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Place of Birth: Babel

Rada Iveković / Boris Buden

Boris Buden: I would like to talk to you about translation as a gendered concept. Let's start with the fact that most translators are women. This fact, I believe, must be related to the traditional idea of translation as merely the reproduction of an original, which lacks an authenticity and autonomy of its own. The translator remains in the shadow of the author in somewhat the same way that women in (traditional) societies are kept in the shadow of men – the "natural" subjects of social and cultural creativity. However, I am not interested here in highlighting translation as a special case of gendered labour – this would probably be the traditional feminist understanding – but rather in focusing on woman as metaphor of a historically specific type of social reproduction, political power and cultural production: in short, on woman as metaphor of translation. It seems that woman appears as translation as long as society claims its originality. But today we no longer believe in the binary character of the relation between original and translation, nor do we think about social agents primarily in terms of original identities. How then are we to understand this relation between gender and translation today?

Rada Iveković: Let me see. We might also reverse the scene,

mightn't we? It depends on how you position yourself in asking the question. All the time that women have been "in the shadow" of men, or translators "in the shadow" of authors, it seems that authors might actually have been in the shadow of translators as well, in conditions of a different understanding of translation. I am told that this was the case in Japan when that country first opened up to foreign relations, contacts and trade during the Meiji Era (from 1868 on), but also more recently in China, where an absolute bulimia for translation has been going on and literally everything is being translated from Western (and probably other) languages[1]. They have understood that mere word-for-word textual translation will not be understood, and that the context needs translation too.

Now, rendering the *context* is a different thing altogether, quite apart from the fact that any translation is personal and also that it is always by definition insufficient, or partly inadequate, though necessary. So translators have engaged in presenting an indispensable cultural context that is lacking in – or substantially different from – the culture-language into which they are translating, into which to usher the textual translation. But the context, even more than a text or a translation, is a conjecture informed by so many things, personal, cultural, historic. A sentence, or a word, can refer to innumerable contexts and meanings or "regimes of sentences" as J-F. Lyotard would have it. *The* regime itself is indefinable, indefinite, although *a* regime is inevitable. There is always a concatenation, but we can't tell in advance which. The number of combinations for a simple phrase like "open the window" is incalculable. The context may be: "it is warm", "it is cold", "I can't stand the air-conditioner" (says the tenant on the 21st floor in Shanghai); "let the bird out", "she can't hear", "there is a fire", "I am buying vegetables (with a basket on a string from the 3rd floor, this is Istanbul)"; "we are replacing the

window panels", "it is midnight (in Rome on December 31st and i am going to throw dishes into the street)"; "Romeo is coming (says Juliet to her maid)", "I need to wash it from outside" (says the Rajasthani cleaning woman in the office to her daughter who is around). So in the examples we are giving, the translators have traditionally taken necessary liberties in explaining the context to readers who might not readily know it. In so doing, they have done a lot of guessing. They have added a lot of their own stuff to the "translation", and have often been "interpreting" rather than "translating". Where is the dividing line between translating, interpreting, or reading? It can't ever be located and nobody can say. It is a matter of "feeling", like the "feeling" in art, in cooking, like the *sazón* in cooking, a *tateo*2 you might or might not have in adding a "pinch" of spices to your dish. Although there can be degrees in the *quality* of translation both textual and contextual, there is no absolute criterion for it just as there is no absolute translation3. The translator translates not only the text and the context; s/he also translates the author, sometimes much to the latter's discomfort. Finally s/he also translates her/himself, much as the cook is in the dish and the painter in the picture; not that much more comfortable for them either!

So translators have sometimes very substantially deviated from the "original", especially in Asia (and probably elsewhere too), and have become entangled as co-authors in their translation, whether openly or under cover. In times and spaces that have deemed it normal, their involvement in changing the contents of the original according to the expectation or understanding of the readers, or according to their own capacities, has prevailed over the "original". The idea of a certain "faithfulness" of the translation was even not at all there as a requirement in translation at all times and in all places. It is truly a criterion raised out of translation among similar,

same-family languages or cultures, possibly western ones. It certainly has to do with holding power. And even if it were a viable ideal, who is to ultimately judge the truthfulness of a translation, when the context, the language, the culture and the time have changed? The idea of a faithful translation cannot be that of a word-for-word monosemic translation. In certain cultures, where one can't even pronounce or remember a foreign name (you need to be exposed to a language before you can memorize the names; this is why Taiwanese or other friends will often do us the exaggerated favour of choosing western names for themselves to make it easier for us to identify them...), the translator will cast a big shadow over the author and "possess" him/her in a way. You know such and such an author through such and such a translator/co-author specializing in his/her work. In such cases, the translator may even largely disagree with the author or contradict her/him.

