The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender

The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender provides a comprehensive, state-of-the-art overview of feminism and gender awareness in translation and translation studies today.

Bringing together work from more than 20 different countries – from Russia to Chile, Yemen, Turkey, China, India, Egypt, and the Maghreb as well as the UK, Canada, the USA, and Europe – this handbook represents a transnational approach to this topic, which is in development in many parts of the world. With 41 chapters, this book presents, discusses, and critically examines many different aspects of gender in translation and its effects, both local and transnational.

Providing overviews of key questions and case studies of work currently in progress, this handbook is the essential reference and resource for students and researchers of translation, feminism, and gender.

Luise von Flotow has taught translation studies at the University of Ottawa in Canada since 1996, publishing widely in the field of feminism, gender, and translation. She most recently co-edited Translating Women. Different Voices and New Horizons with Farzaneh Farhazad (Routledge 2016) and co-translated Tout le monde parle de la pluie et du beau temps. Pas nous, a book about Ulrike Meinhof (2018) with Isabelle Totikaev.

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Routledge Handbooks in Translation and Interpreting Studies provide comprehensive overviews of the key topics in translation and interpreting studies. All entries for the handbooks are specially commissioned and written by leading scholars in the field. Clear, accessible and carefully edited, Routledge Handbooks in Translation and Interpreting Studies are the ideal resource for both advanced undergraduates and postgraduate students.

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The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender

Edited by Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal
To our collaborators, peer reviewers, readers, students, and our children
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Introduction

Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal

The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender brings together a collection of essays representing a variety of approaches at the intersection of translation, feminism, and gender. The conceptualization of this volume started in 2016 as a transnational feminist translation project, initiated by two editors coming from two different parts of the world, Canada and Egypt, connected by our involvement in feminist translation scholarship and practice, yet marked by our distinct academic experiences and cultural locations. From our earliest discussions about the Handbook, it was clear to us that we shared a similar vision: a volume that would bring together the most prominent and relevant research in translation studies, which is grounded in feminist theory and gender studies. Our aim was twofold:

1. To provide an overview of the history, theorizing, and current critical contributions at the intersection of translation, feminism, and gender already established in mostly North America and Western Europe.

2. To encourage the development of scholarly interest in other parts of the world both among colleagues already working in the area of translation studies, urging them to adopt feminist approaches and gender tools, and among feminist literary and social critics, whom we invited to address questions of translation.

We approached known specialists in the area, sent out a Call for Papers for as wide a circulation as possible through all available networks in East, West, North and South, and encouraged promising scholars to expand their work to include translation studies and/or feminism and gender. The response was both gratifying and challenging, as we received almost 50 interesting and compelling abstracts, placing us, as editors, in the difficult position of selection. At this stage, we did accept almost all the abstracts, and started the long process of seeing them develop into chapters.

Halfway through the process we were lucky to be able to organize a meeting for the prospective authors of the Handbook in order to share the work carried out so far, discuss the challenges, and agree on the structures of the chapters that would allow a degree of harmony with some variety. The meeting was generously hosted by the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, owing to the initiative of Ewa Kraskowska,
professor and chair of the Institute of Polish Philology, who organised a conference on “Feminism and Gender in Translation” (13–14 April 2018). The agenda included a general overview of the Handbook, the various approaches adopted by the authors, and the challenges related to the great diversity in areas of specialization, academic writing conventions, and the position of the English language as the lingua franca of international academic publishing. As importantly, it marked an opportunity for participants coming from universities in Canada, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Scotland, the United Kingdom, Poland, Bulgaria, Egypt, the Maghreb, and the United Arab Emirates to communicate, while those authors who could not attend were later informed of the discussion and decisions taken during the meeting. Apart from the different approaches, methods, and theoretical frameworks considered during the meeting, we agreed to structure each of the chapters to include the following sections: an introduction, historical overview, critical contributions, current research and/or case study, future directions, and suggested further readings. Thus, most of the chapters included in this Handbook include these points in their texts.

As editors, we faced two main challenges. The first was structure, which revolved around how to structure a book that addresses such deeply seated cultural and sociopolitical questions as gender and feminism, and adds the complexities of transnational and transcultural translation. Overarching topics were created to organize what is extremely diverse: history, criticism, analysis, and case studies. Yet, once the chapters took their final shape, it was easier to group them into the current five parts, preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue. The Prologue presents a report on a roundtable discussion of “Women (Re)Writing Authority” by a group of feminist translators and translation scholars. It reflects on how feminist approaches to translation destabilize authorship and authority. Although originally submitted as a chapter, it is now the entry point to the whole Handbook, with the authors’ representation of epistemological, geohistorical, linguistic, and cultural multiplicity and diversity reflecting the Handbook project in general, and the following chapters. Similarly, the Epilogue chapter entitled “Recognition, Risk, and Relationships: Feminism and Translation as Modes of Embodied Engagement” presented an apt closure of the Handbook, offering a general commentary on feminism, translation, and engagement.

Part I “Translating and Publishing Women” includes 11 chapters which explore translations of women writers from and into English in India, Iran, Iraq, the Maghreb, South America, Latin America, Poland, Spain, early Modern Europe, and the UK. The chapters also discuss various issues such as the practices of feminist translation, cultural representation, interpretation, publishing, and censorship, as well as specific feminist concepts such as solidarity and herstory. In Part II “Translating Feminist Writers,” we assembled the six chapters dealing with the translations and receptions of foundational feminist texts (mostly from English and French) into different languages and within various cultures. These texts include a study of the translation, adaptation, and reception of Mary Wollstonecraft; the translation of Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own into Hindi; and the problematics of various translations of Simone de Beauvoir into English, Arabic, and Japanese, as well as the Spanish versions of Gloria Anzaldua’s Borderlands. Part III “Feminism, Gender, and Queer in Translation” is composed of eight chapters which deal in more general terms with feminist, gender, and queer intersections with translation in different parts of the world such as Poland, Russia, and other post-communist countries, as well as in Italy, China, and India. These chapters, moreover, address issues related to political history, social structures, and in relation to concepts – largely developed in the “West” – such as transfeminism, gender, subversion, and decolonization. Another group of eight chapters is included in Part IV “Gender in Grammar, Technologies, and Audiovisual Translation.” The chapters deal with
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a variety of issues such as grammatical gender, translating gender, sexist translation, political incorrectness, feminist activism, as well as language issues in audiovisual translation, subtitling, video game translation, and machine translation. The analyzed texts, from different parts of the world, include UN documents, social media, video games, and TV programmes and films. The last part, Part V “Discourses in Translation,” consists of six chapters that focus on the translation of specific discourses: religion, health, and children’s education. Thus, several chapters discuss the translation of sacred texts from a feminist perspective while others address the translation of books on women’s sexual and reproductive lives, and a study of the adaptation and translation of children’s literature closes this section. All in all, the Handbook, in its five parts, prologue, and epilogue, expands the study of translation, feminism, and gender geographically, historically, and epistemologically into the realms of transnational feminist translation praxis.

The second challenge arose from the transnational aspect of this project, in particular the publishing language, English. Thirty-five of the 41 chapters were written by scholars whose first language is not English. While the dominance of English academic publishing may be a fact in many parts of the world, there are as many drawbacks as there are advantages to this fact, especially in the humanities. The advantages include broader accessibility to academic texts worldwide for readers who function in English, as a first, second, or additional language. This Handbook is an example of such accessible international dissemination of academic work. For monolingual English speakers, the dominance of English publishing also makes work available from other parts of the world to which they might otherwise have little access: in the case of this Handbook, this means China, India, South America, and the Middle East. This is valuable, and we hope that the work collected here will prove useful in this regard. However, the drawback of such publishing is that local academics and local readers, who are not readers of English, are excluded. One of the chapters on translating feminist writing from Europe and North America into Telugu makes this exclusion very clear: the source texts—in English, French, Italian, or Russian—did not reach the general local public until the translator ‘Volga’ took it upon herself to make them available, thus fomenting discussion and change. Today, the drive to publish in English continues to exclude large populations from such development, and translation is a costly and not always successful enterprise.

A further difficulty that publication in English raises is the issue of editing. There are many ways of writing an academic text, and different cultures have different traditions. English is one such culture. Yet publishing in English imposes English structures and writing conventions, and demands mastery of the language. Further, authors writing about local topics, histories, cultures—which is inevitable in the study of translation—end up having to explain many details of the context of their work that would be understood by local readers. References to irony, for example, require much more detail: irony works with complicity and requires knowledge of the local situation which is being referenced. Over explaining irony can kill it. Similarly, translation studies requires references to translated texts, the changes they undergo, the losses and gains and misinterpretations that can be detailed; when a Spanish, or German, or Arabic-speaking writer analyzes the Spanish, German, or Arabic translation of a certain text, they will cite examples. For the purposes of English publication, these examples must then be ‘translated’ into English for the international readers to understand the effects of translation translated and retranslated.

These are important matters; they have considerable impact on the transnational aspect of feminist and gender-aware approaches to any academic study. The predominance of English, if only as a gatekeeper excluding work that doesn’t meet its standard, and the power of ideas and theories emanating from Anglo-America and Europe, expressed in English and referred to as ‘the West’ in many of the chapters, create an imbalance that affects the dynamics of transnational
exchange. This has already been explored in postcolonial terms by authors of the 1990s, but it continues to be a factor undermining the collaborative and reciprocal creation and exchange of information sought in transnational feminist and gender studies.

Still, in the face of these challenges, we are proud to have been able to collect such a diverse array of material on translation, feminism, and gender, and we hope that our international English readers will learn as much from these chapters as we did assembling, editing, and finalizing them.

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Women (re)writing authority

A roundtable discussion on feminist translation

Emek Ergun, Denise Kripper, Siobhan Meï, Sandra Joy Russell, Sara Rutkowski, Carolyn Shread, and Ida Hove Solberg

This collectively authored reflection on translation began as a roundtable discussion by a group of feminists considering how translation can subvert, rewrite, or question hegemonic definitions of authorship, as well as how it can disrupt or dismantle intersecting regimes of power. This text is the product of our conversations since that initial meeting, including both in person and online exchanges. Authorizing ourselves to explore a new form of collective writing enabled by digital technologies, one that both recognizes individual ideas and weaves them into the representation of a communal understanding, we explore the theoretical formulations and practical negotiations of the textual authority of translators within the interdisciplinary contexts of feminist studies, literary studies, and translation studies. The dialogic convergence of those three disciplinary territories allows for an in-depth examination of power and resistance in relation to women’s transformative roles as authors, translators, and social justice activists in different geohistorical contexts. Moreover, such criticism is useful in revealing the past and present silencing of women’s contributions to social change as cultural and political agents. The goal of this chapter is to consider how translation brings local and transnational feminisms into dialogue across time and place, and in doing so, challenges legacies of hegemonic cultural authority that too often reproduce heteropatriarchal, colonial formations. Some questions that guided our discussions include: How can translation disrupt or dismantle intersecting regimes of power? What is the role of women translators in histories of resistance (e.g. feminist movements)? How does translation subvert, rewrite, or question hegemonic definitions of authorship? What promising areas of collaboration remain between feminist and translation theories as they continue to evolve? The participants of this roundtable chapter, coming from different interdisciplinary and transnational backgrounds, approach questions of feminist politics and philosophies of authorship and translation with their uniquely positioned epistemic voices. In doing so, they help expand critical understandings of translation in general and feminist translation in particular, and offer a multifaceted meditation that works from our various perspectives and experiences to go beyond (mis)perceptions of authorship towards practices of solidarity in translation.
Critiquing the modern concept of author, inventing multiple translatorship

