

TEJASWINI NIRANJANA, RETRANSLATION, AND THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGNISM

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ABSTRACT: The article examines the “positive” or “utopian” response to the postcolonial condition developed by Tejaswini Niranjana in **Siting Translation**: her attempt to harness translation in the service of decolonization. It traces a postcolonial myth moving from precoloniality through the recent colonial past and current postcoloniality to an imagined future state of decolonization in order to contrast nationalist versions of that myth, with their emphasis on the purity of the precolonial and decolonized states, to postcolonialist versions, which insist that all four states are mixed. Niranjana draws on Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” in order to explore the ways in which translating, like rereading/re-writing history, involves a “citing” or “quoting” of words from one context to another, allowing translation to be used by colonizers for purposes of colonial subjugation but also by postcolonial subjects for purposes of decolonization. Finally, the article contrasts Niranjana’s Benjaminian sense of literalism as the best decolonizing translational mode with the variety of approaches explored by Vicente Rafael in **Contracting Colonialism**.

KEYWORDS: coloniality; postcoloniality; decolonization; retranslation.

RESUMO: Este trabalho investiga a resposta “positiva” ou “utópica” à condição pós-colonial, desenvolvida por Tejaswini Niranjana em **Siting Translation**: uma tentativa de enqua-

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*drar a tradução a serviço da descolonização. Identifica um mito pós-colonial que parte do estágio pré-colonial, atravessa o passado colonial recente e a pós-colonialidade atual até atingir um futuro estágio imaginado de descolonização, de modo a contrastar as versões nacionalistas do mito, que enfatizam a pureza dos estados pré-colonial e descolonizado, com as versões pós-coloniais, que insistem que todos os quatro estados encontram-se combinados. Niranjana remonta à 'Tarefa do Tradutor', de Walter Benjamin, para explorar as formas pelas quais o ato de tradução, tal como a re-leitura e/ou a re-escrita da história, envolve a "citação" de palavras de um contexto para outro, permitindo que a tradução seja instrumentalizada pelos colonizadores para fins de subjugação colonial, mas também pelos sujeitos pós-coloniais, para promover a descolonização. Finalmente, o artigo contrapõe o literalismo benjaminiano de Niranjana como a melhor modalidade tradutória descolonizadora às diversas abordagens exploradas por Vicente Rafael em **Contracting Colonialism**.*

UNITERMOS: colonialismo; pós-colonialismo; descolonização; re-tradução.

*I institute here a practice of translation that is speculative, provisional, and interventionist.
(Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation* 173)*

In *Siting Translation* Tejaswini Niranjana offers a trenchant postcolonial critique of translation practice and theory in the West for the past two centuries, specifically in the context of the British colonial enterprise in India. Drawing on the work of such postcolonial theorists as Gauri Viswanathan, Homi Bhabha, and Talal Asad, and historicizing and politicizing the poststructuralist work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Paul de Man, she shows persuasively how both the theory and the practice of Western translation have served as a channel of empire.

What I want to take a closer look at here, however, is Niranjana's "positive" or "utopian" response to the postcolonial condition – her attempt, specifically, to harness translation in

the service of *decolonilization*. If translation has served the purposes of the colonizers, might it not also today, under the rubric of “retranslation,” serve the purposes of the decolonizers, those struggling in a postcolonial situation to overthrow (or at least minimize) the negative impact of colonialism?

This is a bold and attractive project, one that promises to confer enormous cultural power on translators: *by our work we can make a difference!* It is also enormously problematic. Just how would retranslation make this difference? What kind of effects do we imagine retranslation having on culture? What are the possible channels of this effect? Should we envision readers being emotionally, intellectually, socially, politically transformed by these new translations? What kinds of retranslations might have such a transformative effect?