What i don't quite know, because i am not a sinologist, is whether in East Asia too translation was or is done overwhelmingly by women, and whether women in that part of the world have the same relationship to translation culture[4]. This is not to say that i believe Asiatic societies to have been or to be less patriarchal: they are certainly *differently patriarchal*, and may use other metaphors. Contemporary India would work pretty much like the West that way, with women doing a lot of the translations. Is woman a metaphor for translation there too? I have no idea. It may well not be the case, but it is for others to say. Translating is a very,very old activity among Asian languages, with figures such as Huen Tsang[5] translating the Buddhist canon from the Sanskrit into Chinese. Obviously, you spotted the right problem, "society claiming a text's originality", and possibly -- i would add – its own "originality" too, would be the condition for the stake of women as a metaphor. In such cases, "originality" would be a claim for first-handedness,

precedence, priority, higher knowledge, both in time (crucial) as well as in quality or importance. There is a tendency to historicize here as a technique of mastering and domination, and a claim to some sort of "autochthony", which can then easily allow for ethnicization, racialization, identitarianism and sexuation.

The problems such understandings of translation raise are easily sexuated because of the *material, materialistic stake* that women symbolically represent. But i would hesitate to say that, in Chinese and associated cultures, men have necessarily historically managed to install themselves as symbolically more autochthonous then women, as they have in Ancient Greece and through her, in the West's imagination6. Although there may be no doubt about the historic patriarchality of the Chinese, it is probably the case that the social (and political) aspects of Chinese societies have operated through another, more direct grip on/of society, not necessarily served by a symbolic system where the masculine is thought of as primary. I am guessing.

It is indeed a matter of puzzlement and one that deserves to be investigated, in the comparison of both India and China with the West: that even in symbolic arrangements and contexts *other* than the western one, even where you have the ideal, symbolic, imaginary possibility of the feminine being thought of as primary (and where you have such schools of thought since time immemorial),you should nevertheless find very efficient patriarchies. The metaphor of women as the material stake in translation may not work here: translations may be done by men and women equally (depending much more on social histories such as that of access to public education) – i really don't know –; or translations may also be predominantly entrusted to women (a lesser paid job) and yet, our metaphor may not work there, even

though the social condition of translators, men or women, may (or may not?) be comparable to ours.

The question of the relation of translation to gender may be posed as the question of the *genre of translation*. Is translation a (literary etc.) genre, or isn't it? In many cultures it has been, especially in China, Korea and Japan. And why shouldn't we think of it as a *genre*? Genres are also gendered after all, not only translation. Moreover, the origin of the two concepts is the same, for which we use in French the very same word. So women have historically excelled in genres such as children's literature, poetry, gothic novels (British authors), *romans roses*, Japanese novels, novels *tout court*, short stories, science fiction, translation etc. Different genres are aimed at different readerships.

"Gender" is an ambiguous term. It has had its role in the English language, in highlighting the fact that that "male" and "female" are *relational concepts*. And in stressing the constructed, social and historic character of each. It has brought awareness about the non-naturalness of the construction. But it has its limits, however useful it may have been for political purposes. Like sex, it is easily essentialized and has often been used, exactly like sex, to denote women and not the *relation*. The sex/ gender divide corresponds to the theoretically untenable Levi-Straussian distinction nature/ culture. But we have the concept of nature only through culture... and likewise sex only through gender. So the relation is a false symmetry. It is one of the forms of what i have called *partage de la raison*. "We have 50% of gender", proclaimed proudly the *chiclero* workers in the Guatemalan rain-forest, meaning we have 50% of women. We would not need the concept of gender if there was a symmetry and equality. It would be irrelevant.

