Translating (Political) religious and secularist worldviews in a post-secular age

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Inspired by the works of François Burgat, Jürgen Habermas and Jean-Marc Ferry, this paper addresses the notions of the religious, the political, the radical/extreme, the conservative, the secular and the social as the objects of an extended conception of translation that defines translation as a mode of intercomprehension between competing or adversary groups within a single or among diverse societies. Shifting focus away from textual manipulations, it conceives of translation as a form of active engagement in social and discursive negotiations and explores translation as it brings about change in the dynamics of intergroup and intercultural relations.

Keywords: Islam, secularism, translation proviso, Habermas, citizen translation, inter-referential translation, social philosophy, social justice

Introduction

To "translate the extreme" may entail the use of extreme or even extremist forms of translation that forge broader understandings of the concept of translation. According to this view, established notions of translation as interlinguistic and intersemiotic transfer and transformation can be seen alongside other hitherto less recognized forms of "social translation" (Basalamah 2012). Social translation refers here to the mediation between two sometimes radically opposed worldviews that coexist in a given socio-historical context. 'Social translation' is not the study of translation agencies or the sociological processes and trajectories of linguistic and semiotic transfers in various contexts. Inspired by social philosophy (Ferrara 2008; Fischbach 2020; Saar 2018) and some of its political ramifications (Pedersen 2012), social translation is rather an attempt at considering the various forms of interactions and transformations (institutional, political, economic, legal or discursive) that confront, differentiate and affect two or more interacting groups with distinct, and often divergent, cultures, ideologies, religions or,

https://doi.org/10.1075/tris.21012.bas Published online: 16 December 2021
Translation in Society ISSN 2667-3037 | E-ISSN 2667-3045 © John Benjamins Publishing Company

more generally, worldviews. Social translation examines the translational mechanisms of negotiation that facilitate or impede these groups' mutual understanding, adaptation and peaceful coexistence. This enlarged conceptualization of translation, conceived of through a philosophical sociopolitical lens, is the condition for the study of social processes that take place in a context where semiotics, discourses and narratives all ultimately refer to worldviews and frames of reference that can be culturally, religiously or politically motivated. In the context of trying to explain the complex thread of national and international conflicts, it would not be possible to offer a unified explanation valid for every case and situation.

Given its extensive coverage by the media and its powerful impact on imaginaries over the last four decades, Islamic extremism is a rich example to study within the theme of this special issue. However, it would not be appropriate to single out this epiphenomenon without interrogating the basis from which it has contextually emerged. Extremism in the religion of Islam cannot be separated from the sociopolitical conditions that include the wider spectrum of political Islam, of which its extremist fringe is actually its most marginal form. Therefore, this paper will address the notions of the religious, the political, the radical/extreme, the conservative, the secular and the social as the objects of an extended conception of translation in relation to the works of political scientists François Burgat and Jocelyne Cesari, and of social philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Jean-Marc Ferry. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part tackles the historical context of political Islam and the distinctions that should be made within its wide spectrum of complex affiliations, divergences and ideological categories. While differentiating among the various types and levels of political engagement undertaken in the name of Islam, as well as between the international and national arenas, the main objective is nonetheless to establish a general common thread of explanations. Within that general framework, the different approaches will be categorized in terms of their focus on the psychocultural, the political and the religious. The second part investigates the literature of social philosophy that articulates the notion of translation to account for the legal and political conflicts between religious and secular discourses and worldviews in the public sphere of western democracies. This synthesis allows for an analysis of a selection of various phenomena attributed to Muslim citizens, where the social translation of the religious ethos and faith-based discourses seems to result in compounded failures, deep misunderstandings and increasing disparities. The third and final part articulates the concept of 'citizen translation' as the ongoing undertaking that should motivate post-secular democratic societies, especially those with high numbers of immigrants and their descendants, in a common effort to reach a minimal threshold of social peace.

Translating the perceived religious into political reality

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, the world has seen the emergence of the mediatized phenomenon of Islamic political radicalism. Radical Islamic political groups (Al-Qaida, ISIS and the like) claiming to represent the Sunni majority have been proliferating and claiming responsibility for a globalized terrorist war on/in the west. The question that stems from this four-decade development is: why is there an increasing opposition between two historical ideological groups of adversaries, the 'religious' and the 'secularists?'