Niranjana situates her “utopian” vision of retranslation in a crowded historical realm of the present in which the most prominent “answer” or “solution” to colonialism and its surviving traces is nationalism, or nativism – the belief that the Indians, for example, must recover some “pure” “native” precolonial essence of Indianness as a foundation for the unification and development of the Indian nation. The myth behind this movement, which wields enormous power not only in India but in virtually every postcolonial culture around the world, is that the precolonial “natives” – for example, the various peoples on the Indian subcontinent before the East India Company began to take over – possessed a harmonious cultural integrity that was almost completely destroyed by the evil colonizers and must somehow be recovered or reconstructed if the harmful effects of colonization are ever to be overcome. Represented schematically, this myth or narrative might look something like this:

precolonial state (distant past): pure, good, uncorrupted
 colonial state (recent past): impure, evil, corrupting
 postcolonial state (present): good and evil mixed, hybridized
 decolonized state (future): pure, good, cleansed of colonial evils

Many postcolonial theorists would agree that the myth or narrative that drives their work is – and must be – very similar

to this as well. The key difference, and it is a significant one, is that for postcolonial theorists it is dangerous to believe that the precolonial state ever was pure and good and uncorrupted, or that such a mythical state ever could or should be reattained in the future. Postcolonial theorists live and believe in a morally complex world in which good and evil are always mixed. That mixture preexisted colonialism, was changed drastically but never completely or perfectly by colonialism and again by the end of colonial domination, and will continue to be changed, they hope, by the ongoing process of decolonization. But the mixture, the hybridity, will survive. Decolonization will never mean the eradication of all traces of colonial rule. It will simply mean new transformations of the mixtures. Drawing heavily on the work of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, Niranjana writes:

The call for reversal also informs the discourses of nationalism and nativism that circulate in the colonial and post-colonial situations, and that participate in what Said calls a "politics of blame," a politics of lamentation for a lost pre-colonial past combined with a denunciation of the colonizers. The nationalist and the nativist, whose class provenance is usually that of the indigenous elite created in part by colonialism, often end up colluding in the denial of history and the occlusion of heterogeneity. In the interests of constructing a unified national identity that will challenge colonial domination, the discourse of nationalism suppresses marginal and non-elite peoples and struggles. Claiming to counteract Western domination, nativism (or its more familiar and frightening face, religious revivalism and fundamentalism) advocates a return to lost origins that completely obscures the violent history of the colonial encounter. (166)

Niranjana urges the postcolonial (re)translator to be suspicious of anticolonial myths, to seek out their hidden complicity with the old colonial myths that they oppose. In many cases the colonizers actively created ("interpellated") the nationalism and nativism that is later, before and after the downfall of empire, used against them. The only significant change that na-

tionalists and nativists make in the myths of the “natives” created or consolidated by colonizers is that what was initially imagined in negative terms now becomes positive. Having been interpellated as mystical, for example, the Indian nativist accepts that characterization and simply insists on seeing “native” Indian mysticism not as “irrational” or “primitive” or “ignorant” or “superstitious” but as “profoundly religious,” “steeped in ancient traditions,” etc. Originally useful to the colonizers both as an “explanation” for native behavior and as a justification for colonial hierarchies, it serves precisely the same purposes in postcolonial nationalism: what once kept the natives down now keeps a certain group of natives (those who were identified by the colonizers as best conforming to the nativist myth) in power. The hierarchies have shifted, so that what was low is now high, what was below is now above, what was considered depraved and primitive is now considered the true glorious essence of an ancient and venerable culture; people who for centuries were oppressed are now in power. But both the hierarchy and the terms by which it is justified remain the same; only the groups occupying the various levels in it, and the values associated with their occupancy – whether it is good or bad to be “mystical,” for instance – are different.

