Chapter 5

Legitimacy, Marronnage and the Power of Translation

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The aim of this essay is to examine the relationship between translation and the social practices resulting from colonialism and "postcolonialism," as they are expressed in symbolic goods. This will be done not by analyzing the colonialist discourses present in translations carried out between the languages and cultures of former colonizers and colonized peoples, but rather by presenting hypotheses based on relationships of political domination as well as dominance, as they are inscribed in cultural productions, whether such productions have been translated or not. These relationships will be situated in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture.

The main interest in locating translation within the problematic of colonization and "decolonization" is that it makes it possible to foreground essential elements of the practice of translation, insofar as it is a historically determined game of power, imbricated in transnational power relationships. A thorough examination of the subject, in all its practical implications, would require mapping out the worldwide flow of translations; without such a map, only tendencies based on local and necessarily partial observations can be identified. These will at least make it possible to put forward verifiable hypotheses from which the object translation, in its diverse geopolitical manifestations, can be constructed.
Domination, Co-operation and Translation

It is important, first of all, to distinguish translation as an instrument of emancipation from translation as an instrument used to censure the Other's discourse. But whether emancipation or censure, translation is power—not simply an instrument of power or of a certain power, but intrinsically power, without which there is no translation. How can this power, part of the very essence of translation as of any other cultural practice, be described?

Commenting on K., the character in Kafka's *The Trial*, Pierre Bourdieu writes in one of his most recent works, *Méditations pascaliennes*:

Robbed of the power to give sense to his life, to express the meaning and direction of his existence, he [K.] is condemned to live in time determined by others, alienated. This is exactly the destiny of the dominated, obliged to depend on others for everything, on those who determine how the game will be played and what objective and subjective hope for gain the game offers; they are the masters, free to play on the anxiety which inevitably arises out of the tension between the intensity of the expectations and the improbability of satisfaction. (1997, 279-80)

Clearly, Bourdieu is not describing the specific situation of the colonized; however, his remarks can be applied as well to those within a nation, "dominated nationals," who have also been colonized. Strictly speaking, K. does not live in a "colonized" society, unless this is taken metaphorically to mean "colonized from within," that is, domination experienced on an individual or collective, rather than state, level. Yet could such colonization from within not be the end result of all domination, whatever external form it takes? "Co-operative competition" (Bourdieu 1997, 286) is supposedly the rule in Western societies, yet democracy has its outcasts and its drop-outs. Symbolic violence is directed against such individuals, living on the fringes of society, by denying them the power to live their own lives, by not recognizing the legitimacy of their aspirations, thereby denying them the power to direct their own destinies.

This comparison between colonization from within and colonization in the strict sense is also justified in that present Western societies are still tied to their colonial pasts. The large-scale immigration toward Western metropolises and their suburbs is palpable proof of this. Judging from their linguistic, cultural and especially literary productions, when such exist, immigrants from former colonies usually find themselves in a sociolinguistic situation of "polyoecism" (Durisin 1991, 114). In this context polyoecism refers to what Dyonyz Durisin calls the "more or less conflictual associative co-existence" of languages and cultural (literary) products" (1991,
Durisin considers Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, the British Isles and Switzerland to be examples of situations of literary polyocism. Although he does not mention colonial or former colonial situations, this notion could also be applied to them. This would be all the more justified since Durisin mentions the USSR in particular, whose “relationships” with the Eastern European countries exhibited certain characteristics typical of colonialism. One master often follows on the trail of another, as we shall see below.

The colonial era in Francophone countries is said to have come to an end in the 1960s; such a belief clearly conveniently forgets the situation of the French West Indies. The former colonies are supposedly living an era of independence, of “postcolonialism,” following colonialism. But a key question remains: Who dominates in the postcolonial era? The same masters as during the colonial era? Or new ones? Or do the independent former colonies themselves become dominators, and in relation to whom? Should not the advent of the postcolonial era lead to a redistribution of powers worldwide, according to new global hegemonies?

