

Multilingual, Multifeminisms

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Como hispano parlante que ha luchado para encontrar artículos geográficos en español, mucho menos feministas, y como interprete y traductora profesional que ha trabajado por años para hacer nuestras luchas para la justicia social mas multilingües, quiero antes que nada reconocer y agradecer el importante trabajo que han hecho las editoras de ir creando espacio para geografías en otros idiomas al incluir ensayos en alemán e indostaní.

As a Spanish speaker that has struggled to find geography articles in Spanish, much less feminist ones, and as a professional interpreter and translator who has worked for years to make our struggles for social justice more multilingual, I want first of all to recognize and thank the editors for the important work they have done in making space for geographies in other languages by including articles in German and Hindustani.

Including articles in other languages is a great start towards, as the editors put it, “destabilizing Anglo-American dominance” so that feminist geographies can be more open. I wish, however, that translations had been offered in an appendix – at least a translation of an abstract, or of a longer summary. I do understand that the editors were trying to shake us up by not providing translation, but I think this could have been accomplished with putting the non English texts in the body and only providing the translations in an appendix.

When I first read this text I assumed that translation was not provided because there was not the funding to translate them and publish them bilingually. In general there is little to no funding for translation in geography. As we work to change this, it is especially important that we prioritize funding translation *into* English. I was surprised to learn from Joos Fortuijn’s chapter that there are more articles written by Anglo authors in non-English journals than

articles written by non-Anglophone authors in English language journals (although it's so hard to even *find* non-English language journals online I'm not sure how reliable this statistic is. Many Spanish language journals are not online and/or are not well indexed. But it is anecdotally my experience that those journals often have articles translated *from* the English, while the same certainly cannot be said of English language journals.)

In my ideal world every journal would have a budget to regularly, professionally translate and republish significant articles first published in other languages. We are certainly not there yet. I thank Lisa Nelson for suggesting that, as a start, the American Association of Geographers ([AAG](#)) could create a translation fund. All too often it is expected that bilingual authors should do their own translations, and, for example, write in English. This can be a huge barrier, for even if you speak another language well, writing an academic piece in that language is quite a bit more difficult.

As well as doing more translation (written), we could also do a much better job of offering interpretation (oral) at conferences. In a [Society and Space](#) editorial, Desbiens and Ruddick (2006) argue for more conference interpretation¹ and describe how the International Critical Geography (ICG) conferences have highlighted this need. As they point out, the professional, simultaneous interpretation (into headphones) offered at some sessions in Mexico offered a dramatically different experience, and contrasted to sessions where occasional informal consecutive (out loud) interpretation was offered by non-interpreter bilingual geographers in the crowd, who were unable to convey all of the message, nor then participate themselves. Though in Mexico most interpretation was offered from English into Spanish, and indeed Desbiens and Ruddick stress the importance of interpretation for the experience of limited English speakers, I would argue that for conference interpretation our emphasis and priority, like translation, should be *into* English. Though interpretation is often thought of as a service for those with limited English, it actually benefits most those listeners who are limited in other

¹ They refer to it as translation, but it is clear from the context that they are referring to interpretation (oral). Although this is a common conflation, one of the steps we can take towards being a more multilingual discipline is to properly use these terms so as to be clear about which language service we are talking about.

languages, offering them a window onto the other ways of seeing that other languages offer.

However, neither professional interpretation nor translation is enough. As Fortoojin points to in her chapter, issues, writing and argumentation styles are quite different from place to place. I personally have been struggling with this as I have been translating a book on femicide in the Americas from Spanish into English, because often the writing and argumentation style that is considered more professional in Spanish is precisely what is considered *unprofessional* in English, so a direct translation will often sound unacademic. One solution is to offer much closer editing before and after translation that can serve as a cultural bridge and make the article more accessible in a different context. Or perhaps better yet, we could be more open to reading and hearing different styles of work that do not necessarily get right to the point.

As Richa Nagar puts it in her fabulous essay in this collection entitled “Languages of Collaboration”, “language resides at the core of any struggle that seeks to decolonize and reconfigure the agendas, mechanics, and purposes of knowledge production”. She questions *who* we write for and where, and points to how the political economy of publishing deepens the North/South divide, and how this is connected also to an estrangement between the production and the distribution of knowledges. She also argues that it is “important to reverse the routes of circulation by which knowledges are produced and disseminated”.

