

Translation and national sovereignty. The fragility and bias of theory¹

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Abstract: The author starts by describing her own relationship to language and translation, which is the result of her growing up between languages and among several. She proceeds to explain why she uses elements of “Indian” philosophies to highlight her point about language and translation, just as she uses elements of “continental” philosophy, with the advantage that exposing “our” problems to that “elsewhere” sheds unexpected light on them. She then explains difficulties in language, translation, and understanding as a result of the division between “theory” and “practice,” and gives examples (such as those from ancient Indian languages and writings) of cultures where that division was avoided. The divide takes sharper contours in the relation between the “west” and the “rest.” Assumptions of superiority are based on the tacit *cognitive precondition of separating theory from practice* by an insurmountable wall. Historically located polities have each a *general corresponding cognitive order and translation regime*. Which means that whole genealogies of knowledge have remained invisible to European languages, untranslated, apparently *untranslatable* to the hegemonic gaze. The conclusion points to the disaster of national subjectivation in Yugoslavia, in the post-Yugoslav states, and elsewhere.

Translation always raises the question of its politics. I will try to argue for the inevitability of an inter-con-textual and political approach to translation, quite beyond the textual one.

I start from the observation that any “origin” is located, therefore oriented, therefore interested, and therefore concealing a politics; that knowledge is historically informed and that so is therefore translation. Language and translation are not neutral: translata-

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bility, not only as a possibility, but also as a fundamental mechanism, is already there in any language capacity, even before we can name the language. Both have associated themselves since modernity with the constitution of the nation.

Translation is both on the side of a metaphor as well as, literally, of language(s) and of the material production of worlds, in both cases as political. They involve a declared or hidden politics of translation. Languages traverse each other, bear one another, and rub against each other, even beyond our awareness. They are not mutually excluding. No child is born monolingual. Monolingualism is inculcated in and through a national horizon and the definition of a national language. In this sense a world of translation—translational—is still a transnational world. Because languages are communicating vessels decanting into each other, content is never transferred from a source language into a target language without rest or excess. Translation cannot be reduced to a binary, and it actually precedes the definition or establishment of national and linguistic difference. It happens not between but within languages. It is a complex relationship fleeing in various directions, including all the way through languages, and it transforms the translator as well. The writings of protagonists translate to themselves and to others, but above all, to later generations, their lives, imaginaries and historical conditions. Understanding them from outside their context, from a later generation, or from another translation regime requires some ability of brokering between parallel, circulating, and intersecting histories, where everything is moving and changing meaning: translation takes place on uncertain ground, according to uncertain principles, without guarantee, and gives vacillating, uncertain results. Translation is inevitable, although its politics is unpredictable. The question of learning from others' experience, or from experience tout court arises. How do we translate from one regime of sentences (Wittgenstein, Lyotard), or from one world, into another? But how do we translate from one translation regime to another?

An example: the impossibility and difficulty to translate “caste” (as well as many other terms): the concept of caste is a normative concept of Western sociology for India. How does it translate into India, and back to and from India? It is a “travelling” concept, lost between theories and undermining the construction

of hegemonic knowledge, which is oblivious of translation regimes or of the politics of translation. The question concerns a minimum rhetorical rule: since we can only speak of language from within language itself, don't the rules about language also apply to the would-be metalanguage?

Lost in languages

I was born into Serbo–Croatian which, rather than a clearly and once-and-for-all standardized language, was a constellation consisting of a number of different language feelings, stylistic values, competing standardizations, carrying of course various accents, some syntactical variations, and multiple vocabulary choices. By the accidents of life, i was exposed early on to a series of variants of that language (once going under that common name, though no more). These corresponded to different places in Yugoslavia. The language feeling was regional and local rather than national, because the national/state framework itself was fragmented by accents, syntax, scripts, writing, and various rival standardizations. The language could be “more Croat” or “more Serb,” with a gradation and no absolute distinguishing principles. I could read the two scripts before going to school. Across that *nébuleuse* of multiple possible ways of speaking and writing that were however heavily disputed by politicians and by some language-policing linguists, and that were used to express other political disagreements, i, like everyone else, could find my way at large throughout the country, understand and be understood. Speaking was no issue at all. Publishing *was*, however, depending on the linguistic politics of your editors, of the journal, the publisher, or the local academy. I was constantly negotiating with editing rereaders—bearers of a great variety of language views and believers in different standardization conventions—about my articles and books. We called them “lectors.” Some of them were my great enemies, in general those who were staunch advocates of a strong official codification of separate national languages (whether Serb or Croat). You could tell from their editing (submitted to us before publication for proofreading) not only their linguistic and translation politics most of the time, but their politics *tout court* (Iveković 2007a).

The result is that i have published, depending on how i managed to negotiate my personal language and how my own relation

to it evolved, in a great variety of forms of Serbo–Croatian, completely “inconsistently” over time. It was never like French, which you can write in only one way. Not everyone was as fickle as i was, and most probably adopted the language of his or her social context at the time of writing. But i moved a lot between Belgrade and Zagreb and lived in both. You could write according to various codes and in several ways of which each meant a political statement if you stuck to it. That language contained a contested, competing, and disputed inner multiplicity. Yet i couldn’t help but be utterly inconsistent, not out of carelessness, but on the contrary out of a constant concern for language, meaning, and translation. Such inconsistency was paradoxically dictated by my continuous constancy regarding language. The very spirit and most important feature of that language was that it had plural and inconclusive standardizations as well as plentiful options, and the official rules for writing (*pravopis*, which included spelling and some additional sets of usages) also changed constantly, sometimes due to political disputes disguised as linguistic disputes. Being consistent either meant being dogmatic about form and sticking to only one way of writing, or being inconsistent with the form but consistent with the spirit of this language that was always in transformation. Great writers such as Miroslav Krleža and Ivo Andrić had written in different modes of the language—*ekavski* and *ijekavski*—which have only recently become (and only superficially and, in the final analysis, wrongly, irrespective of language history) identified respectively with Serbian and Croatian. People who had not been exposed, like myself, to various vernaculars and manners of speaking and writing, could stick to one form, although even there official rules changed all the time.²

Since i started publishing predominantly in foreign languages, the fate of my writing is exactly the same: it is corrected,

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² A number of spellings and writing rules were made official for all during the lifetime of Yugoslavia, and alternative proposals were occasionally issued by nationalist institutions. One spelling (*pravopis*) was the *Novosadski pravopis*, or “The Novi Sad writing agreement,” of 1954 (and the revised 1962 version), which focused on similarities, which i had decided to stick to when i started publishing, not so much because it was midway between Serbian and Croatian, but rather because i thought it would be good to stick to one as the rules kept changing all the time. It was contested by linguistic nationalists. Another attempt in 1967, the *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika*, or “Declaration on the name and condition of the Croatian literary language,” insisted on dissimilarities and announced a first nationalist turn a few years later (1971).

depending on the sensibility of the reader or reviewer, because it is perceived to be inadequate in terms of an ideal form of the language.