The modern concept of the author as the sole and individual originator of their own work is comparatively new in the West, as research on the literary cultures of the medieval and early modern periods in Europe demonstrates. At the roundtable, Siobhan Meï reminded us of different descriptions of the medieval woman author by defining ‘authorship’ in both its modern and medieval contexts, as well as exploring the various avenues in which cultural and spiritual authority could be accessed by women of the time. Just as the agency and authority of the translator is often called into question, early modern and medieval women writers occupied an equally precarious role within the patriarchal intellectual and spiritual conventions of their time. Due to women’s historical exclusion from intellectual circles and institutions of learning, the way towards authorship and spiritual authority for women writers was neither straightforward nor, in some instances, without social consequences. In a chapter from The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing (2003) titled “Women and Authorship,” Jennifer Summit describes the multitude of ways in which we might consider the possibility of the medieval woman author, a project that involves defining ‘authorship’ in both its modern and medieval contexts, as well as exploring the various avenues in which cultural and spiritual authority could be accessed by women of the time. Authorship, according to Summit, is a historically variable term whose meaning shifts according to institutional and historical contexts. Where the modern author is identified and culturally valued as the sole creator of their work, medieval and early modern forms of authorship are based in the concept of auctoritas, a term used as a “marker of doctrinal authority” whose ideological power is derived from its “link to tradition, defined as a stream of continuous influence by its root tradere, to pass on” (Summit 2003, 92). Living medieval writers thus cultivated their cultural and intellectual authority from within a recognizable network of sources, including the philosophies and poetics of ancient theologians, classical writers, scripture, and, even, as visionary writing exemplifies, the direct and divine will of God. Writing as “a suspension rather than an assertion of selfhood” (Summit 2003, 96) and as textual demonstration of total submission to God’s will serve as examples of the ways in which women visionaries were engaged as authorial participants in medieval literary culture.

An example of one such visionary writer is Marguerite Porete (1250–1310), a 13th-century French-speaking mystic and author of Le miroir des âmes simples et anéanties (The Mirror of Simple Souls) (1295). Le miroir is a complex and highly abstract prose piece written in the style of a Boethian dialogue that evokes the courtly tradition of fine amor celebrated in works such as Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun’s 13th-century allegorical poem Le Roman de la Rose (Ernst Langlois 1914–1924). In Porete’s text, multiple feminine allegorical voices, including Reason, Love, and the Soul, address one another. Porete’s work is unique in the context of Christian visionary writing in that it does not document corporeal revelation, but rather intimately describes an ongoing spiritual and cerebral negotiation of the self in relation to God’s will. Written in the vernacular, Le miroir was deemed heretical and Porete was burned at the stake in 1310. Porete’s spiritual and literary legacy did not die with her however, as there is strong evidence pointing to connections between Porete’s Miroir and the writing and translations of Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), sister to King François I and a known evangelist sympathizer during the tumultuous early years of the Protestant Reformation in France. Mei suggested that while intellectual submission and textual self-negation would initially seem to contradict or dissolve authorial possibility, the identification of a divine source for one’s writing, which exists not only beyond the self, but also supersedes individual consciousness, generates a space of creative
agency and flexibility in which transmission and reception – rather than ownership – become the goals of cultural production and spiritual enlightenment.

Still prevalent today, the idea of the solitary author has been questioned and contested by literary studies scholars such as Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener (2013), who, building on Jack Stillinger’s (1991) concept of multiple authorship, coined the term multiple translatorship. Traditionally, the multiplicity of agents behind a translation has been understood in terms of collaboration or cooperation, yet it may also involve discrepancies and disagreements. By disclosing the multiplicity of agents involved, traces of negotiations challenge common conceptions of authorship. On these grounds, Ida Hove Solberg reminded the roundtable that opposing viewpoints between agents are likely to surface in translations of ideological works, such as feminist texts, due to the frequent personal ideological involvement of the agents. Keith Harvey finds “bindings” (Harvey 2003) – cover texts, illustrations, promotional material, etc. – to be key sites for negotiation between competing ideological viewpoints. One example Solberg shared is the first Norwegian translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* in 1970 by an intellectual first-wave feminist that was released by a small, predominantly male left-wing publishing house. Its ‘bindings’ present it simultaneously as a work on questions of sexuality, with a faceless naked woman on the cover, and as an existentialist discussion of women’s situation. In the translation, the topic of sexuality is toned down or even omitted, and much of the existentialist vocabulary is simplified. The paradoxical dissonance between what is on the cover and the book’s content is an example of multiple translatorship, but to whom should these choices be attributed, the translator or the editorial team? Negotiations of different conceptions of the book, evident in its bindings and supported by correspondence between agents, illustrate the possibility for both productive dialectical opposition as well as mutual influence and interplay between translational agents.

Similarly, re-conceiving translation as a specific form of authorship, at the roundtable Carolyn Shread drew on her own work as a translator of several works by contemporary French philosopher Catherine Malabou, beginning with *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (2009). She recounted how she self-reflexively began to construe Malabou’s signature concept of ‘plasticity’ – defined as the giving, receiving, or even explosion of form – as relevant to translation. For instance, conventional conceptions of translation can be characterized as an ‘elastic’ model in that translation is measured against a discrete and autonomous original to which the translation always refers back and is inevitably found to be lacking and subservient. The equivalences of the exchanges fail and the translation is never commensurate with the original. By contrast, a ‘plastic’ paradigm views translation as a morphing process by which a text develops precisely through translations. To replace textual elasticity with plasticity is also to adopt a generative framework that aligns with feminist conceptions of relationality as opposed to a discrete subject/object divide. Moreover, because plasticity accounts not only for the giving and receiving of form but also its destruction, this revised conception allows us to understand the ‘accidents’ of translation. Plasticity parses the ways in which translation is involved in reworkings and in the production of the new. In our discussion, Emek Ergun agreed that if our premise is that translations and originals are differently assembled and marked texts, then neither is purely original or copied. They are both creatively produced through different meaning-making mechanisms and they both continue to make and shed meanings when they encounter readers who bring their own locally crafted interpretive schemes to the reading process.

**Representing others for others**

This insight allows us to ask, as Meï put it, on whose behalf are we speaking/translation? As an activity that is built on processes of mediation and negotiation, in what ways and under
which conditions does translation allow agents and communities to speak for themselves? When and how does translation as a representational practice submerge or erase voices, histories, and knowledge? This last question is particularly relevant in the construction of feminist translation epistemologies that seek to challenge regimes of power. Genealogical excavations of liberalism have exposed the racially exclusionary foundations of the Western legal, social, and philosophical frameworks through which bodies become legible as human and the processes through which various narratives congeal and circulate as History. As a porous and de-centred site of critical inquiry that is interested in how community forms across borders and sociocultural differences, feminist translation is also a space in which liberal conceptualizations of freedom, individuality, autonomy, and agency are explored and interrogated.

Even so, in our conversation, Sandra Joy Russell raised the question: what does it mean for women translators to be able to engage with the act of translation when the female body has been, and continues to be, regulated by various spheres, not only sexual and reproductive, but also within political and activist spheres of power, as in the spaces of protest and revolution? This interrogation allows us to consider translation’s unique offering of not only the ‘possession’ of a text but, more subversively, the repossession of a textual body through the reproductive act of rewriting through translation, and, moreover, the extent to which this repossession is translatable between geographic and ideological spaces. In other words, the challenge of textual repossession is especially present for feminist translators, whose work requires active recognition of how feminism(s), transnationally and transculturally, has formed and developed under different ideological and historical conditions. For women translators who have historically confronted expectations of invisibility and the assumed absence of authorship, the symbolic representation or imagining of the human body as a space of ownership takes on a new significance, one that is specifically feminist: it participates in the act of reclaiming authority over a textual body.

In Russel’s unpublished translations of women’s poetry written during Ukraine’s 2013–2014 Euromaidan Revolution from a collection entitled Materyns’ka moltyva [Maternal Prayer], the figure of berehynia, an ancient Slavic goddess or ‘hearth mother,’ emerged as a poetic symbol for women’s roles in the protests. Often fetishized, the image of the berehynia in contemporary Ukraine has been tied to the maternal body and become a catch-all for describing women’s participation in the revolution. Rendering this image in English in a Western context prompted Russel to ask what would it mean to disrupt this figure as a way to reconstruct it as more subversively feminist, as an opposition to, rather than protector of, patriarchy? This impulse is problematic, however, within a Ukrainian activist context, since such rewriting re-performs the revolution in order to meet the criteria of Western feminism. While rewriting through translation can reclaim the female body as feminist, translating from a post-imperial context (Ukraine) to an imperial one (US), we have to ask how power and authority are wielded in translation. More specifically, how does such power, through its representations of the symbolic and corporeal body, reinforce hegemonic and imperialistic formations of feminism?

Thinking about these questions as pertinent concerns across the globe, Mei made a connection to the work of feminist activist Gina Athena Ulysse, who, in Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: a Post-Quake Chronicle (2015), deploys translation as a complex and intimate process of representation for Haiti, a nation that has been constrained by the persistence of stereotypes that alienate and victimize its communities. In this trilingual (English, Haitian Creole, and French) text, Ulysse deconstructs, revisits, and challenges these narratives. Ulysse, a member of the Haitian diaspora, consistently returns to the issue of representation — to the question of who can speak on behalf of whom. The auto-ethnographic reflexivity of Ulysse’s written work and her mobilization of embodied performance challenge how certain narratives are constructed and circulate. Ulysse’s artistic oeuvre offers key insights into what a feminist translational praxis can
look like: one that is always attentive to the ways in which politics and poetics of representation traverse and conjoin the public and private spheres of meaning-making.

**Expanding boundaries of authorship**

The pairing of feminism and translation as discourses and practices produces a rich space for thinking through the politics of speaking and storytelling in transnational contexts, particularly with regard to these questions of representation. In our discussion, Sara Rutkowski shared her interest in contemporary instances in which the translator tears down traditional models of textual authority thereby expanding the boundaries of authorship. A striking example is Ann Goldstein, who has become a virtual stand-in for the celebrated, though anonymous, Italian writer Elena Ferrante, author of the widely popular four novels that comprise the Neapolitan series: *My Brilliant Friend* (2012), *The Story of a New Name* (2013), *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (2014), and *The Story of the Lost Child* (2015). Indeed, it is Ferrante’s determination to remain unknown that has allowed for a more expansive view of translation as collaboration and co-authorship (although it should be noted that in 2016, Italian journalist Claudio Gatti concluded that Anita Raja, herself a translator, was the actual author of the Neapolitan novels – a claim that Ferrante vehemently denied). Goldstein, who translated all four novels into English, has become the embodiment of the hidden writer, the sole conduit to the source, and by her own admission, even mistaken for the source. Her public status in the author’s absence has helped turn on its head the historical and ideological construction of translation, the very problem that initially drives feminist critique – namely, the notion that translation is subordinate to the original and as such is parallel to women’s role as submissive, reproductive, the handmaiden to the master. The famed translator and invisible writer upend that social order and contribute to the rising cultural cachet of translators. In fact, Solberg confirmed that the same can be said of Ferrante’s translators in Norway (Kristin Sørsdal), Sweden (Johanna Hedenberg), and Denmark (Nina Gross), all three of whom have served as authors-by-proxy, attending public events, giving extensive interviews, and generally becoming well-known literary figures in Ferrante’s absence.

