

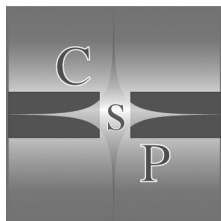
# Translating Identity and the Identity of Translation



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Edited by

Madelena Gonzalez and Francine Tolron



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## INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY POETICS OF TRANSLATION

The aim of this volume is to use the problematic of translation in both its metaphorical and literal acceptations in order to explore the concept of identity and its manifestations in cultural, artistic and literary production, particularly, but not exclusively, in postcolonial societies which have recently undergone profound upheaval. The changing nature of identity in its local and global manifestations is examined as well as the manner in which an identity may be “translated” for the consumption of a specific market. To what extent can translation and the adaptation that it implies furnish access to a foreign culture? Is it possible or even desirable to attempt to transcend cultural barriers through translation and/or adaptation, whether the translator’s agenda be literary, political, ethical or even metaphysical? When we attempt to transfer meaning from one medium or language to another what are the challenges and pitfalls facing the cultural interpreter or “translator”. In an era of late-capitalist globalisation of culture has homogenisation replaced local specificity or is the latter merely recuperated as a facet of marketing strategy? These are some of the questions which will be addressed by the authors of the pieces collected here as they seek to negotiate a philosophy of translation for the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The idea for a collection of essays on identity and translation stemmed from the need to find an interface between research being done in our university on the politics of identity and its manifestations in language and the teaching of translation studies at Masters level. The aim was to link together the scientific and the pedagogical and create a forum for scholarly exchange on a subject which is an essential component of contemporary poetics, but rarely addressed as such. As the project grew in scope, it became apparent that several specific areas of interest and approaches to the subject were surfacing in suggestions for contributions. The familiar questions vexing the process of cultural exchange in its postcolonial manifestations, above all the obsession with authenticity and the “untranslatability” of certain contexts, drew a vigorous response, particularly from writers and scholars on the margins (Francophone Canada, India) and from those working within the diaspora. The losses and gains of the transcultural encounter in Canada (Muna Shafiq), India (Sunny Singh) and Croatia (Russell West-Pavlov) are shown here as constituting a challenge to any conception of

culture as monolithic, bound and independent. The manner in which contemporary literary texts such as Maria Bodrožić's *The Player of the Inner Hour* (2005), Hiromu Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* or Sunny Singh's *Nani's Book of Suicides* (2000), dramatised performatively their own translation strategies, may point the way forward towards a new postnational form of literary studies better equipped to take into account the interculturalism of contemporary life and its altered identities.

Translation as an exercise in writing and even in the rewriting of the self is particularly relevant to the Canadian context where an increasing number of English- and French-speaking authors now write in the language of the "other", translate their own works back into their first language, or mix writing and translation as cultural practices. As Daniel Gagnon explains with examples from his own fiction, this may constitute one way of critiquing colonial cultural politics and sharing out cultural space more equally. The struggle to retain local specificity in the face of the pressures of globalisation puts translators in the role of cultural mediators and literary agents for marginal experiences. Agnes Whitfield illustrates how, by their participation in literary reviews, their involvement with publishing houses, and their investment in scholarly exchange, they are instrumental in developing new traditions of literary translation. For Debashree Dattaray, the practicalities surrounding the act of translation of contemporary Indian novels (T.S.Pillai's *Chemmeen*, 2004, Rahi Masoom Raza's *Topi Shukla*, 2005), such as the usage of glossary and footnotes, "the translator's note", "introductions" (often penned by eminent writers/academicians/litterateurs/translators), cover design, price-tag, quality of book-binding, the policies of publishing houses, foreground translation, not merely as a transfer between cultures, but also as a form of linguistic and cultural practice which produces and fixes the identity of the "Other". These experiences of inter- and transcultural exchange, each unique and context specific, resonate with each other in order to constitute a thought-provoking excursion into the pitfalls and triumphs of cultural translation. However, the thematic of translation obviously cannot be limited to the purely literary. By examining how ideology is created across cultures, Sourav Kargupta seeks to problematise translation within the context of Third-World Nationalism. He shows how the multiple histories and imagined identities of formerly colonised countries give rise not to a poor copy of a Eurocentric original but to a different text altogether, a many-faceted, fragmented narrative of possibility which upsets the original model posited by traditional theorists of Nationalism from Gellner to Anderson. It is to be hoped that thanks to this work of creative recovery of the lost histories of Asia and Africa, the reconciliation of the global and the local, of identity and difference, may finally be achieved.

In contrast to such culture specific examples, other contributors have sought to examine the ethics of translation and its place within the Academy. Claire Davison sees the politics of translation in the classroom as raising important questions about textual authority and faithfulness, as a compromise is negotiated between target and source in a postmodern age where meaning is elusive and constantly shifting. Such questions are equally relevant for the translator of non-literary texts entrusted with philosophical, political or ethical meaning, as Bruno Poncharal affirms. How, for instance, does a particular linguistic approach influence the reinterpretation through translation of texts in the Social Sciences? If, as Lyotard suggests in his reading of Wittgenstein, certain utterances, particularly word plays, are literally untranslatable, how does this affect the possibility of determining a philosophy of ethics and justice? Can translation take place in the spaces between the descriptive and the prescriptive and thus neutralise the spectre of the untranslatable? David Rudrum attempts to answer this question.

