

JUSTICE IN TRANSLATION:  
FROM THE MATERIAL TO THE CULTURAL

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Translating is sometimes analogized to a bridge-building undertaking in which linguistic and cultural disparities among communities are, as it were, reconnected in the post-Babel dispersal of human tongues. Translation creates connectedness, undoubtedly, yet as Michael Cronin has pointed out, “connectedness has as a necessary prerequisite the identification and maintenance of separateness” (2006, 121). Diversity lies at the heart of Cronin’s insight of the separateness that is fundamental to translation, and he advocates the teaching of diverse languages. As diversity excites imagination, it also troubles communication. Much of the scholarship in translation studies has focused on the mediation of diversity and the trouble it has produced. The idea of bridging implies some sort of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic understanding. Maria Tymoczko notes that “the center of a translator’s agency lies in the power to adjudicate difficulties caused by disparities and asymmetries in cultural understandings and cultural presuppositions” (2007, 231). In this light, she asserts that a cultural translator must assume the task of “inducing an audience to be willing to learn, to receive difference, to experience newness” (2007, 232). However, as Gayatri Spivak has suggested in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), in cases of cultural encounters marked by asymmetrical power relations, learning requires the anterior systematic unlearning of one’s privilege and knowledge. Central to Spivak’s notion of unlearning is the deconstructive questioning of the very discourse from within which one learns “to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for)” others (1988, 395). And although Spivak only deals here with the unlearning that is fundamental to the learning to speak to “the historically muted subject of the

subaltern woman" (1988, 395), I contend that unlearning is central to any task of translation.

*Unlearning* as I use it in this essay involves the necessary questioning of fundamental concepts in translation, including the definition of translation itself and the cultural assumptions surrounding the process of translation. Without this unlearning, as I will show, the bridge of translation could turn out to be a channel of cultural violence rather than cultural mediation. If cultural translation inevitably involves the task of cultivating the will to learn in the audience as Tymoczko has stipulated, and if learning must be preceded by unlearning, then it becomes clear that translation is much more complex than the ideal of bridging seems to suggest.

In this article I take up this line of thinking about translation as bridging and explicate the complexity of bridging itself by bringing in the notion of justice and the Spivakian task of unlearning as the foundation of justice. I argue that, in a multicultural context, justice is a matter of translation, and as such translation should be understood as part and parcel of the doing of justice. A view of translation as a gateway to an enlarged cultural horizon proves inadequate if justice is the ultimate goal of translation. Also, the emphasis on the translator as an agent who induces an audience to a world of otherness may in some cases pose injustice to more "resistant" groups for whom an enlarged horizon invariably involves the abandonment of fundamental aspects of their culture. The fact of the matter is that bridging is not always the end of cultural encounters. Reaching out to another culture, in today's world of multiculturalism, often carries with it a certain social and political agenda. A bridge is not constructed merely to provoke a romantic sense of connection and mutual understanding but itself functions as a passageway that channels the flow of ideas and materials across communities. As soon as a bridge is constructed, communities at both ends invariably undergo transformations triggered by the flows that ensue. The view of translation as a bridge-building exercise, therefore, should not stop at extolling it as a symbol of connection, a universally accepted form of mediation, but as a real channel of cultural and material exchanges that affect lives in significant ways.

In this light, the translator does not emerge merely as a cultural mediator channeling cross-cultural understanding but as an active participant in cultural and material justice. The unlearning that constitutes the necessary foundation of the translational bridge-building exercise is the questioning of the presence of the bridge itself, what it does to the communities that it connects, and from what cultural position it is built.

Translation should not be done simply because we want to understand and do justice to the other, yet without hindsight of the cultural consequences that ensue from this effort at understanding and doing justice.

What follows is an account of a case of failed translation in which the translator views herself merely as a bridging agent who has the ambition of understanding the other without the necessary unlearning of her knowledge. As is well known, translation does not take place in a vacuum but in a continuum (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999, 3), and from this case of failed translation I also bring forth the social fabric that anticipates such a failure. In other words, I attempt to show that in many cases translation lies at the heart of justice, especially when justice is to be done across linguistic and cultural borders and when justice in the contemporary world takes heterogeneous forms that require some sort of translation among themselves.