Many were those who refuted that multiplicity, who held monolithic, sovereigntist, national politics of language and translation. *That language was many languages at once, or in one*, always itself in the process of translation. It was both one and many. The comparisons were to me linguistically delectable, ruminating on language was exciting and sometimes frustrating. The one-and-multiple language was fluctuating in its definitions, grammars, spelling, writing codes, and even names, which were occasionally changed and decreed by academies, uncertain to some, loved and disputed by many. All styles were cultivated, from the extreme purism of each “national” language to rather syncretic approaches where “languages” and their accents or vocabularies were mixed.³

Croatian was much more language sensitive at first sight in its national language politics and also more concerned about written form, but it turned out later that Serbian as a national language (somewhat more at ease with oral expression) was no less dogmatic, including in its apparent carelessness about form. What was later (after the war in the 1990s) called Bosnian was more flexible, less standardized, and fluctuating between the two other forms.

Yugoslavia was this peculiar country composed of six republics, two “autonomous regions,” two scripts, and half a dozen main languages, of which several were Slavic, and where Serbo-Croatian was the most widespread, spoken in four of the federal states (Bosnia–Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia) and taught at school in all. Serbo-Croatian was thus imposed on everyone and was also the lingua franca. All instructions on Yugoslav goods were in all Yugoslav languages, including minority languages. These are now all considered and named as four different national languages, linked to the idea of each national state, and more could appear at any time, with theoretically possible, though

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³ Naoki Sakai (2013): “I do not think that difference at stake in this instance can be subsumed under the concept of *species difference*.” It is worth emphasizing the fact that the determination of the species difference is offered as a solution to the initial problem of us being at a loss, in response to the perplexity we come across in such a locale.” “[I]t is imperative to keep in mind that it is not because some person or people are *different*—in the sense of *species difference*—from me or us that we are at a loss. On the contrary, it is because we are at a loss or unable to make sense in the first place that we attempt to determine this encounter with *difference* within the logical economy of *species* and *genus*.”

now less likely, further partitions. The other two Slavic languages were Slovenian and Macedonian, to a great extent understandable with a little good will at least to neighbors, speakers of Serbo–Croatian, who, however, did not learn them at school. Important minority languages were Albanian, Hungarian, Italian, and Romani, and many other languages also circulated. The distinction between Macedonian and neighboring Bulgarian responds to the same pattern, and is a matter of convention, a convention governed by the political stand on the nation. In Yugoslavia and successor states, the language of Macedonia was and is Macedonian. But that may change for those Macedonians who now opt for Bulgarian citizenship (and get it) because it gives them an easy entrance into Europe. There is no doubt about the hegemony of Serbo–Croatian, which, by the end of Yugoslavia, caused a lot of bitterness in particular with the Slovenes (the small difference) and the Albanians (the bigger language difference). In Yugoslavia, the languages flanked Yugoslavia’s constitutive “nations” and “nationalities.”⁴

Only where languages are distinguished can the unity of one language be established, says Naoki Sakai (2013). Languages and nations tend to construct each other reciprocally in an endless process (Iveković 2008).

I have always doubted the existence of the language i was born into. “Lectors” often made you believe that your own language was violating some “pure” form. Competing and coexisting standardizations did so too.

When i started university in Zagreb, i enrolled at a “general linguistics and oriental studies” department where i read “Indian studies,” to a great extent from a linguistic and philological perspective, quite old-fashioned. I came to philosophy through “Indian” philosophy, “in the reverse” as it were if compared to a usual European trajectory. The nonaligned political orientation of the country that came to introduce such and similar studies after the 1961 Belgrade first summit of leaders of the Non-Aligned countries, in view of its nonaligned and third-world friendships and pri-

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⁴ “Nations” and “nationalities” (*narod i narodnost*) were supposed to be constitutive and equal, and most had a federal republic that went by their name, while more-mixed-than-the-others Bosnia-Herzegovina was a conundrum of its own. “Nationalities” (national minorities) had a more complex status: they were supposed to be constitutive in their main national body as nations, in another Yugoslav republic or abroad, as was the case for Albanians in Kosovo or Hungarians in Vojvodina.

orities, still relied to a great extent on an Orientalist reading, notwithstanding the decolonization wind blowing in the 1960s that had reached our shores with, especially, much empathy for the Algerian war of liberation. We studied Sanskrit, Pāli, and Hindi, among Indian languages, and read secondary literature not only in our language⁵ but also in German, French, and English, while i soon read Max Weber on Asia in Italian, because that seemed to be the only available edition, or translation.

I started translating ancient texts from Sanskrit and Pāli into Serbo–Croatian,⁶ besides translating contemporary philosophy from European languages. The technical problem of transcription and transliteration presented itself immediately with Indian sources, and came to feed our engagement with scripts, language, writing of foreign names and words (disputes among several options supported diversely by the script). Sanskrit has a declension of eight cases, while Serbo–Croatian has seven. How do you decline a Sanskrit noun in Serbo–Croatian? How—and where—do you add suffixes from the Serbo–Croatian declension to Sanskrit nouns? There were many different usages and clashes over them. Sanskrit has the sonant “r,” which operates like a syllable-forming vowel, that we also have in our language. But English and French language transcription conventions require “ri”: should we do the same, or should we write simply “r” as we do in our language in words like “prst”? In that case we should write (and we did) “sanskrt.” Consider *ṛ* (“r” with a dot underneath) as is done in some transcriptions? Should we write, as the English transliteration does, *ś* and *sh*, or, as the French one does, *ç* and *ʃ*? Or should we write, in analogy with our *č* and *ć* (two distinct sounds that foreigners usually do not differentiate in our names), *ś* and *š*, something that speakers of Serbo–Croatian understand immediately by analogy? We used to do the

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⁵ “Our [language],” *naški*, has become a most widespread and neutral appellation of the common language without naming it, since the partition of Yugoslavia, with nonnationalists. It indistinctly denotes Bosnian, Montenegrin, Serbian, Croatian, or any future split-off language that may come. The Indian–Pakistani analogy would be *de* and *de i*. NB: i deliberately have no use for the word “dialect,” which has no meaning outside a national vertical hierarchy of languages. Languages and dialects are of course the same, as much as nations and ethnicities, fixed constructs within a regime of rigid “identities.”