It is only a short step from the ethics of translation to its metaphysics and the question: What is translation and what role does it play in the construction of an identity, both literary and even spiritual? For Nabokov, fiction is a form of self-translation and a life-giving ritual turning literalism into liberalism, a revival out of the ashes of the loss contingent on exile. Ruxanda Bontila shows how, thanks to the interplay of languages and intertextual allusions, it can invigorate a variety of cross-referential territories no longer belonging to the author alone. For the translator, the problem of identity is equally as pressing for she is at the centre of the troubled relationship between the text, the author and the reader. However, when the translator becomes active and starts translating, she becomes more than a simple reader, for the confrontation with the creation of a new text is also a confrontation with the principle of reality. Her task is to make the unsaid audible and the unrepresentable visible by listening to the unconscious of the text, and deciphering its associations. For Pascale Grosbras these analytical activities are at the basis of her identity which is at the same time a perpetual interrogation of her own fantasies and desires. Translation as recreation of the self as well as a reciprocal exchange with the subject to be translated is at the heart of Peter Riley's *The Dance at Mociu*. Like a latter-day Pound, he combines both imitation and creation in his encounter with Transylvanian society. Sara Greaves shows how, by entering the realm of language of the other and allowing the other to enter his, he proposes a circular reciprocity for the experience of translation. This contemporary concept of the metaphysics of translation is obviously very different to that of the distant past. "Translators" of French texts at the Renaissance were as much annotators and commentators as translators, according to Sophie Alatorre. They saw the act of

translation as a real contribution to literature, a contribution which was often recuperated by the state as a way of reinforcing national identity.

The question of the translator's burden and responsibility towards the text, but also towards society, is also one of pragmatics. Bernard Hoepffner explains that, very often, the professional translator's task seems an impossible one, that of traducing a text without changing its meaning in the slightest, while changing every one of its letters! However, it is questionable whether a translation which does not carry the burden of the source language is still worthy of being called a translation. This of course puts the translator in a double bind which may become excruciating when dealing with sub literary genres such as the contemporary commercial romance. When the text's very identity is based on a series of clichés, and the instructions given to the translator are to make the text flow without taking too many liberties, Martine Desoille shows how the translator may be tempted or even constrained to improve on the original. There are other cases when faithfulness to context are of the utmost importance, however. For the translator of Geoffrey Philp's *Benjamin, My Son* and Ifeona Fulani's *Seasons of Dust*, the big issue is how to re-create a Jamaican atmosphere/language/culture for a French reader without resorting to the reggae-and-marijuana stereotype. If the speech of the novels' protagonists conveys their cultural/historical/geographical background, is there a way to translate it without losing too much of that context? Christophe Rosson attempts to provide an answer. The transposition into French of the experiences of a young New Zealand soldier in France during the First World War (*A Sovereign in my Pocket*) also provides an interesting comment on context. The difficulty resides in how to distance a familiar world through temporality and this is made more complex by the change in cultural landmarks for the contemporary French reader. Instead of it being a case of "one of our boys" setting out to discover a new world, the French reader witnesses a foreigner entering a familiar world which is nevertheless distant in time, explains Isabel Ollivier.

Distance and proximity are indeed at the heart of any examination of the dynamics of translation and its cultural, social, linguistic, ideological and even metaphysical dilemmas. By taking the reader on an itinerary through Eastern Europe, Canada, India, Jamaica and New Zealand and examining en route the problems of intercultural identity in an age of globalisation, we hope to arrive at the much-needed reconceptualisation of the art and practice of translation called for unanimously by the authors in this volume.

Madelena Gonzalez

## CHAPTER ONE

# TRANSLATING THE MARGINS: TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS AND THE PARADOXES OF HETEROGENEITY

PART I:

THE ALTERED IDENTITIES OF OTHERNESS

LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY IN GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S  
*BORDERLANDS*, ANTONIA D'ALFONSO'S *AVRIL OU*  
*L'ANTI-PASSION*, AND HIROMI GOTO'S *CHORUS OF*  
*MUSHROOMS*

MUNA SHAFIQ

**The Relationship Between Languages**

Honor is self-esteem made visible in action.

Ayn Rand

The connection between languages and narrative identity should be addressed, I believe, in Barthesian terms as *une relation privilégiée*,

Marquée par une différence sensible, rendue à l'état d'une sorte d'inflexion affective absolument singulière, comme celle d'une voix au grain incomparable; et chose paradoxale, cette relation privilégiée [sans]...aucun obstacle à la multiplier: rien que des privilèges, en somme; la sphère amicale était ainsi peuplée de relations duelles (d'où une grande perte de temps: il fallait voir les amis un à un: résistance au groupe, à la bande, au raout). Ce qui était cherché, c'était un pluriel sans égalité, sans in-différence. (Barthes 1995, 67)

Marked by a perceptible difference, brought to the condition of a kind of absolutely singular affective inflection, like that of a voice with an incomparable timbre; and paradoxically...[in] this privileged relationship: nothing but privileges, in short; the sphere of friendship was thus populated by dual relations (whence a great wasting of time: [a need] to see...friends one at a time; resistance to the group, to the circle, to the crowd). What was wanted was a plural equality, without in-difference. (Barthes 1977: 65)

Even though Barthes is referring to friendships between people, I believe his observations could just as easily apply to an individual's relationship with languages. Although we might think such relationships warrant a privileged existence outside the constraints of social, economic and political powers, this is not the case. However, literature affords us the opportunity to experience representations of identity as privileged states—a magical resolution of

opposing and/or conflicting cultural signifiers.<sup>1</sup> Thus, an interaction between dominant languages and untranslated *other* languages on the periphery of a dominant culture allows writers to stabilize and subvert the identity of protagonists who travel between languages as a way to explore hybrid representations of identity.

In this article, I will present two Canadian writers and one Chicana writer who travel between languages in their texts. In so doing, they demonstrate their reluctance to privilege one language over another. Moreover, they invite readers to explore the different possibilities of meaning that are elicited by such an encounter. I will illustrate three aspects of this interaction: i) the possible gains and/or losses the unilingual dominant language reader faces; ii) the contestation of the hegemony of one language's narrative voice in North American life stories; and iii) the desire between characters that is often a metaphor of desire for the other language and culture.

