Exchanges

The Interdisciplinary Research Journal

Volume 11, Issue 2 (Spring 2024)

Issue Highlights:

- Featured Special Theme: Effect of Plurality of Translation
- Mental Health & Criminal Responsibility
- Postdisciplinarity – Rebellious & Subversive?
- Undergraduate Visual Learning Experiences
- Virtual Reality: Dancing, Empathy & Presence

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Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal

Volume 11, Issue 2 (Spring 2024)

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Exchanges is a scholar-led, peer-reviewed, diamond open access, interdisciplinary, online-only journal dedicated to the publication of high-quality work by researchers in all disciplines for a broad scholarly audience. No author fees or subscription charges are levied, and contributors retain their author rights. Since 2013, the title has attracted innovative research articles, critical essays and interviews from emerging domain experts and early career researchers globally. The title also publishes scholarly work by practitioner authors and independent scholars.

A Managing Editor-in-Chief based at the University of Warwick oversees development, policy and production, while an international Editorial Board comprised of early career researchers provide advice and practically contribute to editorial work. Associate editors are recruited to participate in producing specific special themed issues. Exchanges usually publishes two issues annually, although additional special themed issues are periodically commissioned in collaboration with other scholars.

Exchanges' twin missions are to encourage intellectual exchange and debate across disparate research communities, along with developing academic authorial and editorial expertise. These are achieved through providing a quality assured platform for disseminating research publications for and by explicitly cross-disciplinary audience, alongside ensuring a supportive editorial environment helping authors and editors develop superior academic writing and publishing skills. Achieving enhanced contributor esteem, visibility and recognition within these broader scholarly communities is a further goal.

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Five Minutes to Midnight: Editorial, Volume 11, Part 2

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> *There's power in the night. There's terror in the darkness. Despite all our accumulated history, learning, and experience, we remember. We remember times when we were too small to reach the light switch on the wall, and when darkness itself was enough to make us cry out in fear* (**Butcher, 2009: 260**).

Introduction

Welcome to the twenty seventh edition of *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal* and our first issue published in 2024. As always if you are a new reader, thanks for joining us and read on to learn a little more about the journal, alongside advice on how you can contribute to future issues. If you're a returning reader welcome back, and hopefully you'll find this editorial a useful introduction to this issue too. Alongside this, all readers will find advice for authors and an update on our social media channels.

A Brand New You

Last issue in October 2023 we celebrated our tenth anniversary of publication. This marked somewhat of a major milestone for a journal founded by a small and enthusiastic group early career researchers (**Johnson, 2023**). An achievement worth commemorating we thought (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Do you have your commemorative mug?

Sadly, experience and the literature indicate enthusiasm for such community-led journal projects tends to sag over the years as the original members move on in their careers.[i] This is just one of the reasons why the anniversary comprised such a celebration for the team! That we remain viable and active today going into our second decade is a credit to all the contributors and editors of the past ten years who've helped keep *Exchanges* going over such a period. Thank you everyone!

However, since last time's editorial was about looking back over our history, this issue's though is facing towards the future. Regular readers might be aware, and certainly newsletter subscribers will be, that 2024 is shaping up to be the busiest year we've ever had! [ii] Firstly, the last few months have seen a surge of activity around future special issues with the opening weeks of the year witnessing an absolute wave of manuscript submissions. Which I couldn't be happier about, personally.

Firstly, the MRC (Modern Records Centre) @50 and Research Culture special issues have been projects developed with collaborators at Warwick, almost in parallel. Both stem from events in last September, have shared a submission deadline and are likely to see publication mid-year in quick succession. These issues have also both been spectacularly successful in terms of gaining a sizable range of high-quality content among their submitted manuscripts, making it a busy time for myself and the editorial team. Having read through all the raw submissions I was deeply impressed not only by the quality of the authorship demonstrated, but also the diversity of perspectives, insights and topics displayed for both issues.

Consequently, there's a high probability both special issues – scheduled for a summer publication date – will be especially large and engaging ones.[iii] I am also pleased to report that as of writing both issues are now well on their way towards being publication ready, and I think it is only a question of which one of them reaches fruition first: I have my personal suspicions which one that will be – but I could be wrong. Naturally, my thanks not only to the authors for their time and efforts, but the wonderful team of associate editors who are working away behind the scenes to make these volumes appear.

If this mass of activity wasn't enough, *Exchanges* has also been initiating a number of other publishing projects which will see publication over the next 6 to 18 months. Firstly, we have the *Queerness as Strength* special issue being developed in collaboration with Monash University colleagues. The call for participation finished in early March, and as of writing we are awaiting the final paper submissions from those scholars lucky enough to be invited to submit their work. As an issue offering the full range of paper format options to authors, this one will take a little longer to reach

publication than the preceding two special issues, so watch out for it from mid-2025 onward.

Then we have a collaboration with one of the Warwick IAS' early-career fellows on the theme of *Resistance*.[iv] By the time this issue and editorial sees print, the IAS will have hosted an event around this theme and extended an invitation to participants to contribute critical reflections to a specially themed section of the journal. The hope is we will be able to get these to publication for our October 2024 issue – so again, we will be able to share these with you in the autumn.