To do all this, I recount a story told by Bharati Mukherjee, "The Management of Grief" (1988). The story revolves around an effort by a social worker to connect with a group of Indian Canadian citizens whose loved ones were killed in a terrorist bombing of an aircraft. The white Canadian social worker wants to use Mrs. Bhave, whose husband and sons were among the victims, as a mediating agent to help her connect with this Indian Canadian community to provide them with access to the government relief effort. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that, despite the linguistic and cultural mediation provided by Mrs. Bhave, the social worker fails to understand what it really takes for the community to understand and accept the government's outreaching effort and provision of material relief. The story ends with a sense of cultural disconnection whereby the social worker takes for granted the provision of material justice as something universally accepted. She fails to understand the cultural nuances underpinning the Indian Canadian resistance to her outreaching effort. She fails to unlearn the mainstream privileging of material provision over cultural recognition. The story, as I will show, demonstrates the failure of cultural translation as mere linguistic bridging whereby material justice is assumed to be universally valuable.

#### FORMS OF JUSTICE

The literature on justice has undergone significant transformation as poststructuralism and cultural politics spread across the humanities and social sciences. In her most recent book, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (2009), Nancy Fraser revises the

dual model of economic redistribution and cultural recognition that she developed some ten years earlier in *Justice Interruptus* (1997b). Accordingly, the new model not only includes economic and cultural aspects of justice but also recognizes *representation* as an important dimension of justice in a world where economic, cultural, and political processes no longer work in a Keynesian-Westphalian frame.

In Fraser's view, both the substance and the framing of justice have been transformed radically. In terms of substance, there has been a radical heterogeneity of justice discourse in which claims of justice are no longer exclusively concerned with socioeconomic redistribution. There have arisen new demands for cultural recognition from marginalized ethnic groups and homosexuals as well as feminist claims for gender justice. Fraser solves the problematic of substance in the condition of diverse justice idioms by proposing a dual model that recognizes both socioeconomic and cultural claims as legitimate claims of justice. Although her tone in *Justice Interruptus* seems to lean toward reclaiming the prominence of redistribution, and with it the discipline of Marxist political economy itself, in the face of the rising cultural politics Fraser emphasizes times and again that these components of justice are irreducible to one another (Fraser 1997a; Fraser and Honneth 2003).

In *Scales of Justice* Fraser acknowledges that her dual model is inadequate in accounting for the increasingly deterritorialized operations of justice. Instances of injustice in the contemporary world of economic and ecological interdependence can hardly be handled within the borders of the nation-state, what Fraser refers to as the Westphalian frame. In this light, she suggests reframing the subjects of justice by introducing a third dimension: *representation*. While redistribution and recognition addresses the substance, the "what" of justice, representation deals with the subjects, the "who" of justice. According to Fraser, the notion of representation pertains to the political dimension of justice, apart from the economic and the cultural dimensions, and serves two purposes.

First, it sheds further light on internal injustice, that is, injustice within bounded political communities such as the nation-state, in which subjects already counted as legitimate members are deprived of parity of participation as peers in social interaction. This impairment of participation is not caused by an economic structure that effects maldistribution or by a cultural order that casts certain subjects, such as gay and lesbians, as abjects, thus effecting misrecognition. Rather, it is rooted in the political constitution of society itself, and thus the two-dimensional model of redistribution and recognition fails to account for instances of this "ordinary-political injustice."

The second purpose of the notion of representation is to account for the “who” outside of the Westphalian frame of the territorial state. In the post-Cold War era, with the rise of transnational economic and cultural forces, the subjects of justice can no longer be assumed to be the national citizenry. Globalization has rendered the life of citizens vulnerable to social and economic processes beyond their own national borders. A decision in one territorial state can impact millions of lives outside of its immediate borders. For example, a recent approval by the Chinese government of the construction of a nuclear power plant some sixty kilometers from the northern border of Vietnam has sparked both diplomatic tension and public concern in Vietnam. According to some estimates, radiation could reach Hanoi within ten hours following a breakdown of the plant. A Vietnamese official contends that “China has to follow international safety regulations, not act on its own” (Duan, Long, and Lan 2010). While the scenario of a nuclear leak is still a matter of probability, life in the reality of a globalized world is impinged upon on a daily basis by the operations of multinational corporations, supranational financial investors, international organizations, and so on.

The language of justice, therefore, can no longer be couched in the once self-evident framework of the territorial state. Fraser calls the injustice pertaining to this question of the “who” beyond the boundaries of political communities *misframing*. In light of these two functions of the notion of representation related to injustices of ordinary-political misrepresentation and misframing, Fraser has enlarged her theory of justice to include the political dimension, which she makes clear to be always inherent in claims of redistribution and recognition. In this three-dimensional model, practices of maldistribution and misrecognition constitute the first-order injustices, while misframing belongs to a meta-level of injustices.