Before I address these points, I will briefly contextualize three texts that provide some interesting ideas about writers who travel between languages: Chantal Zabus's *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (1991), Sherry Simon's *Le Trafic des Langues* (1994), and Catherine Leclerc's Ph.D. dissertation "Des langues en partage? Cohabitation du français et de l'anglais en littérature contemporaine" (2004). Zabus focuses on linguistic code-switching, presenting the untransferability of culturally specific linguistic expression. In her study, she also examines the West African linguistic logos in order to deconstruct dominant and authoritarian inscriptions of cultural and linguistic signs and reveals how the dominant English language is affected by, or transformed as a result of, an interaction with *other* languages. Simon explores two types of plurilingualism in Quebec literature: i) as a specific social and linguistic *other* code within an existing hierarchical social and linguistic structure; and ii) as a hybrid multi-lingual narration or dialogue. Leclerc's dissertation addresses the viability and consequences of co-lingual texts with an equal, or near equal amount of narration in French and English.

Although the three novelists I have selected for this paper represent different geographic, cultural and linguistic origins, their use of code-switching, non-translation writing strategies, and interaction between languages complement or touch upon the ideas dealt with by Zabus, Simon, and Leclerc. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* documents some of the historical events that have led to the realities of the U.S. Southwest and Mexican borders today. In this autobiographical and historical story (what she refers to as *autohistoria*), she also narrates some of her lived experiences as a *mestiza* (hybrid) Chicana feminist and lesbian. Antonio D'Alfonso's *Avril ou l'anti-passion*, addresses, albeit subtly, the divide between Quebec and English

Canada and one man's longing to be recognized as a French-Canadian and Italian citizen with latent ties to English Canada and the English language. In Hiromi Goto's novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, two protagonists—a grandmother and a granddaughter—employ the oral tradition of telling stories to reinvent themselves as bicultural (Canadian and Japanese) women, celebrating their ethnic differences. All three writers posit intersections between Spanish, Italian and Japanese—their language(s) of cultural origin (respectively)—in dominant English and French texts.

I am interested in contrasting Anzaldúa's autobiographical narrative with D'Alfonso's and Goto's works of fiction for two reasons. In spite of differences of gender, ethnicity, culture and citizenship, these writers share an affirmation of linguistic hybridity. In addition, their hybrid writing strategies demonstrate the impossibility of locating the self, one's subjectivity, without reference to another individual. This is what Paul Ricoeur terms self-hood, the concept of *oneself as another*. This notion of self-hood, where the fate of the individual is tied up in the fate of others is an integral aspect of Ricoeur's philosophy in *Oneself As Another*. Moreover, in "The Self and Narrative Identity", Ricoeur also explains that narrative emplotment, what he defines as "the kingdom of the as if" plays an integral role in the construction of narrative identity. In this article, I will address Ricoeur's "kingdom of the as if" as unfulfilled longings of quasi-fictional and quasi-historic representations of social realities and lived experiences.<sup>11</sup> This notion of the "kingdom of the as if" allows writers to blur the binaries between fictional and real experiences. Similarly, an intersection of untranslated words and phrases between a foreign language and a dominant one creates a bilingual or plurilingual writer/reader pact. The protagonists in Anzaldúa's, D'Alfonso's and Goto's texts assert difference, as Simon (1994, 65) points out, as "la traversée vers l'autre est [...] le retour vers soi [...] le vœu d'établir une nouvelle relation, à travers la rencontre des langues" ["The crossing towards the other is [...] the return towards oneself [...] the wish to establish a new relationship through the meeting of languages"; my translation].

This "nouvelle relation" may also be viewed as a needed convergence of differences that enables Anzaldúa's, D'Alfonso's and Goto's subjects to "organize their life retrospectively" and re-create their lived experiences on their own linguistic and cultural terms (Ricoeur 1992, 162). *Borderlands/La Frontera* addresses differences of language, race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation that shape Anzaldúa's *mestiza* identity. The anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, published in 1981, provides a time-specific framework for Anzaldúa's polemical discourse in her *autohistoria*. The collection of journal entries, letters, public addresses, poems, transcripts, personal conversation and interviews illustrates the different feminist perspectives of women of colour in the U.S. in the 1980s. In the anthology, Anzaldúa (1981, 163) identifies herself as a Third

World woman writer “similar and yet so different” from other writers. She can only wield her power through writing and by reclaiming all her tongues.

Moreover, as a lesbian of color in the 80s, she views herself as “invisible both in the white male mainstream [literary] world and in the white women’s feminist world, though [she acknowledges that] in the latter this is gradually changing” (165). She describes her writing as organic, stating that “it works when the subject [she] started out with metamorphoses alchemically into a different one, [for instance] one that has been discovered, or uncovered by the poem” (172). She measures “the meaning and worth of [her] writing by how much [she puts herself] on the line and how much nakedness [or vulnerability]” she achieves (172). Her refusal to translate the Spanish and Nahuatl (indigenous) words, phrases, epigraphs and poems in *Borderlands/La Frontera* asserts her *mestiza* specificity.

Contrary to Anzaldúa’s polemic discourse in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I read D’Alfonso’s novel *Avril ou l’anti-passion*, and especially the narrator’s interaction between French, Italian and English (and even some Spanish and Hungarian) languages, as a celebration of hybridity. Although the protagonist, Fabrizio, reveals a deep-rooted sense of angst and a latent loss of national identity, he explores his marginalized state predominantly as an Italoophone other and as a national other citizen on the periphery of a dominant French-Canadian culture.

