

Dilek Dizdar, Andreas Gipper, & Michael Schreiber (Eds.). (2015). *Nationenbildung und Übersetzung*. Berlin: Frank & Timme. ISBN 978-3-86596-421-2. EUR 25.

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Dilek Dizdar and Andreas Gipper's introduction to this timely collection stakes the claim of translation studies to be the ideal discipline for addressing the cultural and linguistic history of nation-building. Translation studies, they argue, can subvert dominant models of national culture that are still unquestioned in many disciplines, as well as reconstructing the processes by which such models took shape in the first place (p. 8). Dizdar and Gipper cite the groundbreaking work of Naoki Sakai on translation as a force for the "co-figuration" of language entities and consequently the building of national boundaries (e.g. Sakai 2006). They call on translation scholars to exploit the discipline's potential to the full, avoiding the temptation to remain rooted in the discourse of nation states – a peril aggravated by an exclusive interest in interlingual "translation proper" – and focusing instead on the bordering work of translation in all its guises. The articles that follow present a rich kaleidoscope of such processes. In a book of well under 200 pages, it is no criticism to say that they are not comprehensive: they focus geographically on Europe and historically on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Gauti Kristmannsson's comments on vernacular translation and the role of the "translation without an original" open the volume. Kristmannsson looks at Antoine Berman's *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, a text that has been highly influential in thinking on translation and nation in European Romanticism and is most certainly worth revisiting. His call for a more nuanced reading of the domestication/foreignization couplet made popular by Lawrence Venuti's (1998) reading of Berman is extremely welcome, and is usefully filled out by other articles in the collection.

In the next chapter, Andreas Gipper continues the theme of vernacular confrontations with classical antiquity, finding the seventeenth-century Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes to be a hugely significant nexus in the history of European translation ideologies – and, equally, in the history of a particular notion of national culture. Noting a tendency for historical translation scholarship to become hypnotized by debates between "literal" and "free" translation (often in the framework of domestication/foreignization), his subtly argued article deconstructs the categories of self and other in translation discourse. Before the Querelle, he argues, the "foreignness" of classical antiquity did not yet exist in the European vernaculars: classicist translation practice, far from being "the translational mediation of an Other literature and culture", was "the mediation of what, in classicism's own view of itself, was the core of its own heritage" (p. 29; all translations are my own). In French cultural realities of the seventeenth century, the otherness of antiquity itself was brought into being by the debate over classicist translation. Gipper's paper effectively unpicks the familiar dichotomies of translation studies, concluding: "With its discovery of the Other in the Self, classicist universalism was what prepared the way for modernity's experience of cultural difference, and thereby also for the concept of a national literature" (p. 42).

Following Andreas F. Kelletat’s defence of Herder—a key figure in the theorization of language and nation—and thoughts on Benedict Anderson’s reader-born nation versus Ernest Renan’s “community of destiny”, Sabine Schwarze presents a careful study of discourses on the translation of classics as integral to nation-building strategies in France and Italy. Looking at a wide range of theoretical and polemical texts, she presents an inseparable triad of national “genius”, national language, and a nationally specific “genio del tradurre”. Importantly, Schwarze stresses that translation in the eighteenth century was not only a practical instrument, but “also a theoretical instrument in the development of national identity and national consciousness (patriotism)” (p. 61). She tracks the processes by which Italian and French commentators constructed their respective national translation cultures by attacking each other. Once again, the simplistic dichotomy in which domestication is the crucial tool of nation-building is undermined: Schwarze finds “faithful translation” to be a specifically patriotic, anti-French topos in eighteenth-century Italian translation theory. Though not framed in these terms, Schwarze’s excellent piece perfectly illustrates Sakai’s notion of the bordering and the co-figuration of nations through translation.

The chapters by Michael Schreiber and Lieven D’hulst are complementary, both dealing with the translation policy of the French Revolution and more specifically the translation of Revolutionary legislation into Flemish/Dutch. Schreiber provides a very intriguing glimpse into the institutional context of such translations, worthy of far more extensive discussion, and looks at the terminological and syntactical features of several translated texts of the period. He notes the existence of a translation bureau, a variety of central and local organs carrying out the translations themselves during the French occupation of Belgium, and the likelihood that quite apart from such official translations, statements in court may have been made in Dutch, translated ad hoc, and reported in French for the court records (p. 79). This latter point, in particular, hints at an enormously complex hinterland of translation culture that is difficult for historians to access today: the informal or “habitualized” translation analysed by Michaela Wolf in her study of the Habsburg Monarchy (2015). Such translation goes on “beneath the radar” in situations of multilingual inequality and forms the vital context for the institutional, formal translation acts that enmesh to create “nations”.