Boris Buden: There is one extraordinary woman in the realm of language who emerged from beneath the ruins of the Tower of Babel: the mother from the notion of mother tongue. She is to linguistics what the Blessed Virgin Mary is to Christianity – a cult. Let's reflect critically on this cult. My questions are these: Whose mother actually is she? What sort of woman is she? Is she really a virgin since she gave birth to the nation?

Rada Iveković: I don't believe we have only one mother tongue. Everyone has several or many, since any language is multiple. And also basically, language is something that always escapes us, that flees in front and we are always behind trying to get hold of it.

You could stress the fact that the mother of god, in Christianity, has no Gospel, i.e. no text to recite, no story to tell. Her story, as told by her, has not been recorded. But as her story has been fashioned by all the males around her and since, by those who have the right attributes to dictate the truth, she acted as any woman "sealed from above and open from below" (as Lacan would have women) and physically gave birth to *logos,* in the form of Jesus. *Logos* in that context is word-and-thought, both the receptacle and the contents. Her physically "told" material and bodily story is the body of the exemplary (hu)man (partly god), and that body – Jesus – makes history, makes general history for all of us as a hierarchy where we are all sited. That is why she has no language: language is mediation, negotiation; it gives you the possibility of alternative universes, of escaping, of resisting, of different stories and scenarios, of uncertain and alternative meanings. She gave birth to *The Meaning* instead, the one of monotheism, the one that has the ambition of defining us in definitive ways. That translation is a total one, and totalitarian of course. True language is forbidden to

the Virgin Mary (and, symbolically, to women) *because it is translation;* she therefore has no gospel.

Of course, it is usefully playful to identify the mother tongue with a woman, to use that metaphor. You might also see it another way. Is the *Muttersprache* the *mother's tongue* (socially meaning, in patriarchy, the father's tongue)? Is it the (father's) language spoken by the mother and transmitted to the child? (Of course, we know of numerous contrary examples, where the mother's and the father's language are not the same and where, depending on the location, command will be transmitted by the language where the parent's tongue – whichever one – *coincides* with the politically dominant one.) Or is the *Muttersprache* the *mothertongue,* the mother of all languages? There is of course a big difference. I am interested in the latter. I believe that *translation is the mother of languages*, and therefore our own mother tongue, unethnicizable. As an indologist, i also know that people have imagined Sanskrit to be the mother of (Indo-European) languages; or that they have imagined a common ancient Indo-European language, now lost. These are politically idle, though linguistically fruitful ideas. I have claimed translation as my mother tongue elsewhere. Translation comes "first", it comes "before" any language, as a principle inherent to all. A language is not a language if it is not translatable. "Translatability" is not a mere accidental attribute of language, it is an inherent and fundamental element of it. This is not to say that there are no "untranslatable" elements in every language, but they coexist with *a principled translatability*. Translatability is the life of languages. Thoroughly untranslatable, they would also be immobile and impermeable to transformation and evolution. The untranslatables are absolutely fundamental too, since they are the guarantee of polysemic values. Untranslatables do not prevent translation: they are on the contrary its fuel, and we are lucky to

have them. We translate thanks to, and in spite of, the untranslatables. Therefore we have the context. But fundamentally, you have translation even before you have a language to translate into, because you must translate yourself to the other in communication; you translate inside-out and reciprocally. You also translate social meanings, political codes, institutions, habits, behaviours into language and vice-versa, and this is not a solipsistic activity. It is done by all humanity, even beyond one language, and in a complex network that encompasses space and time, but that also reaches beyond. It is how we are both mortal and historic beings (as individuals, and untranslatable), as well as transcendent beings (as a species, possibly among other species and in interaction with them). And of course, translation is also what is done within one and the same language (if we could define the latter at all; how do we delimit a language from another if not arbitrarily?) But the distinction between "language" and "dialect" is a political one (associated with power, at that), and not at all a linguistic one.

We might want to use the Tower of Babel as a metaphor for the universe containing so many universes, or as a language containing the seed of all other languages in that it is basically translation. The day when we'd have one absolute language and one translation only, we'd be dead. As the Subcomandante Marcos has it, "el mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos"7, and the same is true of languages: so many languages fit into a language.

Boris Buden: Do you personally have the kind of mother implied by the idea of the "mother tongue"? Is there only one? All love relations are ambivalent. Is this true of your relationship to her too? Has she ever loved you as you loved her? Do you still remember her today?

