

Untranslating Translation: Toward the Construction of a New Form of Solidarity

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Abstract

Given the intricate connections between knowledge production, language use, and the politics of the time, people are still in need of a decolonized common language, or medium of communication, that is not regulated or administered by a power structure in place that can be differently configured. This essay suggests that for solidarity to be genuinely established among people in this world, we need to build a de-centered archive of expressions on ways to conceptualize interpersonal relationships beyond power structures, and initiates a step towards it through close-reading-based analysis of radically juxtaposed texts that are committed to the examination of ways to be in relation with people separated from us by the driving force of imperialism on equitable terms, and that embody a way to speak to people beyond the boundary set by power structure through elaborate use of language. Ultimately, for such an archive to be sustained, attention needs to be constantly paid to the efforts made outside the institution and beyond social expectation.

Keywords: *Politics, Writing, Language, Translation, Epistemology*

“Modern ideologies of political contestation have been largely co-opted by neoliberalism. There is resistance, but it is less and less credible as a bearer of a realistic alternative. It occurs increasingly outside institutions and not through the modes of political mobilization prevalent in the previous period: political parties and social movements.”

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*

“Too often, being endowed with language not only did not contribute to our natural growth, but also deprived it of the resources of life and energy that it could receive in relating to other human beings. ... How to get the word not to define our being-with as co-belonging in the same, discourse or world, but to allow each of us to communicate with the other while letting this other and ourselves be in the world that is suitable for each, without subjecting both to a unity or totality extraneous to our own?”

Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being*



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It is common knowledge that modern history is at the same time a history of colonialism, imperialism and exploitation that involves practically every corner in the world, it is also widely accepted that we are living in a world that still suffers the consequences of a not fully decolonized reality under different forms of manifestations. Yet, when it comes to a common understanding of reality at the level of the globe, one appears to be short of a common vocabulary that is capable of describing one's relationship to another beyond the management of a colonial agent or benefactor. Many scholarly works on colonial language policies, the history of language-related studies, and on literary and cultural studies in postcolonial settings (Johannes Fabian, Joseph Errington, Homi Bhabha, Aamir Mufti, etc.) attest to the intricate connections between the sustenance of colonial forms of governance, imperial policies, and language use, thereby illustrating the importance of attention paid to the space in-between, often created by one's intimate workings with the language he/she uses, for signs of resistance against a colonial dominance of the mind.¹²³⁴

Institutionalized knowledge production in modern times is also, at least in part, sustained by an exploitative infrastructure, nurtured by social inequality that makes colonialism possible and drives imperialism forward. Scholarly works in the humanities abound in pointing at the convoluted entanglements between the physical configuration and division of spheres of knowledge and the politics at the time (Spivak, Gikandi, Lowe, Saussy, etc.).⁵⁶⁷⁸ As language is also the medium for the documentation and transmission of knowledge, scholarly narratives are also not exempt from the influence of the politics of the time, and it demands individual, non-institutionalized efforts from intellectuals to ensure intellectual independence in thinking, and to generate and sustain a free space for the learning, thinking, and exchange of ideas on equitable terms.

Crucial to the creation and maintenance of a space as such is a renewed understanding of community shaping, and ways to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with one another in this world, that goes beyond what is allowed by the most immediate socio-historical condition that undergirds one's presence. Language, the mediator of communication between human subjects, bears witness to the intimate efforts from each human being to moderate relationships among people. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "The Politics of Translation," highlights the agency of a translator by drawing attention to the different possibilities of relationships that may

stand in-between the writer, the translator, and the languages in question. Building on Michèle Barrett's idea that translation can be viewed as an independent, political process if language is seen "as a process of meaning construction", Spivak anticipates the risk of imposing one's own desires through the act of translation as a consequence of one of the "seductions" of translating, allowing the translator to "get around the confines" of his/her identity, written in his/her own language, by way of working with a language that belongs to others.⁹ With the remark that:

The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of the British woman/citizen with the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, its often racist present, as well as its "made in Britain" history of male domination. (The Politics of Translation 312-313)

Spivak unsettles the taken-for-granted notion of an easily pronounced solidarity among women, and proposes two points to counter this tendency, that "the task of the translator is to surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text", and that "the translator must be able to discriminate on the terrain of the original", to ensure an ethical translation practice, also a first step to be together with a subaltern "other"(320). In other words, a translator should be able to discern the politics and the power structure behind the original text in question as well as understand his/her own situated relationship with the text, and be willing to set aside, if not totally abandon his/her situational privilege, for transmission of knowledge to happen through the act of translation.