The most interesting moment in Fraser’s theory is when she tackles the politics of framing as a meta-level of justice, which she defines as comprising “efforts to establish and consolidate, to contest and revise, the authoritative divisions of the political space” as it pertains to the determination of the subjects of justice as well as the frame of that determination itself (2009, 22). On this account of the politics of framing, Fraser proposes two forms in which social movements seek to redress the injustice of misframing: the affirmative claims and the transformative claims. “The affirmative politics of framing,” Fraser tells us, “contests the boundaries of existing frames while accepting the Westphalian grammar of frame-setting” (2009, 22). In other words, this politics

aims to redraw the boundaries of who count as subjects of justice without overthrowing the nation-state as a basic category in which to pose and resolve problems of framing injustices. By contrast, transformative movements seek to destroy the state-territorial principle itself on grounds that “forces that perpetrate injustice belong not to,” and here Fraser borrows Manuel Castells’s terminology, “‘the space of places,’ but to the ‘space of flows’” (2009, 23). In this way, transformative politics directly questions the process of frame-setting itself and thus renders it more dialogical and democratic. With the opening of frame-setting to contention and negotiation through transformative movements, Fraser surmises that “what could once be called the ‘theory of social justice’ now appears as the ‘theory of democratic justice’” (2009, 28).

In what follows I would like to connect Fraser’s theory of justice to the problematic of translation, which I see as constitutive of both levels of justice: the first-order justice of redistribution and recognition and the meta-level of the politics of framing. The role of translation in the first-order justice can be seen in Bharati Mukherjee’s short story “The Management of Grief.” I highlight the translation of the material into the cultural as an indispensable component of justice, especially when the operation of justice has to tread on the borders between cultures. In a sense, the story also poses the problem of ordinary-political injustices where the parity of participation in the social life of the legitimate subjects of justice within the same political community is impaired through nontranslation. In the case of “The Management of Grief,” the Indian Canadian relatives of the victims, under the coverage of the so-called multiculturalism, are construed as legitimate subjects of justice within the borders of Canada. Yet far from being homogenous, the multilingual and multicultural territorial state is invariably split between mainstream and ethnic cultures, and translation thus plays a key role in providing the condition for the flow of justice across ethnic differences. Translation constitutes the very means whereby ethnic subjects of justice speak and are spoken to. In this way, the political dimension of justice, which is representation in Fraser’s model, intertwines with the problematic of translation.

FROM THE MATERIAL TO THE CULTURAL:  
TRANSLATION AND THE FAILURE OF JUSTICE

The intersection between cultural and material realms in which translation figures as a mediator is best reflected in Bharati Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief,” printed in her collection *The Middleman and*

*Other Stories* (1988). The story is based on the 1985 terrorist bombing of an Air India jet carrying over three hundred passengers, most of whom were Canadian citizens of Indian birth. The aircraft, en route from Toronto to Bombay, exploded in midair while crossing Ireland and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean, becoming the worst mass killing in modern Canadian history. “The Management of Grief” revolves around the aftermath of the incident as experienced by the narrator, an Indian Canadian woman, Mrs. Bhave, whose husband and two sons were among the victims of the tragic flight. The opening of the story takes place in her home, now crowded with men and women from the Indo-Canada Society, many of whom she does not even know. They are busying themselves with minor chores around the house, including listening to the news for more information about the incident. They all try not to disturb the bereaved mother and wife with their presence, and their effort to reach out to her is always taken with care and prudence. The first few sentences of the story are brief, yet they do more than set up the mood and context of the story. Within the space of a few lines, Mukherjee subtly uncovers the condition of liminality and uncertainty endured by Indian immigrants, especially during the vulnerable times of grief and the rationally prescribed management of it.

A woman I don't know is boiling tea the Indian way in my kitchen. There are a lot of women I don't know in my kitchen, whispering, and moving tactfully. They open doors, rummage through the pantry, and try not to ask me where things are kept. (1988, 179)

A sense of ethnic bonding is here mixed, paradoxically, with alienation. “Boiling tea the Indian way” invokes identity, while the uncertainty over the subject doing the boiling in the intimate place of the kitchen splits the identitarian bonding at the personal level. The kitchen, the familiar and intimate place of Indian women, is now occupied by busy “women I don't know,” and the repetition of “my kitchen” within the space of two short sentences echoes almost as a cry reclaiming what is most personal and intimate of the grieving subject. The strangers come on grounds of ethnic identity to soothe the woman's grieving, and although grieving is cultural or even “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order” (Butler 2004, 22), it is reflected here rather as a private space trespassed and impinged upon in the name of ethnic identity.