Rada Iveković: My own relationship to my mother tongue has always been ambivalent and problematic, and so is everyone's to various degrees. For reasons of facility, i continue to call it Serbo-Croatian, because i didn't want to change its name (a mere label) when the association of differently named languages was made with different national (and also, frankly, nationalistic) projects, since i was personally adhering to *none*. Because i do not believe in the distinction between language and dialect and since i do see language as translation (and therefore as my mother tongue, being the mother tongue of humanity), i didn't have to choose between the various denominations. Even previously, as someone who had been speaking, writing and publishing in that language, i had met the same difficulties in identifying the languages and had met the different standardizations that, over the years, developed in disjoining directions and were applied in more or less rigid ways by the *lektori*, the official "readers" (really correctors who played the language police for the official public spheres which assumed that we were illiterate). We call the language *naški*, "ours" as well; but my friend Stefano Bianchini who, partly for different reasons than me, does not have to choose, also calls it *štokavski*, "the shtokavian lingo". The assumption was an unspoken political-linguistic sin, to be relentlessly punished. In a language (Serbo-Croatian) where the boundaries were traced and retraced, constantly rectified by nation-building *lektori*, by linguists and politicians, and dictated by TV, where the official orthography kept changing over the decades of *my* writing life, linguistic purism soon became a profession. I remember different subsequent certified standardizations and stopped stubbornly at one of them, refusing to introduce any subsequent official changes. The result was that i have published texts in all possible varieties of standardization, depending on the severity of the *lektor* or on the linguistic policy of the publisher

(which also varied). My personal history is that i had grown, lived and worked in both Belgrade and Zagreb, and during my younger life i actually *spoke* the two variants of the language, with some misgivings when in mixed company. Usually, people spoke one form of the language even when in the company of friends speaking the other. But i grew up on both sides and learnt both at an early age. Was i translating between Serbian and Croatian? I spoke French to the French, English to the English, and likewise Croatian to Croats, Serbian to Serbs .... The distinction between the last two was obvious very arbitrary and depended on the official criteria of the moment (those criteria changing all the time, and especially on the Croatian side, in the direction of purism and of introducing more and more small differences making them sound historic or ancient). It could also be a matter of personal feeling. Of course, you are right, the cult of the mother tongue is nonsense, but *it is a nation and a state-building nonsense*, and in any case it becomes associated with the exercise of power. It is *because* language is a wonderful instrument of disciplining that it is also a possible tool for negotiating freedom. These capacities of language extend to what is embedded in language, such as literature, writing.

Today i mainly write in other languages than my first mother tongue, but even in these i have exactly the same problems, or, any language gives you access only through dilemmas and spite. There is no language that can say it all, because language is a part of it all! Basically, we feel any language to be insufficient and inadequate, and so is translation too.

Languages, including our small languages, have their monolinguistic dreams! Linked to linguistic purism and to some extent comparable, you will find at work a feature, which is quite characteristic of the French language: a mono-linguistic, mono-semantic paranoia. I of course agree with David Heller-Roazen

when he says, “je conteste le fait que toute langue soit une langue, avec sa propre identité”8, and when he argues that any language points towards or echoes another language; or, as i say, any language is translation. Therefore, any language is inadequate, incomplete, full of “untranslatables” and yet necessarily *given to translating*, in the manner of a promise and of an unaccomplished project. Not only is Babel confusing, not only is the network of languages mystifying and bewildering, but so is even one language within itself, and within that language any single sentence or even word or sound. We will never have a definitive meaning, which is to say that, albeit in translation, we shall never be thoroughly translated. Rightly therefore, Heller-Roazen thinks that Babel is not in the past, it is the reality of language. If it is only a “myth”, i would add, our space is within it and we inhabit it.

But of course, there is no escaping it, there remains the question of the divinity, sometimes the claimed sacrality of language. In various ways, different cultures or languages have offered *language patterns, or linguistic templates* for the world, or a “sacred text”, a “revelation”, a “truth” in language given to us by transcendence. The monotheisms have gone the furthest in this direction it seems, in founding on a text a more or less potentially fundamentalist clerocracy, when not theocracy (and the two have often coincided). The monotheisms, i say, because they have had the particular capacity of associating that religious power with state power. Of course we have other patterns of religious power embedded in language too, but it need not necessarily operate through the state.

