the West need to be conceptualised), Sakai's work offers a profoundly political rethinking of many of the bases of translation theory. Sakai's notions of homolingual and heterolingual address (1997: 1-17) also complicate translation as a practice, questioning what sorts of community are addressed by texts (both in and out of translation; see also Sakai and Solomon 2006). Douglas Robinson has recently termed the research by Liu, Sakai and Jon Solomon 'Critical Translation Studies' (Robinson 2017). However, this group can be expanded to include other scholars, such as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, whose *Border as Method* (2013) analyses the proliferating borders of late capitalism and the role that translators play in relation to them. Mezzadra and Sakai also edited a special issue of the journal *translation* on translation and politics (Mezzadra and Sakai 2014), containing essays by Liu and Solomon, among others. Other scholars working in comparative literature and film studies on the political aspects of translation include Emily Apter (2006, 2013) and Rey Chow (1995, 2014). All these scholars tend to overlook or not cite mainstream translation studies (with some occasional exceptions)

but their work offers rich resources for deepening the understanding of the relationship between translation and politics, as does the work using the concept of ‘translation’ in political praxis and science.

Translation in Political Thought

Political science has seldom interacted with translation studies as a field, yet the centrality of translation and interpreting in politics has led many relevant thinkers to conceptualise political processes in terms of ‘translation’, which opens the path to potential areas of interdisciplinary exchange, but also between scholars and practitioners.

Although these reflections have emerged at different times and from different traditions within the global left, a common thread runs through them: the need to establish a shared political language that allows understanding between a variety of social agents while encouraging social transformation. A central reference for this strand of thought is Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a major Marxist thinker and a figure of central relevance in the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci had a keen interest in languages, dialects, and translation due to his political experience (see Carlucci 2013); as a Communist cadre, he dealt with a wide range of social classes (workers, peasants, intellectuals) that possessed highly diverging sociolects and worldviews, while as a delegate to the Comintern he engaged with other cadres from many other countries and languages. During his years of imprisonment under Fascism, Gramsci devoted an important part of his well-known *Prison Notebooks* to the study of language and translation from a Marxist perspective; however, due to the fragmentary nature of these writings and sketches, his reflections on translation are far from systematic and, in some cases, might have aged less well than others. Hence the importance of Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte’s edited volume *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* (2010), an invaluable reconstruction of Gramsci’s linguistic and translational thought that combines classic and

contemporary studies of his work. Both Boothman (2010) and Lacorte's (2010) contributions are fundamental to apprehend the full force of Gramsci's ideas of 'translation' and 'translatability'. Firmly rooted in a Marxist tradition that would also encompass Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, Gramsci sees the possibility of translation between cultural, philosophical, and political paradigms as a central element for, but also a barrier to, intellectual and political development. In Gramsci's view, the translation between systems has 'limits' that are 'determined by the fundamental nature' (Gramsci cited in Boothman 2010: 122) of these systems; the superior nature of Marxism — or the 'philosophy of praxis,' as he calls it in his prison writings to avoid censorship — lies precisely in its ability to successfully translate concepts and elements from various other disciplines and paradigms. However, Gramsci was also clearly aware of the practical limits that Marxist political applications faced in the absence of a proper understanding of translation. Discussing a reflection by Lenin on the Comintern ('We have not been able to "translate" our language into the "European" languages'; Lichtner 2010: 197-198), Gramsci remarks how certain Comintern resolutions were too strongly based on 'Russian conditions' and, therefore, were untranslatable to other European countries. Yet political change was not only dependent on translation at a transnational level. As Gramsci emphasises, translation between different political languages is essential in the successful construction of 'hegemony' — the moral and social leadership of one given class above the others (Gramsci 1988: 189-221) —, as it allows the emergence of a new, shared political language that builds on the various theories and models that exist within a given society (Lacorte 2010: 218-221).

The use of 'translation' as a political concept progressively increased at the turn of the twenty first century, due to a growing awareness to the importance of dialogue and understanding between different constituencies. Analysing the role of intellectuals in the contemporary world, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1987: 127-148) claimed that

postmodernity established a decisive shift, as the intellectual is no longer understood as a ‘legislator’ (who provides the rules or laws that others must follow) but rather as an ‘interpreter’ who can facilitate communication between different social groups thanks to her/his expertise ‘in translation between cultural traditions’ (143). This notion of critical dialogue is also paramount in Judith Butler’s highly influential contribution to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, a series of exchanges between Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (2000). In her first two chapters of this book (2000a, 2000b), Butler argues that ‘universality’, i.e. reciprocal recognition between groups and cultures, will only be achieved in our time ‘of hybrid cultures and vacillating national boundaries’ if it is ‘a universality forged through the work of cultural translation’ (Butler 2000a: 20). Therefore, a fundamental task for democratic movements is to establish

practices of translation among competing notions of universality which, despite any apparent logical incompatibility, may nevertheless belong to an overlapping set of social and political claims. Indeed, it seems to me that one of the tasks of the present Left is precisely to see what basis of commonality there might be among existing movements, but to find such a basis without recourse to transcendental claims. (Butler 2000b: 167; italics in the original)

Translation is thus placed as a constitutive practice for political alliances, as it establishes both the limits and the commonalities between various political subjects; to a certain extent, this understanding of translation as a tool for the creation of political platforms seems to adapt the translational nature of Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’ for our times, yet with the crucial addition of placing inclusiveness and mutual recognition at its very core. This challenging formulation bears strong similarities with those formulated later by theorists such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006: 131-147) in his study of the World Social Forum or

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009: 340-351); for related discussions, see also Fernández (forthcoming) and Xie and Doerr in this volume.