To understand the phenomenon of Islamic political radicalism, which is subsumed within the larger category of 'political Islam', it is necessary to discuss the historical context of the past two centuries. It is also necessary to limit the explanatory framework to two perspectives. First, the Arab-Muslim[1] world, which has inherited some key aspects of western modernity, is caught up in a longstanding conflict between religion and secularism that originated in the European Renaissance. Although never entirely colonized, a major part of the Arab-Muslim world, both secularist and religious, was intellectually influenced by the encounter with colonial metropoles. Western thought helped to shape the ideas of many key figures of the Islamic reformist movement of the twentieth century. At the same time, and in line with the al-Nahda movement of Arabic language and cultural revival originating in the nineteenth century, Pan-Arabism was also a secularist slogan calling for Arabs to mobilize under the banner of their cultural heritage and the nascent nationalist resistance against western colonization. This movement led to the emergence, in the next century, of Arab secular nationalism, such as in Egypt (Cesari 2017). It is remarkable that this conflict between secular and religious ideologies has persisted until the more recent Arab Spring and beyond. Not only is this religious-secular dualism western in origin (as it never before existed in this form in the Muslim world), it also reveals the common political motivation of the movements involved to resist western imperialism to the extent that even the secularists would adopt the Islamic lexis to mobilize the people and "portray European modernization and its secularizing components as being in conflict with Arab regional or Islamic identity" (Cesari 2017, 32).

On the one hand, the second explanatory perspective on the phenomenon of political Islam takes the opposite view to that of some neoconservative experts on Islam (Lewis 2002; Kepel 2006) who see the origin of extremism in the scriptural sources of Islam, i.e., the Quran and the oral tradition of the Prophet (Burgat, 2017). On the other hand, this perspective distances itself from the one that explains extremism in terms of the psychosocial conditions of the subjects who are engaged in violence that invokes the Islamic frame of reference (Roy 1994, 2017). In both cases, these analyses of Islamic extremism, which focus on the crude violence of these groups, obscure the political motivations, the enduring historical hegemonic relationship of the imperialist western countries with the Muslim world and the ensuing Muslim resentments (Burgat 2020). These have been cultivating a growing feeling of frustration that, for a fringe of activists, has translated into an extremist political "counterviolence" (Burgat 1997, 81).

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[1] If taken more literally, difference exists already between the original German version and the various English renderings of Habermas we are working with in this article.

The important intersecting point between the two explanatory perspectives is the acknowledgment – although more clearly and emphatically by the second perspective – that the Islamic vocabulary has been used not only by all the stripes of the political Islamic movements' spectrum, from the most moderate to the most extreme, but also by secular nationalists during the movements of independence. In such a situation where the Islamic frame of reference becomes the idiom of mobilization for everyone, it is no wonder that one is confronted with two translational difficulties. First, a deep understanding of that idiom should distinguish between, for instance, the democratically elected party of Ennahda in Tunisia, often compared to the Christian democratic parties in Europe, and the most violent movements of political Islam such as ISIS. Although all are branded as 'Islamist' – a qualifier of political Islam – this designation covers a vast variety of claims while its pool of symbolic apparatuses draws from the rich source of Islamic terminology as the language of social protest and political opposition throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds (Burgat 2001). The political cannot be reduced to its extremist expression, but all extreme and violent movements are political. Making distinctions within this complex tangle of movements and affiliations necessitates a mastery of the subtle differences among their respective discourses and various social-political conditions of emergence, in other words a capacity to translate their ideological dialects among themselves. Second, beyond the internal diversity of political Islam, the major difficulty for the international non-Muslim audience is to be conversant with the "Muslim parlance" (Burgat 2010). Even more necessary for anyone outside the Islamic religion and the pounding pulse of its diversified contexts is the ability to interpret and translate the frame of reference of political Islam, as well as decipher its secular social and political claims beyond the veil of the religious Arabic terminology of Islam. The recourse to this language could be perceived as contingent on the fact that some of the main figures of Islamic extremism are in the Arab world, and that Quranic Arabic is the language of reference for all Muslims. However, if there have been claims that emerged from beyond the Arabic-speaking countries using that same idiom, it is because since the end of the nineteenth century in each of the phases of colonization, decolonization and recolonization (ibid.), the Islamic lexis has remained the most efficient at mobilizing people to resist or retaliate against western imperialism. In reaction to the westernization and the threat of deculturation of Muslim societies, that lexis is an assertion of "the right to speak Muslim... [and] reinstate the legitimacy of this lexicon or more generally of their inherited culture" (Burgat 2010, 14, my translation). Not only is there a lack of translation of the Islamic frame of reference, but any political claim against a military occupation that expresses itself in this language is disqualified as religious sectarism (*ibid.*).