Clarisse Herrenschmidt argues that, in semitic languages (that have by the way produced staunch monotheisms)9, god is the guardian of that part which is invisible – the vowels. Accordingly, for at least that part, the seat of at least the *invisible* part of language (the 3/4ths in the Veda; the vowels in semitic languages etc.) is *outside*

the subject, located within an unreachable transcendence and in the custody of god(s). “We can write, but not speak, without vowels. There could be a language without consonants, but not without vowels. In order to speak, we need breath”10. Thus the consonantic script of languages like Hebrew gave them, according to this theory, the possibility of “reinventing” the language within that part that had remained hidden. (I may have quite a few doubts here in the all too quick political assumption that this is what allowed the Hebrew language to be “revived”; the problem is whether it had been historically “revived” at all, or whether it had simply lived on, in spite of the strong, maybe myth-like, founding narrative of its “revival”). According to the author, the very fact that the language is not all *caught within the script* means that there is space for invention. I would also call this invention translation, political and social negotiation etc. I would see in that “space for invention” a possible political space (thus a space of freedom or of slavery too) quite beyond language. This theory is interesting mainly for *another* reason, in my view – for the politics one can read in a language theory, and for understanding colonial relations through language. In this theory i think – but i am not yet sure, i must read more of her work – that there is no scope for understanding language as translation. But on the other hand, her idea that a language which is written with a complete graphism (noting both consonants and vowels) like European languages (and, i would add, like many Asian and probably many other languages) enables its accompanying philosophy to construct the concept of a subject (or according to her expression “gives a voice to the subject”) is very interesting, though it may be dubious. However, should this be seen as something positive? We might as well refrain from judgement here, not so much in comparison with Arabic (why not, again, Semitic languages, one wonders?), which, according to Herrenschmidt, favours the subject less than

European languages (how about Hebrew?). Linking subjectivity to script is of course problematic, or it refers only to dominant and centric subjectivity. I could go back to what i said about ancient Indian philosophy itself not favouring the constitution of the subject, but clearly as a positive, i.e. autonomous, early civilizational choice related to the Indian early "linguistic turn" (and i don't want to characterize it by a judgement as positive or negative)11. If with any relation to the script at all, in the Indian case, the non-constitution of the subject (which should not be seen as a negative fact) may be linked with oral transmission. Although scripts existed (and to a great extent they mostly had developed vowels), these were used in Ancient India for other – non-mnemonic – purposes than transmitting "sacred" texts12. If anything, the difference which may be implied by the different usages of the script may, i believe, have to do not so much with the script marking or the vowels, but rather with using or not using the script at all as a mnemonic technique for "sacred" texts, i.e. in relation to some kind of power. And here, i might concur with Clarisse Herrenschmidt, if indeed she were going in that direction (which is not clear to me): maybe we do indeed need a written language, written sacred texts if we are going to effectively and permanently colonize and transform colonization into a world system (beyond wild invasions), later called globalization. She seems to imply that we have no world society or global civil society in that we have no underlying universal myth, and especially not for the era of new technologies. Thus, in a world not only desemanticized, and partly de-symbolized (or lacking contemporary myths), we are at a loss as to how to make sense of the world. But then, what myth is Babel, if not an underlying myth still holding good beyond the fragmentation of globalization? And do we need a unified myth? Maybe we don't.

Boris Buden: Maybe we don't need myths at all. Maybe an underlying universal myth is of no use in the globalized world. But can we do without any concept of universality? Should we completely abandon the very idea of universality? Was that only a myth too?

