

INTRODUCTION

Translation and the cultural Cold War

An introduction

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One out of every three people in the world (800 million) are held captive behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains. (IIA 1953: 5)

In the 2017 call for this special issue on “Translation and the cultural Cold War,” we posed the following questions (reproduced here in an abridged form) as possible topics for research:

- What roles did translators, editors, and publishers play in the cultural Cold War?
- In what ways did translators, editors, and publishers contribute to the construction of an image of the Cold War’s key actors in their environments?
- What roles did the allegiances of the translators, editors, and publishers play in the cultural Cold War, and what do they reveal about agency in translation?
- How did the cultural Cold War inform, shape, or transform the field of cultural production in each context?
- To what extent did the cultural Cold War contribute to the development of the publishing industry in the non-aligned/postcolonial countries?
- What has been the legacy of the cultural Cold War in the non-aligned/postcolonial countries?
- Can the practice of translation explain differences in the ways in which the cultural Cold War was waged in Europe and in other parts of the world?

What inspired the call was the observation that there is a potentially rich area for dialog, collaboration and interdisciplinary research between translation studies, Cold War history and cultural diplomacy scholarship that has remained almost untapped. The aim was to combine these interests in order to investigate in greater detail how the theory and practice of translation were used during the Cold War for cultural/intellectual dissemination not only in the Western context but also beyond the transatlantic region. From our respective fields of research in translation studies and the cultural Cold War, a term that refers to various efforts, often clandestine, undertaken by both the superpowers to “win hearts and minds” (see Iber 2019 for a very useful overview), we saw an opportunity to establish a dia-

log across disciplines, which in turn resulted in issuing a call for this special issue. We understand that not every question posed above has been answered, but, as the first step toward interdisciplinary research and as a response to a recent call in translation studies to “expand outwards” (Bassnett and Johnston 2019: 187), we hope this issue opens space for a continuing exchange between scholars interested in exploring this promising field.

Translation in its written and spoken form (interpreting) was, in the parlance of the Cold War (generally considered from 1945 to 1989), one of the major “weapons” used by both the United States and the Soviet Union to reach the “captive peoples” behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains and the “exploited masses” in the West, respectively. What emerges from previous studies and those offered in this special issue suggests that without translation, the cultural Cold War would have been almost impossible, or at least different from what we know. Despite the importance of translators and interpreters in “parting the curtain” (Hixon 1997), translation has remained, at least in its traditional interlingual sense (see Jakobson 1959/2004), of peripheral concern in the historiographies of the Cold War and cultural diplomacy scholarship, or it is used only figuratively (e.g., see Dittmer and McConnel 2016: 7, for whom translation is defined as “the transmission, sharing and transformation of values, beliefs and narratives.”) A considerable body of research has been done on cultural production and reception, ranging from high culture to everyday experiences, the role and politics of print media, propaganda, and culture, but that research has focused mainly on the US and Europe (e.g., Hixson 1997; Berghahn 2001; Barnhisel and Turner 2010; Barnhisel 2014). A growing number of works have also explored the cultural interactions across the Iron Curtain divide (Romijn et al. 2012; Vowinckel et al. 2012; Mikkonen and Koivunen 2015; Mikkonen et al. 2019), but these studies rarely consider the field of translation and its significance for determining how ideas and intellectual output actually enter another culture. Much of this research to date has concentrated on East-West exchanges and the relevance of (often covert) translation for the dissemination of ideas to bypass censorship (Kind-Kovacs 2013; Finn and Couvée 2014). As some of the contributors to this special issue illustrate, the various roles performed by translators, editors, and publishers during the Cold War were therefore crucial both in disseminating the cultural and intellectual output of the colonial powers and superpowers, and (from a more positive and as yet less acknowledged perspective) in the development of indigenous publishing operations around the globe (Rubin 2012; Scott-Smith and Lerg 2017).

With the emergence of translation studies as an academic discipline in the 1970s, several concepts and theories have been either borrowed from neighboring disciplines or developed in response to epistemological challenges, leading to several “turns” in the field that now open up the possibility for studying transla-

tion during the cultural Cold War. Some of these include polysystem theory (i.e., the idea that translations are part of a complex system in the target culture, see Even-Zohar 1978/2004), the cultural turn (to look beyond the text as the only unit of analysis and to focus on the way translations interact with their surrounding culture, see Bassnett and Lefevere 1990), and descriptive translation studies (to describe translations rather than to prescribe how they should be, see Toury 1995). These conceptual tools have made it possible to pay attention to the position (whether primary or secondary) of translated literature in the target culture and the role of ideology, power and politics in the way translation is carried out, which is closely tied to issues of patronage, that is, “the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature” (Lefevere 1992: 15; see also Bassnett and Trivedi 1999). Gradually, translators and their presence (voice) in the process of translation took center stage, giving attention to the idea of the visibility/invisibility of translators produced as a result of the translator’s approach (e.g., domestication or foreignization as described in Venuti 1995). Another important development is the sociological turn, which has drawn on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour, introducing the concepts of field, habitus, and capital in describing the context of translation, as well as the concepts of agency and agents, such as translators, editors, and publishers (for more on the sociological turn, see Wolf and Fukari 2007; for more on agents of translation, see Milton and Bandia 2009).