Translation does not involve only a process of semantic transfer from a text in one language to a text in another; rather, it must be seen in terms of the power relationships which exist between languages, cultures and human beings, between groups whether or not they correspond to existing nation-states. A case in point which is instructive in this respect is the spread of American culture. In April 1961, John F. Kennedy launched the massive “Peace Corps” project, whose “Volunteers for Peace” would invade dozens of Third World countries, from Tanganyika to Malaysia, with the aim of promulgating the values of Pax Americana. The role of the Peace Corps, it was claimed, was completely disinterested: “We do not want to sell America,” proclaimed Kennedy in 1961. His heritage lives on in the nineties, but it is no longer the Third World which is being targeted. This time the Peace Corps is being posted to the former Communist countries with the mission of “bringing English to the Eastern bloc.” Through the English language American development and democracy are being exported. This dissemination of American language and culture by the Peace Corps can be called “soft” colonialism; it is just enough to create a social demand for the “American way of life” in the countries targeted, and, at the same time, form a class of intellectuals well versed in the American language and culture who could become the national agents for translation and cultural importation in these countries.

The “gift of culture,” especially of culture vehicled through language, can take on the guise of disinterestedness while producing greater dividends than if the “gift” is seen as self-interested. But translations do not necessarily correspond to strategies on the part of source cultures to impose
social values. In situations of polyocicism, situations in which former colo-
nies find themselves, power relationships and power struggles are also ex-
perienced politically through cultural, and more specifically linguistic, prod-
ucts. Different forms of cultural production have their own characteristics 
and implications, but they tend to reproduce by homology the issues at
stake in the global social space. This is particularly clear in the case of
cultural fields, such as literature, directly involved with translation.

Translation and the Illusion of Legitimacy

In terms of translation, the logic of the cultural game is such that power
relationships are hidden as a result of the acceptance of dominant models,
presented as the only viable ones. In translation, we live with such an illu-
sion of legitimacy, and this for several reasons. First, because translation is
generally unidirectional. The demand for translation is heavier on the part
of the dominated. In fact, the dominator need not be concerned with the
exportation or imposition of his culture beyond his borders. Once the struc-
tures are implanted, and the agents of translation/importation determined,
the dominator has only to let the laws of the “free” market and of globaliza-
tion have their way. This is the second reason for saying we live with the
illusion of legitimacy, since the laws of the market, the opening up of bor-
ders, the \textit{laissez-faire/laissez-passer} policies in the end always work to the
advantage of the dominator. The aura of legitimacy which the dominated
invest in the dominator rests upon a belief-effect: their social future seems
inscribed in his, and there does not seem to be any viable alternative to his
vision of the future. The dominated and the dominator seem to agree on a
common destiny founded on the legitimacy of the dominator and the social
future he represents.

There are cases in which dominators show a strong individual inter-
est in the dominated, some even going so far as to become “transculturals”:
Lawrence of Arabia or Isabelle Eberhardt come to mind. Transculturals
tend to identify with the dominated, and attempt to live as they do. Such
individual cases, seemingly characterized by the desire to reverse the power
relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, arise from a mysti-
cism of fusion which is doomed to failure since it rests on an aporia of the
self/other relationship and is based on illusory self-effacement. In the case
of translation, the other side of this fantasized fusion of the dominator in the
culture of the dominated could well be literalism, when the source language
is the historically dominated language. The exact opposite of the fantasy of
fusion is that of original purity, preserved through orthodoxy. In fact, every-
thing in social space involves struggle; nothing is definitively acquired and
preserved. Social existence is realized only in the struggle to impose mean-
ing on the social world, a struggle in which translation plays a role.
In order to provide an answer for the question as to whether the postcolonial era established a new power relationship between the former colonizers and colonized, with regard to cultural and more especially literary productions, another question first needs to be raised: What constitutes the exercise of power in a given social situation? Bourdieu writes: “Every exercise of power is accompanied by a discourse whose purpose is to legitimate the power of the person exercising it: it could even be said that for power relationships to have their full force they must remain hidden” (1984, 224). After independence—attained by peaceful or by violent means—a postcolonial society is characterized by power relationships in which the essential element at stake is the imposition of legitimacy, in the sociological sense of the word. Bourdieu defines legitimacy as follows: “Is legitimate an institution, action or practice which is dominant but not explicitly recognized as such, that is, which is tacitly recognized as such” (110). I will now sketch out the social implications of translation, referring to translation of “paraliterary” or “popular” genres, and in particular to translation in what is perhaps its most ambiguous form, pseudotranslation.