And the result of this nationalist/nativist assimilation of colonial myths, Niranjana and many of her fellow postcolonial theorists show, is the suppression of difference, heterogeneity, hybridity. In attempting to set up – or perhaps merely to point to – a transformative practice of retranslation, Niranjana calls for theories of history and cultural contact and growth that will celebrate heterogeneity rather than attempting to suppress it. Like many other postcolonial theorists, she is not quite clear on what these theories will be like; postcolonial translation theory, like postcolonial theory in general, is often a kind of bootstrap operation in which thinkers struggle toward working solutions to centuries-old problems with only the vaguest sense of the direction in which they ought to be heading in quest of those solutions. Niranjana quotes approvingly the apothegm of Homi Bhabha, that “the state of emergency is also a state of *emergence*” (168) – discovering something good and new and productive emerging out

of emergency is essential for this approach – but the outlines of that emergence remain fuzzy, perhaps necessarily so: “The state of emergency/emergence that is the post-colonial condition demands a disruptive concept of history that . . . will also contribute to formulating a notion of representation/translation to account for the discrepant identities of the post-colonial ‘subject’” (168). We are poised, in this statement, on a cusp of some sort, a crisis situation that also holds enormous (if vague) promise for the future; we imagine that cusp “demanding” a “disruptive concept of history” that, in addition to disrupting the old (and thus clearing ground for the new), will also “contribute” to “formulating” a “notion of representation/translation” that will “account” for the postcolonial subject’s “discrepant identities.” There is a chain of subjects and objects here, joined together by hopeful predications, that might be diagrammed as follows:

(subject 1) *the emergency/emergence of postcoloniality*
 (predicate 1) *demands*
 (object 1) *a concept of history* (subject 2)
 (predicate 2a) *that will disrupt*
 (object 2a, implied) *(something)*
 (predicate 2b) *and help formulate*
 (object 2b) *a notion of representation and translation* (subject 3)
 (predicate 3) *that will account for*
 (object 3) *the postcolonial subject’s discrepant identities*

And of course, since the discrepant identities of the postcolonial theorist’s own subjectivity are the source of this hopeful chain, object 3 becomes subject 4 and starts the chain all over again, and again, and again, until something begins to emerge from the vicious circle of emergency, transforming (hopefully) the circle into a virtuous or “emergent” one. This is the difficult bootstrap operation mentioned above: one keeps hoping that persistence in almost certain failure will eventually generate some small germ of success, which will continue to grow into a concept, a disruption, a formulation, a notion, and an account.

A slightly more detailed blueprint for this postcolonial project of retranslation appears a few pages later:

The post-colonial desire to re-translate is linked to the desire to re-write history. Re-writing is based on an act of reading, for translation in the post-colonial context involves what Benjamin would call "citation" and not an "absolute forgetting". Hence there is no simple rupture with the past but a radical rewriting of it. To reading existing translations against the grain is also to read colonial historiography from a post-colonial perspective, and a critic alert to the ruses of colonial discourse can help uncover what Walter Benjamin calls "the second tradition", the history of resistance. This act of remembering, as Bhabha has pointed out, "is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection", Rather, it is "a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present". This is not to say that the past can, simply, be made whole again. (172-3)

Just what it is to say is not entirely clear: sense must be made, but never a whole sense, because that would be an illusion; the past can never be recovered, but neither should it be ignored or neglected. Fragments of the past must be recovered and put together in new ways to "make sense of the trauma of the present", while recognizing that any new "unity" of parts is simply a new creation, not an adequate image of the past.

Niranjana links this process to Benjamin's call for literal translation and Derrida's notion of "citationality", which in the above citation she reads back into Benjamin. "The practice of quotation or citation", she writes, "is part of the technique of the radical historian. As Derrida points out, every mark or sign or 'writing,' whether linguistic or nonlinguistic, 'can be cited, put between quotation marks'. This trait of the sign suggests that it need not be bound to an 'original' context capable of saturation. Instead, it can 'engender infinitely new contexts' (Signature, p. 320). As Derrida's *Glas* so skillfully demonstrates, words 'are citations, already, always.' Since translation marks the continued life of the sign, the text, the past, historical understanding is concerned with this afterlife out of which translation comes. Derrida's *citationality* bears a family resemblance to Benjamin's translatability" (155).