⁶ At that time, the correct and official appellation of that language in Croatia, where i studied and started writing (though my first book came out in Sarajevo), was “Croato–Serbian,” simply called “Croatian” in popular parlance, just as “Serbian” was shorthand for “Serbo–Croatian” in the Serbian context. In order to avoid further complication, i do not use the form “Croato–Serbian” when writing in English or French, where it is in fact unknown.

latter, and immediately created problems for ourselves with any quotation or reference we introduced from Western Indology, and with local nonacademic usages.

The language problems from Sanskrit transposed into Serbo–Croatian were a direct continuation of the language dynamics and complications we had with our own language. Sanskrit and Pāli became for me inner problems of Serbo–Croatian, and of the same kind. And again, i had to deal with more or less understanding rereading and editing. The problems raised by the alternative script, Cyrillic, can be added to these. Cyrillic makes foreign words and, above all, names, unrecognizable, and by the same token it also erases some of the historic depth and traces from the written word. Other subterfuges are needed when writing or publishing in Cyrillic, and they, too, are diversely (non)standardized. So my experience with mediating Indian culture in Yugoslavia and dealing with Indian languages only continued my experience with the now nameless language, one-and-multiple.

Since very early infancy, too, and again without any merit, i was deeply exposed to other languages—French and Italian at first as my parents were living in Belgium and Italy. I spoke Serbo–Croatian, French, and Italian with different people surrounding me. Those languages never left me, although they went and returned with absences or vacations, and Italian was somewhat neglected. I then went to a French school in Germany, where i spoke French and listened to German. Later at school in Belgrade, from grade 5, i took English as a foreign language. From there on, other European languages came through reading or listening. They also came through the other languages and thanks to them, sometimes weighing against each other. They came particularly thanks to Serbo–Croatian into which i tended to translate the new words and to compare them. The welcome diversity of those languages somehow mirrored my own multiplicity, rather than their “national” limitations. It was only natural for me to continue *between* languages, understood both as medium and mediator. I believe that the diversity, profusion, extension, complexity, burgeoning, and abundance those languages gave me through their simultaneity and intertwining were suitable patterns structuring my thinking and work, somehow never in straight lines. I could not be disciplined. When writing in French or English, i continued the same passionate relationship to language that i had

with Serbo–Croatian, brokering styles and writing conventions with more or less success.

The world has changed vertiginously since i was born into Serbo–Croatian. Not only have i been brought to learn other languages, but i have also come to construct with others intersecting spaces of many languages with which i dealt at various levels. It is not my merit. Estranged at a mature age from my first language, especially for publishing and work, since the dismantlement of Yugoslavia, i am in the—regular—situation of constantly hesitating between languages and always being beside a language, or at a crossroads of several languages. Stumbling, faltering, forgetting, double and even treble consciousness help us overcome the double-talk rhetoric, the frozen language (*langue de bois*), the officialese of the *pensée unique*. It is a condition of epistemological diversity and of ontological uncertainty, but it is also some kind of normalcy and way of life. I now write in the language i was asked for a paper, which is mainly French or English, and only rarely Serbo–Croat. The dilemma is devastating not regarding articles, but when it comes to fictional writing: here, no language suits me any more.

But why the hesitation, since displacement is the rule? Uncertainty is critical and part of the technology of becoming in displacement. It is part of a translated world. It may not be the easiest thing to live and it doesn't guarantee any progressive politics, but we are lucky it is there and lucky to be able to mold a world without absolute translation (Iveković 2007a, 21–26; 2007b). Stumbling ushers us into the wasteland, the *terrain vague*, that will give the *hors champ*, the off camera, the *tiers instruit* (Serres 1991), the distance necessary for writing, translating and working. Uncertainty comes as the necessary third “language” or other, the third element, an operator and broker.

Brahmā's Net

Brahmā's net is the name Buddhists give to ideology.⁷

Avijjā, ignorance about both the origin and the functioning of the world, keeps us within that net. In a very early linguistic turn

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⁷ Brahmā-jāla: Brahmā's net is also “the all-embracing net of views,” a hegemonic point of view that, in the eyes of the Buddhist, would be Brahmanistic. There is a speech attributed to the Buddha, *Brahmajāla Suttam* (*Dīgha-nikāya* 1, 1), which deconstructs under that name different doctrines, including unorthodox ones, existing at that time. Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahm are the Trimūrti, the “troika.” Like all three, Brahm is a

in Indian philosophy (6th–7th century BCE), Buddhists discovered that language couldn't say it all, being itself part of that whole. There is no metalanguage different from language. The “beginning” being unknown, Buddhists cultivated cognitive uncertainty and self-decentering.

Let me, however, clarify that i do not take Buddhism as a model to follow, nor do i preach it. I only take it as arguably the clearest example, possibly with Daoism, of a series of ancient “Asian” epistemes having certain characteristics highlighted here through the example of Buddhism. Some of these features are: not cultivating the putative split between subject and object (which is really a capturing apparatus of hegemony), between theory and practice, or between sovereignty and exception—amongst others. This does not mean that Buddhism, much as any other philosophy, cannot be used and misused to enhance nationalistic politics—as it has been in many examples, particularly Japan, or recently more locally in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, if these things can be measured. So Buddhism doesn't give any guarantee for an equitable translation regime, nor should it be idealized. No philosophy carries within itself the guarantee of its infallibility.⁸

I use elements of “Indian” philosophies to highlight my point just as i use elements of “continental” philosophy, with the advantage that exposing our problems to that “elsewhere” sheds unexpected light on them.

Untranslatability is a paradox: there are untranslatables (Barbara Cassin 2004; Lyotard 1983; Balibar 2009); there are also *conditions of (un)translatability*. What is untranslatable according to one *translation regime*, may be translatable in another. There is no absolute translation. There are degrees between untranslatables and translatables (Iveković 2002a, 121–145; also at Iveković 2002b), indicative of a multitude of options. There are levels and registers of translation, which all point to the circulation of (non)intended mean-

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masculine figure and, although without rites, he is also the anthropomorphic personification of the Brahmanist universalist ideal *brahman* (n.), the absolute. I distinguish between *Brahmanic* and *Brahmanist*, the latter involving ideology and a universalist project.