If narratives, whether scholarly or literary, are to be seen as a translation of one's knowledge and thinking into a socially, institutionally, and politically acceptable form of discourse that is to face an audience that has been both socially and historically restricted by existing modes of circulation, also not free from the politics at the time, what can an author do to ensure that his/her ideas can reach an audience beyond the encounters staged by the powers structure in place in a non-imposing manner? What can a literary scholar and critic contribute in this process, if his/her writings are also viewed as a form of translation, and transmission of ideas that is not free from socio-historical limitations? Following Spivak's reasoning, the answer appears to be that a writer who is committed to social justice in his/her writing also needs to

discriminate against the terrain of his/her own writing conditions, and think about the readers he/she attempts to reach and their own socio-linguistic situations. Literary scholars and critics who are committed to fostering a more equitable social-relationship, on the other hand, need to stay tuned to the politics surrounding both the original work studied and his/her own place and time, and strive to read and work beyond institutional expectations and divisions, while seeking to forge new relationships beyond the administration of a power structure through his/her writing, creating simultaneously the linguistic condition for intellectual exchanges across the globe beyond a dominant episteme. Yet, how to make this possible? As I would like to suggest in this essay, it is crucial to build an archive of literary reference that collects different pathways to achieve communication beyond the administration of the power structure in place through one's elaborate workings on language and discourse, an archive that goes beyond divisions according to historical periods or geo-linguistic divisions, and connected based on the way each piece of work suggests an alternative possibility of being in relation.

In the rest of this essay, I initiate a first step toward the construction of this archive with the juxtaposition and close reading of three fictional works across three distinct linguistic contexts that engage a vast span of historical periods: “Zhu Jian” (“Forging the Swords”, 1926), a short story by the Chinese writer Lu Xun; *Vuta n'kuvute* (“Pull and I pull you back”, 1999), a novel by Shafi Adam Shafi, the renowned writer from Zanzibar, Tanzania; and *Viagens na Minha Terra* (“Travels in my Homeland”, 1846), a novel by the Portuguese writer Almeida Garrett. While each writer, if not each piece, has been recognized and appreciated as a merited voice from their time and context, nuances concerning the conceptualization of the dynamics between inter-human relationships, power structure in the contexts of colonialism and imperialism, and the act of writing or using language have not been fully examined. As I hope to show through this comparative analysis, all three pieces of works demonstrate the authors' commitment to thinking about ways to strike a balance between the different forces of the time, so that a better and more critical understanding of how to be in relation to another can be reached. Reading these works together give us an alternative, more independent and comprehensive insight into the different perceptions of a comparable facet of a common historical reality, upon which diverse forms of human experiences can be better understood, and productive conversations can be better staged.

“Zhu Jian” and the Essence of Being Together beyond Power

“Zhu Jian” (“Forging the Swords”), a story by Lu Xun from his short story collection, *Gu Shi Xin Bian* (“Old Tales Retold”), is the retelling of an old story of revenge set in the Spring and Autumn Period of China (722-476 BC). Mei Jian Chi is the son of a skilled sword maker who made a great sword for the king of the Chu kingdom. Upon finishing his work, the king killed him, out of fear of the possibility of him making another sword of similar caliber for another king. Having anticipated this, the sword maker made another sword like this and left it to his wife, who was expecting a child, in the hope that she would ask their child to use the sword to take revenge for him. When Mei Jian Chi grew into a young man, he went out to seek revenge after being told about the death of his father. However, upon learning about his scheme in a dream, the king listed Mei Jian Chi as wanted over the entire kingdom, which forced him to hide in the mountains. A man in black came out and offered to help Mei Jian Chi if he would be willing to give up his sword and his head. Mei Jian Chi, despondent about the prospects of taking revenge by himself, cut off his head with the sword, and offered both to the man in black. The man then came to the king and asked to boil the head in a large cauldron as a form of entertainment, and tricked the king into approaching, by the time of which he cut off the king’s head and dropped it into the cauldron. The two heads, that of the king and that of Mei Jian Chi, started to fight in the cauldron. Seeing Mei Jian Chi’s head losing, the man in black also cut off his own head and threw it into the cauldron to fight along with Mei Jian Chi’s. Eventually, the revenge was taken and the king’s head finally perished. However, since the other two heads also perished in the cauldron, to the extent that it was no longer possible to differentiate between the remains, people decided to evenly distribute the remains among the three and bury these all as part of the king's remains.

In Lu Xun’s retelling, this mythical story of revenge is turned into a careful examination of human nature, and a contemplation of interhuman relationships facing an external power structure. The inspection of human nature is set up in the beginning of the story, with an extensive and circumstantial portrayal of Mei Jian Chi’s hesitations towards the killing of a mouse, an intuitive ethical reckoning of the slaughtering of an animate being. When first annoyed by the mouse, he tries to resolve the problem by resorting to non-violent means. Seeing its ineffectiveness, he refrains from taking more intense actions out of consideration of disturbing

his sleeping mother, yet takes delight in finding that things turn out to work in his favor when the mouse accidentally trapped itself. His subsequent hesitations about whether to kill or to save it reflect both his reservations about the act of killing and his natural feeling of sympathy towards a weakened creature struggling for life. This lengthy depiction of Mei Jian Chi's complex inner struggles and emotional feelings, partly in response to the mouse's reactions, entails a vivid description of human feelings of uneasiness when violence has to be inflicted. His mother, however, views his hesitance as a sign of the weakness of his character. Concerned about his ability to take revenge for his father, she asks him to be stronger and more resolute.