In other words, translating, like rereading/rewriting history, involves a "citing" or "quoting" of words from one context to another. And this means, on the one hand, that the words of colonized populations can be "cited" or "translated" or "reread/rewritten" by colonizers in ways that reframe the colonized culture in the interests of colonial domination, ways that interpellate Indians for example as mystical, childish, sexual, primitive, mendacious, and above all as subject to British rule. But it also means that postcolonial subjects can use the same processes to decolonize their own individual and collective minds. If translation always entails some form of cultural transformation, and postcolonial translation theorists insist that it does, then the question becomes *who is transforming what how?* And also: *if a current or still-dominant cultural transformation is harmful to our interests, how can we retranslate its terms so as to engineer a different transformation?*

The postcolonial translation theorist who has most complexly explored the potential in this process for "native" resistance and reframing is Vicente Rafael, specifically by exploring the complex responses of the Tagalogs to Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century – responses in which assimilation and resistance were complexly mixed, with Tagalog understanding of the Spaniards always infused with various kinds of counterhegemonic confusion, strategic and inadvertent, passive-aggressive and playful. Rafael begins his book with a passage from an 1886 novel by the Filipino nationalist Jose Rizal called *Noli me tangere*, in which a Spanish parish priest named Father Damaso delivers a long and bombastic sermon in Spanish and Tagalog on a Latin Bible lesson. As they listen to the Spanish portion of the sermon, which they cannot understand, the Tagalog congregation pick out bits and pieces of Spanish that they do understand, notably the proper names San Diego and San Francisco, the *guardia civil* or constabulary, and the *tulisan* or bandits: "they observed the sour face of the lieutenant, the bellicose gesture of the preacher, and deduced that the latter was upbraiding the former for not pursuing the bandits. San Diego and San Francisco would, however, carry the matter out themselves, and very well indeed, as could be seen in a painting existing in a

convent in Manila which showed San Francisco armed only with his cincture fending off the Chinese invasion during the first years of discovery. The devotees were then pleased, they thanked God for His assistance, not doubting that once the bandits had disappeared, San Francisco would destroy as well the *guardias civiles*. They redoubled the attention with which they followed Father Damaso as he continued" (quoted in Rafael 2).

"This scene", Rafael comments, "is marked by a near-chaotic exchange of signs which makes it impossible to see the Tagalog position as either clearly opposed to or unequivocally collaborative with the colonial order as represented by the priest" (8). The Tagalogs are intent upon translating Father Damaso's words, precisely because they understand so few of them. The fact that their interpretation of those words is based on a radical *mistranslation* of the sermon, which in Spanish deals with a battle in heaven between the forces of God and the devil, could be – and similar mistranslations in similar contexts frequently have been – taken as signs of:

- (a) the natives' stupidity or ignorance for not understanding Spanish better;
- (b) the priest's stupidity or ignorance for not speaking Tagalog better;
- (c) the natives' malevolence for misreading the priest so egregiously; or
- (d) the missionaries' malevolence for attempting to impose an alien religion on a subjugated people.

Rafael, by contrast, reads it as an instructive example of the complexity of the colonial encounter, the ways in which culturally and linguistically grounded expectations and communicative needs complicate seemingly simple interchanges between colonizer and colonized. The Tagalog translation is a *mistranslation* from the colonizer's viewpoint – but that only makes it all the more useful a starting point for a practice and theory of *retranslation*, which in order to work toward decolonization must precisely break the colonizer's translational rules. Indeed Rafael's historical study seems to me the most powerful sourcebook for postcolonial retranslation that we have.

By contrast Niranjana's sense of the potential for creative retranslation is somewhat impoverished, largely because she has found or developed no local models for such creativity. Instead she follows Walter Benjamin in advancing literalism as the preferred mode of retranslation, arguing that "citing or quoting is in turn akin to *literalness* in translation. For, instead of being concerned with reproducing the meaning of the original, a translation must 'lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification', thus holding back from communicating. Words rather than sentences are the true element of the translator, who must provide 'a literal rendering of the syntax', 'For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade' (TT [Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator"], p. 79)" (155).