Butler's vision of a political community enlightened to a sense of fundamental dependency through our socially constituted and exposed bodies is enunciated from the perspective of the mourning subject who

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has the power to wage war and inflict violence upon others, namely, the United States after 9/11. In her criticism of the aggressive policies of the U.S. post-9/11, Butler calls for a deeper understanding of the task of mourning, and in so doing she has uprooted grief from the private realm and implanted it in the political. Grief in Butler's view is understood as containing "the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am" (Butler 2004, 28), and therefore, being mindful of it enlightens us to a necessary recognition of our bodies as fundamentally exposed and vulnerable to the touch of others. "Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war" (2004, 29). The subject of grief in Butler's criticism is one who has the power to act in retaliation, and in that light Butler summons grief and mourning back into self-recognition as a means to prevent violence.

However, for an immigrant subject, the grieving Indian Canadian mother and wife, mourning is deeply privatizing, and even a prudent touch of ethnic bonding could be damaging. The bereaved ethnic woman seems to be torn between the cultural appropriation of the personal and an inner demand to fully experience the emotional dimension of grief. The first passage of the story has introduced the first level of the tension in one's experience in times of vulnerability and mourning, the tension between the cultural and the personal.

As the story unfolds, Mrs. Bhavé's experience of loss is caught at another level, the tension between the cultural and the material, which is laid bare within the very next passage of the story:

Dr. Sharma, the treasurer of the Indo-Canada Society, pulls me into the hallway. He wants to know if I am worried about money. His wife, who has just come up from the basement with a tray of empty cups and glasses, scolds him. "Don't bother Mrs. Bhavé with mundane details." (Mukherjee 1988, 179)

As a treasurer, Dr. Sharma's concern about Mrs. Bhavé's financial condition is quite reasonable, while as a woman who cares (or is supposed to care?) about the emotional trauma that Mrs. Bhavé is suffering, Mrs. Sharma condemns that question of money as mundane and irrelevant in times of grief. Not to mention the gender divide along the line of material and emotional concerns, there seems to be an irreconcilable tension between material needs, or rather, the mentioning of needs, and



emotional life. Later on in the story we learn that this emotional dimension is impinged upon in many ways and transformed into a site of social and cultural determinations, especially when the Canadian government comes into play in an outreaching effort to heal, materially, the wounds suffered by the hundreds in the Indian community. First of all, medical attention is given to tame a possible outburst of emotion, and in this regard Dr. Sharma once again appears to be on duty:

The phone rings and rings. Dr. Sharma's taken charge. "We're with her," he keeps saying. "Yes, yes, the doctor has given calming pills. Yes, yes, pills are having necessary effect." I wonder if pills alone explain this calm. Not peace, just a deadening quiet. I was always controlled, but never repressed. Sound can reach me, but my body is tensed, ready to scream. I hear their voices all around me. I hear my boys and Vikram cry, "Mommy, Shaila!" and the screams insulate me, like headphones. (1988, 180)

Medical care seems to be given at the most superficial level. The personal emotion, the private struggle over the tragic loss, is occluded from the discursive network of grief management. Care is extended to her home, yet it hurts just as much as it heals. Dr. Sharma reports Mrs. Bhave's condition on the phone to someone unknown to her, and she does not even seem to care, for it would make no difference now that her physical condition and her private grief have been subsumed in the social and cultural network of care. Mrs. Bhave's "deadenning quiet" is translated into a kind of "peace," the expected material effect of the calming pills. Controlled emotion is materialized into a bodily sign of calmness, which serves as a necessary condition for Mrs. Bhave to be picked out from among the bereaved to serve as mediator between the government and the affected community.

Judith Templeton, the appointee of the provincial government, comes to Mrs. Bhave's house in a "multicultural" initiative to provide assistance to the afflicted families. Her self-introduction is plaintively sincere, and her statement of the purpose of her visit is full of confusion and anxiety, yet in a sense precise and direct:

"I have no experience," she admits. "That is, I have an MSW and I've worked in liaison with accident victims, but I mean I have no experience with a tragedy of this scale—"

"Who could?" I ask.

"—and with the complications of culture, language, and customs. Someone mentioned that Mrs. Bhave is the pillar—because you've taken it more calmly."

At this, perhaps, I frown, for she reaches forward, almost to take my hand. “I hope you understand my meaning, Mrs. Bhave. There are hundreds of people in Metro directly affected, like you, and some of them speak no English. There are some widows who’ve never handled money or gone on a bus, and there are old parents who still haven’t eaten or gone outside their bedrooms. Some houses and apartments have been looted. Some wives are still hysterical. Some husbands are in shock and profound depression. We want to help, but our hands are tied in so many ways. We have to distribute money to some people, and there are legal documents—these things can be done. We have interpreters, but we don’t always have the human touch, or maybe the right human touch. We don’t want to make mistakes, Mrs. Bhave, and that’s why we’d like to ask you to help us.” (1988, 183)