Should resoluteness in front of an act of killing really be viewed as a virtue? A negative answer is provided in the man in black's self-evaluation and refusal to accept Mei Jian Chi's verbal honoring as he checks on the reason for the man's willingness to help, to which a critique of the corruption of language in characterizing human virtue is fashioned:

“You? You are willing to take revenge for me, man of justice?”

“Ah, don't wrong me with this appellation.”

“Then, you are sympathetic to us, an orphan and a widowed mother? ...”

“Oh child, don't ever mention these stigmatized names.” He said, coldly, “justice, sympathy, these things were clean in the past, but are now turned into the capital of the fiendish usurers. I don't have those things that you mentioned. I just want to take revenge on your behalf.”

...

“But why do you take revenge on my behalf? Do you know my father?”

“I've always known your father, as I have always known you. But I want to take revenge not because of this. Smart kid, let me tell you. Don't you know how good I am at taking revenge. Yours is mine; he is me. There are so many injuries inflicted on my soul by others, that I hate myself already.”¹⁰

(78-79)

The man in black, more experienced in worldly affairs than Mei Jian Chi, knows the cruelty and the absence of humanity associated to the killing of a human subject, as well as the unreasonableness it bears in a society mapped with a complex framework of power dynamics and intertwined with various levels of hypocrisy, to the extent that there is no room for a thorough and sound reasoning in order for any concrete action to be taken. Language, when corrupted by existing power structure to the extent of alienating the lives of the powerless, leaves them little verbal means to express themselves without making use of a language that is complicit. Therefore, to the man in black, there is not a way to formulate a justification for Mei Jian Chi's revenge, and in order for it to be taken, an extreme form of solidarity that demands

unconditional blind trust and determination for sacrifice, which is another form of cruelty, is required.

Whether or not the revenge can be justified depends, to a large extent, on the characterization of the king and his motivation of wanting the sword in the first place. Curiously, no extended account on this is provided in the story, as the figure of the king is depicted almost as an exclusive embodiment of power - who is bored with a life of extreme and unquestioned power and extravaganza, but still sensitive to places where his power, and the image of infallibility that is associated with it, can be challenged. Upon realizing that the magical effect that the man-in-black promised does not take place immediately after Mei Jian Chi's head is put into the cauldron, the king becomes nervous about the possibility of him being deceived, which constitutes a threat to his otherwise impeccable public image:

After a long time, nothing happened. The king first got irritated, then the queen and the concubines, the chancellors and the eunuchs were also somewhat anxious, the chunky midgets were already sneering. Seeing them sneering, the king felt himself fooled, looking back at the warriors, he wanted to order them to throw the depraved citizen to the cauldron and boil him to death. (83)

Instead of something related to the moral quality of the act of deception, the king's irritation is caused by the reaction of the midgets, themselves the subjects of laughter.¹¹ The contrast between the reactions of the queen and concubines, the chancellors, the eunuchs, who followed the king's reactions, and those of the midgets, the first ones to show their real emotions over the possibility of the king being fooled, suggests a delicate performance of the power structure in place. Those who are among the ones closest to the top of the hierarchy are more prone to follow the rule of the power and be compliant in order to maintain their status quo, to the extent that a natural reaction from those who are close to the bottom of the hierarchy constitute a serious challenge to the very power structure in place. For this reason, rather than directing the punishment at the midgets for daring to consider him being fooled and laugh at him for this, the king is more willing to accept the possibility of deception as a fact. Directing his anger at the man in black - a scapegoat for the cause of the problem, rather than at the midgets, a constituent of the power structure, the king's intuitive response to the situation concerns primarily the maintenance of the hierarchy in place to which he is a benefactor.

It is out of a similar concern that Mei Jian Chi's father is put to death. Is the king the only one to be blamed for his death? Both the man in black's reservation about an easily formulated

verbal justification of the act of revenge, and different people's reactions following the king's defeat, suggest a negative answer. After a brief moment of panic following the perish of the king's head, the queen and the chancellors, etc. decide to extract the king's head and remains from the cauldron, only to be further confused by the mixture of the remains. At every critical moment, a ceremony is performed in a hypocritical manner to follow the stipulated procedures. Not only is the decision on ways to extract the king's head carefully calculated in a formal discussion over a lengthy period of time, the efforts it takes for people to realize that the king's remains has become indistinguishable from that of the others is also depicted in a comic manner that highlights the extent to which veneration of an absent symbol of power is being performed in consideration of the other integrant parties of the power structure. The fact only starts to be acknowledged when it takes long enough for people to fully perform their veneration and when the other parties, also following a hierarchical order, also start to verbally recognize the reality. As the extended and vivid descriptions of people's reactions following the king's death suggests, despite Mei Jian Chi's success in making the king perish, the power structure to which the king occupies a top position is still not broken. As long as the power structure continues to be in place, under the support of a hierarchy of people who either make a living in the system or become increasingly accustomed to, or nonchalant of its operation, violence comparable to the one inflicted on Mei Jian Chi's father will continue to be waged on others, due to its essentiality to the preservation and the maintenance of the status quo of those who benefit from the hierarchy. With such a stable system of power in place, it becomes almost impossible for an individual like Mei Jian Chi to take his revenge when the king still occupies the top position of the power structure. What the man in black succeeds in doing is to take the king away from such a position, hence creating the condition for an honest battle between Mei Jian Chi and the king, symbolized by the fight between the two heads in the cauldron. Upon realizing Mei Jian Chi's soft character which puts him at a disadvantage in combat against someone who is cruel and aggressive, the man in black showed his ultimate gesture of solidarity to stand together with Mei Jian Chi, also by taking himself away from his privileged position, joining the honest fight by chopping his own head off.

