

Trans-, Translation, Transnational

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As I sat to write this introduction as *TSQ*'s new translation section editor, I realized that *translation*, when framed as a semiotic process, may appear at first glance as a misnomer for the intellectual and epistemic work that I hope this section can perform. Much of the intention behind the translation section has been “to decenter the Northern, white, anglophone bias” of trans studies by including work-in-translation (Stryker 2020: 303). To continue this important project and expand on its aims, this section now also invites short reflections that develop alternate genealogies for the field through knowledge formations and disciplines that do not reproduce the imperatives of US American studies, which has largely overdetermined trans studies’ field imaginary. In other words, this will require recognizing trans studies for what it has often been to date: an unmarked area studies formation that takes US American studies as its unspoken center. While trans studies has indeed aimed to address questions of empire, racialization, and political economy, for example, it has repeatedly done so through critique that prioritizes the US nation-state and its transnational histories. This section thus invites short reflections that interrogate trans studies’ material, institutional, and disciplinary boundaries, working at the rub where critical area studies and trans studies meet.

At its most colloquial, like trans, translation has often been thought in terms of horizontal movement, a movement across, from one language to another. Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore’s (2008: 14) theorization of *trans-* instead underscores verticality or the ways in which *trans-* “becomes the capillary space of connection and circulation between the macro- and micro-political registers through which the lives of bodies become enmeshed in the lives of nations, states, and capital-formations.” When figured as a *trans-* operation, translation illuminates the enmeshment of knowledge formations at the micro and macro levels. Such an understanding of translation aligns with feminist elaborations on “cultural translation,” which, as Claudia de Lima Costa (2014: 20)

writes, “is premised on the view that any process of description, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions, and peoples.” This section seeks work on cultural translation as a “trans” operation, examining micro-level acts of interpretation, description, and dissemination as they are mediated by relations of power and asymmetry at both the micro and macro level.

Reflections on cultural translation might foreground “the relationalities and attachments that different analytical categories have as they travel [that] will greatly influence their ability to translate” (21). This is particularly important with concepts such as gender, sexuality, and race. As Neferti X. M. Tadiar (2016: 173–74) cautions, “gender, race, sexuality” as “analytical lenses” have become “nearly Kantian categories”—their arrangement and deployment predetermined by the disciplinary expectations of scholars working within the US academy. Tadiar warns that “you are seeing only as far as these imperial shores will allow: the familiar forms of life that an ‘American grammar’ of power and marginality, visibility and invisibility, identity and difference, normativity and nonnormativity, being and becoming can help you make out.” She goes on to ask, “When we do the critique that we do so well, do we not employ the grammar of the police? . . . Do not we communicate and traffic in the particular colonial, capitalist, real abstract codes of social and subjective being that make up an American grammar?” (176). This is to put pressure on the commensurability of cultural, political, and social arrangements of knowledge. It is also a reminder, as Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017: 126) writes, to recognize when and how “local vernaculars of struggle” might get “run through the machine of North American theories, abstracting from local conditions of possibility and constraints” as a form of extractivism. Such cautions are not a call to abandon the work of cultural translation or to abandon these categories but rather to recognize them as particular arrangements of knowledge and experience, as modes of perception and forms of reading that forge grids of intelligibility and regulate epistemological economies.

As Stryker, Currah, and Moore (2008: 14) ask, “How might we move between the necessary places of identity where we plant our feet and the simultaneous imperative to resist those ways in which identities become the vectors through which we are taken up by projects not of our own making?” Such productive investments in and failures of identity as lived formation along with reflections such as Tadiar’s and Gómez-Barris’s that highlight the geopolitics of disciplinary grammars suggest that if we are to translate concepts such as *trans*, *brownness*, and *gender* among others, we must attend to the material, political, and cultural frameworks that freight such concepts and with which they travel. Likewise, refusing to translate formations like *brownness*, for example, or *travesti* might also do political work. Such refusals have the potential to generate other

forms of proximity, other forms of “being-in-common,” to invoke José Esteban Muñoz’s (2020: 2) formulation, in excess of geopolitical borders. Translation’s refusal, as a critical mode of accompaniment and care, can signal a commitment to copresence as affiliation that does not collapse, meld, or erase ways of organizing experience.