This widespread contempt for the use of religious references in the western public discourse is to be interpreted contextually in light of the development of western modernity. Since the sixteenth century, the increasing secularization of European societies has led to an apprehension toward the public use of religious terminology. This raises the question of, on the one hand, the ability of the west to distinguish among and translate the various religious languages into its cultural, legal and political expressions of secularism, and, on the other hand, the capacity of the various religious denominations to translate themselves into the secular language of the public sphere of western democracies. This question will be addressed in the next section.

The social philosophy of translation

Enlarging the social role of translation

Before delving into the approach this article intends to favor, it is critical to step back and reassess the state of research in translation studies regarding the discipline's various uses of sociology and their ensuing conceptualizations of translation.

Translation studies has so far developed its sociological-related research on at least two fronts. The first, which is dedicated to the study of the weight, shape and extent of the network of translated literary works in national and international contexts, does not have a direct interest in translation as a means of bringing about social change. It is rather focused on the description of the role of translation in diverse sociohistorical situations. This type of sociological-related research can be of two kinds. On the one hand, it describes various ideological contexts in which translated literary works are produced (e.g. Rundle and Sturge 2010), exchanged (e.g., Casanova 2004; Buzelin 2005, Heilbron and Sapiro 2007) or censored (e.g., Merkle 2002; Woods, 2012). On the other hand, this kind of research also allows for the discovery of the social processes into which translation can prompt the infusion of ideology or resistance against it (e.g. Rafael 1993; Cheyfitz

1997; Venuti [1992] 2018; Calzada-Pérez 2003; Mukherjee 2005; Tymoczko 2010; Sherry 2015). In all these cases of sociohistorical translation research, the concept of translation refers to the interlingual and intercultural transfer, deflection or transformation of meanings, practices and artefacts.

The second front of sociological-related works includes those concerned with the often-wilful manipulation of information, discourses and opinions in the media through translation. This strand of research is usually assimilated into the theoretical framework of narrative theory introduced by Mona Baker (e.g. 2006, 2016) and followed by other scholars (e.g. Harding 2012; Salama-Carr 2007; Gutiérrez and Villanueva 2019). While explaining more directly how translation is engaged in weighing in on beliefs and narratives of social-political agents, this research also shows how translation can be an efficient means of orienting opinions, (re)producing ideologies and changing social dynamics through several semiotic modes of expression combining language and layout, as well as still and moving images in multimedia information outlets.

On both fronts of the sociological-related type of research in translation studies, the understanding of the concept of translation is heavily determined by its common definition as a verbal and cultural transfer of meaning, either literary or media-related. In this second part of the paper, the objective is to introduce the notion of translation as an "analytical tool" in line with the "translational turn" (Bachmann-Medick 2009), whereby translation is not only a mediated social event, but is also the very process by which social transformation occurs. Although still marginal in translation studies, except if conceived of as a metaphor, this conception of translation is more frequently encountered in other disciplines, such as sociology (Latour 1987, 2005; Callon 1986; Akrich et al. 2006), and social philosophy, as will be demonstrated in what follows.