And it may well be the puzzlements of this idea in Benjamin that block Niranjana from exploring the kind of retranslation activities that Rafael discovers in Tagalog culture: it is never clear, in Niranjana or any other postcolonial translation theorist who draws heavily on Benjamin (such as Venuti), how "holding back from communicating" can become a powerful tool of decolonization, of postcolonial group solidarity in overthrowing the surviving traces of empire. "Holding back from communicating" has served a number of social purposes over the centuries, most of them related to some form of mystification: concealing a religious or other in-group's mysteries from outsiders (see my *Translation and Taboo*); concealing heresy from ecclesiastical authorities (see Pym 55); marking the superior knowledge and taste of a cultural elite (see my *Translator's Turn* and part 3 of *What Is Translation?*). It is difficult to imagine how "holding back from communicating" could ever have widespread effects on a culture, because communication is essential to the "spreading" of an effect..

Is there then only one truly "radical" mode of translation that can be effective in the decolonizing process, namely a neoliteralism or foreignism coming out of the German (post)romantic tradition from the Schlegel brothers, Goethe, Schleiermacher, and Humboldt to Benjamin, as Niranjana and Venuti insist? Or might a whole shifting variety of playful popu-

lar modes of “mistranslation” be more effective, as Rafael claims? What’s more, as Rafael also insists, might those modes already be in place? Answers to these questions seem to depend on the extent of the postcolonial theorist’s cultural elitism: the greater the elitism, which is to say, the more drawn the theorist is to standards of taste maintained by cultural elites involving difficulty (relative inaccessibility to the “masses”) and overt intellectual critique (especially poststructuralism), the more clearly and exclusively translation tends to be dualized as either (a) communicative, accessible, assimilative, domesticating, and therefore part of the problem, or (b) noncommunicative, inaccessible, nonassimilative, foreignizing, and therefore part of the solution.

This position has become strongly associated with Lawrence Venuti, who has researched and presented it indefatigably in a variety of practical translation contexts in both his books and articles and in lectures around the world; it figures prominently in Niranjana’s *Siting Translation* as well, and Eric Cheyfitz alludes to it in passing, in *The Poetics of Imperialism*. The driving idea behind this set of assumptions is that assimilative or domesticating translation, which used to be called “sense-for-sense” translation, is a primary tool of empire insofar as it encourages colonial powers (or more generally the “stronger” or “hegemonic” cultures as usefully outlined by Richard Jacquemond, especially the West with respect to the third world, and England and the U.S. with respect to continental Europe) to translate foreign texts into their own terms, thus eradicating cultural differences and creating a buffer zone of assimilated “sameness” around them. Members of hegemonic cultures are therefore never exposed to true difference, for they are strategically protected – not only through assimilative translations but also through five-star hotels in third-world countries, and the like – from the disturbing experience of the foreign. Members of peripheralized cultures in turn are forced to “write for translation”, to preshape their cultural expressions to meet hegemonic expectations. In this way diversity is gradually leached out of the world, and we are all immeasurably impoverished.

The remedy to this situation, for the postcolonial foreignizers, is a mode of translation designed to retain and assert differ-

ence and diversity by sticking closely to the contours of the source text. My critique of this solution, which I have presented at length elsewhere (in *Translation and Taboo* with regard to Niranjana, in *What Is Translation?* with regard to Venuti and Antoine Berman), can be summarized in the context of postcolonial theory as follows:

a. It is not clear that foreignizing and domesticating translations are all that different in their impact on a target culture. All translations are based on interpretations, and interpretations will vary not only from translator to translator but from target reader to target reader; foreignizing translations do not necessarily add to the existing diversity of this situation. Niranjana's sixth and final chapter, for example, consists largely of her discussion of three English translations of a 12th-century Vira_aiva sacred poem or *vacana*, attributed to Allama Prabhu; the first she attacks as a Christianized version, the second (by A.K. Ramanujan) as a Romanticized version. The third, her own, is offered as a radically literal "retranslation" of the sort she believes will contribute to decolonization. As I argue at some length in *Translation and Taboo* (161-62), however, what Niranjana brings to the translation task is not so much a different *method* of translation (foreignism rather than domestication, say) as it is a specific interpretation, one informed by poststructuralist thought.