⁸ I would like to thank Naoki Sakai for pointing out to me the danger that talking about Buddhism may lead to some kind of its idealization: this is not the intention here, nor am i pleading for any kind of indigenism. We should also meditate on the fact that this is very difficult to get through under the ordinary hegemonic translation regime. I am not dealing with the existing political instrumentalizations of Buddhism, but with the Buddhist conceptual apparatus.

ing and implications, with possible incalculable gaps between the two. *Because* we have the option between an infinite number of translations (including impossibility and unwillingness), and an equally infinite number of methods, we either translate in sheer ignorance of our subject-position as translators/mediators, or we must have a politics of translation and know or ignore that we do.

Lyotard's *Le Différend* (1983) was a turning point in continental philosophies as these opened to the possibility (not the guarantee) of other epistemes in principle. Since any utterance releases myriad possible worlds,⁹ as Lyotard would have it after Wittgenstein; and since a concatenation of sentences is inevitable although there is no guarantee or predictable indication—theoretically—concerning their contents and “sentence regime,”¹⁰ we must count with the coexistence (and confusion) not only of sentence regimes, but of “translation regimes” as well. We might be under a sentence regime unwittingly, or apolitically, but we can also form a *politics of translation* by choosing this or that translation code. There are translation regimes even when there is no “translation” as such, since there is no zero degree of language, of translation, or of the human condition, including in extralinguistic matters. But then, for humans, as Buddhist philosophy knows, there is no extralinguistic condition, except outside Brahmā's net, a very unlikely although possibly desirable ambition, as in *nirvāṇa*. Some translation from one condition to another is always at work.

The difficulty of theory

There is some problem with the concept of theory. One could indeed invoke Kant here, but here is a simpler approach. The problem comes from the paradox of the concept of theory's origination in the West, yet its propagation everywhere as a normative idea in science especially with modernity, and from its vertical hierarchy. Theory is a must. It is a contentious notion dividing the West from the rest (see Sakai 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; Mignolo 2011; 2012), assigning ideological advantages to the West in keeping the monopoly of theory.

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⁹ One and the same utterance may open up many diverse universes, as “open the window,” which may be a command or a prayer, may imply that it is cold, that it is hot, that there is an earthquake, that there is a bat in the room, that Romeo is waiting outside etc.

¹⁰ Sentence régimes, *régimes de phrases*: performative, imperative, interrogative etc.

How to translate from one episteme to the other without essentializing them?¹¹ We may temporarily forego the philosophical self-critical breakthrough achieved *in principle* regarding the lingering, but eventually receding, superciliousness of Western thought, ridden with immunity. *In principle*, for “Western” philosophers, self-critique is self-understood. They have even theorized this self-critique as *the* achievement of Western modernity, and claimed that theirs is the only self-critical *episteme*. Non-Western scholars have repeated this, though it may be questionable whether anyone is non-Western at all by now (Chakrabarty 2012). The problem remains. Assumptions of superiority are based on the tacit *cognitive precondition of separating theory from practice* by an insurmountable wall, an abyssal line. This division has a normative function. It grounds the ideology of western superiority *but presents this as neutrality*.

Assumptions of preeminence sharply separate subject from object, theory from practice, “civilized” from “uncivilized,” “us” from “others.” Such divisions are characteristic of modern Western knowledge inasmuch as it is colonial, its coloniality being concomitant and coextensive with the historical construction of capitalism. Such bipolar structuring of knowledge serves a predatory purpose, the purpose of *appropriative* sciences at the service of nations and states.

Academic disciplines and status–knowledge, which differ from language to language, are constructed in collusion with hegemonic colonial knowledge, which is still to a great extent operative in spite of the post-Cold War devolution into a network of biopolitical control through various outsourcings of state prerogatives. Disciplines are circularly based on the nation, and reproduce it. Historically located polities each have *a general corresponding cognitive order and translation regime*, with variations, interconnections, interferences and overlaps.

On the other hand, there is in general no separating subject and object, body and soul, theory and practice in most of ancient Asian philosophical systems or other extra-European knowledge

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¹¹ In the next three paragraphs, i draw on my as yet (2013) unpublished paper “The immunity paradigm’s contradictory / complementary facets” from the conference *Except Asia: Agamben’s Work in Transcultural Perspective*, Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, June 25–27, 2013.

configurations. *Something of this cognitive condition is still available culturally* although refuted by modern sciences, coming through in various new assemblages — (post)modernity, and “Western” hegemony notwithstanding. What has been the condition of Western understanding of the relationship sovereignty–subjectivity, namely the separation between subject and object or theory and practice, has been neither the condition of the making of politics in the “rest” nor that of sovereignty, and has not been understood as being at the root of the becoming of political subjects in the “rest.” Which means that whole genealogies of knowledge have been kept invisible to European languages, untranslated, indeed apparently *untranslatable* to the hegemonic gaze. But untranslatability (like absolute translatability) is also a politics.

In another conceptual and translation regime, experience and “practice” can outweigh ontological consideration, theory, the latter being in any case only an attribution, a random predication onto some reified object. The implications of *śūnya-vāda* (the teaching of naught in Buddhism) are even more radical: This “theory” (*śūnya-vāda*) is really here an *antitheory invalidating in advance*, by an implacable logic, any economic reason, material interests, selfish vital interests, any speculation trusting language and reason or daring ontological qualifications and metaphysical judgments.

But both the Brahmanists, who resorted to the absolute, who believed in unconditional given knowledge (*Veda*), as well as the philosophically nuanced Buddhists, refused building separately such concepts as “subject” or “object.” This is the *advaita*, nondualism, in both, which however doesn’t amount to monotheism. It is a disposition that is decisive even today, and present in art, literature, aesthetics, much of philosophy, in some political dispensations, in forms of life, and in general culture. The historical distinction subject–object known to the West and disseminated all over the world for modernity-useful purposes, is part of an *appropriating* conceptual and language apparatus that always has the tendency to reappear. It is part of a pursuit limited and burdened by the *vital interest*, situated within the horizon of “lower” knowledge.¹²

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¹² Buddhist philosophers introduced the somewhat problematic but philosophically rich distinction between ordinary and higher knowledge. The two are intertwined and the former leads to the latter, which allows

The preoccupation with subject and subjectivation, specific to “Europe” and the “West,” stems from *monotheism*. It emerges as a Mediterranean particularity, and becomes all-pervasive, through colonial history. But there were originally no comparable monotheisms in Asia (except for a late Islam). Something of the mahāyānian Buddhist philosophy can be extrapolated to most philosophies of Asia: The subject–object relationship together with the realm of politics is part of the experiential, conventional truth, *limited by language* and within “Brahmā’s net.” We perceive the world as plurality through the appropriational mode.