This is certainly not to suggest that concepts and theories as arrangements of knowledge are not taken up or intervened in different ways across multiple geopolitical borders. Translation does not generate isomorphic meaning effects, nor are concepts and meaning passively received but rather appropriated and ascribed anew within contexts of power. I draw attention here to the ways that we may wish to attend carefully to mediation and the ways that certain knowledge formations and modes of critique travel south while others may not travel north. Commensurability and incommensurability of ways of being in and knowing the world are at stake. Material and ideological conditions matter. The task at hand thus “demands mapping the dislocations and continual translations” of trans theories and concepts “as well as the constraints [that] mechanisms of mediation and technologies of control impos[e] in the transit of theories across geopolitical borders” (de Lima Costa 2014: 24). This section seeks work that performs such mappings and attends to the mechanisms of mediation and technologies of control central to understanding how theories and concepts move through the world.

Such mechanisms of constraint are also material. Textual translation, as labor, holds great consequence. It not only governs who gets cited but also foregrounds the uneven material conditions of knowledge production under which we all labor—to the benefit of some and the exclusion of others. It signals the labor of scholars whose primary language is not English who must translate their work (or pay for such services) in order for their research to appear in journals published by presses (like this one) that will not publish work in other languages. As Sonia E. Alvarez, Kia Lilly Caldwell, and Agustín Laó-Montes (2016: v) suggest, without the work of translation and the circulation of work-in-translation, it is impossible to forge the “feminist, pro-social justice, antiracist, postcolonial/decolonial, and anti-imperial political alliances and epistemologies” that translation, as trans- operation, has the power to effect. This section will thus continue to invite work-in-translation that cultivates feminist, antiracist, post/decolonial, and anti-imperial epistemologies as well as reflections that address the political economies of translation.

National and regional political, ideological, and theoretical currents similarly impact the ways that conceptual apparatuses do and do not translate, pushed or carried along in transit. For example, the continued centrality of socialism as a viable mode of politics as well as the import of Marxist theory to feminist, queer, and trans and travesti studies throughout Latin America might differently

shape the theoretical, conceptual, and political genealogies of trans studies and its critical moves. The repeated and violent collapse of financial markets in the region during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s due to neoliberal economic policies further underscores the imperative of attending to articulations of class and labor. At the same time, trans and travesti theory as it emerges from Latin America's Southern Cone and its diasporas centers class and revolution as, in part, grounded in recent experiences of leftist resistance to dictatorship. Such incommensurability with a US context—politically, historically, perhaps even theoretically—is productive and, on the other hand, points to how attention to class struggle has largely failed to translate meaningfully into US trans studies.

Some of the questions this section asks include: How does *trans* as a geopolitical knowledge formation travel, get received, reshaped, and refused outside the US academy and in the global South? What kinds of feminist, antiracist, post- and decolonial global south genealogies might unfold through translation or its refusal? What are the material conditions of the circulation and translation of trans knowledges, cultural formations, and political claims? How do we analyze this circulation, from its material conditions of inception, contexts of production through to its movement and recombination? How do material, political, and cultural frameworks affect how trans theory travels (or cannot)? What kinds of counterpractices or countertranslations might we mobilize? How do geopolitical and scalar categories such as province, state, island, archipelago, region, nation, ocean, or global south or north facilitate (mis)recognitions or mediate knowledge formations?

This section seeks work (three thousand words or less) that pays deep attention to how transcultural, transregional, and transnational flows of ideas, subjects, capital, and resources impact the field of transgender studies—its constitutive categories, critical vocabularies, institutional boundaries, and disciplinary commitments. This includes theoretical reflections, meditations on artistic and aesthetic practices, and writing on activist projects that change how we conceive both translation and our field(s). In addition to featuring such reflections, the section will also continue to publish work in translation. I invite work by academics, artists, and activists working across disciplines in and from the global South as well as work by scholars with deep area training.

Translation, as Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel (2016: 154) suggest, is “a choreography from which one might commence, rather than a conversion that occludes or wraps up its trajectories.” Translation as choreography, as the art of composition, unfolds new ways of being and knowing in proximity and in difference. At the same time, untranslatability and (mis)recognition might also serve as points of departure, fueling new arrangements of knowledge, vulnerability, and care across geopolitical borders, while we remain attentive to the ways in which the incommensurable continues to structure our field(s).

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