The last two lines of the poem, for example, "Guh_var_, n_nu jy_tirlingav_dare / upamisi n_daballavarillayy_," are translated by S.C. Nandimath, L.M.A. Menezes, and R.C. Hiremath as "O Guh_var_, if Thou become / The effulgent linga, there be none / Thy glory to match," by Ramanujan as "O Lord of Caves, / if you are light / there can be no metaphor," and by Niranjana as "Guh_var_, if you are become the *linga* of light, / Who can find your figuration." Niranjana argues that the Nandimath/Menezes/Hiremath version is overly Christianized, as the use of "effulgent" (for *jy_ti* "light") and "glory" (with no Kannada equivalent) suggests, and that the Ramanujan is overly Romantic, as the use of "metaphor" (for *upama* "comparison") suggests; but of course her choice of "figuration" for *upama* "comparison" is more indebted to poststructuralist theory than it is to foreignism. She also argues against the assimilative omission of the god's

Kannadiga name, Guh__var_, and his symbol the *linga*, in Ramanujan; but the overly "Christianized" version of Nandimath/Menezes/Hiremath retains both as well. It is difficult to see how any one of these translations is "better" or "worse" than any of the others for the project of decolonizing India.

b. The impact of assimilative and foreignizing translations on target-language readers is neither as monolithic nor as predictably harmful or salutary (respectively) as the foreignists claim. There is an implicit reader-response assumption behind foreignist theories, that an assimilative translation will dull the mind of "the" target-language reader and enforce a hegemonic mindless blandness that will be increasingly blocked to cultural difference, and that a foreignizing translation will rouse "the" target-language reader to critical thought and a new appreciation for cultural difference. To put it as simply (perhaps simplistically) as possible, the assumption is that assimilative translations will (continue to) colonize the reader, to enforce colonial hegemony in that reader's thinking, while foreignizing translations will (help to) decolonize the reader, undermine colonial hegemony and thus conduce to effective political and cultural action in the service of increased freedom from the colonial past.

But this is an abstract claim that has almost no basis in the complex communicative realities of human interaction. When the Tagalog congregation translates Father Damaso's sermon assimilatively, does their assimilative translation perpetuate the ideological work of colonization? Of course not. When foreignists attack assimilative translations, they mean renderings of a dominated culture by a hegemonic culture; the very fact that the Tagalogs' assimilative translations of Father Damaso would have to be considered a "positive" response, however, suggests that what foreignists are attacking in assimilative translations is not the fact that they assimilate a foreign text to domestic norms, but that that process has a deleterious effect on *some people*.

And even if we focus more specifically on the people foreignists believe are adversely affected by assimilative translations, it is not clear that foreignizing translations are necessarily more beneficial. Many readers associate the strategic awk-

wardness of a foreignized text with the authoritarian discourse of textbooks, legalese, etc. – so that it seems more “colonizing” than certain playfully liberating assimilative translations. For other readers the “quaintness” of foreignized texts – for example, if the Spanish “*el mundo es pañuelo*” is “foreignized” as “the world is a handkerchief” rather than being “assimilated” as “it’s a small world” – makes their authors, and the source culture in general, seem childish, backward, primitive, precisely the reaction foreignism is supposed to counteract. It seems impossibly reductive to assume that all assimilative translations will have a single type of negative effect on all readers, and that all foreignizing translations will have a single type of positive effect on all readers.