In this way, the story presents a radical view on the act of being in real solidarity with another person in one's fight for justice when a power structure that exists only for the

preservation of its own existence takes absolute control of everything, including language. In addition to drawing attention to the unbroken power structure as the root of all conflicts in the story, it also brings to light the extent to which a power structure that constantly reproduces itself by recruiting nonchalant human subjects, or animate beings, into its operation leaves little space for sound contemplation on the ethics of killing. As the man in black suggests with his sober mind, it takes a price, both moral and material, to acknowledge one's complicity and to strive to put up an honest fight. As the ultimate inconclusiveness of the story suggests, perhaps only when everyone agrees to create a condition for such, totally independent of the power and privilege, that the structure can start to break down.¹²

***Vuta n'kuvute* and an Ambivalent Language for Contribution**

Vuta n'kuvute ("Tug of War", or literally, "Pull and I Pull You Back") is a novel by the renowned Tanzanian novelist Shafi Adam Shafi that tells a rich and subtle story set primarily in Zanzibar during the transitional moments at the end of the colonial regime, when the Sultanate of Zanzibar was still a British protectorate, but revolutionary spirits from the African continent were present. Instead of presenting a black-and-white narrative of colonialism and anti-colonial resistance, the novel brings to life the complex socio-political situations through vivid depictions of the lived struggles of a diverse range of characters historically present on the island of Unguja. Yasmin, a young woman of Indian descent, was married to Bwana Raza, a merchant of Indian descent and the age of her father, at the wish of her parents. When they relocated to Mombasa for the sake of Bwana Raza's business, Yasmin's sense of subjectivity was awakened by Bukheti, a local Swahili man who appreciated her beauty, and consequently, she decided to run away from her unhappy marriage and move back to Unguja. Not accepted by her own family and relatives, who considered her escape a shame of the family, Yasmin took refuge at her friend Mwajuma's place. Through Mwajuma, a young Swahili woman who lived an open and independent life, Yasmin got acquainted with many other young people, among whom Denge, a young revolutionary constantly being followed by local police, with whom she had a profound love affair. Following a series of incidents that put to test their love and their respective understandings of various issues, Yasmin turned into a more mature, independent, and socially responsible person, eventually reestablishing herself successfully in Unguja, where she found her

own place in the communities, and married Bukheti, who followed her to Unguja and also underwent personal transformation from his part.

While the weight of anti-colonial activism is carried throughout the book with the heavy portrayal of Denge and his friends, the fact that the story revolves primarily around Yasmin suggests a different interpretation of the significance of anti-colonial struggles and its projected outcome. In the novel, the theoretical and political foundation of Denge's activities is not directly disclosed. In its place, he is introduced as a smart guy who succeeded through a colonial/modern education up to the 12th grade, who went to Russia to further his education at the recommendation of a politician he met at work, and who, upon returning, has been involved in political activities that seek to overturn the British colonial regime. Aside from this information, the readers are often put into the perspective of Yasmin and Mwajuma to interpret Denge's behaviors and personality. Despite receiving Denge warmly as a friend, Mwajuma is not familiar with Denge's life in work, and mistakes him for a loafer: "What work? Really you have work to do, Denge? ... Whenever I see you you are just loitering around with your bike."¹³ (Shafi 41) Only after being approached by Koplo Matata, an undercover police who tries to bribe and manipulate Mwajuma and Yasmin for information about Denge, that they start to be aware of the troubling nature of Denge's activities:

"Denge is communist, he studied in Russia and people like this are very dangerous. People like this do not believe in God, and they want to bring big chaos in the country."

Mwajuma was shocked, she did not know what to say because these things of communism and non-believing were new to her, she has never heard of these not even a single day. (Shafi 57)

When inquired about his involvement in communism, an unfamiliar word to Mwajuma and Yasmin, Denge also does not provide them with a standard definition of the word. Not confirming his commitment to communism, he chooses to emphasize his anti-colonial stance to the two young women:

Listen Sister, these colonizers and their puppets are very stupid people, for them everyone is communist. If you claim your rights you are communist. If you speak the truth you are communist. If you oppose being ruled you are communist. Everything you want to do if it is not in their interests then you are communist. They have called the Mau Maus of Kenya communists, they have called the fighters for the freedom of Algeria communists. Everyone who claims their rights is communist, and the big poison they use to separate people like this from their

fellow citizens is to say that these so-called communists do not believe in God.
(Shafi 60)

“Communism”, in this context, is characterized as a word manipulated by the colonizers to reinforce their “divide-and-rule” strategy that covers a range of actions that do not oppose religious doctrines. Denge does not seek to self-identify as a communist in front of the two young women, but instead tries to explain his commitment through a set of concrete actions potentially more accessible to them. Still, Yasmin and Mwajuma do not immediately understand Denge’s explanations to clarify their doubts about his integrity and make an informed decision to support him in political solidarity. In its place, they choose to trust and support him, rather than the police, after making their own evaluations according to the circumstances they experience. In this way, the figure of Denge and the significance of his political involvement is mostly depicted through his relevance to the two women characters, especially Yasmin.