While the key notion of "sociological translation" from Actor Network Theory has made a moderate impact within translation studies (Buzelin 2005, 2007; van Rooyen 2019), it remained confined to describing the social processes of producing literary or journalistic translations. Translation studies has not yet integrated the full extent of the notion of sociological translation conceived of as the shaping and reshaping of human, non-human and semiotic-based articulations with a view to producing a social assemblage, a network, and ultimately a collective response to an issue or a project, be it scientific, political or other (Latour 2005). The reservations of translation studies scholars toward this kind of metaphorical use of the notion of translation, which does not necessarily include the meaning of interlingual translation (Jakobson 1959), can be understood to a certain extent (Trivedi 2007; Pym 2009). But if the "translational turn" were to be accepted (Bachmann-Medick 2006), then it should be possible to conceive of translation also as a sociological transformation project in and of itself. In fact, "enlarging translation" (Tymoczko 2007) could go as far as conceptualizing translation as a process or even a program of social change. Such a concept of translation as found in social philosophy has not yet hit the shores of the discipline most concerned (i.e., translation studies) when it comes to the fate of its object of study, especially when that concept is found and used beyond its customary borders.

In the following, I would like to argue that translation studies should not only be open to considering the instances of the translation concept as found in social philosophy; it should also contemplate the relevance of translation as the very mechanism by which the achievement of social change, peace and justice can be theorized. In order to demonstrate such relevance, I will briefly discuss the example of the Habermasian model of social translation.

The translation proviso

In times of acute tensions around the management of pluralistic democratic societies, especially regarding the place and role of religion in the public sphere, it is fruitful to turn to the influential work of Jürgen Habermas. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987), Habermas has discussed in depth the theorization of modernity, its institutions, politics and democracy through the prism of the major conceptualization of procedural rationality.

One of the most significant aspects of Habermas's focus in the last three decades is the place and role he attributes to religion in western democratic societies. As a proponent of deliberative democracy, Habermas has attempted to answer critical questions such as the following: given the secularization and modernization of western societies, what weight is still to be attributed to religions in shaping social and political systems? To what extent – if at all – should religions influence public opinion and lawmaking? Should public deliberations be accessible only to secular reason, or should they also include the reasons of different communities of faith?

In a nutshell, while the plurality of models for conducting a good life and cultivating values (ethics) creates interpersonal conflicts, a collective answer to these divergences needs to be sought on the level of social norms (morality), which must not only be universally accepted but also be elaborated through procedural rationality and public discussion. Thus, if religion falls under ethics because it provides a model for the good life of individuals, the normative content of religion cannot provide a public answer and be used without translation in a political setting.

In the last two decades, the conception of religion according to Habermas made further progress toward the inclusion of normative contents. Habermas admits that religious traditions include semantic contents that integrate moral intuitions, images and ideas, which can transform into universal norms that can be accepted by all members of a given society (2008). Although these religious contents cannot be shared as is, the role of post-metaphysical philosophy is to “salvage” them from their religious origins and make them available through translation (Habermas 2003, 114).

In the shadow of capitalism, science and technique, the influence of instrumental reason and the reification of human relationships has unveiled not only the threats of fundamentalist reactionary anti-modernists, but also a decline in contemporary normative consciousness, and hence an increasing need for practical reason to be complemented by new resources of meaning (Habermas 2008, 211, 238–239). For Habermas, religion has relevance because it contains a reservoir of moral intuitions that can enrich the moral consciousness of contemporary citizens (see also Ferry 2002, 107–108). Some of the meaning contents of religion (because of the universality of their moral value) can be accessible and acceptable to all citizens. But in order to access those meanings, philosophy needs to semantically translate religious contents into a secular language. These moral resources need to be transmitted to people who do not embrace them. As a result, the role of post-metaphysical philosophy is to liberate these religious moral contents by formulating them independently of their religious foundations. This recuperation of universal moral contents preserved by and buried in religions needs to be unearthed and conveyed by philosophy through translation (Habermas 2003, 114).

Given the neutral character of the democratic state (Habermas 2006, 9), Habermas believes that it is crucial to grant religious citizens the freedom to express their religious arguments in civil society in order for their propositions to be taken into account in the political public sphere. However, because of the principle of separation between church and state, with the latter having to preserve its neutrality, Habermas contends that an “institutional translation proviso” must be established between civil society and the political to allow religions to provide secular translations for the expression and justification of their convictions (Habermas 2006, 9–10). While the passage of religious views into the realm of the political sphere takes place through the institutional translation proviso (which literally means that the integration of religious convictions is *conditioned* upon their translation into a secular idiom and argumentation), the duty to translate the moral intuitions contained in the memory of religion is no longer the sole prerogative of philosophy – or theology according to Jobin (2004) and Ferry (2016). That duty becomes also the cognitive responsibility of ordinary citizens (Habermas 2006, 10–17).