The distinction between “foreignizing” and “assimilating”/“domesticating” a text is in any case based on a naive linguistics. For postcolonial foreignists, “the familiar” is a narrowly circumscribed realm of language or culture grounded in ruling-class ideology and a blandly repressive “ordinary language.” To translate into this “familiar” or “ordinary” language is always, therefore, to impose a hegemonic straitjacket on a text – one that Venuti calls “fluency” or “invisibility.” But there are infinite varieties of “familiarity” or “ordinariness” in a language, and they certainly do not all imprison their users in hegemonic or colonial prison cells of the mind. What seems “familiar” or “ordinary” or “fluent” is never an intrinsic property of a word or phrase; it is sometimes built up by long usage, so that it may seem intrinsic (though it too can and will change with time), but in other cases it is purely situational, so that a new coinage, something no one has ever heard, strikes everyone present with the force of “rightness” and a new word is born. Ostensibly “reductive” or “assimilative” or “fluent” language can be “foreignized” or “defamiliarized” by the simple act of reading it in a different tone of voice – sarcastic, ironic, angry, campy, fearful, bombastic, etc. – and a good actor or speaker can “naturalize” even the strangest and most foreign-sounding phrase, so that no one notices anything out of the ordinary.

c. In their deep mistrust of the “popular” and the “populist,” in their suspicion that any cultural expression that appeals to the “large audience” must necessarily be reductive, assimi-

tive, and must therefore have a colonizing rather than decolonizing effect, foreignist theories of translation are inherently elitist. Left-leaning theorists like Venuti and Niranjana have struggled valiantly to undo this elitism, to harness foreignism for dissident or counterhegemonic politics, but the imaginative leap that would make this shift possible remains extremely difficult to make. Niranjana too follows Benjamin in his insistence on “holding back from communicating” – precisely because she too, like Benjamin, seems to perceive the large audiences to whom translators would normally want to communicate as dangerously conservative and inclined to the suppression of difference. William Jones and other early British translators in India sought to interpellate India as Britain’s subject by translating Indian laws, literature, and sacred texts into English for the large Indian audience; this project was so enormously successful that, presumably, it is entirely suspect today. To “decolonize” India by using similar methods, by seeking to interpellate India anew by communicating a different India to the large Indian audience, would be not to decolonize the country but to recolonize it. Hence the importance of “holding back from communicating”.

Clearly there is something seriously wrong with this logic. Something different must be done; but is communication, especially communication to the large audience, the true culprit? Walter Benjamin, a twentieth-century German thinker channeling centuries of cultural elitism, says it is; so it is.

d. Like its theoretical predecessor “sense-for-sense” vs. “word-for-word” translation, the “assimilative”/ “foreignizing” distinction presumes a stable separation of source and target languages. An assimilative translation is one that makes all translational decisions in terms of a stabilized or objectified target language or culture; a foreignizing translation is one that owes a stronger loyalty to a stabilized or objectified source language or culture. What happens when postcolonial texts, originals and translations alike, begin to inhabit a middle or hybridized ground between “source” and “target” – for example in the *métissés* that Samia Mehrez discusses, or in the Tex-Mex mix of Gloria Anzaldúa, or in *la langue quebecoise* or *joual* as discussed

by Sherry Simon and the other quebécois(e) translation theorists that she collects in *Culture in Transit*? What happens when the distinction between original and translation itself begins to break down, and it is no longer clear which part of a text is original and which is translated from another language? What happens when groups of people simultaneously produce and consume originals and translations in a playful creolizing slippage between languages, interchangeably occupying the roles of writer and reader, speaker and listener?

That creolization is no postcolonial panacea should be clear. It offers exciting new postnationalist perspectives on language, culture, and translation; but the ability to inhabit those perspective and put them to decolonizing use may still be the achievement of a small cultural elite. In the nationalist world we do still inhabit, the inability to sort your ideas out into one national language or another means confusion, inarticulateness, stupidity; and even with all the trappings of an elite education and position it is virtually impossible to write or speak a radically creolized idiom and be heard or taken seriously.

But these may be transitional difficulties that we can at least imagine being overcome. Elitist/traditionalist resistance to "popular" or populist forms of "confusion" is tenacious but not invincible. It too can be inundated in a tidal wave of popular writing, full of the mixed accents of postnationalist communities.

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