If “communism” is to be understood according to Denge’s explanation, as a word manipulated by those in power, and therefore encompasses a range of actions against the abuse of power and the exploitation of others, then Yasmin’s development can be interpreted as her growing into a communist, as she learns to defend herself while supporting Denge in difficult situations. However, Yasmin’s actions are not informed by a clear guidance of political consciousness, but emerge from her constant struggles with her own life concerning family matters, love affairs, and interpersonal relationships. Each time she makes a decision about her life that drives the plot forward, it is to escape from, and to fight against an existing power structure that does not work in her favor. She decides to escape from her first husband because she cannot bear living with a man whom she does not love but who wields power over her. She decides to stay with Mwajuma in the Swahili community, segregated from and looked down upon by the Indian community, in order to stay away from a family structure that seeks to reinscribe her into a social system that makes her suffer. She decides to trust Denge’s integrity and support him in part also to revolt against the police who seeks to take advantage of her vulnerability by threatening to send her back to her husband if she refuses to collaborate. She decides on a hasty marriage with Shihab from Tanga, upon realizing, through suffering, the importance of stability in her life, which Denge cannot provide for her. As Shihab attempts to keep her inside all the time to prevent her from being pursued by others, Yasmin is taken over again by her longings for freedom and true love. As she finally reaches a more comprehensive

understanding of the rights and the treatments she needs as a human being, she decides to negotiate a fair deal in protection of her interests when approached by Bukheti with another marriage offer, eventually finding true love in him as he shows willingness to commit to an equal relationship by accepting her conditions, in pursuit of a new and dignified life together in Unguja. While Yasmin's growth cannot be dissociated from her relationship with Denge, her decisions are not made under the direct influence of Denge, who is not in a privileged position in comparison to Yasmin in the decision he has to make about their relationship. Being both independent and equal in this relationship, Denge's formal training as a liberated revolutionary is provincialized, whereas Yasmin's agency in the struggles, as well as her contributions to its outcome, which is yet to be articulated with clear vocabulary, is highlighted.

The fact that the protagonist of the novel, Yasmin, is not ethnically Swahili, whereas the title of the novel bears a traditional Swahili expression, "vuta n'kuvute", opens up the question of the conceptualization of the Swahili identity, also a subject of political manipulation under the colonial regime. Although the correspondence between the protagonist and the title of the novel displaces any essentialist ethnocentric claim of an exceptional quality of the Swahili identity, and also suggests the open nature of a Swahili way of seeing, one cannot overlook the persistent ethnic and gendered tensions throughout the novel whenever a Swahili woman character is concerned. It is Yasmin, not Mwajuma, who is always approached and pursued with serious love interest by the male characters, whether Indian, Swahili, or European. When Bukheti decides to marry Yasmin, he has to decline a Swahili wife that is proposed and arranged for him by his relatives, to the dismay of his extended family. Kermali, the friend of Yasmin's uncle from whom she seeks support to mend her relationships with her family, only manages to convince her uncle, Gulam, to accept Bukheti as Yasmin's husband by mentioning his own secret marriage to a Swahili woman, which is never brought to light and is a subject of knowledge privileged to the men in the society.¹⁴ All the unresolved tensions suggest the inconclusive nature of the anti-colonial struggles throughout the book, especially if one also takes into consideration the role the colonial regime plays in reinforcing the ethnic divides and promoting mutual hatred to maintain its own structure of power. These struggles are to be carried forward by both the Swahili women characters in their own life struggles in manner comparable to that of Yasmin, and by

revolutionary characters like Denge, eventually in exile in China following his escape from the prison, with the help of Yasmin.

On the other hand, the fact that “vuta n’kuvute” is also an expression that Denge uses to explain their revolutionary strategies alludes to the universal nature of the significance of anti-colonial struggles, as well as the ultimate translatability of the actions taken in the process. If, similar to “communism”, words like “solidarity”, “anti-colonial struggles” and “liberation” are also subject to the manipulation of the power structure in place for the interests of its own preservation, it is expressions like “vuta n’kuvute” that carries more weight in capturing the substance of these struggles, that of the initiation of a new form of interpersonal relationship in a society. Despite the novel does not further elucidate Denge’s activities in China, its ending leaves one wonder the applicability of “vuta n’kuvute” in designating a new form of social and political solidarity, or ways of being with each other, that carries the essence of words like “communism”, “socialism” but displaces its Euro-centric bearings and its complicity with power. A language free from the control of an oppressive power structure does not replicate another hierarchy, and does not set people apart.