Finally, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, in many respects a follow up to Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan*,<sup>iii</sup> Goto illustrates travel between languages in more serious terms, as an instrumental aspect of (re)constructing an immigrant’s marginalized individual and group identity. In Kogawa’s and Goto’s novels, the old woman embodies the group. While Obasan’s silence in Kogawa’s novel symbolizes the group’s silenced and fragmented identity, in Goto’s novel, Naoe’s incessant communication in Japanese symbolically (re)constructs and (re)asserts the collective voice of Japanese Canadians: “Words, words, words, WORDS....My body folds over itself under the weight....*akiramete*...the words seep from my nostrils, my ears, even leak from my paper dry eyes” (Goto 1994, 21). Naoe and her granddaughter, Murasaki affirm their otherwise peripheral status to the dominant English Canadian culture by narrating their stories in a mixture of English and untranslated Japanese. Moreover, as women of colour, they construct their particular feminist voices (like Anzaldúa) while celebrating their ethnic differences.

### **The Unilingual Dominant Language Reader**

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where

this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.

Barthes, *The Death of the Author*

An intersection between untranslated minority languages and dominant ones encourages readers to recognize ethnic differences and seek meaning in plural terms, *outside* the hegemony of one language. In such texts, the author engages the reader, especially the unilingual one, in an interactive process of meaning-making between languages. As James Clifford (1988, 95) points out, “in a world with too many voices speaking all at once, a world where syncretism and parodic invention are becoming the rule, not the exception...it becomes increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent ‘culture’ or ‘language’”. Thus, multi-vocal North American literary writers such as Anzaldúa, D’Alfonso and Goto cannot pigeonhole narrative identity within one linguistic voice.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* complicates the writer/reader pact and the processes of communicative exchange and coherence through an intersection of untranslated words and passages in Spanish and other Chicano languages. In the first part of the text, there are over twenty short and long epigraphs along with random words and phrases interspersed on almost every page of her seven essays. The second half of the text is a collection of Anzaldúa’s poetry. Her hybrid language writing strategy, with its fusion of poems, Indian legends and myths, historical and personal stories, allows her to choose when and how she privileges the Chicana community (or Spanish speakers) with a more intimate reading of her narrative while simultaneously excluding the monolingual English reader from this intimacy.

In *Avril ou l’anti-passion*, I do not interpret non-translation as a tool to contest the hegemony of one language or exclude the unilingual French reader; rather, I view it as a symptom of Fabrizio’s inability to identify himself through one linguistic voice. He manifests what Simon (1994, 146) refers to as “la conscience diasporique [...] à l’impossible retour chez soi, et aux multiples appartenances du présent” [“The diasporic conscience [...] the impossibility of returning home and multiple belonging in the present”; my translation]. Moreover, in comparison to Anzaldúa, Fabrizio’s usage of untranslated Italian and English words and sentences is sparse (less than fifty references). His discourse has a philosophical, not a polemical, tone. Therefore, an absence of translation does not signify the same form of exclusion for the unilingual French reader. I choose to view this particular interaction between languages as an invitation to the reader, rather than an insistence, on interpreting the text in hybrid terms. I recently asked D’Alfonso if he could clarify what this interaction represents for him. It “means nothing,” he replied. “It is artificial since there is no intersection between the English and French sides of this country...what I try

to do is pretend that they do exist, or better do not exist and make that non-reality become one.”

Goto's usage of untranslated Japanese words and phrases in *Chorus of Mushrooms* also addresses the non-reality of a hybrid linguistic exchange; this time, however, it is between Japanese Canadians and English Canadians. In her essay, “Words Like Buckshot: Taking Aim at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*”, Mari Sasano (1998, 6) suggests that Goto's refusal to translate Japanese words is her way of “marking out her liminal territory to her readers”. In an article entitled “Translating the Self: Moving between Cultures” Goto (1996, 12), explains that “the text is also a place of colonisation” where “difference exists, all cannot be understood, language could and can be a barrier”. As I understand Goto, language difference should not be erased; rather, it needs to be articulated as an obstruction, otherwise the language in question will disappear or be replaced by another language. Goto (12) assumes that most of her readers are “English-speaking and [they] do not understand Japanese.” Unlike Anzaldúa, who speaks to readers in her Chicana community, as well as those outside of it, Goto's focus is on the unilingual English reader.

However all three writers converge on one point: in their travel between languages, each writer constructs hybrid narrative identities that stand in opposition to and challenge notions of authenticity based on pure cultures. Moreover, I view their non-translation writing strategies as a creative privilege because this strategy obliges the unilingual dominant language reader to seek meaning outside the dominant language.

In addition, these code-switching writing strategies allow readers to experience language in Bakhtinian terms, what Simon (1994, 28 144) refers to as “un jeu ouvert de langages en dialogue” [“an open play of language in dialogue”] where, as Simon suggests, the “I” of the minority voice weakens the “we” of the dominant voice. Simon (47) also affirms the notion of (re)invention stating that “la langue et la culture ne sont pas à retrouver dans une logique de la conservation, mais à inventer, dans le risque et l'exigence de la créativité” [“language and culture are not to be found in the logic of conservation but through invention, in the risk and the requirement of creativity”]; my translation].

Thus, the reader who understands the *other* language (or seeks translation) engages in a Barthesian privilege of friendship and a creative privilege of interpretation while the unilingual dominant language reader (who does not seek translation) remains excluded. Self-understanding, I believe, develops from a deeper understanding of the other and the act of non-translation in texts promotes a more enriched exchange between readers and the stories they read since these texts insist on and contest the hegemony of one language and engage the reader in a plural linguistic interpretation of the text.

## Contesting the Hegemony of One Language

It is not very useful to say “dominant ideology”, for the expression is a pleonasm: ideology is nothing but an idea insofar as that idea dominates. But I can go further subjectively and say: *arrogant ideology*.