The social worker makes it quite clear that the confusion of language, culture, and customs poses a hindrance to distributive services, and Mrs. Bhave can help clear the issue because of her calmness and acquaintance with the locals. Money comes with legal documents that need to be signed by the beneficiaries, which Judith Templeton is well aware could not be done with interpreting alone but requires “the right human touch.” What is here conceived of as the right human touch is precisely translation in its fullest linguistic, cultural, and psychological sense and not merely interpreting. Interpreting may help clear linguistic problems of the legal documents, but it alone cannot create a cultural channel for distributive services to be intelligible within the culture and customs of the receiving community. Distributive justice here figures as an original text unfamiliar and unintelligible to the target language and culture, which thus requires a process of target-oriented translation whereby it is rendered comprehensible within the local framework. Templeton, however, seems to conceive of the task the other way round: to get people “who’ve never handled money or gone on a bus” to sign some legal documents, that is, to bring the locals out of their cultural realm into the material realm she is bringing in. Government money, the material justice itself, is taken for granted as a value readily comprehensible and acceptable within the local cultural norms.

In the end, Templeton fails in her effort to reach out despite Mrs. Bhave’s liaison. An old couple refuses to sign the document because “it’s a parent’s duty to hope” for the return of the beloved whose death has never been confirmed in any way. Signing the documents of justice means giving up this parental hope and therefore is against their moral and customs. What is even more troubling is the fact that the couple is Sikh, who Mrs. Bhave knows would not listen to a Hindu like her. The

choice of a mediator by way of the material sign of calmness once again shows a complete insensitivity to cultural nuances and contentions. Judith Templeton is vexed by the locals' resistance to her services, and she complains somewhat angrily to Mrs. Bhave: "You see what I'm up against? ... their stubbornness and ignorance are driving me crazy. They think signing a paper is signing their sons' death warrants, don't they?" (1988, 195). Templeton's initial awareness of the complex cultural issue and the need for "the right human touch" vanishes as she approaches the community, leaving in her mind only the material problematic, a failure of translation, of the fundamental unlearning task. The problematic at hand is, I argue, the translation of distributive justice into local language and culture, a translation of the material into the cultural, if the material is to be accepted as justice.<sup>1</sup>

"The Management of Grief" is in many ways a story about the interface between the material and the cultural and a certain kind of untranslatability between the two realms. We have seen how Mrs. Bhave's personal grief is translated into a material sign of calmness, presenting her as a "pillar" among the bereaved. That translation hurts because her inner voice and feelings can never be heard and felt once unilaterally translated into the visible field of the material. In her role as a mediator, Mrs. Bhave witnesses a form of violent translation from the cultural into the material, which leaves her getting out of Templeton's car in the

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1. In some cases the lack of this sort of cultural translation of justice constitutes a deprivation of justice itself, rather than merely a refusal to accept justice, as in the case of the old couple in "The Management of Grief." In *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1987), Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee records accounts of several parties involved in the tragedy, including the bereaved themselves. Mr. Swaminathan, a bereaved husband and father, sends his grievance to a law firm, contending that the legal differentiation of the death of an adult and the death of a child in determining compensation is against "the Indian way of life." According to him, a parent can be a dependent just as a child is. Bringing up a child means investing in the child's future and also the parent's future, a kind of contract implicated in Indian cultural and moral values and uniformly carried out in Indian society. Loss of a child, therefore, would impinge on the parent's future. More important, as Mr. Swaminathan points out, this "unique system of insurance," though unwritten, is honored in Indian courts. The Western category of "dependent," if untranslated, thus denies Indian parents of pecuniary compensation that they would otherwise be entitled to in their home country (Blaise and Mukherjee 1987, 101-3). This is a point I wholeheartedly identify with, because just as in India the Vietnamese elderly are not taken care of by the social network of nursing homes and social security benefits but live within the embrace and care of their children.

middle of their way home. The encounter between the two realms as represented in the story poses an agonistic relationship that cannot be mediated, it seems, once and for all. From the medical management of grief and the identification of dead bodies to distributive services, all material determinations at one point or another impinge upon the delicate cultural fabric of the ethnic community. Bharati Mukherjee seems to hint at a missing process of translation whereby the material is rematerialized in a cross-cultural context.