To give an example of how the translation proviso may be applied, one could suggest a different path and outcome to the various legislations that were made in Europe and Quebec to ban the face cover, specifically the Muslim *niqab* or *burqa* under the pretext that it is a sign of affiliation to extreme political Islam. Enacted and enforced with the alleged motivation to assert equality between genders and ensure security for identification purposes, the ban integrated the legislations of the secular democratic states involved without translation of any sort. This has led to the exclusion of the targeted women from being treated as full citizens. However, a postsecular treatment of this matter would have secured, before any legislative enactment, a cooperative translation proviso whereby Muslim citizen leaders and secular political representatives would have deliberatively come to translate (i.e. explain/understand) the religious reason of a minority of Muslim women who wear the face cover (continuation of the Prophet's wives' tradition of modesty) into secular reason to be shared with all citizens (a reaction to the hyper-consumerist society we live in). A social translation of the Muslim moral intuitions could have helped to alleviate the social tensions, the sensationalist media coverage and the political drama we have been witnessing. Interestingly, the translation of what appears as medieval, foreign and extreme may come across in the end of the deliberative process as an example of youth-led, endogenous and legitimate critiques of neoliberal societies.

Returning to the Habermasian theoretical framework, the deliberative process of political public justification has two conditions: one negative, which prevents the exclusion of any citizen from public deliberation, the other positive, which urges citizens to adopt each other's perspectives, aim for the common good and respect the rule of the best argument (Jean 2019, 190). This deliberative process has a transformational power because participants are not only actively engaged; they also are forced to interact and adjust according to the justifications with which they are confronted (Cooke 2007, 228). For Habermas, while translation serves the function of recuperating the moral intuitions contained in religion into a secular, universally accessible language, which is the only one comprehensible to neutral political institutions, it also involves the transformation of both groups involved in the procedural, cooperative – but nonetheless fallibilist – task of reasoning and arguing.

The notion of cooperative translation means that both sides need to share the burden of translation. However, while monolingual religious citizens who cannot articulate anything but the language of their religious reason are spared the obligation to speak the secular idiom directly in the political sphere, this does not mean that religious contents are protected from critiques and transformations, as all religious reasons will go through the filter of public scrutiny (Jean 2019, 198–203). All citizens must be included if they wish to participate, directly or indirectly, in public deliberations. They "owe" one another the reasons of their political statements and positions (Habermas 2006, 11, 13). As a corollary to this civil duty of cooperation among citizens, Habermas suggests that for cooperative translation to be implemented, "[a] change in epistemic attitudes must occur if religious consciousness is to become reflexive and if the secularist mindset is to overcome its limitations" (Habermas 2008, 144). This means that translational cooperation is conditioned upon, first, religious and non-religious citizens not dismissing each others' views *a priori*, and second, upon the willingness of both groups to expose themselves to their counterparts' worldviews. Translation cannot take place without a substantive knowledge of the said worldviews. As the onus of knowledge and translation falls on all citizens educated about their fellow citizen's worldviews, it could be suggested that the state – though neutral – plays a role in fostering a public education that develops knowledge of religions and traditions that have had a determining influence on a given society (Jean 2019, 209–212). Habermas notes that even citizens of other religious denominations could play a role in translating a religious discourse other than their own for a secular audience, and the other way around (Habermas 2006).

Critiques of Habermas's concept of translation

Following this brief overview of the foundations and scope of the notion of translation according to Habermas, there are many in-depth discussions that could be undertaken around some of its specific applications, its viability and relevance in the real world. While it is not the purpose of this article to review all these debates, suffice it to make a few remarks from the specific vantage point of social-oriented translation studies, as well as from that of the modest wisdom one has accumulated in the general language-based research of our discipline.