Barthes, *Roland Barthes*

While D’Afonso’s use of untranslated Italian affirms that “the rediscovery of one’s inner self is directly linked to the rediscovery of one’s mother tongue”, his hybrid writing strategy does not contest the hegemony of one language (Salvatore 1999, 105). Similarly, Goto’s use of untranslated Japanese suggests that suppressing a language may be equated with suppressing an important aspect of an individual’s or a group’s cultural identity. However Goto does not overtly contest the hegemony of the English language. Gloria Anzaldúa’s text in particular emphatically contests the hegemony of one language, since she does not possess a homogeneous cultural or linguistic identity. Therefore, employing different linguistic expressions is a strategy for remaining outside the ideology of one dominant group, language or cultural reference. As a result, “intervening in an interconnected world, [she is]...to varying degrees, ‘inauthentic’: caught between cultures [and] implicated in others” (Clifford 1988, 11). Much like James Clifford’s task as ethnographer, Anzaldúa travels between cultures, exploring her identity in “mixed, relational, and inventive” terms (10). Being Chicana means that, like Clifford, she must ask the intercultural identity question: “Where are you between?” rather than “Where are you from?” because she is “more or less permanently in [cultural] transit” (Clifford 1992, 109). Her usage of, and attachment to, different languages also embodies Bakhtin’s notion of “exotopy...the most powerful level of understanding,” where one culture can only be understood through its “external aspect” to another culture (Todorov 1984, 109). As Simon (1994, 46) puts it, “c’est dans et par l’étrangeté que se construit l’identité” [“it is in and by strangeness that identity is constructed” ; my translation]. Thus, Anzaldúa’s perspective outside Chicano and American cultures is an important one.

According to Bakhtin (1986, 7), “in the realm of culture, outsidership is a...powerful factor...[I]t is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly”. Anzaldúa identifies her outside position as the borderlands—a physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual space. As she states, it exists “where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 1999, 19). To shrink the space between her multiple subjectivities, Anzaldúa interweaves Spanish and English narratives. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001, 37), she

effectively traces the hybridity of her own identity in a way that suggests how multiple and intersectional identities can be. The very title both differentiates English from Spanish and joins them at the border of the slash. The [subject] “I”/eye move back and forth across the border, just as Anzaldúa writes of navigating the intersections of sexuality, ethnicity, gender, and nationality at the constructed borderland of Texas and Mexico.

Anzaldúa (1999, 20) explains that “the switching of ‘codes’ in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all these, reflects [the Chicano]...language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands”.<sup>iv</sup> Writing simultaneously in different languages without translating everything into English allows her to break down paradigms and extract her narrating “I” and her ideological “I” from any “traditional frames...oppressive histories and myths that censor” their difference (Smith 1993, 154). For instance, the section in the first essay of *Borderlands/La Frontera* following a Spanish epigraph, reads “The *Aztecas del norte*...compose the largest single tribe or nation of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today [who]...call themselves Chicanos and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlan (the U.S. Southwest)” (Anzaldúa 1999, 23). However, in another essay Anzaldúa explains that, out of shame, many Mexicans do not acknowledge their indigenous ancestry. Thus, this quotation, nestled between Mexican lyrics and an English poem interspersed with Spanish, speaks to her immediate need to assert her indigenous heritage.

Moreover, her hybrid literary strategy (a mix of poetry, historical and personal references in different languages)—what Sidonie Smith (1993, 155) calls “the autobiographical manifesto”—allows Anzaldúa to transcribe her narrating “I” as a “moi poétique” (to borrow Quebec poet and translator Jacques Brault’s expression).<sup>v</sup> It also permits her to employ language as a metaphor of Ricoeur’s “kingdom of the as if” as she enters a “dialogical engagement with history and fantasy” (154). By having her ideological “I” and her “moi poétique converge”, Anzaldúa unites her role as writer and poet. For instance, her bilingual description of the U.S. and Mexican border as an open wound—*una herida abierta*—where the “Third World grates against the first and bleeds”, conveys her political message poetically.

The use of untranslated Spanish also allows Anzaldúa to contest, as she puts it, the “white superiority [of Americans who] seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (Anzaldúa 1999, 29). However, many of the translations (from Spanish to English) that I sought out, reveal that Anzaldúa’s refusal to translate should not be read as an overt tool to exclude the unilingual English reader. For instance, the following expression: “Son las costumbres que traicionan. La india

en mi es la sombre: La Chingada, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue. Son ellas que oyemos lamentando a sus hijas perdidas” (44) roughly translates as “It is the customs that betray. The indian in me is a shadow: the fucked one [her own translation from earlier on], Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue [proper names]. They are the ones we hear lamenting [or mourning] their lost daughters”. The English references before and after this Spanish reference arguably convey a similar meaning because in these passages Anzaldúa speaks about betrayal from inside one’s own culture. For instance, she states that “the worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer...not me sold out my people but they me...because of the color of my skin they betrayed me” (44). This convergence of similar meanings demonstrates Anzaldúa’s desire to “write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to [directly] translate” from Spanish to English (81). Moreover, her refusal to translate *all* her references in Spanish reflects her refusal to accept English as her only language.

Zabus refers to code-switching between languages as an assertion of choice and a resistance to domination. According to African writer, Chinua Achebe, “the complete renunciation of English” (quoted in Zabus 1991, 35) is an irrelevant option for “people who speak different mother tongues” (25). However, Achebe also recognizes that “English is inherently unsuitable for conveying the African experience” (35). Similarly, Anzaldúa’s integration of Chicano languages demonstrates her desire for binary positions to converge, to express her particular subjectivity as a Chicana. In doing so, she claims what Sidonie Smith (1993, 155) refers to as “the subjectivity of [the] universal man,” where Anzaldúa represents “authority, legitimacy, and readability”. However, she does this outside a phallogocentric claim of universality.