Moreover, Ferrante’s novels themselves are particularly germane to the topic of feminist translation because they are in many respects about the power of translation and its vital role in expanding the boundaries of women’s social and political identities. One example is the narrator’s struggle to reconcile her two languages, the Neapolitan dialect, which intractably represents the intimacy of home, the working-class, anger, and violence, and standard Italian, which signals the aspirational world beyond the domestic, itself oppressively constructed. It is only when she becomes a writer that the narrator is empowered, and not by the language in which she writes, but by the act of translating. Translation is a central motif for crossing over linguistic, national, and gendered borders. The story both around and inside Ferrante’s novels highlights translation as an act of subversion, a claiming of territory that has been habitually denied to both women and translators.

**Fictionalizing translation and translators**

Along with the growing public interest in, and awareness of, individual translators, there has also been a global upsurge in the representation of the act of translation and the task of the translator in literature itself. This fictional turn is fundamental because it foregrounds translation by allocating a leading role to translators and interpreters, who have been largely erased, even though they have always been central to the production and circulation of texts. As a literary device, translation prompts us to reconsider the way we perceive fiction. At the roundtable,
Denise Kripper presented her research on how fictional women translators and their practices are portrayed in contemporary literature in Spanish. In these works, they challenge the original/copy dynamic celebrating irreverent translation as an act of subversion. They mistranslate and they do so on purpose, with a political agenda in mind. So what happens when a ‘bad’ translation becomes a good one? What happens when meanings are subverted deliberately? In the same way that Chicana feminist writers have reclaimed and reappropriated the figure of La Malinche (see for example Norma Alarcón 1989), the indigenous interpreter who aided the Spaniards in the conquest of Mexico and has been historically rendered as a traitor, these works release the woman translator from a servile, invisible, and inferior position. Feminist translation thus becomes a creative and empowering approach whereby, through an exercise of mistranslation, a productive new work is created. Their strategies vary from impeding communication by refusing to translate to overshadowing the original by mistranslating it, attempting to resist regimes of power such as the hegemony of English, patriarchy and male-dominated spaces, and even the very reign of the original. For example, the short story “Never Marry a Mexican” by Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros (1992) is sprinkled with Spanish terms, followed by their explanation, translation, or (re)elaboration by its code-switching translator protagonist. Thus, a US-based empowered English-speaking target readership is suddenly dependent on her for understanding; readers are forced to rely on a character ambiguously depicted as treacherous, while, by contrast, a Hispanic bilingual audience is invited into a complicit reading. Moreover, the novel Inclúyanme afuera (2014) by Argentine writer Maria Sonia Cristoff narrates the experiment of its protagonist, a woman tired of her machine-like job as a simultaneous interpreter stuck in a booth, who eventually decides to remain silent for a year. Silence becomes her counteroffensive, her tool of resistance and the novel dwells on what happens when the world is deprived of translation. As Kripper proposed, these and other feminist fictional translators tamper with globalization’s running wheel, hinder its fluidity, slow down readers, forcing them to take a pause and reflect, or even suspect, mistrust the process. They make translation visible.

Considering pedagogical questions

In our discussions since the roundtable, one of the most pressing questions we asked ourselves was what can we do as feminist scholars, translators, and educators? Ergun pointed out that it is not a given that feminist translation is intersectional since it may easily be disrupted or curbed by global machineries of communication. Indeed, the existing Eurocentric feminist translation scholarship has largely adhered to a gender-only focus in its theories and practices and only recently, both with the emergent geopolitical expansion of the field and with the deep interrogation and transformation of Western feminist praxes by the intersectional critiques of feminists of color, queer feminists, and third world feminists, feminist translation scholars have explicitly begun to claim intersectionality as a crucial signpost for their translation praxes. After all, any translation that only takes into consideration gender injustice can reproduce other forms of oppression along the axes of race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, geopolitics, etc. Given that translation always takes place across linguistic, cultural, national, and geopolitical borders that are ridden with various asymmetrical power relations, intersectionality thus appears as an essential framework for feminist translation, whose ultimate goal is to intervene into discourses of domination and help forge connectivities and solidarities across differences and hierarchies.

In a world of violent borderings that are designed to undermine, if not disallow, translations practiced for socioeconomic justice for all, feminist translators have an ethical imperative to pursue intersectionality so that their work does not end up replicating the very structures of power that we mean to disrupt. To prevent this from happening, Solberg pointed out the importance
of translating feminist literature from minoritized languages in order to counter the dominant translational flow, as well as including such texts in syllabi. She brought up the example of Norwegian feminist and lesbian activist Gerd Brantenberg’s *Egalias Døtre* (1977), translated by Louis Mackay as *Egalia’s Daughters* (1985), an innovative novel that swaps gender roles. On a related note, Kripper mentioned the need to refresh the canon with new translation perspectives, such as Emily Wilson’s recent version of *The Odyssey* (2017), translated into English by a woman for the first time. These new translations have the potential to reinvigorate not only the cultural discourse but also our critical pedagogy.

Ergun put theory to practice by considering feminist classrooms, particularly those that interrogate the neoliberal, white-supremacist, and hetero/sexist forces of globalization, as spaces of engagement where we can develop a vision of feminist translation as a vital part of transnational feminist politics. Her undergraduate course “Transnational Feminism” became just such an experimental space in 2017 by adopting Hilary Klein’s *Compañeras: Zapatista Women’s Stories* (2015) as textbook. While translation is not at the centre of the book as a topic of discussion, it is everywhere in this text. Zapatista women’s stories of creating common grounds of resistance among various indigenous communities, each with its own language; producing and distributing their decolonial feminist agendas through pamphlets and women’s laws; implementing workshops and cooperatives for local sustenance and economic independence; and sharing their political demands and visions on larger nationwide and worldwide platforms are also stories of feminist translation. *Compañeras* not only reveals the possibility of building commonality within difference but also the strategic use of hegemonic languages, Spanish in this case, in service of communities of resistance, particularly those marginalized at the intersections of colonial and patriarchal power relations. Numerous stories in the book revealed to students the power of translation to disrupt male hegemony over discourse and knowledge and helped them reframe translation as an enabler of cross-border solidarities and polyphonic assemblages that pursue liberation and justice.

**Translating in the digital revolution**

Carolyn Shread built on Emek Ergun’s interest in feminist pedagogy by recalling that practices of solidarity are undergoing dramatic changes as a result of the digital revolution. In this context, she discussed her recent translation of Catherine Malabou’s *Morphing Intelligence: From IQ Measurements to Artificial Brains* (2019) in which the author explores the way that natural intelligence and brain plasticity, upon which she had formerly based democratic claims (*What Should We Do with Our Brain?* 2008), are being transformed by technological advances that move towards the creation of a synthetic brain. In this human-machine adaptation, we observe corresponding modes of power that we have yet to fully comprehend. Within this digital transition, translation offers a practice that helps us grasp intersecting regimes of power that are unlike any hitherto engaged. Thus, while feminist translation previously sought to alter the paradigms by which translation was framed, its analysis now helps us anticipate new forms and modes of exchange that are emerging and that feminists must learn to negotiate.

The question becomes how does artificial intelligence reframe authority in translation? While there is a generalized belief in the superiority of human translation over machine translation, the condescending jokes about Google Translate mask both an underlying anxiety and the fact that we are developing an increasing tolerance for, indeed a habit of, interacting with both automated and mediated forms of intelligence. Sooner or later, depending on the languages, machine translation will be very effective. Authority and authorship will be rewritten by agents that do not resemble those we know now. As the instrumental relation to our tools gives way to
the adaptation human plasticity is experiencing, we are in uncharted territory. Collective intelligence, amassed and oriented via artificial intelligence, may crowdsource solutions and dissolve the lines upon which a male heroic narrative of solo authorship established itself.

How do these technology futures affect feminist translation? While in the immediate it calls for an intersectional critique to identify the sexist, racist, and other biased foundations of algorithms, along with analysis of the effects of building translation from a corpora that draws on a male and Western canon, reinforcing patriarchy in automated reflexes, it also allows us to imagine machines outside a gendered body and to ask what happens to humans when they accommodate themselves to artificial intelligences. As we consider the future of feminist translation, it is important to ask how do we position ourselves not only in relation to other feminisms, but also in response to emerging augmented intelligences? When we arrive at artificial authorship in translation, what is the place of feminism? Moreover, following Michael Cronin’s argument in *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2017), how does feminist translation respond to the imperative to reduce the energy consumption implicated in translation technologies when human authority is overridden by the fact of climate change?

**Towards solidarity in translation**

At this point Mei encouraged us to consider how modern, hegemonic framings of authorship continue to efface, undermine, and mute the various ways in which we are entangled with one another – humans, animals, things, and even technologies. These earthly and digital entanglements and the diverse relationalities and frictions they produce have been central sites of exploration for transnational and interdisciplinary feminist work at the intersections of biology, environmental studies, anthropology, sociology, and literature. In response, Ergun suggested that we focus on our encounter to discuss the unique significatory potential of translation to connect stories and subjectivities across borders – borders that are usually promoted to polarize and segregate, rather than to bring closer and connect. Translation, by facilitating cross-border travels and encounters of differently originated, assembled, and situated stories and discourses, helps reveal our semiotic gaps, interpretive habits, epistemic illusions, and subjective imperfections. It is precisely due to this power to defamiliarize our (half)truths by welcoming difference that translation appears as threatening to the self, when it is imagined and performed in opposition to the other. However, this supposed threat is the very celebratory aspect of translation. It is how translation is created and creates: it lures the self into a vulnerable state of hosting the other and becoming anew with them.

When we welcome translation with sincere hospitality and open our ‘home’ to that beloved or unknown guest arriving from a long journey and bringing us stories from a distant land (or perhaps not as distant as we think it is), we have the opportunity not only to become aware of the partiality and limits of our reflections and imaginations but also to grow with those stories and appreciate the incompleteness and permeability of our interconnectivity. Translation enables our subjectivities, individual and collective, to grow beyond – beyond where the language/s we speak can take us. It is by encountering translated originals that we become original translators ourselves – unique transnational assemblages of ‘home-made’ stories partially and indefinably borrowed from others, some of whom we do not share a language with. It is in this sense that we argue that an entrenched fear/hatred of the other can come to an end with the demise of the entrenched fear/hatred of translation. This is about reimagining relationships to worlds and words, some we know, some we don’t, but we are of them, they are of us, and it is only through an ethics of hospitality, vulnerability, plurality, and solidarity – a translational ethics – that we learn to become with each other and co-exist in our differences. In this sense, we claim
feminist translation as utopian. It is the very principle, practice, and promise of transnationality. When reconceived as such, not in opposition to authorship, but as a transnational form of co-authorship, translation means hope—not loss or failure—for a future in polyphony.

Further reading


This text explores the role of translation in the emergence of vernacular literature in medieval Europe. It is an excellent resource for researchers interested in the historical intersection of translation and literary culture in the European context.


Doerr presents her counterintuitive field findings that a multilingual environment—one that depends on interpreters—is more democratic than a monolingual setting. Her research challenges long-standing assumptions about effective modes of communication to show that translation has the potential to be a powerful political tool.


This recent collection is composed of 16 essays that explore translation as a form of local and transnational feminist activism from different interdisciplinary perspectives, while at the same time seeking to geopolitically expand the Anglo–Eurocentric boundaries of the field. It also includes a roundtable discussion on translation with leading scholars on feminist politics.