Translation as Resistance and Transgression

Too often, resistance to domination is considered to be exceptional. Several analogies, however, can be drawn between the position in which cultural producers find themselves, a position of being dominated, and that of a position of resistance to the imposition of a power which denies the individual the right “of feeling justified in existing as he does” (Bourdieu 1997, 280).

In source societies, some authors resemble Franz Kafka, whose entire work plays on the fictional mode of transforming power relationships within society by illuminating the “inert violence” (Bourdieu 1997, 276) of structures and institutions, relayed by the active violence of human beings. The populist illusion of the resistance of the dominated can be seen in “one of the most tragic effects of the dominated’s situation, that is, the inclination to violence which is brought about by early and continual exposure to violence” (Bourdieu 1997, 275). There are also, however, “unrecognized forms of resistance,” among which Bourdieu counts irony and humour. Other types of texts could also be included here, in particular the so-called “popular” genres, through which large segments of Western societies symbolically live out their utopian aspirations. “Co-operative competition” is fuelled by compromises arrived at between partners capable of selective co-operation or resistance. This is pushed to the extreme in situations of territorial occupation, with imprisonment or voluntary exclusion, as with resisters going underground or slaves taking to the hills and the forest, beyond the reach of
the “authorities.” The Maquis and the Maroons affirmed the possibility of liberty, of freedom, in their desire for a liberated state. The agents involved in this struggle clash not so much over the meaning of the world, as over the recognition of the right of every human being to express the meaning of his world. It is only if such is possible that there can be “co-operation” over the meaning of the world.

In relation to translation the question is: What are the implications of inserting imported foreign texts into target societies where power relationships are exercised? As Bourdieu states: “The symbolic transgression of a social boundary has a liberating effect, because it brings the unthinkable into being on the level of practice” (1997, 279). The crucial question for translation, as for other cultural practices which deal with texts, is whether the activity or practice is on the side of emancipation through the symbolic transgression of a social boundary. Does translation contribute to reinforcing the power of the dominators, or does it submit that power to the corrosive effect of irony? Translation necessarily is involved in the struggle of cultural productions for legitimation and recognition, through the fact that the interests of the agents engaged in that struggle push them toward works which can dislodge existing hierarchies of legitimation at work in certain fields.

With the cultural space of translation, the agents—beginning with the translators—belong to the target culture, which, in the present context, corresponds to the formerly colonized society. But are such agents “mercenaries” of the source culture, or even “double agents,” as they are sometimes referred to? In that context it might be more accurate to portray translators as collaborators or resisters, with all the nuances that these terms have acquired during the history of their usage and which run the risk of slipping into political dogmatism when used outside their specific context. But it is perhaps marronnage which provides a more appropriate analogy for resistance in the context of colonialism.7

Marronnage and Translation

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Caribbean, slaves who took to the mountains to escape from their white masters and from there launch attacks were known as maroons. Even though translation is generally carried out under the domination of legitimate powers, the concept of marronnage makes it possible to break out of the vicious circle of domination by these powers. Can translation exist in any other way than as an activity reinforcing the power of the dominators, given the power relationships between cultures? Can translation constitute an activity of resist-
ance and liberation in terms both of the source and target societies? Marronnage was not a perfect solution; for once regrouped into societies, the runaway slaves could not avoid certain socio-historical choices, such as the best form of government for individuals henceforth liberated from the constraints of the colonial state. While the conception of translation as marronnage radically frees the text from domination, marronnage should not be adopted as a euphoric vision of translation, for there was no greater salvation inherent to marronnage than there is in translation. There is some degree of angelism in certain communicative conceptualizations of translation, as if it were the messenger of civilization, capable of breaking down national boundaries and of promoting the movement of progress—of the kind usually proposed by the so-called “developed” nations—those very nations which have merged with the former colonizers, the “postcolonizers.”