Rada Iveković: Clearly, myths, and their being embedded into language, helped defuse the violence, which was always potentially there. But you need to have an operating symbolic system for that. The situation we are in now is that we have different symbolic systems, none of them of universal origin but many with universal claims, and we also have symbolic systems falling apart while new ones are not yet consolidated. To a philosopher, this usually means that we need to reconstruct and re-establish universality (or universalities?), and allow it to grow in new ways. My formula for this is simple, and at the same time complex, but i recommend Balibar and Laclau on the question of the universals13. My deconstruction of the hierarchical and hegemonic universal goes as described in the example for "man" and "woman", *homme* = *homme+femme*. The formula speaks for itself and reads like this, translated:

Level of the Universal: **UNIVERSAL**

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Level of the Particulars: **universal + particular**

NB: one of the particulars is called "universal"; there are many particulars, but we only take 2 as the minimum for multiplicity

It could also read A(A+B). The force of the universal is that it holds both ends of the equation, it is both "universal" and

"particular", so it can switch levels and trick us at all times. There is no problem whatsoever at the level of the particulars; at that level, we are different but equal. The problem arises only regarding the relationship. Now, *the universal should always be seen (paradoxically?) as a relationship between the universal and the particular(s)*. There is no universal that is not inhabited by particulars. Translated, it also means that you have to reshuffle the hegemony at every step, you constantly do it and undo it; but i also don't want to stick to the label of hegemony as a dead-end (Laclau/Mouffe). I prefer to see the constant acting of the political (*le politique*) in it; it is our chance, regardless of the fact that our chance has often been our (or in any case, someone's) doom. There is no avoiding risk; the risk of mistake is inherent to the political. I don't think we can expect a "common explanation of what is happening to us" (*explication commune à ce qui nous arrive*, Herrenschmidt). Not if we live in Babel.

So many new things are happening and so abruptly, the acceleration has been such that we don't understand our world any more and have lost criteria and values, while new ones are slow to set in. But reterritorialization follows and is parallel to deterritorialization in the same way that resemantization traverses desemantization and a slow but steady resymbolization spreads over fragmented desymbolized spaces and times. These things are only visible a posteriori rather than in real time. And, because of the general global connectedness over even the great global fragmentation, all meaning, all symbolization, all language is never lost at once, but is being differently reconstituted at the same time as disintegration is at work. This is the situation of Babel and of the multiple "mother tongues" we all have. If there is universality, it is Babel itself. The paradox and the miracle of language is that it

is both personal and transpersonal, and that it transcends time and space. It would be none of these if it were not translation.

As it appears, we need translation because we are immersed in the historical condition14. I have reflected elsewhere on the difference in terms of linguistic politics of colonialism and of the post-colonial condition, on the differences between French and English, the latter only having become a global language. The political consequences in countries speaking those languages are huge, both in the metropolis and the former colonies. Indian intellectuals, whose local language (English, one among their local languages) coincides with the global language, benefit greatly from this situation and go directly to universities in the USA, unlike the Algerians for whom there is no equivalent situation, since their colonial language is not at the same time a global one and gives no cosmopolitan access to knowledge15. Very convincingly, André Chevrillon argued that English is more at ease with "becoming" (*devenir*) and the flow of time, while French is so with "being" (*être*) as well as with immobile but successive chunks of time16. Even today, or today more than ever, the two languages seem to engage in different degrees or intensities of actualisation of the virtual. There are of course continuities and discontinuities between the two at the same time, in the sense in which any language carries within itself other languages, and this also has a parallel in (in)compossible continuities and discontinuities between past and present at all times: it has all boiled down to the present condition of globalization. The erosion of sovereignties and deregulation has coexisted with new "assemblages" (S. Sassen, A. Ong) or rather *agencements* (G. Deleuze) that, in the interconnectedness of the new cosmo-political, *produce new networks and unexpected combinations and connections*. This production of new ways of life, of politics, of production, of public

spheres, of closed spheres, of informal politics, of new sovereignties (including those built on war), of nonlinear developments and unexpected results, of imaginaries, of new meanings and new symbolizations – is also translation. These translations from the global level can even still trickle down into the national level: it is still possible to translate from the national-state level to the global level[17] as well as to the personal level, and vice versa, with some misgivings, some misfirings sometimes, and many diversions and gaps to be filled with other unexpected elements. It is contexts that change and that need translations, not only texts, and the phenomenology of politics too. It is clear that we cannot come to terms with the world as it is with the sole claim of the universal, or the sole claim of the particular. Resistance movements, women, have claimed both – neither was sufficient. In reframing the relation that universality means, we may want to investigate universal singularity. Balibar has worked on this, and so have in very different ways Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou and others. How can we overcome closure of public, social, political spaces? One of the main questions today is how to understand, politically, *migrations*, and what to do politically with them[18], and how to disconnect, also in our perception and analysis, political subjectivity from imaginary identity. I have proposed the concept of *missing citizen*, to render a class visible: for example, the missing citizens of Europe or of Australia, those who are drowned at sea or are *refoulés,* to be understood positively as a category (those who could have contributed to our collectivities, but have not –because of our stupidity and shortsightedness). More or less radical theological, revolutionary or *theoretical* solutions have been attempted and, apart from the fact that they are not mutually exclusive, they didn't seem to solve the paradox maybe because they didn't tackle reframing the universal? "Radical" solutions, on the safe side of radical university campuses and away from political