This anthology presents new research on the roles that gender plays in the complex processes of translation, transnational transfer, and reception of translated texts. It focuses on Scandinavia in particular.


This anthology engages with emerging interdisciplinary research on queer (including feminist) dimensions of translation and interpretation.

References


Part I
Translating and publishing women
Volga as an international agent of feminist translation

Rajkumar Eligedi

Introduction

The ‘cultural turn’ that took place in translation studies in the 1980s liberating the discipline from strictly linguistic approaches and moving towards descriptive approaches as discussed by Gideon Toury (1995) brought the study of the context and the sociocultural aspects of translation as well as the place and function of the translation within the target culture to prominence. The emergence of feminist approaches to translation studies in the 1990s, focusing on the question of gender as an interdisciplinary area of research and translation practice (e.g. Simon 1996; Flotow 1997), added a further sociopolitical dimension to the field. However, despite the extensive translation activity that takes place in India, translation studies remain an emerging or a marginal area of research, and even more so feminist translation. In relation to the Indian context, Spivak (1993) initiated a discussion of feminist translation in postcolonial contexts, followed by scholars such as Niranjana Tejaswini (1998), Devika (2008), Kamala (2009), Tharakeshwar and Usha (2010), who contributed to this discourse. This chapter builds on these scholarly efforts by exploring the role played by Volga, an Indian feminist translator, in translating feminism into Telugu. It discusses her work as an agent of translation, working from mainly English to Telugu, and analyzes Volga’s role in stimulating a debate on feminism in Telugu through her translations. This chapter also addresses the opposition Volga faced in translating feminist work as a foreign idea that might divide the indigenous social movements in the name of gender and encourage individualism. This was the primary
Table 2.1 Feminist texts by Volga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the book</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Author/translator</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Agnes Smedley’s <em>Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution</em> (1976) is translated as <em>Samanyula Sahasam</em></td>
<td>Memoir/biography</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Hyderabad Book Trust</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Agnes Smedley’s <em>Daughter of Earth</em> (1929) is translated as <em>Bhumi Putrika</em></td>
<td>Semi-autobiographical novel</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Hyderabad Book Trust</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Alexandra Kollontai’s <em>Three Generations</em> (1929) is translated as <em>Mudu Taralu</em></td>
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<td>Volga</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Feminist Study Circle</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Oriana Falacci’s <em>Letter to a Child Never Born</em> (1975) is translated as <em>Puttani Biddaku Talli Uttaram</em></td>
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<td>Volga</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Feminist Study Circle</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Ariel Darman’s <em>Widows</em> (1983) is translated as <em>Missing</em></td>
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<td>Volga</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Maanavi Prachuranalu</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>A collection of papers on black feminist theory translated as <em>Kombahi River Collective Prakatana</em></td>
<td>Feminist theory</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Vantinti Masi-Shrivaada Prachuranalu</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Naval El Sadavi’s <em>Women at Point Zero</em> (1983) is translated as <em>Urikoyya Anchuna</em></td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Swechcha Prachuranalu</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Sushma Deshpande’s <em>Vhay, Mee Savitribai</em> (Yes, I Am Savitribai) is translated as <em>Nenu Savitribaini</em></td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Volga</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Asmita</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>A collection of research papers are translated into Telugu as <em>Akshara Yuddalu</em> (War of Words)</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><em>Tholi Velugulu – Strivaada Siddhanta Vikasam</em> (First Illumination – Feminist Theory)</td>
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<td>Volga</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Swechcha Prachuranalu</td>
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reason for the strong opposition that arose against her translations in the 1980s. However, Volga has argued and shown through her writing and her translations that feminism is not aimed at dividing social movements but in fact, aimed at defending the rights of women who are part of these movements and organizations.

The Telugu public sphere\(^1\) has been one of the more vibrant spaces in India in terms of social movements. Leftist activism, the Dalit movement, and women’s movements have emerged demanding liberation and representation as well as confronting the established hegemonic structures. Due to the multiplicity of languages used in the different political movements across the country, various activists involved in these movements connect with and influence one another through translation across local languages, demonstrating how translation can act as an agent of social change through its transfer of thought across various social and political contexts. In this

sense, translation can be seen to contribute to social and political movements as much as these movements impact translation. Anthony Pym (2002) notes that one of the main tasks of translation is to help solve social problems. It may also work as a catalyst for social change (Lin Kenan 2002) or operate as an agent of change (Eva Hung 2005). Within the context of the Indian Savarna and Dalit feminist movements, Telugu feminists have played a significant role trying to bring social change to the existing patriarchal society by introducing a version of feminism which combines theory with practice, and was made accessible to the Telugu-speaking readership through translation. These pioneer feminist efforts included bringing to light the painful narratives of women’s sufferings, voicing different forms of their suppression and telling subsequent stories of their journeys to liberation from dominant patriarchal institutions.

Popuri Lalitha Kumari, popularly known as Volga (pen name), was born on 27 November 1950 in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Venkata Subba Rao, Volga’s father was a communist, and well versed in Russian literature. At a very early age Volga had also read the translated versions of Russian literature and was influenced by Marxist philosophy. She is considered a pioneer of the Telugu feminist literary movement, immensely contributing to the field of feminism and feminist writing by introducing feminist thought to the literary and political spheres of Telugu society. She was an active member of the Student Federation of India (SFI) at Andhra University and participated in the Naxalbari movement in the late 1960s as a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist), continuing her active involvement with the Marxist Leninist (ML) movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to her political activism, she worked with Viplava Rachayitala Sangam (Revolutionary Writers’ Association) and Janasahiti (People’s Literary Organization) in the 1970s. At a later stage, Volga took the initiative of forming a feminist study circle in 1988, while maintaining a cordial relationship with the members of Stree Shakti Sangathana (Women Power Organization), a women’s organization established in 1977. Later, she worked with Anveshi (established in 1985) over a period of time and subsequently joined Asmita.

Volga and other translators who introduced a feminist perspective into Telugu have been subjected to serious criticism from progressive writers and thinkers. Despite this strong opposition, however, feminist translators like Volga, P. Satyavathi, and organizations like Stree Shakti Sanghatana (Women Power Organization), the Feminist Study Circle, Anveshi and Asmita, and the publishing houses like Hyderabad Book Trust and magazines like Bhunika (Role) and Mahila Margam (Women’s Path) continue to translate feminist ideas and make the discussion on feminism in Telugu possible and acceptable.

**Historical perspectives on feminist thought**

In the globalized world, ideas travel in various settings: from one language to another, one culture to another, and from one society to an altogether different one. “Like people and Schools of Criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another,” Edward Said argues in his path-breaking essay “Travelling Theory” (1983, 226). In her study “Travelling Concepts in Translation” (2018), Hala Kamal discusses ‘feminism’ and ‘gender’ as travelling concepts that move across histories, geographies, cultures, disciplines, languages, and politics. Feminist ideas, too, have travelled across the world via translations and in defiance of opposition and criticism from the local cultures and societies that may resist the challenges to patriarchal orders that such ideas represent. The ‘travel’ from the international context into the Telugu society was made necessary by the needs of women and the demands of the women’s movement.

The evolution of the history of feminism in India can be classified into three periods: the social reform era of the 19th century, the nationalist era of the 20th century, and the new
feminist era that began in the 1970s. During the 1960s and 70s, the women’s movement in Telugu society was influenced by Marxist and Leftist thought. With the entry of feminism after the 1970s, there was a great change in the women’s movements across India and in the Telugu region as feminist activists and translators influenced by international feminist thought translated feminist ideas into Telugu to mobilize women against patriarchal norms. When the UN declared 1975 the International Women’s Year and then extended this into an international women’s decade (1975–1985), this gave further impetus to feminist activism in the Telugu public sphere as many autonomous women’s organizations emerged out of these contexts. These organizations led the movements against social practices such as male domination and the dowry system, as well as crimes against women that manifested in sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, and gender violence. This activism was inspired and supported by various national and international women’s movements as well as the translation of women’s literature and feminist writing. The worldwide feminist movement and its experiences provided a theoretical base for feminist organizations to engage with the women’s question in the Telugu society.

The first feminist socialist organization

The POW (Progressive Organization for Women) was established in Hyderabad in 1974 by a group of women students who were influenced by Marxist-Leninist thought and socialist feminism. It was considered the first feminist socialist organization in Hyderabad. In the Telugu context, ‘feminism’ originated in the Srikakulam Naxalbari movement and the Telangana Armed Struggle stimulated by questions raised by women about ‘male domination’ and the ‘patriarchal nature’ of the revolutionary groups. The POW was dissolved in 1975 due to state repression and ideological differences between the women leaders and the Marxist-Leninist Party (M-LP) with regard to women’s issues. Most of the leaders from the organization left the M-LP and established such organizations as the Stree Shakti Sanghatana (SSS), which was formed in 1977.

Members of the group were influenced by Western feminism and their own political experience. K. Lalitha, Geeta Ramaswamy, Rukmini Menon (of POW), and members of SSS (Stree Shakti Sanghatana) studied classic feminist texts like Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963), Germaine Greer’s *Female Eunuch* (1970), Shulamith Firestone’s *Dialectics of Sex* (1970), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), and Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970). They were also influenced by readings of Marx, Lenin, Che Guevara, and Mao. One of the early discussions in the SSS was on the women in China, with a focus on the Chinese revolution, women’s roles in that revolution, and the conditions of women in China after the revolution. Thus, various versions of feminism emerged in the Telugu context through translation, and it was through SSS publications that the idea of the ‘personal is political’ was propagated from a feminist perspective in the Telugu public sphere. Eventually, the SSS stopped functioning (1984), but it gave birth to two new feminist organizations: Anveshi in 1985 and Asmita in 1991, which built their activism on their predecessors, POW and SSS, and pursued ideas that have some transnational impact. These are the beginnings of feminism in the Telugu context. There were international influences on this feminism, with the most important coming from China, the Soviet Union, and the mostly Anglo-American feminism of the West.

Critical issues: problems encountered in translating feminist texts or ideas into Telugu

Volga faced considerable resistance to her questions and feminist thoughts while she was working in the Marxist-Leninist groups. She left the revolutionary organizations as a protest against
the male domination she experienced there and began translating feminist texts to educate and enlighten the progressive groups and others about the basic concepts of feminism such as patriarchy, oppression, sexuality, motherhood, reproductive rights, and sexual freedom. She faced stiff opposition to her feminist writing from civil society after she left the revolutionary organizations, especially with regard to her novels and translations. Her novel *Swechcha (Liberty)* (1987) is considered the first feminist novel in Telugu, and was criticized precisely for its feminist content. Political parties, literary persons, organizations, and common people alike in Telugu public sphere expressed their opinions, objections, and criticisms of this novel (Volga 1987, v–xiv). Similarly, many of her translations such as *Mudu Taralu (Three Generations)*, *Puttani Biddaku Talli Uttaram (Letter to a Child Never Born)* were subjected to similar criticism for introducing new feminist ideas into the Telugu context. Jwalamukhi, a well-known leftist writer, argued that feminism is an international imperialist conspiracy, implemented through non-government organizations (NGOs). He asserts that as part of the conspiracy feminism has spread widely only after the UN declaring 1975–1985 as international women’s decade. He expresses his fear that feminism might stop the (communist/leftist) revolution in India, and says that the description of sexual intercourse, or the pain women experience after intercourse constitutes “porn poetry” (Satyanarayana and Suryaprakash 1997, 38). His critique is that women writers are “doing business with their body” (Satyanarayana and Suryaprakash 1997, 9–13, 38–40). In another vein, Raavi Sastri, a Telugu revolutionary writer argues that feminism is an issue of middle-class women, that feminists are those who don’t have any work and are ‘gayyalulu’ (quarrelsome) (Satyanarayana and Suryaprakash 1997, 40–41). Raavi Sastri’s argument is upheld by S.V. Satyanarayana, a leftist writer, who says the so-called women’s poetry does not represent the woman. It just represents the desires of elite urban women (Satyanarayana and Suryaprakash 1997, 42).