For instance, one of the problems with Habermas's translation proviso is that some of its interpretations conceive of translation as an "equivalence" (e.g., Jakobsen & Fjørtoft 2018, 147), in the sense that it requires the religious citizens to express their arguments in a way that formulates their religious language according to a shared discursive reason. This involves the reference to existing non-religious concepts only approximately matching religious ones. If this is the meaning of the translation proviso, then it would only provide for something assimilable to what Eugene Nida calls "formal correspondence" (Nida 1982), i.e., the lexical matching between two existing sets of vocabularies that forces established concepts to be equated with each other. However, a truly pragmatic conversational translation of (religious or otherwise) ideas, frames of reference or worldviews should be creative and dynamic in the sense that it would go beyond merely reformulating the meaning of the religious notion in terms of the current and most recognized expressions of the receiving non-religious citizen. It would also attempt to bring to the fore some unusual meanings ("revelations" and "disclosures" according to Cooke 2013) and shed new light on meanings that in fact constitute the very ground upon which the common culture has been developing throughout history.

In some of the critiques of Habermas's "translation proviso", there is a strand that contests the very fact of submitting religious discourse to translation (Sikka 2016). These critics wonder why religious reason should be translated at all and contend that religious argumentation is not different from any other in relying on authority. They believe that most religious interventions in public debate do not appeal to the unimpeachable authority of revealed texts or ecclesiastical pronouncements as an immediate basis for justifying coercive measures. Rather, they draw on the teachings of such authorities in the course of explaining what they feel is right or wrong on a given topic, and this is not in principle different from drawing on the teachings of any other kind of authority, for example that of a reputable economist (Waldron cited in Sikka 2016, 101).

This means that, while in the mind of secular people religion is often thought of as inaccessible to reason by definition, for commentators such as Waldron (2012), religious reason is also plain reason because if it "can be thus translated [it] is not in principle unintelligible to outsiders" (Sikka 2016, 100). This implies that when translation is required, it is only because the object to be translated is communicable and does not rely on theological doctrines. It is not the theoretical proposition by Habermas on the translation proviso that is problematic; it is the assumption about what translation entails and to what extent the objects it translates are transformed and conveyed. If Cooke (2006, 2007), Chambers (2010) and Waldron (2012) are critical of Habermas's translation proviso, it is because they believe that the object of translation is mischaracterized (i.e., religious reason considered as irrational) more than they believe that translation is a necessary measure enabling secular and religious citizens to come to a minimal ground of mutual understanding in the public sphere.

At the same time, Cooke (2006) emphasizes that what should be excluded from processes of democratic legislation and decision making are not religious viewpoints but those that are "epistemologically authoritarian," unwilling to support their claims with reasons in "open-ended inclusive, and fair processes of argumentation" (Cooke 2006 cited in Sikka 2016, 102). This exclusion may cover certain forms of religious discourse, but it will not be because they are religious. The exclusion applies to any discourse, religious or other, that would present claims in the political arena while refusing to enter the fray of public reason.

This means, according to these critics, that what in fact is untranslatable into public reason is fundamentalism or extremism – whether religious or not – as is any self-exclusionary doctrine that does not recognize the legitimacy of the basic secular social contract. And because it is the mere fact of being disposed to dialogue and transformation, which is already a translational process, that qualifies for inclusion in public deliberation, it is hardly conceivable that religious extremism would engage in the translation of religious content in the context of collaborative and constructive political contributions.

Another misunderstanding about translation may be attributed to Habermas himself. While Habermas believes that it is "illegitimate to violate the principle of neutrality of the exercise of the political power" (2008, 134), which means that the secular state is "neutral" toward competing worldviews, the translation that philosophy undertakes to "*circumscribe* the opaque core of religious experience" (143) is not a neutral process. Despite the bidirectional and cooperative procedure translation must submit to, not only does translation create difference, but it is also supposed to produce change (whether social or otherwise). This means that not only can a "neutralizing translation" (Habermas 2002, 73)[2] not exist because of its differentiating nature, but also that this hypothetical translation would not entail any transformation, whether in the utterer or in the receiver, unless conceived of as "a historically evolving wide (not universal) agreement, and as a confluence of various *types* of agreement, justified in commonly acceptable language whose form we cannot anticipate in advance" (Sikka 2016, 113, emphasis in the original).