Despite the above noted theoretical arsenal, contributions to the study of translation during the Cold War from the field of translation studies often lack the interdisciplinary approach necessary to fully situate translation in the context of powerful social forces or political systems of influence. For example, scholars have explored the politics and ideology of translation (Calzada Pérez 2002; Merkel 2010), but they have largely focused on censorship and its strong, rather subversive impact on the field of cultural production in the former Eastern bloc, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, among others (Merkle 2002; Billiania 2007; Ní Chuilleanáin et al. 2009). Very little has been done on the role and impact of the cultural Cold War on the professionalization of translation, the development of a publishing industry in developing countries, or the formation and transformation of the broader field of cultural production in each context. Comparatively speaking, as some of the articles in this special issue illustrate (e.g. Blum and Hofeneder, Sicari, Erokhin and Elias-Bursać), research on the theory and practice of translation in Eastern Europe and Russia contributes more to our topic in this special issue and to attempts within the field to decentralize the dominant (Western) narratives of translation (see Baer 2011; Baer and Tyulenev 2019; Popa 2018).

Recent scholarship has nonetheless paid some attention to the literature of the cultural Cold War. Here are two examples from the *Routledge Handbook of*

Translation and Politics (Evans and Fernández 2018). In the entry “Translation and the Cold War,” Emily Lygo (2018: 453) suggests that “on both sides of the iron curtain, translation became a site for the negotiation of political ideology.” She also observes that, despite state control and manipulation, translators “were able to use their agency to pursue their own aims and interest” (453), a provocative insight that needs to be empirically tested (see for example, Blum and Hofeneder, Sicari and Haddadian-Moghaddam in this issue). This line of research can furnish substantial evidence for a better understanding of the agency of translators. In the second example, “Translation and Cultural Diplomacy,” Luise von Flotow acknowledges the lack of research on the role of translation in the field of cultural diplomacy. She offers two reasons for this: first, translation studies as an academic field of study is recent; second, “the use of translation in cultural diplomacy seeks effects, and the effects of any translation are notoriously difficult to research and establish with any certainty.” She points to the need for interdisciplinary work and extra training in “specific, local knowledge of the times, places, histories and politics involved” (von Flotow 2018: 200–201).

There has been also a third set of contributions (both direct or indirect) to the study of translation and the cultural Cold War from scholars of history, library sciences, and literary studies. This research has addressed Soviet film festivals (Razlogova 2015), libraries and cultural diplomacy in Francophone Africa (Maack 2001), censorship in the Soviet Union (Sherry 2015), and Cold War poetry (Quinn 2015). A recent study has examined the case of Radio Free Europe (RFE) where the practice of translation at the RFE is examined in the context of the “perceived reality of an Iron Curtain for audiences on both sides of the curtain.” The author thus invites us to study the cultural Cold War from a “translational perspective” (Ottersbach 2020; cf. Bassnett 2011: 74).

Due to its reliance on archival sources, history informs and shapes our interdisciplinary research on translation during the cultural Cold War. A recent study in translation studies proposes an ambitious plan to shape this historical approach by making use of several key concepts in relation to any cross-cultural communication event: trust, distrust, and network. By proposing a “tripartite approach” to the study of trust on the levels of “interpersonal, institutional and regime-enacted,” the authors call for a new translation history that involves the tracing of “some kind of translational product (written, spoken or graphic)” through its networks (horizontal and vertical), both upstream and downstream (see Rizzi, Lang and Pym 2019: 14, 33, 37). This approach offers fresh perspectives and methods on how to explore some of the actual products of the cultural Cold War with the aim of generating, among other things, a better understanding of both Cold War legacies and the reasons behind the failure (or the success) of relevant cultural diplomacy initiatives, for example, in the Middle East.

The articles selected for this special issue provide a broad range of studies that showcase the depth, diversity and level of detail that an interdisciplinary study of translation and the cultural Cold War can produce. The case studies involve different settings, from the former Soviet Union and East Germany to the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, the broader Middle East, and the United States. The studies pinpoint specific areas of interaction where translation represented a key conduit for knowledge transfer. First, they highlight the agency of translators themselves, who undertook the task of transferring meaning “across the blocs” and across competing ideologies. Second, they illustrate the importance of translation training, underscoring the ways in which institutions, be they state or non-state, can shape translations according to their political and economic interests. Third, they highlight the power of the social and political structures within which translators carry out their work and which place specific limits on their agency. Last, they all demonstrate the level of background debate and the search for nuance that is involved in every act of translation during the politically-charged context of the Cold War. Perhaps the most significant contribution of these articles, however, is in exposing processes of communication that have so far remained largely hidden in discussions on cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. In doing so, they provide the basis for further explorations into the micro-histories of translators and the field of translation as essential to our understanding of the cultural Cold War as a whole.

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