Employing a hybrid writing strategy also allows Anzaldúa to assert her Chicana feminism. She defines this genealogy as “being both male and female...the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (Anzaldúa 1999, 41). Anzaldúa contests any ideology (including her Chicano culture) that denies her right to be Catholic/divine/pagan/supernatural/sexual/homosexual/Mexican/Indian/Texan/male/female. I employ slashes between these words to demonstrate how “multiple and intersectional” her identity is, both uniting and dividing her at these different borders (Smith and Watson 2001, 37). She explains that nothing “in [her] culture approved of” her so she must confront the “rebel” within, her “Shadow-Beast” (Anzaldúa 1999, 38).

In the introduction of Anzaldúa’s text, Sonia Saldivar-Hull translates one of Anzaldúa’s Spanish epigraphs. She refers to it as a “proclamation of independence for the *mestiza* bound within a male-dominated culture”, a personal address to the “men and male identified women in her community” (3).

As a proclamation, it also becomes an official document, therefore reading it in Spanish authenticates its message to the Chicano community. Anzaldúa establishes an intimate dialogue between herself and this audience [her Chicano community elders] “who [could, but] refused to speak English” (3). Her refusal to translate this epigraph suggests that the passage is intended only for these community members—those who represent its phallogocentric population—the Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures, who, in her words, “have no tolerance for deviance....[They view] the queer...[as] the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe’s fear [of] being different, being other and therefore lesser” (40). While Anzaldúa does not ignore negative attitudes towards lesbians outside these three cultures, this quotation declares her sense of otherness within the Chicano, Mexican and Indian cultures.

In addition, her hybrid discourse and emphasis on cultural differences distinguish her feminism from the dominant discourse of white feminists. This attachment to different languages also asserts Anzaldúa’s Chicana lesbian specificity. According to Gayatri Spivak (Lionnet 1995, 3), women should not limit themselves to questions such as: “Who am I? [They must extend their inquiry to also ask:] Who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?”. Anzaldúa rejects white feminists who “want...to apply their notion of feminism across all cultures...They never left their whiteness at home....However, they wanted...[her] to give up...[her] Chicananess and become part of them; [which meant she] was asked to leave [her] race at the door” (Anzaldúa 1999, 231). Anzaldúa rejects any universal reading of her Chicana subjectivity, particularly her Chicana lesbian feminism.

She also asserts her own particular hybrid genealogy through a feminist discourse that “interpolates [her]...as native to the Americas and with a non-Western, multiple identity” (2). She employs a narrating “I” to “find [her] own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on [her]” (38). As she puts it, “I am my language...[and] until I can accept as legitimate Chicana Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself” (81). In “Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault”, Honi Fern Haber (1994, 102) suggests that Foucault’s “view of the relationship between language and power” rejects “the view that the power of phallogocentric discourse is total”. In this essay, Haber argues that since “discourse is ambiguous and plurivocal, it is [also] a site of conflict and contestation. Indeed, women, [like Anzaldúa] can adopt and adapt [discourse]...to their own ends” (102). For instance, Anzaldúa interweaves songs and poetry into her narrative to connect her Indian origins with her Mexican ones. Anzaldúa also “contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, the old politics, the *ancien regime*...our social reality...what Donna Haraway describes as our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction”

(Smith 1993, 157). Anzaldúa rejects social realities—fictional or real—created by *any* male dominant culture.

## Metaphor of Desire

What is utopia for? To make meaning.  
Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*

As I suggested at the beginning of this piece, avoiding universal readings of narrative identity implies, I believe, *une relation privilégiée* or the sphere of friendship spoken of by Barthes. In this sense, I think it can be said that each of Anzaldúa's seven essays illustrates a different desire and her longing to "enact her multiple subjectivities" (Anzaldúa 1999, 72). In essay one she addresses her desire to reclaim the Texas land as Mexican and indigenous. In essay two she speaks about personal rebellion and betrayals and her desire to be heard as an "Aztec female" because "her Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (43). Essay three speaks of pagan beliefs specific to Mexican Catholics. In the next essay she describes the Coatlicue state as the "symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche" (68) and how knowledge and consciousness (in her case, asserting her lesbian sexuality as *une relation privilégiée*) allow her "a travesia, a crossing," a move towards a deeper self-awareness and inevitably, self-acceptance (70).

Similarly, in essay five, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa explains how the Chicano languages are "neither espanol ni ingles, but both...a forked tongue, a variation of two languages" (77). As a result, she speaks Standard English, Working class and slang English, Standard Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, and other related dialects (77). As she states, "there is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (80). Travelling between languages, Anzaldúa demonstrates her desire to have, and to use, her "Indian, Spanish, [and] white...tongue" and explore her multiple subjectivities (81). In essay six, she reveals that writing lets her express her multiple desires and "mak[e] meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be" (95). Her final essay identifies her desire for "a *mestiza* consciousness...a breaking down of paradigms [one that]...depends on the straddling of two or more cultures" (102).

In Antonio D'Alfonso's *Avril ou l'anti-passion*, the protagonist, Fabrizio, also straddles different cultures by travelling between three languages. Living in Montreal means that he lives as "trois personnes en une seule" (D'Alfonso 1992, 180). He embraces the city with all its defects and advantages, [and] its "regards divers" (180). As Lianne Moyes explains in her essay, "Global Baroque: Antonio D'Alfonso's Fabrizio's Passion", "the text [*Avril*] emphasizes the set of choices Fabrizio confronts each time he speaks or writes and concretizes the way in which languages cohabit the space of Montreal" (5). His

identity is Italian “as much as...Québécois and Canadian,” thus it is “plural and deterritorialized” (5). While the city defines him as a hybrid citizen, Montreal is Fabrizio’s playground and his prison. Like Anzaldúa, he has no homogeneous or fixed point of cultural reference. He will never be either a *Québécois de souche*, (a so-called pure-stock citizen), a native Italian, or an English Canadian. However, travelling between languages allows him to validate his otherwise marginalized status.