A final point to note about critical views on Habermas's concept of translation is what he means by "language", which includes "rationality", "logic" and "frame of reference", that is, more than language. In other words, language encompasses the code that helps decipher the knowledge, culture and ways of thinking that are conveyed by a given social group. To translate religious language into secular language means to translate *all* that it is enclosed within and beyond language itself, including the social dynamics that it entails. This is a conception of language that may be perceived by some commentators as unexpected and may be too lax – a charge that could be directed at this author on translation, and that this article provides a response to.

Citizen translation

If we agree on taking on the Habermasian conception of translation – which opens to translating religious reason in the public sphere of deliberation but also to an *inter-referential translation* (Basalamah 2008, 2010), that is, to the translation of a meta-language that includes frames of reference, imaginaries, moral intuitions and worldviews – this means that we are no longer restricted to the limited level of language and semiotics but are invited to the broader spaces of both the epistemic and the sociological dimensions of the procedural rationality to whose dynamics translation is core. This observation could be assimilated to the achievement of what Berman (1992) calls *Bildung*, which refers to the translational process by which the self encounters the other and gets transformed without the extremist appropriation of the other (ethnocentrism) or the other extreme, which is the loss of one's own identity (alienation). On the contrary, with the balanced decentering of the self and its respectful "experience of the foreign," it is being enriched and bonified, even if simply by confirming one's own knowledge of or position toward the other.

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[2] See also Sikka (2016, 96).

This brings us to the question of the agency that would be charged with such a task. While Habermas considers post-metaphysical philosophy to be the most qualified epistemic instance for translating religious contents, and all citizens to be the sociological agents of cooperative translation, it remains true that translation agency needs to be attributed to profiles characterized by a high level of understanding and proficiency in more than one worldview. What does not appear in citizen cooperative translation according to Habermas are not only the special mediating competencies that the concerned citizens, whether religious or secular, are required to have before engaging in semantic translation in the public sphere; it is also the degree of motivation and the type of political agenda they have. In the same vein as the engagement of activist translators and interpreters in revolutionary settings (Baker 2016; Baker and Blaagaard 2016) or the work of individual and NGO volunteers (Baker 2006; Boéri 2008, 2012), citizen translation in our more extended meaning is marked by the commitment of the translators to social change and ultimately the mutual recognition of equal citizenship to all members of society. These are primary characteristics that *citizen translators* (Basalamah 2005, 2021) must possess.

In addition to the "political *habitus*" promoted by Michaela Wolf (2014), which is invested in "changing the *doxa*" about the visibility of the translator and their involvement in political debates (15–16), among the qualities of activist translators there are at least four other complementary ones to call upon in the context of the post-secular objective to allow religion to reclaim a legitimate contribution to the public discourse with a view to improving life's social, political, economic and legal conditions. First, the translational subject does not need to be restricted to individuals – just as it is not to the interlinguistic – but it also can be extended to *groups* – who likewise do not have to be the associations of activist (interlinguistic) translators and interpreters such as Babels, ECOS or Tlaxcala (Boéri 2008; Baker 2009). The group might include converts, associations of secular and/or religious activists, scholars of relevant fields or others. Second, a key characteristic of the translation subject is their *citizenship* – not only as an administrative fact, but as a concrete feeling of belonging to the social fabric. If, according to Sherry Simon, "translation is the key to citizenship, to the incorporation of languages in the public sphere," (2013, 7) which implies pluralism more generally, then citizenship is key to social translation,[3] as it is the condition for an activist motivation that, without venturing into illusory neutrality, transcends the confrontational dichotomies that pit majorities and minorities against each other and strives to achieve inclusive solutions. A third competence consists of the ability to debunk myths, apprehensions and misconstrued beliefs about either of the parties involved. In fact, in an era of intensive use of social media for the circulation of information, deliberations and flows of communication in the "wild" or "anarchic" public sphere (Habermas 1996, 187) could result in discursive intoxications and spread of fallacies, especially those nourished by deep-seated fears and unsubstantiated populistic imaginaries about the Other – whoever they may be. The pervasiveness of this kind of trend is a danger to the very existence of the social cohesion and fabric of a democratic society. A fourth and final characteristic of citizen translators consists of developing a basic cognitive translational, hermeneutical and social competence, which is the ability to search for the *tertium comparationis* (or the common denominator) of the parties in dialogue. As the fundamental structure of metaphors, which is the etymological origin of the concept of translation itself, the *tertium comparationis* constitutes the bedrock of any translational transaction and the "*ground* in the analysis of similes and metaphors; more often, it refers to what is shared between the objects of any comparison, for which *tertium comparationis* provides the necessary common ground" (Zhu 2017, 35). In the social setting of our concern in this paper, this concept becomes the meeting point between the different social actors involved in the cooperative translation of citizens worldviews.