The metaphor of literary translation as marronnage is based on the presupposition that there is a similarity between the State in which we live and the colonial State. This may seem shocking at first, for the “legitimate violence” which (intellectuals of) dominant groups exercise over dominated groups seems to have nothing to do with imprisonment in slave societies. However, in present-day societies, governed by an economic variant of Darwinism, the strong tend to get stronger and to dominate the weak, who cannot or do not have the right to resist. Resistance based on difference is stigmatized as retrograde, as a conservative reaction to ineluctable progress. 8

But marronnage has conceptual value beyond translation. Marginalized writers and artists, the so-called écrivains maudits, those who do not play by the rules of the game, protesters ... are the maroons of the source culture, as they attempt to remove themselves from the hold of legitimacy. And translators too can be the maroon agents of that source culture, as they break away from the discourses of legitimacy. With regard to translation, marronnage begins before the actual act: translation marronnage consists, first of all, in the translation of the source culture’s maroon writers, the least cynical writers and translators, those who are the least directly and exclusively market-oriented. Translation can also be marronnage in another way, such as when it uses the orthodoxy of the source culture in order to effect the emergence of heterodoxy in the target culture. This heterodoxy can, however, at any moment become a new orthodoxy, tied to the legitimacy of the source culture within the translation culture, as was the case of American literature translated in France after World War II.

Literatures in dominant cultures all have their maroon writers: in the United States, for example, one could name Dos Passos, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Dreiser, Wright, Hurston, Himes and Dick, in three different genres (realism, the detective story and science fiction), along with a plethora of
mythifying WASP American writers. Indeed, today in the West, there is a type of "neocolonialist" influence, which characterized the relations of the United States and France after World War II. Elsewhere I have attempted to show this (Gouanvic 1999) using a corpus demonstrating how American literature in translation, in particular science fiction, was parachuted into France after 1950. The legitimacy of the United States was so great that any translated American text could be successfully marketed in France. Consequently, American texts quickly dominated the French market, and caused French authors to languish. This is evident in print runs. During the 1970s, the books of Michel Jeury, the most talented French author of science fiction, were printed in the tens of thousands, while translations of mediocre American authors sold in much greater quantities. This eventually culminated in French authors adopting American pseudonyms and telling their stories in an American fashion, setting them in the United States, all in order to garner favour with the French public. How is it possible to account for such behaviour on the part of agents in literary fields, if not in terms of individual and collective alienation?

Pseudotranslations are particularly significant in terms of the collective nature of the relations between cultures, as Aniko Sohar clearly saw when she criticized Gideon Toury: "the decision to put forward a text as if it were a translation is always an individual one" (qtd. in Sohar, 156). Indigenous writers and the publishers of pseudotranslations position themselves from the outset on the side of the most highly legitimized source culture within the target culture. Even Boris Vian pseudotranslating Vernon Sullivan (see J'irai cracher sur vos tombes. Et on tuera tous les affreux...) explicitly takes the reader back to American culture, to Dashiell Hammett's and Raymond Chandler's detective novels, works which have been grouped together by Marcel Duhamel as translations in Gallimard's "Série Noire" since 1944. The pseudotranslations unearthed by Sohar in the genres of science fiction and fantasy are an indication of the hegemony of these genres, construed as American, in Hungarian culture. An analysis of the themes and discursive elements of these texts would probably demonstrate how far the imitation of American works goes in pseudotranslations. Are they formulaic replications of American science fiction? Are they adaptations in which markers of Hungarian culture are still readable? And if so, are such markers hegemonic in the texts? The central question which arises in the case of pseudotranslations, where alienation seems clearest, is whether they constitute in their own way transgressions of practices inscribed within the doxa of the national target culture. To answer this question, the problem needs to be considered from the perspective of the literary genres involved. Ever since Western cultures (e.g., France, Germany, Italy, Spain and so forth) adopted the American institutional model, with science fiction as a specific genre, science fiction has been ghettoized within national cultures.
As a result of such compartmentalization, literary innovations in science fiction have little or no effect on other genres, and in particular on the dominant genre of realism. If pseudotranslations are able to have influence beyond the limits of a particular genre, it is less because the genre itself has gained influence than because the source culture possesses a legitimacy encompassing several genres.

It may not be politically correct to speak of "neocolonialism" with reference to symbolic domination. In the area to culture, dominators have no need of exercising their power for it to work in their favour. With Darwinian laissez-faire, identities are put to the test: traditionally liberal regimes invoke the "cultural exception" as a way of protecting themselves against the increasing ascendancy of dominating factors; the champions of liberalism, ultraliberals, who surrender to the laws of the market, profit most from those so-called "laws," both in terms of consumer goods and cultural goods. Nor should the capacity of cultural producers to make a virtue out of necessity be underestimated, as they appropriate the most orthodox discourses, dislodging the hierarchies of legitimacy in the target fields.