***Viagens na Minha Terra* and the Untranslation of a Narrative**

Viagens na Minha Terra (“Travels in my Homeland”) by Almeida Garrett (1799-1854), considered a masterpiece of Portuguese Romanticism, encapsulates both the stylistic and the political tensions at a time when Portugal was under the challenge of liberal ideals that is backed by a new mode of imperial dominance. Two layers of plot weave together in the novel, one of the narrator’s travel from Lisbon to Santarém, an aged cultural municipal that bears witness to the history of Portugal from the very beginning, another of a complex love story between Carlos and Joanhina that exemplifies Portugal’s struggles for self-identification and moral fulfilment in light of the oppressive political atmosphere. On top of the two layers of stories, the author/narrator’s evaluation and critique of literary and knowledge productions in Europe also prevail, making the novel at the same time a piece of literary and social criticism.

The novel’s engagement with the relationship between literary productions and contesting forces of power unveils at the beginning of the novel, where a formal parallel to the great travel narratives during the times of the early modern maritime expansion is established for the narrator’s domestic travel between Lisbon and Santarém, a journey of less than 100

kilometers in distance. The geographic and cultural contrast between Santarém and Lisbon, the latter being under the continued influence of other European metropolitan centers, brings about a critical lens through which Portugal's involvement in differently configured imperial/colonial activities and the ways the exploitative social relationships are also reflected in the domestic tensions of the country are examined:

These interesting journeys of mine will have to be a masterpiece, erudite, brilliant of new ideas, something worthy of the century. I have to say this to the reader, so that he would be forewarned; don't mind that it is any of these scribbles of fashion that, with the title of impressions of Journey, or something else like this, weary the presses of Europe without any benefit of science and the advancement of the species.

Before everything, my work is a symbol ... it is a myth, to use the Greek word, it is of the German mode, which nowadays gets into everything and explains everything ... how many things are there that it does not know how to explain.

It is a myth because - because ... Let me now tear the veil, and openly declare to the benevolent reader the profound idea that is hidden behind the slight appearance of a little trip that seems to be made to joke, but in the end [it] is something serious, substantial, conceived of as a new book of the class of Leipzig, not of those little brochures of the boulevards of Paris.

Many years ago there was a profound and immeasurable philosopher of another kingdom, who wrote a work on the march of civilization, of intellect - what we would say, in order for us all to understand better, the Progress. He found that there are two principles in the world: one spiritual, which marches without attending to the material and the earthly part of this life, with eyes fixed in his big and abstract theories, rigid, dry, hard, inflexible, that can very well personalized and symbolized by the famous myth of the knight of Mancha, D, Quixote; - the materialist, who, without paying attention to the those theories, the impossible applications of which declare all utopians, which he does not believe in, which can very well be represented by the round and fat presence of our old friend, Sancho Panza.¹⁵ (Garrett 14)

As the narrator dynamically brings together and merges the merits of all discussed narrative styles, he makes a critique of the uncritical treatments of all these styles. He has to deliberately emphasize that the work is "a masterpiece" that is "erudite", "brilliant" and "worthy of the century" because it does not agree with the fashionable style of writing of the time, due to which it would be easily overlooked by readers who are accustomed to thinking that only fashionable writings are worthy of attention. On the other hand, the narrator's deliberate juxtaposition of words emphasizing the importance of his own travel narrative, together with his copious attempts to characterize its seriousness, along with "the Greek" idea of "myth" and "the German mode" of

writing and explaining “everything”, also entails a critique of each idea’s pretense of claiming to be something more above and beyond. This critique carries on as the narrator explains the dialectics between the “spiritual” and the “material” by making reference to Cervante’s *D. Quixote*, which is configured into a mythical style and labeled as the work of a “philosopher”. With the vague revelation of Cervantes’ origin, only introduced as an erudite philosopher of “another kingdom”, any unthoughtful acceptance of the superiority of anything that comes from abroad is also under attack. Besides, an appraisal of the connection between literary genres, political power, imperialism and knowledge production is also made as the narrator repetitively emphasizes, to an unnecessary extent, the importance of progress and advancement of civilization and intellect in characterizing the significance of a work. In this way, the author brings to light the force that stands between readers and knowledge contained in literary formats that foreclose an honest and upfront conversation, also signaled by the carefully placed expression of “let me now tear the veil”. This force can be either the force of capital and the market, as is the case of the light fashionable writings, or a political force, as is the case of the writings that claim to be valuable for the progress of civilization and human species. It can also be an opportunistic force that comes as a result of people’s irreflexive submission to it to secure their own immediate comfort, which further complicates the situation. In light of everything criticized, the narrator’s journey to Santarém, as well as his attempt to write about it, becomes something important as it goes against the trends, seeks to bring one’s attention to the historically present but underrepresented, and strives to liberate the merits of knowledge from manipulation of power structures by reestablishing its relevance to the not immediately visible.