In this context, Volga and other feminist writers engaged in writing, translating feminist literature, and countering the arguments of leftist writers. They are criticized for translating feminist texts into Telugu as these bring Western ideas that have created radical change in the source culture. While it was not an easy task for Volga to translate feminist texts in the face of these regular criticisms, she took it as a challenge and continued her work to bring feminist ideas into the Telugu context.

**Current research: Volga**

Until the 1980s, there was little writing in Telugu from a feminist perspective, while women continued to face various issues like dowry, eve teasing, and sexual harassment, and started protesting against these and other forms of oppression. However, they lacked an ideological framework to articulate a political stance since the concept of ‘feminism’ was deemed unacceptable and the term itself was used as an offensive expression throughout the 1970s and 80s in the Telugu public sphere. Terms such as ‘feminism’ and ‘male domination’ troubled the revolutionary groups in the Telugu society in this period, as even the progressive thinkers saw it as a dangerous Western encroachment on the revolutionary movements. It was also viewed as a part of a conspiracy to divide the people on the basis of gender. Feminists were seen as overfed, self-indulgent urban upper-class women who smoked cigarettes, cut their hair short, wore sleeveless blouses, and demanded unmitigated freedom. Hence, there was a strong opposition to the translation of feminist texts into Telugu in the 1980s. Yet, gradually, a curiosity developed around this term in the literary and revolutionary circles. In this context, a number of other feminist writers began to bring feminist theory into Telugu, taking the risk of being attacked, even by the politically progressive circles, for translating such materials into Telugu.
Volga is among the most prominent of these feminist translators. Her translation philosophy was based on a strategy of close translation, as she believed that the TL text should be faithful to both the intentions of the original author and the contextual meaning of the SL text. In a conversation with this researcher, she said, “I translated the original text without sacrificing the flavour of the original. I have been faithful to the original in all my translations. I feel that translated text should reach the readers without any injustice to the original text” (Eligedi, 20/11/2013). She is aware of the problematics of ‘faithful’ and literal translation in relation to feminist translation, where it could fail to make a text accessible to the TL readers. She says:

If we translate a feminist text as it is into Telugu, it won’t reach Telugu readers. The main reason for this problem is that English feminist writers write theory from their own experiences, which does not reach the Telugu readers. Therefore, I have taken the theory developed by feminist writers. I used to write essays and books with feminist theory from my experiences and the experiences in Telugu Public Sphere. (Eligedi, 20/11/2013)

Her translation is informed by feminist theory, which she combines with her own political experience as well as the experiences of people in the Telugu public sphere, thus constructing a text accessible to her Telugu readers. Volga also compares the importance of writers in relation to translators, commenting on the role of translators and writers in the following words:

The writer is very important. There is no translator without a writer but the ideas, ideologies of the writer are translated into another language by the translator. The translator also brings new readers to the writer in another language. The important task of the translator is to take the ideas and ideologies of the writer to the new readers in a different language. (Eligedi, 20/11/2013)

As a writer and translator, Volga considers the role of the writer more significant than that of translator, as the translator ‘exists’ because of the writer. However, the translator is also important as he/she is acting as an intermediary between readers and writer. Therefore, both are important in the process of translating or transferring ideas into a new language.

Despite fierce opposition and criticism from leftist groups, Volga continued her translation work. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she translated collections of essays and wrote some significant feminist essays to reduce the negative approach towards feminist thinking in the Telugu public sphere. Initially, these were published in various Telugu magazines like Edureetha (Swim Against Tide), Udayam (Morning), and Nalupu (Black). In 2003, these essays were published as a collection entitled Tholi Velugulu–Sthrivadha Siddhantha Vikasam (First Illumination–Evolution of Feminist Theory (2003)). The book includes 19 essays on feminist theory, translated mostly from English, and published by Swechcha Prachuranalu (Liberty Publications)11 in Hyderabad. Many of these essays can be considered summary translations, as they are translated, rewritten, and adapted from multiple sources in English. However, it is important to note that this form of translation was used by Volga, and many other feminists, to bring international feminist knowledge into Telugu, and offer a historical account of feminist thought across the world. The volume begins with groundbreaking feminist texts, written by pioneers of the feminist movement and offers a comprehensive discussion of feminist ideas.

One of Volga’s essays, titled “Feminism Ante” (Feminism Means) was published on 26 May 1988 in the Udayam (Morning) magazine. In this essay, Volga discusses the misconceptions around
feminism, trying the redress its negative implications in the Telugu culture. She explains the connotations of ‘feminism,’ saying: “Many people do not like the two words feminism and women’s liberation. Traditionalists think that feminism and women’s lib are related to the modern women who cut their hair, wear sleeveless blouse and smoke cigarettes” (Volga 2003, 96). In this instance, Volga not only confronts the traditionalists but also addresses the male social scientists who assumed that feminism was imported from the West. In this essay, she argues that feminism and the women’s liberation movement have been present in society from the time women first started resisting oppression in its various forms (2003, 96). In other words, she contends that feminism is not a Western import but has emerged from the lived experiences of the people and the political movements. She published another essay in 1988, in the July 21–28 issue of Udayam (Morning) magazine, entitled “Socialist feminismsamlo dorakochchu samaadaanaalu” (Answers May Be Found in Socialist Feminism) as a response to some of the questions raised in regard to her essay “What Is Feminism?” These questions were about the difference between Marxist theory and feminist theory as many people in the Telugu public sphere assumed feminism was communist theory. Volga discussed the differences between Marxist and socialist feminists to address this issue.

Volga published many essays on oppression, liberation, love, friendship, sexuality, domestic work, and pregnancy. From 1988 to 1995 she translated and introduced into Telugu the lives and groundbreaking texts of Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, Francis Wright, Judith Sargent Murray, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Suzanne Clara La Follette, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She translated most of these texts from English into Telugu as they were originally written in English. She also translated Kollontai’s works into Telugu from English translations of the original Russian. She introduced the ideas in On the Equality of Sexes (1779), A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), The Subjugation of Women (1869), Women and Economics (1898) and Concerning Women (1926) in the translations. All these translations and essays focused on a wide range of feminist issues like male domination, women’s oppression, and reproductive rights, and thus triggered a debate on feminism in Telugu. These essays triggered heated discussions among leftist organizations in regard to women’s issues, as the women engaged in these organizations had started questioning the male domination in the organizations and in society in general. These essays also enabled Telugu readers to understand the development of feminist theory in various parts of the world. Volga’s translations and explanations thus played a crucial role in enhancing the Telugu readers’ understanding of feminism in the face of criticism from Marxist/revolutionary groups.

**Translated texts**

Volga also faced opposition for her translation of feminist writings from Chinese, Russian and Italian works. Coming from a Marxist background, she was interested in looking at the conditions of women in leftwing movements across the world. Her choice of theoretical texts was based on their relevance to the Telugu sociocultural context, in terms of their themes and the issues discussed in them. For example, Oriana Fallaci’s A Letter to a Child Never Born (1976) raised many questions about reproductive rights and single mothers. Referring to the text, Volga said the following in a conversation:

> These questions are very significant. If it is translated into Telugu, there will be discussion about it. I thought this book would be useful in our context. So, I have translated it into Telugu as Puttani Biddaku Talli Uttaram (Letter to a Child Never Born). I read feminist texts in
English. Some of them raise very pertinent questions. When I think it is relevant and these questions raise discussion in our society, I translate them into Telugu.

(Eligedi, 20/11/2013)

Volga played an important role in not only translating but in selecting the feminist texts that might raise questions about such topics as reproductive rights and encourage progressive discussion in the society. In the 1980s, she started translating the works of Agnes Smedley, who documented the lives of the Chinese women she knew personally, and the events she herself witnessed in the revolutionary movements. Volga started with *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* (*Samanyula Sahasam* 1984), which is useful in understanding the lives of Chinese women activists in the 1920s and 1930s. Volga also translated Agnes Smedley’s autobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth* as *Bhumi Putrika* (1985), which is a semi-autobiographical novel, describing Smedley’s role in the Chinese revolution and her struggle for the liberation of women. This book also gives a detailed account of Smedley’s involvement with social and revolutionary movements across the world, and her involvement in both revolutionary and feminist activism. Volga seems to have identified with Agnes Smedley and chosen this text for its relevance to both the leftist and the women’s movements, emphasizing the interconnectedness between feminist and revolutionary politics.

Volga also translated Oriana Fallaci’s novel *Letter to a Child Never Born* (1976) as *Puttani Biddaku Talli Uttaram* in 1989. It was first published in Italian in 1975 and was soon translated into English in 1976. Volga translated the English version into Telugu, and it was published by the Feminist Study Circle in 1989. Oriana Fallaci (1929–2006) was an Italian author and journalist who wrote this novel in the form of a letter from a young woman to the fetus she carries. It portrays a woman’s struggle as she is caught in a situation that forces her to choose between continuing in a career she loves and motherhood, due to an unexpected pregnancy—a struggle that ends with a miscarriage, and opens a discussion about reproductive rights and politics. By translating the book, Volga introduced and propagated the controversial notion of “vyakthigatham kuda rajakeeyame” (the personal is political) into the Telugu public sphere. The translated book triggered a debate on reproductive rights as the translation raised the following questions, among others: Why is motherhood glorified in literature? Why is there no focus on the complications of pregnancy and the problems women face after pregnancy? How does the state control women’s reproductive rights through society itself but also the institutions of science, technology, medicine, and law? How are family relations, pregnancy, children, and gender relations not merely personal but also sociopolitical issues?

Volga translated Alexandra Kollontai’s *The Loves of Three Generations* (1929) as *Mudu Taralu* in 1988, working from the English translation. The Telugu version was published by the Feminist Study Circle. Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) was a Russian revolutionary, feminist, and the first female Soviet diplomat. She advocated for and wrote extensively about radical sexual politics and free love as she looked at family and marriage as oppressive institutions: “She was instrumental in the legalization of abortion and homosexuality, the creation of a system of quick and easy divorce, and the introduction of a crèche system” (Kirstyiane, 27/05/2008). The book is about an inter-generational conflict between three women: Maria, the grandmother; Olga, the mother; and Genia, the daughter. It describes the experiences and thoughts of these three women about love and the sexual relations of the daughter Genia, revealing the contradictory opinions of the older and younger communist women in the family about life, love, marriage, sexual pleasure, feelings, desires, and relationships. The main message conveyed through this text is that women should not be judged based on their relationships, as it is a common practice to stigmatize women as ‘loose women’ (women of easy virtue) if they have had a relationship with
more than one man. The translation of this text into Telugu aimed to introduce yet another feminist perspective and thus shake up traditional notions of womanhood, even though the act of translation and publication could stigmatize both translator and publisher.