movements in theory have sometimes produced vain labels and enumerations. Nations and all sorts of more or less ethnicizable "identities" claiming that they are victims (my victimhood against yours) freeze and are made through the structuring of a very complex and always renewed network of reciprocally supported hierarchies. This is why getting rid of one injustice never means getting rid of all, since new inequalities are being reproduced all the time. This is why Babel is our condition.

Rada Iveković in conversation with Boris Buden
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1 Viviane Alleton, "Traduction et conceptions chinoises du texte écrit", *Etudes chinoises*, vol. XXIII, 2004.

2 Meredith E. Abarca, *Voices in the Kitchen. Views of Food and the World from Working Class Mexican American Women,* Texas A&M University Press 2006.

3 Rada Ivekovic, « Resisting Absolute Translation like the Rhinoceros / Résister à la traduction absolue comme le rhinocéros », *Livraisons* 8, 2007.

4 I have limited knowledge about this through Dongchao Min's paper "Translation as Crossing Borders: A Case Study of the Translations of the Word 'Feminism' into Chinese by the CSWS [Chinese Society for Women's Studies]" for *Translat*e, as well as from other papers on the site "Translating violence" http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/1107

5 Huen Tsang or Huanzang (玄奘), 7th century according to Western chronology, was a traveller from China to India, and the first recorded translator of Buddhist scriptures.

6 Nicole Loraux, *Les enfants d'Athéna,Seuil* 1990; *La Cité divisée : L'oubli dans la mémoire d'Athènes*, Payot, 2005.

7 Marcos, *Cuarta declaracion de la selva lacandona*, www.ezln.org/documentos/1996/19960101.es.htm

8 His Interview "La langue, l'éco, l'oubli" in *Le Monde* 27 april 2007, p. 12; see Heller-Roazen, *Echolalies. Essai sur l'oubli des langues*, Paris, Seuil 2007.

9 Although the extreme distinction between monotheism and polytheism is highly problematic, as any Indologist would know, but we may leave that otherwise *highly important* question aside.

10 C. Herrenschmidt, Interview in *Liberation* May 31, 2007, "Livres", p. III; see her book *Les Trois Ecritures : Langue, nombre, code*, Paris, Gallimard 2007.

11 I stress that my two meanings of "positive" in this sentence are obviously different.

12 With regard to the monetary writing standardizing numbers being absent in India and China, as claimed by C. Herrenschmidt, i can't say anything, as i don't know: but if the Indians didn't use the script to memorize the *Veda*, and if they didn't use it either while fixing it on coins that materialized numbers (while at the same time they invented "Arabic" numbers) - what did they use it for? They obviously used it for commercial and everyday purposes, for messages; was it only lists of merchandise? They also used coins. I

am trying to catch the sense of it all, this is something i don't quite know and should study further.

13 Etienne Balibar, *La crainte des masses*, Paris, Galilée 1997 : see last chapter « Les universels », pp. 419-455; "Sub specie universitatis", *Topoi* (2006) 25 :3-16 DOI 10.1007/s11245-006-0001-6, ©Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2006 ; « On Universalism. In Debate with Alain Badiou », http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0607/balibar/en

14 Vania Baldi, *Appartenenze sconosciute. Politiche della traduzione culturale*, Roma, ER 2007.

15 Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Capitalisme cognitif*, Paris 2007.

16 *Trois études de la literature anglaise*, Paris, Plon 1921.

17 Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006.

18 Sandro Mezzadra, *Diritto di fuga*, Ombre corte 2002 ; enlarged edition 2007 ; *La condizione postcoloniale. Storia e politica nel presente globale*, Verona, Ombre corte 2008.