Judith Butler has made clear that for materiality to be conceived as such, it must go through a process of materialization that “takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulatory practices” (1993, 1). Distributive justice as posed in “The Management of Grief” has been solidly materialized, yet its materialization is governed by norms and institutions that are culturally and politically bound and thus fail beyond their boundaries. The task of translation here involves more than the linguistic interpreting of legal documents or the use of local mediators as an extra force, but the necessary transforming of those documents and the money itself into the culture of the beneficiaries. Using calmness, the material effect of calming pills, as the first premise for her outreaching effort, Judith Templeton shows throughout her approach to the Indian Canadian community another faulty premise that takes untranslated material justice as the foundation of multiculturalism. Her commitment that “we don’t want to make mistakes” becomes ironic, and Mrs. Bhave’s response, “more mistakes, you mean,” implicates more than a bitter reference to the faulty police procedures that led to the catastrophic bombing.

Interpreters and local mediators are provided, yet the Indian community is denied the very work of translation in the operation of justice. This nontranslation is probably implicated in the larger political context of this “houseless” tragedy, as Mukherjee calls it. It is houseless because neither the Indian nor the Canadian governments, despite their grief, named the bombing as its own tragedy. Instead, the two governments cross-referred to it as “their” rather than “our” tragedy (Blaise and Mukherjee 1987, 174).

The interface between the cultural and material realms appears to be a troubling one, especially if no adequate translation is done. It is hard, however, to determine once and for all the definite configurations of what constitutes adequate translation, with a fixed set of strategies and techniques that apply in every context. But at a more macro level, we can at least talk of justice here as a balanced flow of translation between the two realms. Bharati Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief” has

shown us that the hegemonic translation of the cultural into the material and the lack of rematerialization may constitute a form of injustice in the very process of justice. Materiality is not a universal and a priori category that transcends cultural specificities. They are invariably imbricated within frames that vary in size and shape across cultures. Rematerialization, or the translation of the material into the cultural, points at the necessary reworking of the material so it can be accepted beyond its original context of materialization. Positing a translation of the material into cultural, however, does not presuppose a distinction between the material and the cultural as ontologically separate spheres of life. In her essay "Merely Cultural" (1997), Judith Butler has convincingly shown that material life is inextricably linked to cultural life, and the separation of the two reflects a certain amnesia of the works of Marx himself. It is precisely because of its grounding in cultural relations that the material can be rematerialized or translated into another fabric of cultural relations.

There is no lack of translation in "The Management of Grief," since "we have interpreters," as Judith Templeton confirms. What is needed is "the right human touch," and it is unfortunate that, instead of an ethical recognition of the limited self and an ethical response to the other, the human touch is only configured as the use of mediation (through Mrs. Bhava) to pave the way for the assertion of the self. Nontranslation as injustice here can only be perceived at the level of the cultural frameworks in which justice is done, since it is covered up at the linguistic level with the provision of translators and at the material level with mediation. Although "the right human touch" is not fully realized in "The Management of Grief," it does complicate the problematic of translation beyond the sheer provision of translators/interpreters and local mediation.

When material justice is taken at face value and even universalized as readily accepted in all cultures, the cultural translation of the material itself is often ignored and repressed. Indeed, there is a tendency to posit materiality as a precultural foundation, and material relations become the rationale behind anything cultural. The category of sex in the Beauvoiran sense, for example, reflects one such recourse to the materiality of the body as the precultural foundation of gender, and Judith Butler (1993) has reminded that materiality is invariably bounded with the cultural in such a way that the distinction between sex and gender is but a grammatical fiction. In social life, the distribution of material resources seems to underpin cultural activities. Michael Cronin points out that "awareness of the primacy of communicative competence as a means

of economic integration and social survival is the rationale behind the organization of language classes for immigrants and the stress on the acquisition of the dominant language as the key to successful integration,” leading to the condition of what he calls translational assimilation (2006, 52). The material is often taken for granted as transcendent of cultural particularities and does not require translation. “Translational accommodation,” to use Cronin’s terminology again, from the vantage point of the dominant culture, is yet to be accomplished, as seen in “The Management of Grief.”

FROM THE CULTURAL TO THE MATERIAL:  
CASES OF INJUSTICES IN TRANSLATION

What emerges from my discussion of justice above is a perceptible relation of translation between the different components of justice within the same territorial state. Outside of the territorial state, translation figures even more prominently as an underpinning force that relates the cultural and the material spheres of justice. Eric Cheyfitz has brilliantly shown how the translation of Native American land into the European concepts such as *property*, *possession*, *ownership*, and *title* serves as the “prime mode of expropriation that the colonists used in their ‘legal’ dealings with the Indians” (1997, 48). With the conviction that “from its beginnings the imperialist mission is, in short, one of translation: the translation of the ‘other’ into the terms of empire” (1997, 112), Cheyfitz exposes the process of dispossession whereby “Native American land was *translated* (the term is used in English common law to refer to transfers of real estate) into the European identity of *property*” (1997, 43, emphasis original). Here Cheyfitz explores social and cultural disparities between the European and Native American conceptions of land and place and the colonizer’s manipulation of the material through cultural translation, or, to be more exact, the programmed occlusion of a balanced cultural translation in which the terms of the “other” are honored. The violent hegemonic translation of the Native American land into the European terms of property corresponds here to the injustice of misrecognition. This misrecognition consists of the colonizer’s refusal to recognize the Native American terms and conceptions of their land, which paves the way for the translation of those terms into European ones, invigorating the imperialist material appropriation. Thus, just as in the case of the Indian Canadians in “The Management of Grief,” the native cultural terms are completely translated into the material. There is, of course, a difference in the two cases: the Indian Canadians are