Unlike Anzaldúa and Goto, D’Alfonso does not address any overt barriers of ethnicity, race or gender. Moreover, Fabrizio’s godparents’ environment illustrates the existence of the hybrid lifestyle he longs for. He describes his godfather as “un Notte québécois...tout ce qu’[il] désir devenir” (D’Alfonso 1992, 63) [“a Quebec Notte...everything he wanted to be”]. His Montreal born Italian godfather marries a Québécois and Fabrizio cannot believe that she speaks his family’s Italian dialect as fluently as his parents. He describes her ability to speak Italian as “la modernité, de l’ouverture québécoise” (62) [modernity, and the Quebec openness”]. His own friendship with Mario Berger, a francophone Québécois, and his affair with Mario’s wife, Léah, a woman of Hungarian cultural origins, illustrates his implicit longing to reconcile the Anglo and ethnic populations with the Québécois. However Fabrizio’s description of his relationship with Léah as “une relation morte,” suggests that Léah is the symbolic trope of an irreconcilable divide (175). In his essay, “La Passion du retour: Ecritures italiennes au Québec”, Pierre Nepveu (1996, 113) suggests that “l’un des passages les plus révélateurs du roman est celui où Fabrizio se retrouve une fois de plus avec son amante d’origine hongroise, avec laquelle il trompe son meilleur ami québécois, Mario, triangle dont la dimension symbolique interculturelle est assez savoureuse” [“one of the most revealing passages of the novel is where Fabrizio once more finds himself with his lover of Hungarian origin, with whom he deceives his best friend, Mario, a Quebecker; the symbolism of this intercultural triangle is to be savoured” ; my translation]. Léah’s presence may be read metaphorically, as a bridge that unites and divides the English and ethnic groups from the Québécois.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, with the help of her grandmother Naoe, Murasaki constructs her own bridge between the Japanese and Canadian cultures, largely through storytelling. Moreover, her involvement with a nameless Japanese immigrant who does not speak English symbolically reflects her desire to be recognized as a dominant female other of Japanese culture. Her nameless lover also represents a homogeneous trope of Japanese identity and his relationship with Murasaki illustrates her longing to connect with her lost Japanese cultural origins. Growing up in rural, white Alberta, she discovers as early as eleven years of age “that the shape of [her] face, [her] eyes, the colour of [her] hair affected how people treated [her]” (175). However her grandmother Naoe instills

a sense of pride in Murasaki and educates her about Japanese culture through stories. Storytelling also allows Naoe to symbolically empower Japanese women.

Through the stories she tells, Naoe emphasizes Japanese cultural difference, empowering the Japanese female in her role as creator. She also celebrates “women’s voices, storytelling, and female creativity” (Ty 2004, 152). For instance, Naoe tells Murasaki about the legendary sister and brother “Izanami and Izanagi” who leave “their celestial home to create the world...Japan” (Goto 1994, 45). Naoe tells another story about a *yamanba* [a mountain woman] who swallows maggots and pumps them from her breast as “millions of soft-skinned people,” emphasizing the importance of creativity and the power stories hold in (re)constructing and (re)affirming lost or forgotten traditions (118). In the essay, “Thrumming Songs of Ecstasy: Female Voices in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*”, Eleanor Ty (2004, 153) describes the rewriting of folktales in this novel as “attempts to re-script Japanese Canadian female subjectivity and to challenge...the ‘old story’ of otherness”. Naoe’s imaginative storytelling skills allow her to reconstruct the collective identity of Japanese Canadian women and empower them—freeing them from both the constraints of the male dominant Japanese culture and the dominant white Canadian culture.

Naoe also re-scripts her granddaughter Muriel’s Canadian identity by renaming her Murasaki, after the first female to write a novel in late tenth century Japan. By renaming her granddaughter, Naoe symbolically transforms Murasaki into a renowned storyteller and feminist hero. Similarly, Naoe adopts an English translation of Murasaki and calls herself Purple. This English translation marks Naoe’s entry as a bicultural Japanese-Canadian citizen. It also allows Naoe to enter the rodeo, an Albertan English space, as the “Purple Mask...a mystereerious bullrider and participate in a male-dominated white sport (Goto 1994, 160). Masking her identity, “[s]he becomes “known, even renowned, but [since] no one knows who the Purple Mask is, [it represents] both an unmistakable sign of identity and a guarantor of anonymity” (McCullough 2003, 160). Naoe’s masked participation suggests that she does not want the dominant group to be privy to her entry into their world—thus implying there is more power in anonymity. Neither Murasaki nor Naoe hides “behind [their] new names,” they simply “adopt names to suit their identities, creating a movement between what each is born with and what each eventually chooses [or longs] to become” (Sasano 1998, 4). These new names also symbolically allow each woman to enter another linguistic and cultural space.

## Contrasting Metaphors of Desire

The struggle is inner...the struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

By way of concluding, I would like to contrast the different metaphors of desire in each text. Anzaldúa’s desire for binaries to converge resonates in all her essays and poems. She describes her existing hybrid in-between space as “awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating...because...[she is] in the midst of [continual] transformation” (Anzaldúa 1999, 237). D’Alfonso’s protagonist, Fabrizio, also longs for hybrid subjectivity, in terms of citizenship and language, however he illustrates this desire through his relationship with Mario and Léah. Through his exploration of these relationships, he rejects the idea of “un pays pur” [“a pure country”] primarily because, as he states, “nous sommes tous d’ailleurs” (D’Alfonso 1992, 88) [“we are all from somewhere else”]. By singing to Fabrizio in Italian and Hungarian, during and after their lovemaking, Léah personifies “une nation [sans]...frontières géographiques” (88) [“a nation without geographic frontiers”].