The dialectic between the spiritual and the material, figured in the reference to the contrast between D. Quixote and Sancho Panza, returns as the narrator gives a more extensive evaluation and critique of the disjunction between reality and its representation:

But here it appears to me an inexplicable incoherence. The society is materialist; and the literature, which is the expression of the society, is all excessively and absurdly and unreasonably spiritualist! Sancho the king in fact, Quixote the king by right.

It is like this; and it is explained. - It is the literature which is a hypocrite: there is religion in the verses, charity in the novels, faith in the articles of the journal - like those who give alms to put in the Daily, those who support orphans in the Gazette, and those who support widows on the theater posters. (Garrett 27)

This relatively conclusive remark comes after a lengthy examination of how society operates upon unethical acquisition of wealth and unequal distribution of it. Instead of formulating a general critique of either a capitalist mode of operation or a mode of political governance that is still not fully emancipated, the narrator details the extent to which the idea of “progress” in recent developments of science and social reform does not apply to all human subjects involved - for some people to enrich and experience the progress, many others have to be thrown into misery. The extravagant sensationalism of romanticism, the genre of the century, therefore, should be understood as corresponding to one’s indignance and feelings of hopelessness to stop society from continuing to operate as such. Yet, little effort is made to reestablish relevance between literature and the reality experienced by the people who are further exploited, and eventually forgotten in the verbal representations of the society - an “incoherence” not yet explained by the more advanced scientific theories (“inexplicable”), since it does not serve the interests of the dominant powers that manipulate both the production of knowledge and the discourses around it. In effect, people do not need to think about what brings beggars, orphans, and widows, etc. into existence, as long as they can stay assured that acts of charity such as giving alms are morally credited in the society. Literary representations, when conscripted into the dominant structures and forces in place, do not provide adequate language to connect to the marginalized as human-beings in an equitable manner. In this way, literary representations that uncritically sing praise to the spirit of the time without confronting the politics behind its own production and existence are always under the risk of hypocrisy for disagreeing with a reality that is experienced by all.

The significance of connecting knowledge expressed in words to the lived experience of people beyond the possibilities enabled by the power structure is signaled both by the author/narrator’s insistence to explain a dialectical relationship by way of referring to the contradiction between D. Quixote and Sancho Panza, and by his continued effort bringing to attention the extent to which the meaning of verbal expressions that are commonly accepted by some do not apply to that of the others. It is also materialized in the other layer of the plot, which brings the readers’ attention to the way political events that take place at a higher level and framed differently play out in the intimate relationships among characters that one can identify with, and the amount of struggles it takes for each character to combat the unethical forces that

set them apart. The narrator, as another character in the book, joins them in their struggles with his trip to Santarém, a trip that is heroic by crossing the borders set by the operation of the power structure in place. The author, on the other hand, makes the similar attempt of getting his ideas across beyond the limit set by the same power structure at a discursive level, with his exquisite crafting of a narrative whose density and complexity shows the work it takes to fully untranslate the translation of his thought into an acceptable form of discourse so that a language not corrupted by the power can be found. Yet, being a narrative that survives the trials of time without breaking the very force that continues to separate knowledge production, its material configuration in words and in reality, and the lives of many people, the challenge remains for one to see how a comparable effort can be made in our own place and time.

Constructing Solidarity in our Time(s)

Many thinkers and scholars have been questioning the relationship between a writer/academic's work and the institutional restrictions as well as social conditions that prefigures his/her presence, thereby contemplating the space an individual/writer/academic has in going beyond the limits that come with the ambivalent yet unavoidable complicity between knowledge production and the continued running of a still exploitative social infrastructure, so as to implement changes in a substantial manner. A cursory examination of important intellectual contributions circulated in Euro-American academies in recent decades, such as Theodor Adorno's critique of an intellectual's troubled relationship with knowledge production in a capitalist society, Jean-Paul Sartre's discursive justification of the vitality of "existentialism", Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's elaborate definition of the concept of "minor literature", shows the extent to which there is a shared urgency for a liberated understanding of relationships among human subjects that can be expressed in a language not co-opted by existing power structure, and that can pave the way for the construction of a new form of solidarity towards positive social changes.¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ Works from leading feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, on the other hand, take a step further by embodying a discursive reform that affirms the subjectivity of historically excluded or marginalized human subjects.¹⁹ Yet, the exigency that leads Kimberlé Crenshaw to bring up the idea of "intersectionality" for a proper articulation and recognition of the perspectives and experiences of people of intersectional identities, and that drives Chandra Talpade Mohanty to put feminism into the context of colonialism to give voice to women from

non-Western societies, reveal the difficulty to secure women's solidarity towards a common goal of emancipation in the absence of an autonomous language shared among all women that is not vulnerable to the conscription of a hegemonic structure.²⁰²¹ Intellectuals committed to liberation from the epistemic impacts of colonialism, like Édouard Glissant, have also been pointing to the essentiality of redefining dominant concepts to the facilitation of communication between human subjects scattered by the imposition of a colonial way of seeing.²² At a different level, thinkers like Bruno Latour make a comparable effort in attempting to redefine the "social" in social sciences to prevent knowledge production in social sciences from being turned into a complete accomplice of a capitalist apparatus.²³