Volga’s *Mudu Taralu* became one of the most debated translations in Telugu. It was reviewed by many Telugu writers in popular Telugu magazines in the 1980s, creating a heated debate and raising questions about gender relations in general and within revolutionary movements in particular. A Telugu Marxist woman writer, Muppala Ranganayakamma (1989, 48–49), criticized the translation for encouraging women and men to have multiple sexual relationships. She also argued that the three generations of women are portrayed in a negative light: the behaviour of Maria, of the first generation, was shameless and self-disrespectful, while Olga and Genia (of the second and third generations) have lost their minds in the name of ‘love’ and ‘liberty.’ Ranganayakamma adds that, “this story also showed that as soon as the political activities are developed, sexual relations also get developed. While showing that Olga, the mother participated in the political activities more than her grandmother, Maria and her daughter, Genia participate in political activities even more than her; it demonstrated that their sexual relations also developed in a similar way” (50). In this comment, Ranganayakamma discusses the connection between these women’s sexual relations and their political activities over three generations. She was critical of this translation as she considered that it might encourage sexual promiscuity. On the other hand, many Telugu feminist activists saw *Mudu Taralu* as a historical necessity, as it was translated in a context of public discussions about feminism, relationships, and sexuality in the Telugu public sphere.

In the introduction to this translation, Volga and the Feminist Study Circle note that a wide range of discussions about gender relations and sexuality has been addressed and clarified in *Mudu Taralu*. They also point out that the idea of translating and publishing the book was considered very seriously because of the possible stigma that could be attached to them as ‘loose women.’ They also revealed their awareness of the society’s views on women’s sexuality, and particularly women’s ‘virginity,’ arguing that this is little more than a myth and a cultural construct that needs dismantling. Finally, they assert their vision of the three women as worthy of the respect they received from their own society, for their services to the country, as communists, regardless of their views on love and sex (Volga 1988, iii–v).

Volga used translation as a tool to bring feminist ideas into Telugu in direct opposition to leftist politics of the time. These translated texts show Volga’s interest in various languages and cultures but she always translated from English. It was the ideology of feminism in its different international versions that motivated her to translate and bring international feminist ideas and thoughts into Telugu for the benefit of the Telugu reading public. Her choice of translations demonstrates her intention to change the thinking of male-dominated society. All her translations (summary translations, essays, books) introduced new ideas into Telugu and contributed to the growth of feminist literature in the Telugu context.

**Volga’s response to contemporary Dalit-Bahujan feminist translations**

 Eventually, Volga also faced criticism from Dalit woman writers for not seriously engaging with Dalit women’s writing. The Dalit movement gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s in Andhra Pradesh, under the influence of Dalit intellectuals such as Kancha Ilaiah and Katti Padma Rao, who raised the caste question with regard to Dalit women and other lower caste women. In the post-Ambedkar period, Dalit women used literature as a weapon to counter...
mainstream feminist writing. When asked about Anveshi’s perspective in dealing with Dalit and Muslim questions in Andhra Pradesh, Susie Tharu, a well-known Indian writer and intellectual responded saying:

Anveshi has been much more open and concerned about issues of difference. [. . .] Consistently, for almost twenty years, we have been invested in it and taken it forward. We have been very interested in seeing the connection between feminist thinking and other kinds of thinking and why it is that the old form of feminism is not hospitable and does not easily invite Dalit women or Muslim women. They do not feel that this is their place. That criticism and that thinking are very central to Anveshi.

(Eligedi, 25/7/2013)

This was a time when feminist organizations and savarna feminists began to think about Dalit and Muslim women’s issues, as Dalit women writers like Gogu Shyamala, Joopaka Subadra, Challapalli Swarupa Rani, and M.M. Vinodhini started questioning the positions of dominant caste feminist writers for ignoring Dalit women’s problems. Volga welcomes the questions and criticisms brought forth by Dalit feminist writers and in an interview with The Hindu, she responds, “That is a good thing. Let their anger flow. . . . We have to wash ourselves in their anger and grow more sensitive to their questions.” However, she does warn that it is “important for them to question patriarchy within the Dalit world and with the same sharpness” (Bageshree, 20/01/2013). The Indian feminist movement was initiated by upper caste/class women, but the questions that they asked are relevant to women from all Indian communities. In India, feminism continues to be a largely urban middle-class movement. Many of the dominant caste feminists realized that there is caste violence and different identity politics facing women from Dalit communities. In a conversation with Volga about caste/class and gender, she says:

I think there is nothing wrong in upper caste/class women raising feminist questions or raising the problems of their own. However, Dalit women have been thinking whether these questions are relevant to them or if not, how to make them relevant to their backgrounds. Since feminist ideology is accepted, people also felt that feminist questions have some sense of justice, these questions; struggles bring some change in the society. This discussion created a space where Dalit women are asserting as Dalit feminists, BC (Backward Caste) women as BC feminists and Muslim women as Muslim feminists.

(Eligedi, 20/11/2013)

Subsequently, with the criticism from the Dalit movement and Dalit feminist thinkers, Volga and other feminist writers also turned to Dalit women’s issues. Volga, Vasantha Kannabiran, and Vindya translated The Combahee River Collective, the Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties, published as Kombahi River Collective Prakatana–Nallajathi Strivaadhula Swaram in 1996. Introduced by the African American feminist, Barbara Smith, one of the pioneers of ‘black feminism,’ the book includes a collection of essays on black feminist theory, black feminist politics, identity politics, the challenges facing black feminist organizing. Obviously, the purpose of this translation was to make black feminist theory available in Telugu so that it contributes to the development of Dalit feminism. In a conversation about this book, Volga said, “I have translated it with the intention that this Black Feminist theory would be useful for the growth of the Dalit Feminist theory in Telugu” (Eligedi, 20/11/2013).
Volga also translated Sushma Deshpande’s play *Nenu Savitribaini* or “Yes, I Am Savitribai” in 2000 from Marathi into Telugu. It was titled *Vhay, Mee Savitri Bai* or “Yes, I Am Savitribai” in Marathi, and first published in Telugu by Asmita in 2000, then reprinted in 2005. The Dalit feminist leader, Savitribai Phule, was a woman teacher and a crusader for women’s education in India, and together with Jyotirao Phule fought the exploitation of Dalits at the hands of Brahmins and other upper caste people. Jyotirao encouraged Savitri to teach in a school, and as soon as she started teaching, voices were heard critical of a lower caste woman becoming a teacher, considering it shameful to the country. Later on, both Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule established schools for the lower caste girls in the state of Maharashtra. In her interviews, Volga pointed out that she was inspired by Savitribai Phule:

I thought that the ideologies of Ambedkar and Phule needed to be discussed. I was inspired by Savitribai Phule when I read the original text. I did not know much about her before reading this text. As I was inspired, I also thought that many people would be inspired if they read this text. This will bring a change also. I also felt that many people would come to know about Phule, Savitribai and their thoughts. I am the first one to translate Savitribai Phule into Telugu.

(Eligedi, 20/11/2013)

Volga’s translation of Savitribai Phule resulted in many other translations of her work into Telugu, drawing Telugu scholars’ and activists’ attention to the writings of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule on post-Dalit and Bahujan movements. Today, several Indian social, political, and caste movements are inspired by the work of Savitri and Jyotirao Phule, and many feminists as well as Dalit and Bahujan activists were inspired by their visions, owing to the translation of *Nenu Savitri Baini* (Yes, I Am Savitribai).

**Conclusion**

Volga acted throughout as an intermediary and an agent of change, having dedicated her life to feminist ideology. She has played a very significant role in translating and introducing ‘feminism’ to Telugu, using her translated feminist texts as tools to aid in the empowerment of women through feminism. Without her translations, feminist thought was accessible only to English-educated women capable of identifying and reading these texts. It was only in the 1980s that Volga began translating them into Telugu, thus immensely contributing to the development of feminist writing and activism in Telugu. Owing to her, Telugu women have been empowered by the feminist notion of “the personal is also political,” and her translations remain a source of inspiration to generations of women and relevant to the present social context. Her work has introduced feminism, raising awareness about gender discrimination, and generating political and intellectual debates within leftist, progressive circles and beyond. Today, feminism is accepted as a serious ideology in the Telugu leftist, progressive, and literary circles, as a result of the relentless efforts of Volga through her translations, her original writings, and her activism. In this sense, Volga’s work is a model of feminist activism through translation.

**Future directions**

This study has mainly looked at the ‘travel’ of feminist knowledge from English into Telugu. There is, however, scope for further studies looking at Volga’s translations from Telugu into English. As there are many translations from Telugu into English, it would be interesting to...
study how feminist knowledge from Telugu has travelled into English and what impact it has had on International feminism. The following research questions may be worth considering: How does the translation of feminist texts shape sociopolitical/identity movements? What is the role of sociopolitical/identity movements in pushing or promoting the translations of feminist texts in Telugu? How do translation and political movements shape each other?

**Further reading**


Tharu, Susie and K. Lalitha, eds. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* in two volumes.

*Women’s Writing in India* has been used as an authentic text on Indian women’s writing across the world. These two volumes offer around 140 texts (poetry, fiction, drama, biographical notes) written by women in 13 Indian languages in India. These volumes include the translations of the work of many Telugu women writers into English.


This is one of the significant texts in the field of feminism and translation in the Indian context. It offers an analysis of feminism in India through postcolonial inquiry into translation. It shows that the discourse of feminism and feminist politics might open up new conceptual–political formulations/strategies through translation.


This is one of the seminal essays in the field of feminist translation in postcolonial contexts. It argues that the translator must surrender to the text as translation is the most intimate act of reading. It offers insights into feminist and postcolonial approaches to translation.


In her study of the context of Kerala the author reflects on the translation of feminism into Malayalam. She looks at the efforts of translating feminism into Malayalam within two distinct modes of translation: the ‘faithful’ mode and the ‘grounded’ mode. This study looks at the work of many feminists in Kerala who have been translating feminist concepts produced in first-world contexts into the local language.


This is a collection of essays on translation and women in the Indian context. These essays explore various questions on women’s writing, women’s language, politics of language, women translators, and the agency of translators.

Sravanthi, Kollu. 2009. *Mapping the Feminist Subject: A Reading of the Women’s Movement(s) in Andhra Pradesh* (M. Phil dissertation). Available at: http://www.efluniversity.ac.in/these_cultural_studies.php

In this study on women’s movement(s) in Andhra Pradesh, the author attempts to map the debates that emerged around feminism in the last few decades through a focus on the feminist subject. This study is based on interviews with eight feminist scholars from various women’s organizations.


This project looks at earlier initiatives to produce higher education material in Indian languages. It examines the reasons for their success or failure in the context of Kannada. It has a chapter on gender studies/women’s studies material in Kannada. It offers a brief history of the discussion on women in Kannada, the emergence of feminism in Kannada, the department/centres of women’s studies in Karnataka. It also includes a report on the workshop on the translation of gender studies into Kannada.
Related topics

Translating feminism; gender and translation; activism and translation; translation and resistance; ideology and translation; translation and agency

Notes

1 Telugu is an Indian language belonging to the Dravidian family of languages. It is the official language of the Indian states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. It is the second largest language spoken in India after Hindi and has around 75 million speakers across the world. The Dravidian language family consists of around 80 language varieties. They are spoken mostly in southern and central India. Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam are the largest languages in this language family.

2 Savarna feminism refers to upper caste feminism that addresses the concerns of upper caste women without any (or with less) regard for Dalit and other lower caste women.