Finally, the notion of translation has also been fundamental for emerging actors in the political field during the wave of protests that have swept the world since the start of the current economic and social crisis (following the banking crisis that began in 2008). For instance, activist Mark Bray, who took part in the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011, defined Occupy as ‘a vehicle for translating anarchy to a society that was generally receptive to many anarchist ideas but wary of its ideological trappings’ (Bray 2013: 5). This notion of ‘translation’ as a process of communication that goes beyond the limits of fixed ideologies in order to find commonality between social groups has also been central for the Spanish political party Podemos, founded in 2014 and inspired by the ‘indignados’ protests of 2011. A key part of Podemos’ strategy was in itself the product of multiple processes of translation, as many among its founders aimed at translating the Latin American ‘populist’ experiences to the Spanish context using a political framework that was largely indebted to Gramsci and Laclau. At the same time, ‘translation’ has been a fundamental tool to conceptualise their political praxis. According to their Secretary General, Pablo Iglesias, ‘communication is a pivotal work of translation’, as politicians need to transform their ‘diagnosis into a discourse that people can understand, using words that are useful to explain things’ (Iglesias cited in Fernández, forthcoming). This notion of ‘translation,’ which seems at first to be distant from the sort of linguistic translation familiar to translation studies, shares a common goal of finding ways in which to communicate ideas to different audiences.

Overview of this Handbook

This handbook aims to link together these wide-ranging discussions of translation and politics. We have set out to provide an overview of the key ideas and tendencies. It is impossible to cover everything: while we have attempted to be inclusive, the content is shaped by our own interests as well as the sense of a critical mass of work in the field. The book consists of four thematic sections: 1. Translation and Political Ideas, 2. Translation and Structures of Power, 3. Politics of Translation and 4. Case Studies.

The first section includes essays which explore the dynamics of the translation and circulation of political ideas (such as Marxism, Democracy, Feminism, among others) and how these ideas intersect with and affect translation practice. The second section focuses on ways in which translation is used and affected by structures of power (which might have also been shaped by translation in the first instance), as well as the way in which it can be used to resist power. Essays in this section analyse the effects of external events on translators' and interpreters' behaviour and the ways in which translators and interpreters are caught up in the currents of power, whether through resistance or compliance. Essays in the third section focus on the politics of translation in specific fields and domains, ranging from the role of politics in translators' associations to the politics of literary and audiovisual translation, localization and the translation of popular music. Finally, the fourth section focuses on case studies of the relationship between translation and politics at specific periods and in specific locales. These demonstrate through example the relevance of thinking of translation as a political act, making concrete in many ways the discussion in other chapters. Obviously, it is impossible to cover all time periods and locations, but we have aimed for a global selection and a historical range that extends from the Classical Mediterranean to contemporary India and Arab countries, via Medieval Europe, Meiji Japan, twentieth century China and Viet Nam.

Chapters throughout the book aim to give an overview of the issues at stake as well as examples demonstrating these in practice. Each chapter aims to provide a critical introduction to the topic at hand while suggesting potential future paths for study and research. Essays should be accessible for undergraduate and postgraduate students, but also offer insights to researchers and scholars. We can see their use in a number of classroom situations, as initial readings to introduce students to a topic or as further reading that gives another perspective on the topic at hand. Not all readers will read the whole book and it has been designed so that readers can go straight to their area of interest. Essays have suggestions for further reading and for other relevant chapters in the handbook; therefore, we encourage readers to explore topics beyond their own immediate interests, developing a wider understanding of the intersections between politics and translation.

The chapters in the handbook all focus on translation but are not limited to translation studies approaches; contributors work in a variety of areas across the humanities, including translation studies, literary studies, politics, economics, classics, modern and medieval languages, development studies and area studies. As we argued at the beginning of this introduction, politics and translation have been strongly interwoven throughout history; going beyond fixed disciplines is, therefore, necessary to properly illuminate the bond between them. We hope that this handbook can further stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue about translation and politics.

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¹ There are also the politics of translation studies to consider (see e.g. Pym 2006), both in terms of individual scholars (who can be more or less politically active individuals) and the institutionalised form of the discipline itself, which has often been criticised of Eurocentrism (see e.g. van Doorslaer and Flynn 2013). However, this is beyond the scope of this introduction