Although Goto’s subjects, Naoe and Murasaki also develop their desire to be bicultural Japanese and Canadian citizens through their relationships with their lovers; their hybrid discourse primarily addresses their longing to (re)connect with Japanese traditions and the Japanese language. However, Murasaki celebrates the importance of speaking English *and* Japanese. Through her hybrid discourse, she promotes what Leclerc describes as the co-lingual presence of languages. Although the untranslated Japanese references do not quantitatively equal the English ones, the Japanese language co-exists on a creative level, on an equal footing with English. This is especially true in Murasaki’s narrative—she enjoys juggling two languages.

At one point, she questions her lover about his fluent English knowing that he has never formally studied it (Goto 1994, 187). However he responds by stating, “[W]hen I speak with you, I only speak in Japanese” (187). Murasaki’s inability to distinguish between English and Japanese words may be interpreted as her inability to choose one language over the other. As she tells Naoe, “when there isn’t one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there’s something lacking in your tongue, I’ll reach for it in English. So I say to you in English [:] I love you Obachan” (54). Through this quotation, Murasaki implies that there are no words in Japanese to say I love you, thus she needs *both* languages to articulate her feelings and thoughts. Thus, interweaving English with Japanese in her discourse means that Murasaki needs both languages to

communicate. Naoe points out that the cultural and linguistic space that initially divides Naoe from Murasaki, the space where “one thing end[s] and another begin[s]” should be inseparable (213).

Ultimately, this fluidity—a radical putting into question of binaries—exists in all three texts. To borrow Leclerc’s (2004, 318) idea, a co-lingual interaction between languages, or any interaction of untranslated foreign languages in a text, may be read as a contestation of social inequalities between people. In my research, I will continue to locate and examine texts that travel between languages so that I may explore the losses and gains that result when writers on the peripheries of a dominant culture employ nontranslation, code-switching writing strategies to explore and construct hybrid representations of narrative identity.

## Notes

- i. I am borrowing the term “magical resolution” from Hal Foster who refers to trauma discourse (“where the subject is evacuated and elevated at once”) as “a magical resolution of contradictory imperatives in contemporary culture” (124).
- ii. I am borrowing the terms “quasi-fictional and quasi-historical” from *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory* by David Kaplan.
- iii. Kogawa’s novel addresses the oppression, internment and dispersal, one instigated in public discourse (especially the press) suffered by Japanese Canadians during and after World War II.
- iv. The notion of the new language may be interpreted as “Un texte à cote d’un texte [...] qui n’arrête pas de parler” [“A text alongside a text [...] which doesn’t stop talking”]; “Etre mal dans sa langue comme on est mal dans sa peau, c’est reconnaître que [...] les rapports entre les langues mettent en jeu des asymétries de pouvoir, mais que la vérité de la langue fonctionne à la fois en surface et ailleurs” (Simon, 61) [“Feeling uncomfortable in one’s language as one feels uncomfortable in one’s skin, means recognising that [...] the relationships between languages involve asymmetries of power but the truth of language functions both on the surface and elsewhere”] (editor’s translation).
- v. Brault explains, “je flotte dans une inter-langue [...] ; un texte ni d’un autre, ni de moi, se dessine en forme de chiasme. La voix cassée invite à la mort, comme elle ouvre à l’infini du possible” (quoted in Simon 62-63) [“I float in an in-between language; a text which is neither someone else’s nor mine takes shape as a form of chiasmus. The voice thus broken opens up to death as it opens up to the infinity of the possible”] (editor’s translation).

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# WRITING IN MY OWN FOREIGN LANGUAGE: DILEMMAS OF AN INDIAN WRITER IN ENGLISH

SUNNY SINGH

From the very beginning, even before the first words have been written on a page, a writer perforce struggles to translate her experience, ideas and imagination into words. That initial translation has long been accepted as a hazard of the profession, replete with all the mistranslations, misunderstandings and errors that human frailty brings to translating our multi-dimensional life into the tightly controlled two-dimensional existence of words. However, for me, as an Indian writer choosing to write in English, that initial translation of thoughts into words is further complicated, perhaps even preceded by, another one: of finding the words to fit and encapsulate cultural concepts that seem crystal clear in my first language—Hindi—and yet have no logical linguistic or cultural equivalent in English.

In this essay, I address some of these issues, although privileging the perspective of the writer over that of the academic. Although I have no ready solutions to offer, I shall share with you some of the dilemmas of a writer who is attempting to translate not just words, or even experiences into writing, but trying to somehow convert cultural concepts and traditions into a language that often appears inflexible, and more often than not, seems to defeat my best efforts at stretching, kneading, moulding it to my purposes.

To place my writing in context, perhaps we ought to begin with my childhood, spent in equal measures in the sacred city, Varanasi, and in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. Shuttleing between the army cantonments in the mountains and my grandmother's rambling old house near the Ganges also meant commuting between languages. From the very beginning, my world was multilingual and we spoke primarily Hindi and English, but also Tibetan and Bhojpuri, at home. The first two were for immediate members of family, friends and schoolmates. At that early stage, in multi-lingual classrooms, marketplaces and army messes, they were the two easily trade-able linguistic commodities, of which everyone seemed to possess at least some.

Tibetan was learnt, spoken and forgotten all before the age of ten because of our geographical situation and my father's job with the Tibetan refugees. It made for a great medium of communication for playmates and the myriad of