3 This was an armed peasant struggle that began in 1967 in Naxalberi, a village in the state of West Bengal with the objective to occupy the lands of Zamindars (big landowners) and redistribute them among the landless labourers. The slogan of the movement was “The land belongs to those who till it.” It was a violent movement aiming to overthrow landowners and the state.

4 The feminist study circle was started by Volga and other Telugu feminist writers in 1988 with the objective to familiarize people with feminism as an ideology. It played a crucial role in introducing and disseminating knowledge on feminism through its publications and discussions in public forums.

5 Stree Shakti Sangatana (Women Power Organization SSS) was an autonomous woman’s group established in 1977 by a group of women activists. K. Lalitha, Veena Shatrugna, Vasantha Kannabiran, Susie Tharu, Ratnamala, Ambika, Swarna, and Vasantha were among the founders. They worked on the issues like dowry deaths, rapes, single women’s rights, and price rise. They used to read, discuss, research, and document local women’s histories. The demise of SSS gave birth to the two feminist organizations: Anveshi in 1985 and Asmita in 1991. Volga worked with Anveshi for some time. Later, Volga and Vasantha Kannabiran established Asmita. While Volga worked as the first president of the organization, Kalpana Kannabiran was the secretary of the organization.

6 Anveshi and Asmita have been very active in shaping the discussions on feminism and gender in the Telugu public sphere.

7 Satyavathi is a writer and translator who has worked as an English lecturer.

8 Hyderabad Book Trust is a non-profit publishing collective formed in 1980. It supports feminism by publishing translated/feminist texts.

9 Viplava Rachayitala Sangam (Revolutionary Writers’ Association) and Janasahiti (People’s Literary Organization).

10 Sexual harassment or molestation of a woman by a man in a public place. It also refers to unwanted sexual remarks/advances, groping, etc.

11 Swechcha Prachuranalu (Liberty Publications) is specialized in publishing feminist texts.

12 Daughter of Earth was published in 1929 in English. It was republished in 1987 by the feminist press with a foreword by Alice Walker and an afterword by Nancy Hoffman. It was published in Telugu in 1985 by Hyderabad Book Trust.

13 The Feminist Study Circle started with the objective to familiarize people with feminism as an ideology. The study circle held many discussions on feminist literature. These discussions resulted in many publications: Puttanibiddaku talli uttaram (Letter to a Child Never Born), Maku Godalu Levu (We Do Not Have Walls), and Mudu Thalalu (Three Generations).

14 The word ‘Dalit’ means broken, downtrodden, or oppressed. It refers to the people who are discriminated and oppressed based on the caste.

15 Dalits have been leading the movement or struggle against untouchability and caste-based discrimination. The aim of this movement is the annihilation of the caste system.

16 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar proposed the idea of getting rid of the caste system and introduced many protections for the Dalit community in the constitution of India. He also fought for women’s empowerment and education as he believed that education is the most powerful weapon to change the lives of women. The term ‘post-Ambedkar period’ refers to the period after him when Dalit women started asserting their position inspired by his philosophy and writings.
References


Translation of women-centred literature in Iran
Macro and micro analysis

Sima Sharifi

Introduction/definitions

The objective of this chapter is to provide insight into the translation of feminist writings before and after Iran’s 1979 revolution, and examine how the Islamic Republic of Iran (henceforth, IRI) has influenced this process. To take into account the transformation of women-centred texts in translation across two different eras – in a monarchy and under an Islamist government – I attempt to answer four questions: First, which books on women-centred texts (i.e., feminist literary fiction or non-fiction) were published in Persian translation, before and during the 1970s and the reign of the Shah? Second, which women-centred texts were translated into Persian in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, i.e. after the Islamic Revolution, what kinds of changes can be traced in the translated texts over these decades, and why were these made? Third, how has the androcentric agenda of Ayatollah Khomeini (henceforth, Khomeini) and its Islamization of Iranian society, from his arrival on 1 February 1979, influenced Iranian women’s lives, societal culture and as a result the translation of feminist or women-centred texts? Finally, what happens to a source text (ST) which is committed to ending the subordination of women and is meant to have political impact when it is transferred into an overtly and stiflingly patriarchal target system?

The definition of women-centred or feminist texts I adhere to here is the sort of writing that Eva Lennox Birch defines as “enabling an expression of the world as it is perceived by the female” (1994, 241). Such women-oriented texts may be authored by women and/or involve thematically pertinent female characters with an eye to the question of equal legal, political, social, and economic rights for women.

To locate Persian translations of women-centred literature of foreign origin prior to and after 1979, I tapped into three resources: the data base of سازمان اسناد و کتابخانه ملی جمهوری اسلامی the online catalogue of the National Library & Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran (henceforth, library), Iranian expatriate scholars, and an Iran-based translation studies journal. Parallel to my library-based research, and in the hope of adding to my inventory of women-oriented texts in Persian translation, I reached out, via email and/or telephone, to Iranian scholars residing in North America, Australia, and the UK, all of whom are known for their feminist work. I provided these professors with a short list of book titles by well-known authors usually referred
Women-centred literature in Iran
to as feminist such as George Eliot (Middle March 1871), Betty Friedan (The Feminine Mystique 1963), Virginia Woolf (A Room of One’s Own 1929), Simone de Beauvoir (Le deuxième sexe 1949), and Kate Millet (Sexual Politics 1970). I added that any writings by these or other authors interested in the status of women were welcome. As they were unable to provide any useful information in regard to the existence of Persian translation of feminist texts before 1979, they introduced me to colleagues and PhD students who they thought might be able to help and whom I immediately contacted. Most of my contacts were certain that no translations of such materials had been produced in the decades prior to and including the 1970s. As for Simone de Beauvoir’s Le deuxième sexe, however, some replied in the affirmative. One PhD graduate, Golbarg Bashi said, “I know The Second Sex was translated because my mother used to read it in the 1970s” (email). But when I asked her for further information, she admitted that she was unable to locate the book.

A PhD candidate offered, via email, an explanation about the reasons for the lack of a coherent women-friendly translation policy in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. According to him, in those decades, there were three potential groups who had the tools, power and funds to engage in the act of translating women-centred literature but for a variety of reasons failed to do so: (1) the dominant institutions of the monarchy which had no political interest in the consciousness-raising effects of such literature; (2) the religious class of clergy that was unwilling to invest in secularism, in spite of its close connection to the masses and independent flow of income; (3) leftist groups who were among the most educated and linguistically competent, but who considered feminist literature a capitalist product with a divisive effect on the working class (email).

Since my research focuses on the translation of women-centred literature, I did not pursue the question of whether or not the said institutions devoted their resources to translating other literary genres, such as poetry or autobiography, for example. That being said, I agree with my contact’s argument about the scarcity of feminist translations in Persian in the decades leading up to, and including, the 1970s possibly due to potential translators’ ideologies, and their disinterest in feminism. Further, the sparse translations of feminism may also be explained by the low rate of literacy in Iran in the decades before the 1970s. In her article, “Educational Attainment in Iran,” Mila Elmi (2009) writes that in 1966 only 17% of the Iranian female population, and 39% of males, were literate. Even if there were feminist translators, the low literacy in Iranian society made feminist translation in that period highly unfeasible. In 1976, however, the literacy rate had more than doubled to 35% for women and 47% for men; this stems from the Shah’s decree, strictly implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, dictating the need for girls and boys to be literate. After 1979 the literacy rate climbed to 52%, 74%, and 80% for females, in 1986, 1996, and 2006 respectively, a phenomenon that may explain not only the increase in the rate of translations in those decades but also the reason for the change in the kind of books translated. This will be discussed in the following sections.

The other source I reached out to is an Iran-based Translation Studies Quarterly, originating in Tabatabai University in Tehran; it has published an article titled “The historiography of the translation of women in contemporary Iran” (Farahzad et al. 2015, 57–74) with the stated objective to examine the kind of material Iranian women have chosen to translate in different historical periods over 100 years, since the early 20th century. The research paper claims that between 1901 and 2011, Iranian women have translated over 1700 books of a variety of genres and topics from English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Although the article includes the number of translations, no book titles, names of writers or translators, or the countries of the source texts are mentioned. Neither does the study reveal if any feminist books are considered in the research, or to what extent Anglo-American literature may have been prevalent in Persian translation during the Shah’s reign (1941–1979), which might be expected as the USA had a strong influence on
Iranian politics and culture at the time. In short, my approach to the Iran-based journal, similar to my outreach to expat scholars, failed to pinpoint any feminist translations beyond what I had already accessed through the library.

Further, there seem to be no studies of Persian translations of English work with feminist perspectives. A number of studies exist that focus on cross-cultural communication and linguistically specific translation issues of certain English novels. These tend to appear in article form, in online journals, written by Iranian scholars or students based in Iran, with a focus on a linguistic theoretical framework, such as Katharina Reiss’ text types. While this chapter examines and compares the translations of two eras with an eye to the sociocultural contexts of the target society, the linguistically based studies are not concerned with contextual questions. This brings me to the point that there may well be no previous study dedicated to a comparison of Persian translations spanning several decades; nor is there any study of women-centred texts translated into Persian. On both counts, this chapter intends to fill the gap.

Next, I will examine the search results for the translations published before the 1979 revolution.

**Translations of women-centred texts before the revolution: 1930s–1970s**

Through library searches, I accessed Persian translations from 1936 to 1978, a year before the 1979 Iranian revolution (Table 3.3). Some of these translated authors are known for their work on social justice and women’s issues; for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 1852, trans. Keyhani 1936), Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*, 1868, trans. Doostdar 1949), Pearl S. Buck (*The Good Earth*, 1931, trans. Lorestani 1957), Christiane Rochefort (*Les petits enfants*, 1961, trans. Najafi 1965), Simone de Beauvoir (*Djamilah Boupacha*, 1962, trans. Taraji & Pooyan 1965), and Edward Albee (*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, 1962, trans. Hariri 1977), among others. Common thematic threads connect these books expressing sentiments opposing colonialism, slavery, autocracy, and poverty. One may argue that the translators sympathize with the themes of the source texts, and deploy language to challenge the dominant despotic culture in Iran, for as Olga Castro puts it: “Language and translation inevitably are tools for legitimizing the status quo or for subverting it” (2013, 6). While 13 books were translated between the 1930s and the 1960s, five translations were published in the 1970s, and all of these 18 translations raised awareness of the poverty and social injustices plaguing Iranian society. In fact, such translations seem to underline the mood of protest that ruled the sociocultural discourse in the decades leading up to the 1979 revolution which overthrew the Shah of Iran and the Pahlavi dynasty (1924–1979). Table 3.1 shows the texts containing feminist/social justice themes found in Persian translations in the 1970s.

In Table 3.1, the heading of the last column, ‘Location,’ points to the labelled shelf in the library where these books are held. The importance of this location and its effect on readers will be explained later. Sparse as they are, the translated texts produced in the 1970s are inquisitive, combative, and subversive; but with the exception of Woolf’s *The Waves*, they are not strictly feminist.

