Arvi Sepp, Philippe Humblé (Eds.)

Bearing Across

Translating Literary Narratives of Migration
Bearing Across

Translating Literary Narratives of Migration

Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
# Table of Contents

*Arvi Sepp (Vrije Universiteit Brussel / Universiteit Antwerpen) and Philippe Humblé (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)*  
Introduction: Literary Translation and Migration .......................................................... 1

## I. Otherness, Community and Communication

*Michael Cronin (Dublin City University)*  
Translating Migration: The Digital Connection ............................................................ 13

*Michael Jacklin (University of Wollongong)*  
Translated Lives in Australian ‘Crónicas’ ................................................................. 27

*Sonja Lavaert (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)*  
Translation as Ethics of Otherness: Primo Levi’s *The Canto of Ulysses* ............... 37

## II. Biographical Accounts of Migration and Translation

*Alexandra Lopes (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)*  
Ilse Losa Writes Back: Migration and Self-Translation ........................................... 51

*Elisa Alonso (Universidad Pablo de Olavide)*  
Francisco Ayala: Exile, Migration and Translation .................................................. 63

*Vivien Bosley (University of Alberta)*  
Borne Across the Ocean: Two French Men Dig in to Alberta  
and Pierre Maturié is Translated into English ......................................................... 75

## III. Representations of Linguistic Hybridity

*Tiziana Nannavecchia (University of Ottawa)*  
Translation as Homecoming: Migrant Narratives  
and a Long-Awaited Journey Home ......................................................................... 89
Loes Singeling-van der Voort (Independent Scholar)
“I Am Complicated”: The Lazarus Project and the Problems of the Migrant’s Hybridity in an Age of War ................................................................. 101

Nasima Akaloo (Independent Scholar)
Patterns of Moroccan Migration in Spanish Fiction: From Arrival to Cultural Negotiation .............................................................................................. 111

IV. Translation and Migration. Case Studies

Gys-Walt van Egdom (Vrije Universiteit Brussel / Hogeschool Zuyd)
Bearing any( )how: Conceptualising At-Homeness in Hafid Bouazza’s De verloren zoon and its French Translation .............................................. 123

Inés García de la Puente (Ohio State University / Boston University)
The Return in Self-Translation: A Case Study of Cuando era Puertorriqueña ..... 135

Stella Linn (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)
A Loud yet Hardly Audible Voice: Urban Youth Language in ‘Street Literature’ ........................................................................................................... 145

Cristina Vezzaro (Independent Scholar)
Translating Fouad Laroui: A Journey Through Languages and Cultures ............... 159
Introduction: Literary Translation and Migration

Arvi Sepp and Philippe Humblé

In migration literature, mobility, both in a literal and figurative sense, lies at the heart of the concept of translation. The spatial aspect of translation is emphasized in the famous quote by Salman Rushdie from *Imaginary Homelands*: “The word ‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from Latin for ‘bearing across’. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (1992, 17). Moreover, migrant writers “are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders of this society” (19).

Translation – in French *traduction* and in German *Übersetzung* – is seen as a sequence of language practices and an existential situation of a migrant dealing with dislocation. Rushdie’s definition of “translated men” (17) with their “stereoscopic vision” (19) has become an iconic image for present-day mobility, movement and transience, together with their implications for individual and collective identity. Susan Bassnett’s essay “Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Travellers’ Tales” (1993) shows the similarities between and ambiguities of both translation and mobility which, embedded in spatial practices, involve the transfer of views and people (see Polezzi 2006). Both have starting points and end points. Travellers link the novel to the familiar, just like translators. Travellers and translators are eventually not capable of writing – or rather functioning – as reliable guides and mediators in their stories and translations.