Even if they are only the tip of the iceberg, however, such formal translations bear great significance. Lieven D’hulst continues the topic in his study of the Dutch and Flemish version of the French *Bulletin des lois* from 1797–1813. He makes further valuable points of principle regarding the study of translation in nation-building. Schreiber’s concluding comment was that Revolutionary translation policy was not concerned with enhancing the status of its target languages – far from it, given its goal of linguistic standardization – yet de facto, the distribution of laws in parallel versions contributed to other languages’ “symbolic upgrading” (p. 92). In turn, D’hulst begins his paper with the paradox that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe saw both the beginning of cosmopolitanism and the beginning of national ideologies (p. 93). As he rightly stresses, translation was at the heart of this paradox, capable both of reinforcing local languages and of restricting them – of enforcing their standardization and of imbuing their development with the ideologies of the dominant, “exporting” nation. In fact, a further valuable distinction presented by D’hulst is the terminological couplet *intraduction* and *extraduction*, with which he distinguishes between two different perspectives both relevant to the theme: the perspective of the target culture’s choice of and handling of texts to import, and the perspective of the source culture promoting itself in foreign languages. In this case, Revolutionary France was exporting a new legal and political

culture by means of highly controlled translation activity in the area of law. Remarking that the exportation of legal terminology, and more broadly legal discourse, was complicated by both local resistance and linguistic malleability on the part of the receiving language, the paper stresses the complexity of translation norms and the need for larger-scale studies of the “correlated processes of diffusion and integration” (p. 94) that contributed to nation-building at certain highly charged crossroads in European history.

The final three chapters extend the collection’s scope beyond Western Europe. Christos Karvounis looks at the Greek linguistic and cultural space in the period from 1774 to 1832. In a useful survey of some fundamental issues in translation and nation-building, Karvounis makes the point that in any one sociocultural context, translation is not an isolated phenomenon but must be addressed as part and parcel of literacy and written culture as a whole. In a succinct description of language’s roles in his chosen time and place, he reveals the tremendous complexity of linguistic, ethnic, religious and political identities in a pre-national setting. This is an important corrective to any notion of a teleological development towards a single national language. Among other things, Karvounis cautions against hasty definitions of “languages” themselves: “Greek”, he convincingly argues, is far from a self-evident category, especially in the late eighteenth century. This historical insight cries out for application to today’s translation analyses as well: studying the historical contingency of national languages may help to complicate our definitions of “source language” and “target language” in the present day.

Julija Boguna offers a theoretically sophisticated and densely argued study of a canonized founding text of Latvian nationalism, itself a translation from German. Through Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere, she examines the performativity of translations and the ways in which historically and culturally specific definitions of translation – including the possibility of ignoring translatedness, the “blind spot” cited in her chapter’s title – enable translations to be deployed so variously in the construct “nation”. Boguna presents a strong claim: that “translation and nation appear to be conceptually and ... epistemically constitutive of one another” (p. 135). Boguna’s productive study provides interesting insights into a “small nation” building itself in counterplay to the cultural colonialism of German.

Finally, Birgit Menzel’s chapter is a fascinating case study rooted in Azerbaijan but covering, as she puts it, “Eurasia as a space of translation”: the translation history of the bestselling Azerbaijan-set novel *Ali and Nino* by Kurban Said, first published in German in 1937. The story of its flamboyant and prolific probable author, whose possible names and national or cultural affiliations are too numerous and contested to list here, is read through the prism of postcolonial theory and particularly in terms of the surrounding culture of Orientalism. Menzel shows how the reception of this intercultural love story in the West tracked Orientalizing trends, including a “self-Orientalization” by the author. In Azerbaijan itself since the 1990s, the massive popularity of the novel has made it a tempting candidate for the vacant role of a “national poet”, but conflicting ethnic attributions and ideological doubts – as well as the fundamental problem that no “true original” of the novel is to be found – have complicated that appropriation. Menzel’s study aims to explore the role of translation history within a new area of “historical geoculturology” (p. 148); her findings, perhaps not surprisingly, indicate just how convoluted that role may be.

With its many detailed historical analyses and its salutary critiques of over-easy categories and interpretations, this collection is a very useful reminder that the area of translation and nation-building is extremely complex and full of countervailing currents. There are no simple

narratives, and our own unquestioned assumptions about nation – or more generally, about self/other dichotomies – run deep. The editors lament that research on translation and nation-building has not yet been “systematized” (p. 7). *Nationenbildung und Übersetzung* certainly does not fill that gap. Yet its high-quality individual contributions offer crucial tools and approaches that may help a much larger range of scholarship tackle a topic in which the stakes are becoming higher every day.

## References

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Kate Sturge

Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin / Aston University, UK

[k.sturge@aston.ac.uk](mailto:k.sturge@aston.ac.uk)