As a final note, I would like to suggest that exploratory ethnographic research on citizen translation performances in the making would be a noteworthy complement to Habermas's social philosophy. Conceptualizing sociological translation performances of secular and religious citizen translators according to the Actor-Network Theory framework would allow for an immanent tracking of the to-and-fros of the reasoning taking place among all relevant participants in public deliberations. With a network of communication and transformations represented in this manner, and by following the rhizomatic trail of arguments, counterarguments, refractions, reactions and ramifications of the citizens involved, it would be possible to see the overall trails of social translations that articulate the network and show the various stages of its progress through ANT's

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[3] "Citizenship" here is meant in the broader sense of legal rights rather than only administrative status, according to Van Deth et al. (2006), which includes participating residents of all nationalities and "involves the intent to influence" (7), hence the key notion of "involvement" in the title of the edited volume.

"four moments of translation" (Callon 1986, 203). The concept of "citizen translation" (Basalamah 2005, 2021) as proposed in this paper (to be distinguished from that of Federici and Cadwell, 2018) is then the synthesis of an overall dynamic body of sociological translations undertaken by an unplanned and unstructured network of religious and secular citizens who align in a diversity of places within a given social jurisdiction but nonetheless united by a certain period of time, toward the possible outcome of a collaborative political proposition.

Conclusion: Translation as justice

Though relying/drawing on a wealth of literature containing numerous empirical sociological studies on the disparities of recognition among various groups of citizens – mainly non-majority religious denominations (e.g. Laurence and Vaisse 2006; Beaman and Beyer 2008; Potvin 2008; Joppke and Torpey 2013; Wolfreys 2018) – the main objective of this paper was limited to articulating a *conceptual reflection* on the translatability of religion and its extremes from the vantage point of translation studies in order to lay out the grounds of a *translational social philosophy* (Basalamah, 2018). The attempt here, by conceiving of religion as more than a vehicle of meaning, is to demonstrate that the concept of translation would gain a greater interdisciplinary influence by widening its scope of applicability to the extreme extent of a social operator of integration in the secularized public sphere of universal religious moral contents and among the citizens who are willing to articulate them according to the post-metaphysical intersubjective process proposed by Habermas.

On the basis of the above-mentioned studies, one can notice a clear absence of cooperative translation between Muslim and secularist citizens (let alone extremists from both sides) in francophone countries such as France and Quebec – albeit at different degrees. It is thus the purpose of this paper not only to call for a redress in favor of the minorized – but nonetheless voluntarist – religious voices that attempt to be heard in secularized democratic societies, but also to think of an intersubjective method to translate the inequalities of their representation and influence into a process whereby all members of a citizenry can attain the same and equal access to the mediatic, cultural and political spheres. In a secularized democracy, and away from political extremism concealed behind a mask of religion, the social order to be sought should be no less than *social justice*.

As opposed to a traditional power-laden translational configuration, which necessarily entails an asymmetrical relationship, it should be emphasized that, in turn, at the heart of a bidirectional translational process, the search for the *tertium comparationis* is also a search for the common ground, conditioned on the principles of equality and reciprocity. Consequently, here again, social translation is conceived of in a way that demonstrates its *inherent ethical nature* and tension associated with the attempt to achieve a *balance between two extremes*, that is, a certain measure of *justice*.

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Publication history

Date received: 1 July 2021
Date accepted: 3 November 2021
Published online: 16 December 2021