This volume seeks to map the wider coordinates of different approaches on the relation between migration and translation. The thirteen contributions are interested in how the effects of globalization, digitalization, exile, asylum, assimilation fundamentally shape literature and its translation in their broadest definition: including life-writing, migrant and refugee fiction. They explore the effects of translation on our relation with the national, subnational and the world at large. They deal with the translation of literary texts from Italian-Canadian, Dutch-Moroccan, Australian-Uruguayan, German-Portuguese, Italian-Jewish, Spanish-American, American-Puerto Rican, Bosnian-American, French-Canadian and French-Algerian authors. These hyphenated designations are at the core of the negotiation of a sense of belonging. From their personal locations consisting of multiple connections and allegiances, the writers reinvent the multilingual space they inhabit, endowing it with deeply personal meaning coloured by the diverse cultural strands deriving from this experience. Through issues such as dwelling and displacement, monolingualism and multilingualism, transnationalism and national identity, the contributions in this volume investigate how the translation of migration literature engages with and shapes the ongoing redefinition of cultural identities. Translation also encompasses practices of cultural translation, which involve the nego-
tiation of languages, values, and narratives across cultures. This volume thus aims to explore the possibilities and limits of the notion of “migrant writing”, investigate migration as a theoretical concept, analytical category, and lived experience by writers and professional translators and ask how language practices in migration literature signify the translated experience of migration.

In these literary texts and their translations, alternative, peripheral views of the discourse on national or regional history constructed by dominant culture, opens up an avenue of investigation that conceives of translation as an “ethics of Otherness” (Sonja Lavaert). The condition of the modern subject as a translated being indeed seems to be that of geographical and linguistic border-crossing, between the local and the global. Translation can thus be regarded as a sequence of language practices and an existential situation of migrants dealing with dislocation. Accordingly, this volume focuses, on the one hand, on the translation of literary narratives of migration as an intralingual transaction – as a cultural translation – that reformulates and reassesses cultural specificities in a new and often alienating way and, on the other hand, as an interlingual transaction that applies processes of mediation to issues of agency and communication.

The thirteen contributions in this volume show the interaction of global and local forces in translation and migration literature. From different angles, they elucidate how translation – in its manifold understandings – brings to the fore the deconstruction of the paradigm of individual self-identity and the idea of monolingual authenticity. The translator is a prominent actor of the intercultural. Jhumpa Lahiri, the Bengali author of Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond (1999), equally defines the concept of translation as a means of making sense of the other and the foreign: “Almost all of my characters are translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign to survive” (120). The sense of belonging can be understood as a complex sense of place that is created by linking a multiplicity of locations (Sepp 2017).

Transcultural writers, such as Francisco Ayala and Ilse Losa, reject a hermeneutics of transcultural literature that is solely focused on “questions of belonging” at the expense of the literariness and singularity of their texts. Accordingly, the German-Turkish Zafer Şenocak writes:

> In the case of authors who live outside their native linguistic geography, questions about belonging threaten to obscure other biographical details. The mythic foundations of their work disappear completely from view. [...] One does not read an author’s texts, but rather, the biography written onto his body. Genealogy substitutes for biography. The body of the text – with its own patterns, its own concealed forewords, disappears behind the image of the author. What motivates this type of reading? Fear of wonder? Fear of understanding or not understanding, a sense of strangeness, real or imagined? (2000, 77-8)

The ethical dimension of a translational hermeneutics of migration literature cannot be underestimated in this context. Indeed, as Rita Wilson (2011, 244-5) notes, the utopian horizon of transnational literature points to the multi-faceted nature of society and the fecundity of métissage: “[T]he function of translilingual literature is not primarily a pragmatic, but an aesthetic and an ethical one. Its aim is more symbolic than realistic:
Introduction 3

it symbolizes the variety, the contact and the crossing of cultures and languages.” In
migration literature, the act of “translating” is a powerful yet complex image showing a
“dialogue” of Turkish and German cultural elements. According to Zafer Şenocak, the
communicational ethics of conversation, inherent in transcultural literature, entails the
possibility of a Sich-Verstehen-Können, of a mutual understanding, that is fundamental
to the idea of translation: “Every conversation, that would like to be more than mere
monologues meeting, is translation” (Şenocak 2011, 17) (Our translation).

Writing in another tongue cannot be separated from a quest for identity and, by exten-
sion, from centre-periphery issues in general. As is the case for postcolonial franco-
phone literature, for instance, context and form, “resist and ultimately exclude the
monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: ‘in between’, at once
capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the
reading experience” (Mehrez 1992, 122). The unbalancing of cultural and linguistic
points of reference nearly always implies a deconstruction of identities and fixed ideas.
Migration literature offers alternative, peripheral views of the dominant discourse on
national culture and history and most often entails a deconstruction of the romantic
idea of monolingual nationhood. The Dutch-Moroccan writer Fouad Laroui (2014,
43), for example, states that neither classical Arabic nor French are languages of the
Moroccan nation. As a consequence, it has been impossible to establish a genuinely
Moroccan national literature: “The Moroccan writer uses the language of the Other or
the language of others: either way, it’s mission impossible.”