Pseudotranslations are cultural practices that assume all the appearances of trickery, and which are therefore subject to moral condemnation. In fact, nothing prohibits the transgression of other, otherwise untouchable, social boundaries by way of this alienated form of translation.

**Conclusion**

From the point of view of cultural products, and especially of the exportation of these products by way of translation, postcolonialism represents the domination of certain cultures over others. This domination can wear different faces: it can be accepted as positive by the dominated or it can be considered harmful. If domination is accepted, it rests on the recognition by those formerly colonized of a certain legitimacy of the former colonizer, on the recognition of a *common destiny* of cultural partners. Cultural exchange, through translation or in the language of the former colonizer, is likely to be affected by different agendas in the fields which determine them: the field of power where the clientele for available cultural products is recruited; the literary fields to which the text belongs; the journalistic field, which produces and diffuses judgments on cultural texts; and the political field, which can override the others, at least locally.

Another model, which rationalizes the heterogeneity of the cultures in question, must be added to this colonial/postcolonial one. In any culture there are maroon writers, publishers and translators who do not always play according to the laws of the market and who position themselves to resist orthodoxy and the illusion of legitimacy. The maroons are heterodox, her-
etics within dominant cultures, resisters at particular historical moments, like the French publishers Éditions de minuit or Maspero, or, in the case of translation, translators of non-legitimized genres such as Marcel Duhame l and Boris Vian.

To better understand the phenomena of cultural hybridity arising out of colonialism, and to grasp what is at stake in it, the question to be asked is: To whose detriment is the legitimate violence assumed by the agent of translation exercised? The dominated's or the dominator's? It will then be possible to see whether the discourse on hybridity in fact hides stakes other than those brought to the fore, stakes more in keeping with the interests of the dominator and which, in a sleight of hand, translate into a reinforcement of the dominator's power.

Notes

1. This study has benefited from support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a research project (1997-2000) entitled “Socio-analysis of the Translation of American Realist Literature in France after the Second World War (1945-1960).” This text and the quotations from Bourdieu 1984 and 1997 were translated by Donald Bruce (University of Alberta), and revised by Joanne Akai and Paul St-Pierre (Université de Montréal).

2. The quotation marks indicate a certain distancing from this commonly used, but not unproblematic, term.

3. Durisin is paradoxically silent on the question of the nature of this co-existence, as if polyoecism were free of all political implications. An analysis of the institutional status of a minority language or culture in a situation of polyoecism would show that the main determinant in the relationship is definitely political. See Cronin 1995.


5. There are cases which seem to prove the opposite, and it is true that certain dominant national cultural fields may be historically constructed on the model of associative cooperation with the dominated cultures. It remains to be seen, however, if such cases are not just “islands” of difference which hardly, if ever, modify the power relationships between the languages/cultures although they make it seem as if the dominated culture is being taken into consideration. On the question of the implications of translation for minority languages, see Michael Cronin’s study of the situation in Ireland.

6. For Isabelle Eberhardt, see in particular Houria Daoud-Brikci (Forthcoming).

7. See Jean Fouchard’s fine book Les marrons de la liberté (1972).

8. Basing himself on the work of Canadian sociologist Anthony Wilden (Imaginary Canada, Toronto, Pulp Press, 1980), Michael Cronin (1995), 90-91, observes: “Wilden claims that Freud’s Oedipal and paranoia theories ultimately blame the victims for their own plight and he extends the remit of his analysis to cover other theories that blame the oppressed for their own oppression... Language relationships are asymmetrical. The powerless or those with less power will always appear to be on the ‘defensive’ to those in power.”
9. The case of science fiction in Hungary is even clearer. In her Ph.D. dissertation, Aniko Sohar shows that of 712 novels published between 1989 and 1995, ninety-four were pseudotranslations, overwhelmingly "translated from" the Anglo-American. According to Sohar, this phenomenon is even more widespread in "romance" and detective novels (158).

Works Cited


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