Reluctant theory and unreflected theory. *Théorie malgré elle*

If we agree that “theory” is a normative, somewhat paradoxical concept, difficult to sustain and to prove since subsequent ones will correct any theory, and if we agree that it is a normative concept originating, again, in the conceptual “West,” we then must admit that “theory” is a fragile concept.

If there is no neutral theory, the normativity in a theory will be its political bias depending on its ideological, geographical, cultural, class, gender etc. interests. It will have an origin in a specific concern that can be defined as political and vital, with a tendency to be universalized if possible and neutralized in order to pass unnoticed.

Sundar Sarukkai (2013)¹³ mentions examples that identify ideological biases of theories, particularly in the area of history and of philosophy of science, and also their critique. We couldn’t agree more with him, principally as he argues “that non-Western philosophies might actually contribute more usefully to the understanding of the complex scientific description of reality compared to the tools available in dominant western traditions” (Sarukkai 2013, 6). Indeed, there is a blatant incapacity of philosophy and of history of science to *translate from one cultural register to another*. I would call this failure political, a politics with a deep historic condition. I must quote Sarukkai extensively, before suggesting some comments and complements to his excellent work.

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for an unphilosophical jump to esoteric knowledge in popular Buddhism and elsewhere, later. But it also allows important philosophical speculation.

¹³ I would like to thank Sundar Sarukkai for letting me engage with his important paper here.

What is striking about these [Western or after the Western pattern] discussions is that there is no mention of the non-European traditions in all these debates about H[istory of] S[cience] and P[hilosophy of] S[cience]. Even in the invocations of “tradition” and the “ever-changing fabric of human culture” there is no mention of the possible histories of the non-West which might be of interest to this debate. (Sarukkai 2013, 3)

Sarukkai displaces his argument on the political terrain without announcing it. He switches from the HS and PS level to the political. Indeed, silencing a discourse is a political act, besides being a cognitive one. The two registers (scientific and political) come in the same wording, but have different implications. Yet as Sarukkai expects an answer from history of science and philosophy of science, he withdraws from the political register again (although a broader reading would have both history of science and philosophy of science as political, but this is not Sarukkai’s option.)

Elsharky¹⁴ makes the important observation that it was the creation of the new discipline of history of science that begins to propagate a global ideology of science based on universal values. This effort, beginning before WW I, began to use a new ideology of internationalism in order to reshape the idea of science. Using notions such as Scientific Revolution, this discipline departed from the earlier syncretic model in order to frame the new global science which became synonymous with western science. (Sarukkai 2013, 5)

Here, Sarukkai acknowledges a political and ideological dimension to history of science and philosophy of science, and he would be right in expecting an answer in political terms. But he stops short. He fails to acknowledge the national character and framework of the discipline of history of science—part and parcel of the international and colonial configuration of “Western science.” History, be it of science, was born as the foremost national discipline.

If, as enough work in H[istory of] S[cience] clearly shows, colonialism and imperialism influence the very creation of the larger historical and philosophical themes associated with modern science then why is there still appreciable resistance to a critical engagement with other scientific traditions in the world? Ignoring them only continues this

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¹⁴ Referenced by Sarukkai as M. Elshakry, “When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections,” *Isis* 101, 2010. See also Jack Goody (2007).

process of colonialism and imperialism and this is more dangerous since it is now done implicitly. (Sarukkai 2013, 5)

But the “other scientific traditions in the world” are also national, since the nation has prevailed as an organizational principle even retrospectively, when we say “*Indian* philosophy” or “*Greek* philosophy,” meaning antiquity. We are now clearly on political terrain. But where does the identified “resistance to critical engagement with other scientific traditions” occur? Presumably, again in history and philosophy of science only, which are also pointed to by the author as coming from the Western cognitive hegemony. Why not seek alliances where doors are open, in (some) political philosophy? Why not break out of a limiting discipline, discourse, and translation regime?

Sarukkai further remarks that philosophy of science ignores Indian logic because the latter doesn’t distinguish between the empirical and the formal (Sarukkai 2013, 7), or indeed between theory and practice. This observation is fine, but the problem is now defining “Indian logic” as if it were a fact given once and for all, as some kind of retroactively operating national logic. If we wish to overcome historical unfairness due to the national construction of knowledge and its transmission, the solution cannot be to claim fairness for one nation or “national” science, “ours,” but only to critique that general national blueprint of knowledge construction.

In the Indian case, the extensive work on Indian metallurgy, chemistry and mathematics—to give a few examples—have conclusively proved the presence of an active *theoretical and practical* engagement with activities that seem to be similar to other such activities in early Greek and later Europe. However, this does not mean that there was a universal way of doing and creating science. (Sarukkai 2013, 7, italics mine)

Again—the comparison is national for all examples, and the nations fixed and defined as preexisting the translation operation. More importantly, Sarukkai doesn’t link whatever he notes in the just quoted paragraphs with the *absence* of divide between theory and practice in “Indian” philosophy (reproached by “Western” views to “Indian” thought). Surprisingly, he invokes it without clarifying the relation between “theory” and “practice,” without defining them or tracing their genealogy. But the divide between theory and practice (a marked hierarchy too) is originally a typically mod-

ern Western one. Why would it oblige Sarukkai to conform in any way, if he contests the latter's logic? There is a

skewed mainstream history of science which does not take into account non-Western contributions in the creation of science (ironical considering the work in H[istory of] S[cience] which questions this view!). We need to take this ideology of the mainstream history of science seriously for the harm it has created to non-Western societies—the harm extends from their students to government policies and indeed has had a great impact on these cultures. An exclusivist history of science that keeps the possibility of the scientific imagination within a constructed Greek and European history does great violence not only to other non-Western cultures but also to the very spirit of the scientific quest. (Sarukkai 2013, 8)

It is the national configuration of knowledge that needs to be overcome. One step further is needed. Why not combat Western history and philosophy of science with the help of “Western” and “non-Western” political philosophy and other disciplines of the kind that take into account those other epistemologies? Why not draw a broader picture involving *a critique of the logic of the episteme*? If we do that, we will also find that an episteme is coextensive, coexistent, and enmeshed with a mode of production, forms of life, a political regime, a construct of culture and language, and that we need to look for a broader context. As Solomon writes, “One of the qualities that distinguishes the West as a paradigm of the modern apparatus of area is the institutionalization of translation-as-cultural transference through the disciplinary control of bodies of knowledge” (Solomon 2013).