In Beyond the Mother Tongue (2012), Yasemin Yildiz argues that we are currently
living in an era of migration and mobility, characterized by a “postmonolingual condi-
tion”. In a similar vein, in Means Without End (2000, 66-7), Giorgio Agamben under-
lines the interconnection of factum loquendi and factum pluralitatis as fictions that
have been legitimated by political and language theory since Romanticism. The rela-
tion between language and community, that is taken for granted within the context of
the nation-state, is deconstructed by emphasizing the fundamental and indefinite “for-
eignness” of both “language” and “people”:

The relation between Gypsies and argot puts this correspondence radically into question in the
very instant in which it paradoxically reenacts it. Gypsies are to a people what argot is to lan-
guage. And although this analogy can last but for a brief moment, it nonetheless sheds light on
that truth which the correspondence between language and people was secretly intended to con-
ceal: all peoples are gangs and coquilles, all languages are jargons and argot.

If the foreign is fundamentally inscribed into every language, then consequently every
language is already a translation, “no originally natural language, but an originally cul-
tivated superposed language” (Haverkamp 1997, 9) (Our translation). This language-
philosophical reflexion is made highly explicit in migration literature in its emphasis
on the heterogeneity of languages.

In his introduction to the English translation of Paul Ricœur’s Sur la traduction,
Richard Kearney (2006, xx) emphasizes that, for Ricœur, translation ultimately desig-
nates “interlinguistic hospitality”. For Ricœur, the future political ethos of Europe and
the world is based on translation in that it translates the collective wounds of national
traumas into the language of the other. Migration as a profoundly personal experience
bound to a collective movement is given a voice in migration literature and its transla-
tion that has intimate ties with a sense of justice. The ethical relation between transla-
tion and justice is also brought to the fore by James Boyd White in Justice as Transla-
tion: “Translation and justice first meet at the point where we recognize that they are
both ways of talking about right relations, and of two kinds simultaneously: relations
with languages, relations with people” (1990, 233). The contributions in this volume
intend to scrutinize these relations, both with languages and with people.

The contributions selected for this book were presented at the international conference
“Bearing Across. Translating Literary Narratives of Migration”, which took place on
September 16-17, 2013. The conference was organized at the Vrije Universiteit
Brussel by the Centre for Literature in Translation/Centrum voor Literatuur in Verta-
ling (CLIV).

The first part of this book focuses on otherness, community and communication. In his
chapter “Translating Migration: The Digital Connection”, Michael Cronin suggests
that there is a schismatic paradigm of migrant language which is undergoing a read-
justment in the contemporary digital moment and that this readjustment has potentially
major implications for the way we think about the city as translation zone in literary
contexts. Cronin illustrates his remarks by specific references to the city of Dublin
which has witnessed an increase in migration in the first decade of the 21st century.
The digital age is indeed transforming the landscapes of ‘here’ and ‘there’ in ways that
will profoundly shape migrant literature for many years to come.

In “Translated Lives in Australian ‘Crónicas’”, Michael Jacklin investigates the genre
that is known in the Spanish-speaking world as ‘crónica’ in its Australian version. The
crónica offers a subjective view of contemporary events, current affairs or social is-
issues. In recent decades it has migrated successfully to “the home of the platypus: Aus-
tralia”. Jacklin focuses specifically on the work of Ernesto Balcells, a pseudonym for
Uruguayan-born migrant, Michael Gamarra. In the magazine Versión he published
between 1982 and 1986 a total of thirteen crónicas. Through language and cultural
heritage these texts may appear ‘foreign’ in the sense that they are not English, but
many of these texts tell Australian stories with Australian settings, Australian charac-
ters and Australian circumstances. The crónicas discussed here exemplify this; they do
so in the language spoken by those many thousands of Australians who have migrated
from Spanish America and from Spain.

In “Translation as Ethics of Otherness: Primo Levi’s The Canto of Ulysses”, Sonja
Lavaert discusses Agamben’s thesis that all languages are vernaculars, dialects, jargon,
or argot. All people are migrating, moving, dislocated, unidentifiable gypsies in two
separate stages. First, Lavaert relates this to Susan Sontag’s reflection on the subject of
translation and literature – both considered as ethics of otherness. Second, she focuses