These issues are also addressed in Geraldine Pratt’s absolutely fantastic short chapter (if you read only one chapter, read this one) entitled “Complexity and Connection”. It takes her earlier piece (also included, and entitled “Reflections on poststructuralism and feminist empirics, theory and practice”), and carries it beyond a US context. She argues, again, for the central role that geographers can play in working through differences between women. Rather than spouting tired universalizing generalizations, geographers can actually do the hard work of translating *across* contexts, material differences and, as she puts it, “competing, situated universal norms and claims” (70), rather than simply translating ideas *into* the language of the dominant framework, or absorbing them into a generalization. As a translator, I couldn’t agree more. Although I have been arguing here for prioritizing and funding more translation

into English, I envision this as only one part of an engaged back and forth building of more connections between (as the book calls us, though I do not love the term) “Anglo-American” and other feminist geographers. Gerry Pratt is absolutely right that as geographers we have an important role to play in building a transnational feminism by drawing, as Cindi Katz (2001) calls them, counter-topographical contour lines that show how the same processes affects us in different ways. Doing so can help us articulate struggles across different places. These lines, as Pratt puts it, open possibilities for political connection (71) and meaningful alliances. We are not pure victims or oppressors, and we can forge connections “across our many shifting complicities as well as oppressions” (73).

Kath Browne’s chapter was useful to me in thinking through how to do this work as geographers. In it she points to how power and privilege work even in feminist geographies. I very much appreciate that she asks how relations of power between feminist geographers re-produce experts and expertise, and that she looks in particular at the *practices* of power that continually re-create spaces of speaking and writing. This book as a whole works to interrogate, as Kath Browne puts it, how we *do* our feminism, and work to open those practices. Holding a review panel at the AAGs like the one these review essays come out of, with more ‘junior’ scholars, continues this work. But it is not just a matter of, again in Browne’s words, including more silenced voices, but actually sensitively and constructively engaging with one another in safe spaces. This book functions as one such safe space, the review panel was another, and I hope that this journal can continue to be one.

It is no coincidence that multilingualism is finally, slowly, coming in to geography through feminist spaces, such as our review panel, this book, [Gender, Place and Culture](#), which is now translating abstracts into French and Spanish, the *Annals*, which has followed with abstracts in Spanish and Chinese, and [acme](#), which publishes in English, Spanish, German, French and Italian. Ideally, to me, feminisms are about making space for more sorts of becomings, and this book is all about *doing* that. In that way it really does function as an *anti*-anthology, opening up what can be considered feminisms in geography, rather than defining it down.

Strangely, even as a life long feminist with an MA in women’s studies, I really have not felt comfortable calling myself a feminist geographer, because I never took a feminist geography class per se,

and felt like I had not read enough of the ‘classics’ to be able to pose as that sort of an ‘expert’. This book, fabulously, made space for me. It made me feel like I can absolutely, proudly, call myself a feminist geographer. Not because it defined feminist geography in one way that resonated with me, but precisely because there was room in this book for so many feminisms, so many lines of flight, that I felt like my story, my knowledge, was welcome.

Not only did the work that the book *does* have an impact on me, but I found the process of *doing* the book very inspiring. I know both how hard and how important collective process is. Call me a process geek, but when I read about the huge diverse advisory committee that the editors pulled together before starting this book, I was so moved that I literally cried into my soup. I was sitting in “sopas de la abuela” in Bogotá, reading by skylight because the electricity had gone out. This was, however, not the safest space to cry in, because I realized a man at the table next to me was staring at me. Or maybe he was staring at the posters of Coca Cola girls across the ages on the wall behind me. At any rate, be careful where you read this book, because it actually made me tear up every other chapter or so, and I don’t tend to get weepy when reading academic texts, really—but I was quite moved by the courage of the authors to explore new lines of flight, and be so vulnerable and honest in sharing those struggles with us. I particularly appreciated how Amy Trauger’s story made it clear that our work in geography is always personal, and can serve as a way to be more fully in, and make more space for, our own lives.

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References

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