[T]he social formation that we have come to know as ‘the West’ is precisely that form of community that reserves for itself, among all other forms of human community, the key position in the speciation of the human, the place where the epistemological project is articulated to the politico-ontological one. Seen in this light, the West aspires to be the sole community that is self-aware, through scientific knowledge, of humanity’s active participation in its own speciation. Yet it is not simply by virtue of a proprietary claim over knowledge that the West has been able to form itself as the pole or center or model of human population management in general. In order to occupy this position, it has been necessary to construct out of the contingency of historical encounter (colonialism) a political system for effective population management (effective from the point of view of capitalist accumulation). (Solomon 2013, n. p.)

I argue that the separation reproduced by Sarukkai between hard sciences on the one hand as well as the social sciences and po-

litical philosophy on the other coincides with the problematic distinction between theory and practice mechanically taken over from positivism and from some unsophisticated forms of Marxism. It is itself “Western” in origin and manner, but, what is more important, *it belongs to appropriative knowledge*. It has also become quite universal by now. History of science

still draw[s] on philosophical concepts that are also available in alternate philosophical traditions. There is no reason to believe that these philosophical ideas are irrelevant to these contemporary concerns of philosophy of science. (Sarukkai 2013, 8)

I agree.

Connective history of science will by necessity have to deal with and incorporate alternate worldviews and philosophical concepts. (Sarukkai 2013, 8)

I agree, but additional efforts are needed to achieve this and get out of the system.

Connective history of science is a move towards a “global history of local science.” (Sarukkai 2013, 9)

Agreed, but it is also a move towards a “global history of science” *tout court*, since the local–global distinction reproduces the other divides that are at the basis of *objectal*, and eventually *predatory* knowledge—particularly congenial to globalized capitalism. Such knowledge was alien to and discarded by ancient “Asian” philosophical systems. Although this has been revised as modernity made its way, *refusing* objectal, appropriative knowledge instrumental to production has nevertheless persisted as an alternative scientific temper in “India” and generally in Asia as well as elsewhere. But Sarukkai only insists that *Indians* did have all the rationality needed for modern industry, and that their knowledge was merely stolen by the British through distinguishing between “theory” and “practice.” That is surely only part of the story.

When the British encountered many Indian inventions in science and technology, they made use of them in order to establish their own industries but refused to acknowledge that these processes were part of scientific rationality. Claims that these Indian inventions were more a product of “doing” rather than “knowing,” specifically a theoretical

mode of knowing, made it easy for them to reject the claim of science to almost all intellectual contributions from India.” (Sarukkai 2013, 9)

How can we project India back, a later and national formation, onto ancient science? The fact that Western philosophy has always done exactly that with ancient Greek thought does not justify the mimetic gesture. That would keep us within the system instead of showing ways out. We need some other “scientific” and, eventually, political imagination. A useful investigation here, in line with Sarukkai’s attempt, would be to probe into the parallel, intertwined, interrelated structures of knowledge, power and production.

About the normativity of science and theory: “One of the primary ways by which the title of science is denied to non-Western intellectual traditions is through the invocation of terms such as logic, scientific method, evidence, prediction and so on” (Sarukkai 2013, 9).

While discovering the normativity of hegemonic forms of knowledge, Sundar Sarukkai fails to investigate the relationship between knowledge, production and political system, and thus deprives himself of the help that political thought could bring, including a consideration of the terms of translation. He remains riveted to a world with fixed identities, which reduces translation to a sterile bipolar exercise that ignores the fluidity of relations.

Sarukkai further significantly argues that western mathematics are irreparably linked to Platonism, unlike Indian mathematics. This makes it impossible for the former to recognize the latter. From seeing the trees, Sarukkai doesn’t see the forest! His claim about Platonism is extremely important: It implies the body-and-soul, theory-and-practice divisions. It will become systemic and institutionalized through monotheism (Christianity) among others, and hence, in modernity, through the grounding of state sovereignty and all this implies. Platonism will pervade all spheres of life, labor, and culture, not only mathematics, so that understanding and deconstructing it will require social sciences, one step further from the history and philosophy of science because these too need to be questioned (not that social sciences are in any way a guarantee). It is the whole framework, the regime of translation that requires interrogation.

What is really so mysterious (a word used by Einstein in this context) about the use of mathematics? The major reason for this mystery is Platonism. If mathematical entities exist in a nonspatiotemporal world then how do we spatiotemporal beings have knowledge of them? For these scientists, who viewed mathematics along such a nonempirical axis, the use of mathematics was surprising. Its “natural match” with physical concepts was a source of mystery only if we first begin with a clear disjunction between mathematics and the world.¹⁵ (Sarukkai 2005, 11)

Very well: a clear disjunction between subject and object, theory and practice, body and soul, man and woman could also be stated in the same line. The disjunction between mathematics and the world corresponds to that between body and soul of the Christian episteme. It has been the main apparatus of capturing the material world by the vested interests of dominant classes, and thus of hegemony. Sarukkai proceeds:

It is precisely this point which Indian mathematics would challenge. Mathematics is essential to this world; it arises from this world and through human action. The puzzle of applicability will take on a completely different form if we begin with the assumption that mathematics is enworlded and embodied. Interestingly, this is a position that has now gained some ground through the framework of cognitive studies but in a predictable replay these approaches also make no mention of such approaches in non-Western traditions. (Sarukkai 2005, 11)

The disjunction of mathematics with the world also implies that of theory with practice, of soul with body, of man with woman, as it entails hierarchical normative relations. One could be more ambitious than Sarukkai, while supporting his critique, and claim that it is not only mathematics but the *whole episteme* which is affected by such disjunctions; and that these do not appear, or not to the same extent, in extra-European epistemes—that is, in non hegemonic epistemes (except for the universal divide, diversely implemented, between men and women). There is a historic reason for this: these extra-European epistemes, far from being more righteous, have not been able to impose themselves as hegemonic, considering the colonial leaning and attraction for power involved in any knowledge. No answer can come solely from traditional philosophy of science or history of science here, but rather through a

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¹⁵ The author’s reference here is Sarukkai, 2005.

more comprehensive approach and critique of translation regimes, by way of political philosophy, or through an all-encompassing approach that will question the whole hegemonic episteme and concrete national epistememes too, their genealogy and apparatus.