meant to be receiving material justice, whereas the Native Americans are dispossessed of their land.

The exploitative translation of indigenous cultural values into the material realm of the colonizer is abundant in the history of colonialism and imperialism. History has shown that imperialist translation does not just take place in the colonizer's "legal" dealings with the natives. It pervades all aspects of native life and irremediably transforms the native environment and traditions. The destruction of the bison in North America in the late nineteenth century is an example of the imperialist translation from the cultural to the material. Although it is true that the bison population provided a vital source of food for Native Americans, in the native consciousness and cultures the roaming bison herds did not just represent a material resource for human exploitation. The human-bison relationship in the native memory extended back to creation itself (Zontek 2007), and the hunting of this animal was not merely an act of killing and consuming, since the people perceived the animal not as inhabiting an objectified material world but as cohabiting with themselves within the same realm. Writings in different genres such as John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1979), James Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986), and Mary Brave Bird's *Lakota Woman* (1991) have all revealed to us what American imperialists of the nineteenth century either refused to see or reluctantly saw with a desire to totally destroy the other: the native hunting of the bison was a deep-rooted tradition of Native American cultures that not only reflected a native means of subsistence but also embodied a whole way of life with deep cultural nuances.

In *Black Elk Speaks*, for example, we see how hunting was performed as an initiation into manhood for Black Elk and Standing Bear and also as an activity embedded in the network of interpersonal relationships organic in the structure of native societies. In the mind of the Euro-American hunters, however, bison were merely objectifiable animals that provided them with basic material for consumption. The American government itself advocated slaughtering the bison population through legal and military means. Directives such as "Kill every buffalo you can. Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone" (cited in Zontek 2007, 25) would not invoke any feelings of abhorrence among the majority of Euro-Americans; instead, it was received as the natural progress of history.

Cultural misrecognition, configured as the wholesale translation of the cultural into the material as I have elaborated thus far, underpins the material destruction of the indigenous livable worlds and the disintegration of their cultures. To probe into the problematic of justice in relation to translation, therefore, necessarily means to instigate the reverse flow

of cultural translation that has been historically repressed. The problem has been provoked powerfully by Cheyfitz in *The Poetics of Imperialism*, and his question continues to invite inquiry: “Can one translate the idea of place as *property* into an idea of place the terms of which the West has never granted legitimacy?” (Cheyfitz 1997, 58, emphasis original).<sup>2</sup>

In my discussion of the relationship between the two dimensions of justice above, I have treated the material as encompassing economic relations. A close reading of Fraser’s redistribution/recognition framework, however, reveals that the economic and the material do not inhabit the same sphere, and Fraser herself has made clear the necessary distinction between the economic and the material in her debate with Judith Butler (Fraser 1997a; see also Butler 1997). Nevertheless, the way Fraser situates her theory within what she refers to as the postsocialist scenario gives the impression that the notion of economic redistribution, in contrast to the increasingly prominent politics of cultural recognition, is synonymous with the material. Both Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth 2003) and Butler (1997) tend to understand the economic in Fraser’s theory in this way. Fraser herself would not object to the fact that injustices of misrecognition could be just as material as injustices of maldistribution. What I have discussed thus far illuminates precisely this overflow between the material and the cultural without touching upon the economic. In regard to economic relations, a significant body of research in translation studies has been focused on the role of translation in the (re)organization of economic structures and the negotiation of economic power and interests. As the structuring of economies changes from a local scale to regional and international scales, the manners in which translation is done and perceived and the way it functions in society also fundamentally alter. In this respect, Michael Cronin’s *Translation and Globalization* (2003) offers an exciting account of how the transformed economic factors, including the use of new information technologies, new networks of communication, and the global organization and management of capital, labor, raw materials, information, markets, and so on, have had a fundamental impact on the practice and theorization of translation. Although many of Cronin’s claims about the

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2. Another profound example of this imperialist translation can be found in Clayton W. Dumont Jr.’s *The Promise of Poststructuralist Sociology: Marginalized Peoples and the Problem of Knowledge* (2008). In a chapter on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, Dumont offers a deeply engaged account of the struggle against the holding of the remains of deceased Native Americans by museums and universities for “scientific data” (Dumont 2008, 108–48).



changed nature of translation in the age of globalization are too general and tend to apply in any case of cultural production, thus failing to account for the specific impacts of globalization on translation, they provoke more thinking and unsettle any stubborn clinging to traditional ways of thinking about translation.