**Persian translations of women-centred texts since the establishment of Islamist rule after the 1979 revolution**

**1980s**

As demonstrated in Table 3.2, there is an increase in translations of feminist work in the 1980s. Despite, or perhaps because of, the anti-feminist climate of the 1980s, and probably because of the already increased rate of literacy, Iranian translators seem to have enlarged the scope of
Table 3.1 Library search results of somewhat feminist translations: 1970s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Source Text, date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Translator, date</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albee, Edward</td>
<td><em>Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf</em>, 1962</td>
<td>Rejection of a number of myths: marriage institution, American dreams of happiness, success, manhood; illusion as an escape from reality</td>
<td>Hariri, Alireza, 1977</td>
<td>Beena</td>
<td>CS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolf, Virginia</td>
<td><em>The Waves</em>, 1931</td>
<td>Existential questions: meaning of life; self-definition; alienation of the feminine from self and other or permeating into and defining one another; male dominance</td>
<td>Daryoosh, Parviz, 1977</td>
<td>Amir Kabir</td>
<td>CS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
translated books by selecting women-centred texts for translation. While in the 1970s only one out of five translated books were clearly women-centred (e.g., Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* 1931/1977), the 1980s saw the production of 15 translations of 13 women-centred books (see Table 3.2). A possible additional explanation for the increased number of such translations in the 1980s, a turbulent decade when a long list of revolutionary changes, detrimentally affecting women’s lives, were put in place as laws (section 3) is that at least some of these translations had already been produced in the preceding decade(s), but revised and reprinted in the post-1979 years. Some others may have been purged from the national library of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, according to my contact in the USA, the Persian translation of de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, existed in the 1970s, but does not show in the library’s search results.

As indicated in Table 3.2, in the 1980s several of Simone de Beauvoir’s fiction and non-fiction books were translated. Similarly, while Jane Austen’s work is absent in translation in the 1970s, four of her novels were imported into Persian in the 1980s.

**Persian translations of feminist texts: 1990s and 2000s**

There is a plethora of translations of feminist articles on unofficial websites in Iran that self-declare as feminist, one of which is the web page *The Feminist School*, founded in 2009 and managed by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, who is also an author and translator of books focused on women’s issues. The web page was initiated by a group of Iranian women activists involved in women’s rights campaigns. In ‘About Us,’ the managing director and editor in chief, Ahmadi Khorasani, describes the web page as a “platform for voicing women’s issues” and “demand for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Source Text, date</th>
<th>Translator, date</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>De Beauvoir, Simone</td>
<td>The Second Sex, 1949</td>
<td>San’vi, Ghasem, 1981</td>
<td>Toos</td>
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<td>Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée, 1958</td>
<td>San’vi, Ghasem, 1982</td>
<td>Toos</td>
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<td>La femme rompue, 1967</td>
<td>Iran-doost, Naser, 1985</td>
<td>Ordibehesht</td>
<td>Shavaviz</td>
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<td>Vieillesse, 1972</td>
<td>Toosi, Mohammad Ali, 1986</td>
<td>Ordibehesht</td>
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<td>Mrs. Dalloway, 1925</td>
<td>Daryoosh, Parviz, 1983</td>
<td>Ravaagh</td>
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<td>Emma, 1815</td>
<td>Aghaa-Khaani, Ayoob, 1983</td>
<td>Ordibehesht</td>
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<td>Sense and Sensibility, 1811</td>
<td>Khorosavi, Hossein, 1984</td>
<td>Golshaaei:</td>
<td>Mazhar</td>
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<td>Sense and Sensibility, 1811</td>
<td>Karami Far, Abbas, 1984</td>
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<td>Villette, 1853</td>
<td>Teymoori, Farideh, 1986</td>
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<td>Mansfield Park, 1814</td>
<td>Haghighi, Maryam, 1986</td>
<td>Kooshesh</td>
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<td>Bronte, Charlotte Voynich, Ethel Lilian</td>
<td>Jane Eyre, 1847</td>
<td>Afshar, Mehdi, 1987</td>
<td>Mahtab: Erfan</td>
<td>CS</td>
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<td>Gadfly, 1897</td>
<td>Shaheen, Daryoosh &amp; Soosan Ardekaani, 1987</td>
<td>Negaretstan</td>
<td>Ketab</td>
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<td>Eliot, George Buck, Pearl S.</td>
<td>The Mill on the Floss, 1860</td>
<td>Yoonesi, Ebrahim, 1989</td>
<td>Negaah</td>
<td>CS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Imperial Woman, 1956</td>
<td>Badre’i, Fereidoon, 1989</td>
<td>Chekavak</td>
<td>NE</td>
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equality” (original in English). The home page features a variety of women-centred articles written in Persian, or translated, by both women and men, that explore topics such as peace and women, advocate the transformation of the male-dominated face of the Iranian parliament, and run reviews of feminist magazines and books.

Translated articles on the Feminist School web page include Cassandra Balchin’s “Fundamentalism and Violence Against Women” (2010; trans. Faranak Farid, 2011), an essay about Pierre Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination* (1998; trans. Norman Rahimi, 2013), Michael Kaufman’s “The Guy’s Guide to Feminism” (2011; trans. Norman Rahimi, 2012), Mary F. Rogers’s *Ecofeminism* (1974; trans. Parastoo Ansar, 2014), and Judy Whipp’s “Pragmatist Feminism” (2004; trans. Djelveh Djavaheri, 2010), among many others. None of these articles turn up in the search results at the national library. It seems that the relatively free transnational exchange of feminist concepts and thoughts, albeit in the form of short articles, takes place only through unofficial Iranian channels such as the aforementioned Feminist School, which has become a leading platform showcasing women’s experiences of everyday life under the Islamist theocracy of Iran.9

Unofficial feminist web pages tend to focus on strictly feminist material for translation, but the same cannot be said about books translated since the 1990s, which do turn up in the official channel of the library. Here are a few examples: Pearl Buck’s *Imperial Woman* (1956, trans. Shahshahani, 1992) or Ethel Lilian Voynich’s *Gadfly* (1897, trans. Nahid Dade-Bakhsh, 1996); and in the 2000s, Phyllis Chesler’s *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* (2001, trans, Farideh Hemmati, 2008). However, the library also offers other translations for the 1990s and beyond that can be considered feminist work, such as Maya Angelou’s poem *I Shall Not Be Moved* (1990s, trans. Farzin Hooman Far, 1996), Kate Chopin’s *The Story of an Hour* (1894, trans. Rooh Anguiz Poor Naseh et al., 2006), Marilyn French’s *The War Against Women* (1992; trans. Toorandokht Tammadon, 1994), and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; trans. Fatemeh Sadeghi, 2013), among others.

Between 2000 and 2017, the source books selected for translations become increasingly bold and more provocative in their approach to feminist consciousness-raising. A case in point is the translation of the Canadian author Rupi Kaur’s debut poetry collection *Milk and Honey* (2015) and Hillary Rodham Clinton’s *What Happened* (2017). Kaur’s poetry is described by some critics as “explor[ing] female experiences with evocative and accessible language”10 and engaging in “raising awareness of taboos on menstruation and sexual abuse.”11 This book of poetry is translated in two consecutive years, 2017 and 2018, by three different translators. Two translators, Samaneh Parhiz-kari (Tehran, Mikhak Publishing) and Niloofar Ebrahimi, worked independently and produced one translation each in 2017. A third translation was created by Fahimeh Godaz Chian in 2018.


The search results for Persian translations of English feminist fiction and non-fiction in three periods, prior to and including the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and beyond, available through the national library, display a remarkably consistent pattern: fewer translations turn up before or during the 1970s while the number of translations steadily increases after the 1979 revolution. For the sake of space, I do not present the numerous translations produced during those periods. However, I will show the number of translations from the 1930s to 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and beyond in Tables 3.3 through 3.5 respectively.

Table 3.3 shows that in the years prior to and including the 1970s, before the revolution, the number of women-centred translations are 18 in total, and only five out of the 18 volumes are
produced in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the first decade after the revolution, a total of 15 translations were produced (Table 3.4 based on the details of Table 3.2). In the 1990s, the number of translations of women-centred literature were slightly higher than those of the 1980s. The greatest increase in women-centred books in Persian translation takes place in the 2000s with a total of 148 translations (Table 3.5). It is conceivable that the proliferation of women-centred publications in Iran has created a clash of ideologies between these and the anti-feminist leaning of theocrats in power. The following discussion is one possible example of how the IRI deals with such an ideological collision.

In the library search results of 2018, I observed a situation, pertinent to the translation of feminist literature, which did not exist in previous searches (2012 and 2014), and that is the marking of some feminist book titles (Table 3.1 and 3.2). In the column ‘Location,’ certain books are marked as either Closed Shelves (CS), Non-Existing (NE), Donation Shelves (DS), or the “source text may not be loaned.” To illustrate, here are some examples of marked book titles: Alice Munro’s *Runaway Stories* (2004; trans. Mostafa Shayan, 2016) is located in Closed Shelves, while Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928; trans. Mohammad Naderi, 1991) is marked Non-Existing. Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is placed in the Closed Shelves for one translation (Soheil Sommy, 2003) while it is Non-Existing for another (Seyyed Habib Gohari Rad, 2018). Mary Wollstonecraft’s text of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is an interesting case which clearly reveals the patriarchal zeal of the IRI. The *Vindication* is a book written in protest against Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) in which he opines that women’s education must be inferior to that of men, because if a woman is fully educated, she “would no longer be bound by her marital and domestic responsibilities” (qtd. in Jane Afary 1996, 197). The library search turns up no translation for the *Vindication*, which I therefore assume is not available in Persian, and the English source text is marked “may not be loaned.” However, Rousseau’s *Emile* has been translated by at least four translators. All of these translations, as well as the source texts, both in French and English, seem to be accessible to the public.

To disambiguate the meaning of the terms Closed Shelves (CS), Non-Existing (NE), and Donation Shelves (DS), I asked my contact, residing in Iran, to find out from his local libraries the correct meaning of these terminologies. The librarians’ reactions and answers varied depending on whom he asked:

- “These words mean what they say: CS means not accessible to the public, NE means the library does not possess the volume, and the DS means the books were donated.”

When my contact pointed to a case marked with both CS and DS, the librarian simply said, “no clue.”
Table 3.4 Number of translations of feminist books (1980s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
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Table 3.5 Number of translations of feminist books (1990s and beyond)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2010</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2018</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- “Never seen such a thing in our local library.”
- “These are special classification systems of the national library.”
- “I really don’t know.”

Yet, one librarian tested my contact’s claim by searching Jane Austen herself. She was genuinely shocked at the sight of such results as Closed Shelves appearing on her own computer. Finally, she could only say “I really don’t know.” Since my contact was eventually questioned by the security personnel of some of the local libraries about his ‘suspicious’ interest in such a matter, he quit his line of inquiry, out of fear. As a result, I cannot offer a conclusive explanation for these terminologies. Yet, the terms seem to indicate a simple purging of books from the library shelves.

The library marking of certain books suggests that women-centred literature, even in post-translation and publication, may be at risk of being obliterated by obstructing public access to them. It may be argued that some of these books do exist in the black market. However, not everybody, students and researchers in particular, can afford to purchase costly books; nor can it be expected that every reader navigates the underworld of unauthorized market. The Closed and Non-Existing shelves deprive that section of the population who are most in need of books in public libraries.

**How do the sociopolitical changes influence women and translation?**

To unpack my third research question, I will look at the impact of the social-legal-political discourses on women and what they might mean for translations and book publishing in the IRI. The integration of sociopolitical contexts into the analysis of translation has a long history in translation studies, hence the coined term “cultural turn” by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (1998, xxi). In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, “the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran repealed many of the legislative and social changes of the Pahlavi era that were seen to conflict with the laws of Islam” (Lewis and Yazadanfar 1996, xii). Within two months after his arrival, Khomeini undid decades of women’s achievements in the area of legal reform. He abrogated the family protection law which had allowed women to initiate divorce and have custody of their children, and subjected women’s travel and employment to their husband’s permission;