Sarukkai convincingly argues that contributions of “Indian philosophies and sciences” to science in general have been occulted and obscured, impoverishing the history of science of important parts of its heritage. He also gives examples of how varied and rich “Indian physics” or metaphysics (considerations of matter, substance, nature, elements, quality, inherence, motion, etc.) have been ignored, how different schools of “Indian logic” have been uncared for, while similar views from “Greek” philosophy have become the only reference and terminus even though “Indian” examples could have been offered. This additionally left out of sight original “Indian” contributions. Sarukkai therefore proposes the method of a *connective history of science* which would take into account the philosophical context of the different historic configurations where all contributions to “global science” would be acknowledged, helping the advancement of both science and its history. But without an extra step, he will remain within the system he pledges to critique. Sarukkai has the enormous merit of identifying the non-Platonism in “Indian” sciences, which has earned it nonrecognition on the side of “Western” universalized knowledge.

Another important characteristic may be mentioned concomitantly here that added to “Indian” philosophies being rejected by the “Western” ones, and that has been mediated especially through Buddhism: the purposeful nonrecognition of any kind of subject (or any kind of subject/object divide) on the “Indian” side, and thus the not grounding of any kind of (state) sovereignty at the other end of the scale (Iveković, 2014). While i share Sarukkai’s observations about the configuration of “Indian” philosophies and while i think that they can be enlarged and applied to other areas of knowledge, i would also suggest that it would be more than necessary to define or discard terms such as “Indian,” “Indian science” etc. in the way of deconstructing the national scaffolding, if we wish to overcome the given national and transnational framework and inner logic we critique.

For a critical (Anti)Theory of Translation: competing translation politics

Theories are built by subjects and sovereigns, and when successfully hegemonic, also in support of sovereignties. Sovereigns need to have a monolithic national language that is also the language of command and of maintaining the system. Theories are linked to conjuncture, to places, to specific and interested readings of history, to fending for the dominant regime of thinking, of languages, of translation, and, once they prevail, for mainstream. Today it is global capitalism. The reluctant “theories” we are nevertheless *practicing* as processes, for better or for worse, can at best attempt to deconstruct the national framework of knowledge as well as of its transmission (theory), through inventing new politics of liberation and new *imaginaires* of translation. It must be understood that translation does not guarantee freedom of any kind, and that it can be as much a politics of conquest, capture, exploration-and-exploitation,¹⁶ and colonialism, whether inner¹⁷ or outer. But politics of translation may be invented. Since they will necessarily be forever amendable, such politics of translation may rather not respond to the high name of theory. They will be checked by translation practices in view of their resistance to new enclosures within an “unsurpassable” capitalist horizon.

Theory tends to correspond within knowledge, in a figure of co-figuration,¹⁸ to the sovereignty of the political sphere. It tends to be absolutized, to produce transcendence and an absolute other. It has also been historically self-attributed, self-complacent, and reserved by the West to itself. This construction originally comes from the monotheistic Mediterranean context where god as the supreme subject (sovereign) is the necessary condition to the projection of the human (epi)subject: no god, no subject. The theory has its modern developments and versions. One of the subject’s declensions will be the nation. Theory is a kind of (barely)

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¹⁶ One and the same word, *exploração* appropriately denoting “exploitation” and not “exploring” in Portuguese.

¹⁷ By inner colonialism I mean the treatment of such groups as women, Roma, migrants, minorities, or whoever the excluded beyond the *abyssal lines* (Boaventura de Sousa Santos) or subordinated of one time are. See de Sousa Santos (2000) and de Sousa Santos (2007).

¹⁸ Sakai’s important term in a slightly different application. See N. Sakai (1997).

secularized cognitive variant of divine transcendence.¹⁹

“Scientific knowledge” has been intertwined with and inseparable from theology. Theory will sustain the sovereign (whether godly or human) and its emanation, the subject, as well as their separation from life experience. The subject (and, in its/his stead, derivatively, the epi-subject), custodian of Revelation (Sanskrit: *śruti*), kicks a “beginning” *as if* it were absolute. The multiple genealogies, origins, and inheritances of theory, however carefully hidden and silenced, resurface again and again, disputing its high and unique status. In fact, what is hidden is the whole apparatus of theory-established hierarchies and exclusion—that is, the mechanism of its sovereignist claim (see Solomon 2013). Theory’s tools are language and narration, just as in less theoretical matters. In South Asian ancient philosophies in Sanskrit, this corresponds to the hammered—but really constructed and ideological—difference between *śruti* and *smṛti*.

Theory will also distribute names and set grades, in which its function—as well as that of language through master-narratives—is not very different from that of foundational myths (*smṛti*). The Greek *divide* and constructed abyssal gap between *logos* and *muthos* (taken over into the Christian religion in corresponding form, and parallel to the developing split between theory and practice) reinforces and maintains the coloniality of knowledge and power: all “others,” whether inner or outer, have systematically been reduced to *muthos* and *nontheory* (mere “practice”), as irrational and incapable of science. This separation, downgrading, exception, is also an exemption from sovereignty. “Others” were deemed bereft of autonomy out of their own limitation: other continents, women, and any other group, form of life, or translation regime under that label. Theory, as much as god, designates the other.

There are certainly ways, and historic experiences, of not complying with such a diktat, that amount to “other possibilities of the spirit.” François Jullien says that such “other possibilities” are

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¹⁹ See François Jullien (2012, 107): “[L]es ‘Grecs’ ont-ils jamais existé? N’ont-ils pas été forgés par nos Humanités?” A similar point is made in Prasenjit Duara (forthcoming). I would like to thank Duara for allowing me to read chapters of his work in progress.

not always played out, and he goes on unveiling them by “comparing” Greek, Christian, and Chinese thinking histories: they become particularly visible when various civilizational options are rubbed against each other. We mentioned some, stemming from what would ultimately be known as (ancient) “Indian” philosophies, while Jullien has been showing it for the Chinese worldviews. Chinese or “Indian” philosophies did not delve the insuperable gap between *logos* and *muthos*, or theory and practice. No grand narratives were therefore constructed in China, according to Jullien: China had no need to posit god, and the word is not foundational there (see Jullien 2012, 68, 69, 70, and 98).²⁰