But translation is not just a passive activity perpetually influenced by globalization. Translation appears as an active force underpinning economic operations. In this sense, translation has been proven by scholars as an agent in the establishment of economic relations and transactions, or even in the mediation of economic orders. *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783–1823* (1994), a volume edited by Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, explores translation as an ideologically driven process with norms and strategies that are fluid enough to articulate political agendas that either efface or reinforce the abolitionist cause embedded in some French women's writing. The book, however, is a little disappointing in the sense that the authors, while dealing with writings that speak to the economic and political order of their times, often draw conclusions that are limited to emphasizing translation as a process of ideology. It seems that the volume refrains from making claims about the effects of translation on the economic and political order of slavery that the writers and translators under discussion engage so vehemently in their works. By abandoning the themes of slavery and returning to translation studies in its conclusions, the volume has in a way failed its own title, which appears to promise so much.

The reluctance to delve into issues beyond translation studies itself that we see in *Translating Slavery* could be attributed to the nascent phase of the cultural turn in the field in the early 1990s, when the book was published. At the time, ideological aspects of translation were not yet a prominent object of study, and research was still confined in the methods of contrastive linguistic studies, hence the authors' emphasis on the ideological underpinnings of translation. As the cultural turn has taken deep roots in translation studies and has swept across the humanities in general, there emerges a body of research that makes resolute claims about the role of translation in constructing economic, cultural, and political order. Sabine Fenton and Paul Moon, in their essay "The Translation of the Treaty of Waitangi: A Case of Disempowerment," have forthrightly stated that, "although the treaty had seemingly brought together two distinct cultural groups in an act of enlightened respect for and trust of each other, ironically, the translation to a large extent has managed to destroy both and has become the cause of

much confusion and bitterness” (2002, 25). For these authors, translation plays a primary role in the “imposition and reproduction of power structures” that obliterate the sovereignty of a nation and annex it to the British Crown. Interestingly enough, Fenton and Moon show how translation functions in the case of the Waitangi Treaty as a secret code to override English humanitarianism, which was at its height in British politics in the nineteenth century. The abolition of slave trade and the establishment of numerous political and religious groups, such as the Church Missionary Society, the Aborigines Protection Society, and the Society for the Civilisation of Africa, were in part the direct result of humanitarian aspirations. Fenton and Moon also point out that “the new humanitarian imperative found its highest expression in the establishment of the 1837 House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines to consider the best ways of improving the conditions of the natives in the colonies of the British Empire” (2002, 28). In a sense, humanitarianism inspired a revision of the frame of justice, and natives became legitimate subjects to enjoy Empire’s distributive justices.

Within this new framework of heightened humanitarian sentiments, Captain William Hobson, assigned by the British government to negotiate with the Maori the transfer of their sovereignty to the British Crown, found himself in the middle of a contradiction. On the one hand, he was to achieve the transfer of sovereignty; on the other hand, all transactions were to be, as instructed by the Colonial Secretary Lord Normanby, “conducted on the principles of sincerity, justice, and good faith” (cited in Fenton and Moon 2002, 29). As if magic, the translation of the treaty from English to Maori language, done by Anglican missionary Henry Williams, helped achieve the double task, of course, not without hindsight. Fenton and Moon observe that “the convoluted and technical English text is recast in simple Maori, with glaring omissions. Certain crucial terms were not translated into the closest natural Maori equivalents” (2002, 33). They conclude that “Williams was a product of his time, his religion, and the prevailing ideology. His translation reflected all three” (2002, 41).

I read the translation and signing of the Treaty of Waitangi as a complication of the injustice of misframing in Fraser’s new model. New humanitarian sentiments permeated politics and unsettled the framing of justice within colonial rule, effecting a discursive inclusion of colonized subjects as legitimate subjects of justice. Yet the reframing here was not obtained in actuality due to a certain way of translation. Empire expands its border to account for new subjects of justice, and simultaneously it surreptitiously withholds justice through translation. Just as

in the case of redistribution and recognition, where translation must be called upon to mediate between the material and cultural spheres, I suggest that in the framing dimension of justice, with its necessary extension beyond the border of the nation-state, translation also plays a primary role and that without insight into the insidious working of translation, justice could hardly be achieved.

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