Against this backdrop, the authors of the fictional works analyzed in this essay share with these thinkers a common concern over ways to bring together human subject beyond the epistemic characterization of a dominant language. In this way, these works form an epistemically de-centered archive of expressions that brings to light the different ways in which a writer/individual/intellectual may show awareness of the limit of the forms of linguistic expressions prescribed to him/her, as well as the different attempts to go beyond it. It is also with the juxtaposition of great writings across linguistic and historical boundaries, itself also in part a product of the power structure in place, that one may become more sensitive to the presence of minor, yet substantial connections among human subjects in each work that otherwise become easy to overlook through conventional reading practices. Ultimately, it brings more perspective on ways to better understand our relationships with other human subjects with whom we have no direct encounter but who are nevertheless connected to us in intimate manners, thereby becoming better aware of, and more sensitive to the work it takes to be in actual solidarity with different human subjects.

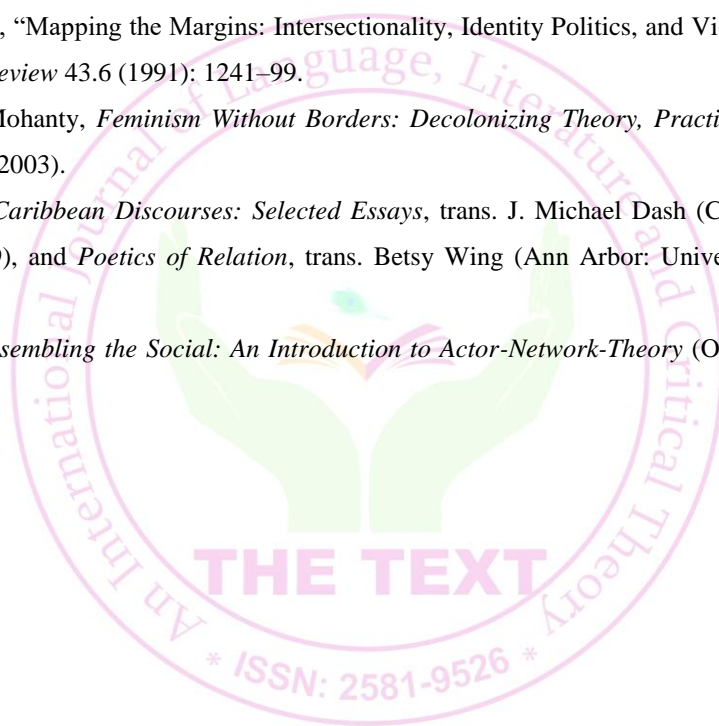
As we continue to live in a reality in which knowledge production is still intricately convoluted with a mechanism that feeds on the sustaining of social inequality at different levels, further foreclosing possible connections between articulations of knowledge production and different human subjects in ways independent to the operation of the power structure in place, how to secure the non-institutionalized and the non-capitalized component of our endeavors to be with one another, how to account for our efforts to do the maximum to untranslate our ideas from the linguistic and discursive frameworks prescribed to us, and how to keep real solidarity in

action from the corruption of a language that still does not speak for everyone are questions that demand further contemplation. Perhaps until the day when equality among human subjects is genuinely secured across the globe, we will need to be in perpetual search of a new form of solidarity by untranslating our modes of expression, so that it can break away from the imprisonment of the force of power that stands in the way toward equitable exchange of ideas between human subjects.

Notes

1. Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
2. Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power*, (Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).
3. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
4. Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
5. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
6. Simon Gikandi, "Contest Grammars: Comparative Literature, Translation, and the Challenge of Locality," in *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, edited by Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas, (Chichester and Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).
7. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Duke: Duke University Press, 2015).
8. Haun Saussy, *Are We Comparing Yet?: On Standards, Justice, and Incomparability*, (Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2019).
9. Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in the *Translation Studies Reader*, third edition, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) 312.
10. All translations from this story in this essay is mine, made in reference to Julia Lovell's translation of the story collected in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*. The original consulted comes from Lu Xun's "Zhu Jian" in *Gu Shi Xin Bian*, (Beijing: Ren Min Wen Xue Press, 1973).
11. The midgets used to be kept among the nobles as entertainers.
12. This is also reflected in the inconclusiveness of Mei Jian Chi's reckoning of the killing of the mouse: since a mouse and a human being is set up against each other in the world, there is not a way to discuss an ethical act of killing as long as Mei Jian Chi is a human being unless condition is created for an honest fight between the two, comparable to the fight of the heads in the cauldron.
13. All translations from this novel in this essay are mine. The original consulted comes from Shafi Adam Shafi's *Vuta n' kuvute*, (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 1999).
14. Gulam's wife is also revealed to know about this secret second marriage, but she is reticent about it.

15. All translations from this novel in this essay are mine. The original consulted comes from Almeida Garrett's *Viagens na Minha Terra*, 6ª edição. (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1883).
16. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), and *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).
17. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Philosophy of Existentialism: Selected Essays* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2012), and *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
18. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
19. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).
20. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-99.
21. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
22. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourses: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), and *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
23. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).



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