Jullien pleads in favor of *reading a system of thought* “from outside,” through “contrasting parallels” (which is not a dichotomic hierarchical comparison of the classical Western type, and does not presuppose prior categorization), through letting go, letting play parallels, through yielding, through detachment from one’s own/unique culture. The contrastivity, letting the effects of a gap work, will shed light on avenues of thought that have not been fulfilled (Jullien 2012, 65 and following). He calls the contrasting of Chinese and Western thought “entering a way of thinking” (*entrer dans une pensée*). Such an entry is not afforded through a narrative or a subject behind it. It is operated from a *declension* or inclination of the reader, of the translator, of the one who approaches a “way of thinking,” who is changed in the process: the translator is translated as she discovers the unthought (*l’impensé*) lying at the base of thought. It would be difficult to translate this into Sakai’s translation theory, but, like the latter, the former doesn’t believe in neutral translation or a neutral ground between contrasted elements. In both, this entails concrete political responsibility from case to case. Discarding one’s armature of thinking, deconstructing and dislocating the national construction and fixed framework of knowledge (see Iveković 2007b; 2009–2010) is a necessary precondition and way of doing this.

Contrasting without establishing categories and hierarchies, without heeding disciplines (molded by national cultures and insti-

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²⁰ Although an “Asian” disposition, this does not fully correspond to Brahmanic (consider the Veda, Mahabharata, and Ramayana) or Hindu thought (see Rada Iveković 1992).

tutions), may be particularly helpful in highlighting unexpected possibilities, unfulfilled options, or eschewed results. Given that disciplines denote borders of theoretical territories, ignoring them sometimes allows passing beside, below, above, or through dividing lines. This might be a possible way indeed in systems where there is no dominant narrative or vertical epistemological hierarchy, no historic construction of sovereignty and of the concept of a subject (Iveković 2013), such as is sometimes the case in Asia or elsewhere in once colonized continents, or where there has been some constitutive (even merely) structural resistance to monolithic national narratives. Times of crises put an accent on the subject's wavering (Europe today), but can prompt these other thinking options where the concept of a subject was purposely avoided.

The great writer and philosopher Radomir Konstantinović wrote about the tension resulting from the inner cleavage of the citizen and of the communist, important figures of the subject in twentieth-century Yugoslavia (but metaphorically, also elsewhere), ending in the failure of both (Konstantinović 1981).²¹

Konstantinović's pessimistic message concerning Western modernity in general was that the political subjectivation of the citizen may end in nationalism/Nazism.²²

He exemplifies it with the Serbian case. His optimistic message comes with, in principle, open possibilities (the blank of the borderline spirit of the crisis, *palanka*) and through the split subject. Paradoxically, this is best shown in art, writing, and translation, as in the self-fulfilled prophecy of the novel or drama that can only signal the impossibility of a novel (as the form *par excellence* of national citizenship) or of drama: in the same way in which the only possible subjectivation from perhaps the end of the 1960s is—the impossibility of constituting a subject.

Did Yugoslavia not implode because of that impossibility, having no middle class and no nation, supposed to be only a secularized administrative, common post-national frame? No drama was to oppress its nonsubject citizens, who were to be spared the

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²¹ See also French excerpts in Konstantinović (2001a), Konstantinović (2001b), and Konstantinović (2001c). Other French excerpts can also be found in Becket and Konstantinović (2000), and Iveković (1998).

²² Konstantinović talked about modernity as such, irrespective of whether capitalist or socialist: the pattern, for him, was the same, and socialism was a form of modernity.

need to engage in politics (my generation), because everything had been taken care of by our revolutionary fathers in the Second World War through resistance to the Nazis? Revolution was “museified,” drama excluded. Radomir Konstantinović tried to think the non-subjectified subject of our times,²³ the one incapable of, or refusing translation as exchange and fluidity; the one allowing only for absolute translation (see Iveković 2011), entrenching borders, social relations and inequalities.²⁴

Naoki Sakai however deems that nation is not a fatality or a necessity, and that it could have been avoided. What forms in Asia could have helped such an alternative? It is difficult to imagine other options, he insists, from within the prevailing one. We could have had another world, with no nationalities and no nation states. In particular, it was not the destiny of Asia, which took a very long time to adapt to the international world. According to Sakai, nationality was not given, being “a restricted and distorted derivative of transnationality.” Like language being the result of translation (and not vice-versa), so is nationality the outcome of transnationality that precedes it. “A bordering turn must be accompanied theoretically by a translational turn: bordering and translation are both problematics projected by the same theoretical perspective” (Sakai 2013).

Writing of the scandals with the cartoons of prophet Mohammad, Judith Butler analyses the ways in which, according to different frameworks (Christian or Muslim), we may diversely understand the term “blasphemy”: “the translation has to take place within divergent frames of moral evaluation. [...] in some ways the conflict that emerged in the wake of the publication of the Danish cartoons is one between competing moral frameworks, understanding ‘blasphemy’ as a tense and overdetermined site for the convergence of differing schemes of moral value” (Butler 2009, 103–104).

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²³ See not only Konstantinović (1981), but also downloadable texts by and on him in Serbo-Croatian, including Konstantinović (n.d.). The site from which these texts can be downloaded () is an archive of important Yugoslav intellectual and political works and is run by Branimir Stojanović Trša. On Konstantinović, see also *Sarajevske Sveske*, an on-line Serbo-Croat journal. See also Klaus Theweleit (1977 and 1988), and Iveković (2009).

²⁴ On bordering as a process, see Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2003) and (2013). See also Sakai in general, but (2013) in particular.

There are thus competing translation codes or regimes, much as Balibar identifies competing universalisms.²⁵

They may go hand in hand. Wendy Brown has it that critique (and theory?) have been identified with secularism. As we know from Balibar (see especially 2012), secularism or cosmopolitanism and religion compete on the same terrain. It is all a matter of translation.

It is on that contested terrain that various political options for translation can unfold. Alas, there is “normally” no imaginative power or political imagination enabling us to think a world without nations, nationalities and borders, or translating them: in order to do so, we must step without that frame through our mind’s eye. This is a contribution towards an attempt to start thinking one. The question of political translation becomes a concrete one at times of crisis and reshuffling. We are currently in one such age, and translation may well be one of the tools.

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²⁵ Étienne Balibar, from “Les universels” (1997) through “Sub specie universitatis” (2006), develops the observation of competing universalisms, then, logically, with his paper “Cosmopolitanism and Secularism: Controversial Legacies and Prospective Interrogations” (2011), that of competing national sovereignties and competing religions or secularisms. This matter is taken up once again in Balibar (2012).

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