If that wasn't enough, we have *another* two special issue projects now actively underway. The first of these is linked to events hosted by Warwick, and we are working with colleagues in the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender (CSWG) this time. We are especially delighted to find have been able to offer a home to work emerging from their highly competitive Graduate Seminar Series. This series of events, with papers given by scholars from across the world, will be running through to the summer this year. As part of this we will be – potentially – producing not one but two special issues containing critical reflections and full articles inspired by and directly adjacent to the seminars' contents. I would expect we'll be seeing the first of these volumes appearing in early 2025, so there's some time to go before we can bring that one to you.

Now you might think, given our modest staffing resource this would be enough to be getting on with.[v] You would be incorrect in that assumption, because the second project has seen us agreeing to collaborate with colleagues in Taiwan on a special issue concerning *Sustainability Culture*. This issue has been inspired by papers at two International Conferences on Sustainability Culture (ICSC) presented by NCHU (National Chung Hsing University) in '22 and 23, and is being developed alongside the 2024 iteration of this event. The call for participation went live a week or so ago, so if you are interested in participating, visit *Exchanges*' homepage to find out a whole lot more. I would argue this is an especially exciting development for the journal, as it should help us to showcase more authors from outside the UK and Europe scholarly worlds. Something which I think you can agree will be to the benefit of you the readers, and the rich diversity of thought in our pages too.

I think though, for now at least, this represents the full gamut of fully reified projects and publication activities for *Exchanges* for the next 12 months. That said, I am acutely aware of at least three more projects – pending funding and agreement – which we may well be kicking off in the latter months of 2024. So, it very much appears that things aren't set to quieten down any time soon on the journal! Naturally, as, when and if they

are confirmed, I'll look forward to sharing their details with you all in a future editorial.

For now, let's turn to the heart of the issue and the new articles published in this spring issue.

Papers

This issue we have a selection of articles, some of which you will note are tied to a thematic call we made for a prospective special issue. For various reasons, the special issue never quite coalesced, despite two years of work by myself, the authors and editorial team. However, I am certainly delighted to offer these intriguing pieces prominence within this issue as a themed section, alongside our regular papers.

Articles

We open the issue with a richly illustrated paper from **Mark Pope** and colleagues entitled *Pushing the Boundaries of Reflection: The Answer's on a postcard*. In this paper Pope reports on a project engaging undergraduates in reflective practices through a visual and graphical lens utilised postcards. This illustrative approach allowed the authors to explore the students' learning experiences in a more holistic and authentic manner, and to better understand how they critically engaged with their educational world (1).

For our next article **Rita Augestad Knudsen** explores *Mental Health Exemptions to Criminal Responsibility*. The author first notes how poor mental health can often be used to exempt individuals from criminal responsibility. Augestad Knudsen further explores how such exemptions are clinically assessed and awarded, highlighting the particular complexity surrounding such endeavours. To illustrate their argument, the author focusses on the differences between Norway and UK's frameworks and implementations of such assessments, especially in terms of burden, proof and causality (29).

We follow this with a piece from **Lisa M Thomas** and colleagues considering dance and virtuality. In *Assembling with VR: Dancing in a more than human world* the authors consider questions of immersion, presence and empathy relating to virtual reality (VR) in the performing arts. The paper especially examines a case study of how young dancers attending a series of immersive technology workshops made use of VR to co-create immersive environments. Thomas and colleagues particularly note how through this technology their students were able to explore new modes of engagement, alongside disrupting boundaries between spectators and participants (55).

Special Theme: The Effect of Plurality of Translation

Shifting to our special themed contributions on the *Effect of Plurality of Translation*. We invited contributions which incorporated addressed the possible effects of plurality in linguistic, conceptual, and cultural translation. Firstly, **Cristina Peligra** offers *Voices and/of Places*. In this article Peligra looks at Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel 'The Song and the Truth' (*Het lied en de waarheid*) and considers how linguistic identity is represented in Dutch literature of repatriation. The author argues this novel, alongside exploring plurality in literature and translation, takes steps to move beyond this framing. Utilising a comparative textual analysis. Peligra highlights how lessons from this text can also help illuminate issues of cultural and linguistic hybridity within other translated works, beyond those in Dutch or English alone (1).

Next **Natalia Rodriguez-Blanco** explores the multilingual news coverage concerned with the nation of Bolivia. In *Plurilingual Perspectives, Pluricultural Contexts*, Rodriguez-Blanco presents a case study focussed on *Agence-France Presse*'s (AFP) news coverage, especially as it related to the country's 2020 general election. The author's ultimate aim through this piece is to examine translation in plurilingual news settings, exposing a domain wherein the role of translators often goes unacknowledged within standard journalistic practices (**107**).

Then **Alka Vishwakarma** takes us on an exciting multilingual journal in *Translating Ramayana: Plurilingual to pluricultural*. Vishwakarma explores the classic Indian literature and poetical forms of *Ramayana* through their historical presentations to more modern translations and representations. In doing so, they consider their relationship and resonance Ramayana has today with questions of regional nationalism and cultural identity. Illustrating their arguments with extracts from these poems in multiple languages, the author also examines how achieving or working from a 'genuine translation' can present a challenge for scholars and national cultural alike (**133**).

Finally for this section **Luis Damián Moreno García** examines issues around English and Spanish subtitles for Hongkonese audiovisual works. In their article, *Subtitling Hong Kong Code-Mixing and Code-Switching*, Moreno Garcia considers how the proliferation of plurilingual content represents a globalised intermingling of language. The article particularly contrasts how dialogue in Netflix shows are translated into official Chinese, English and Spanish language subtitles. In particular, the author highlights the loss of diversity and nuance from the original works and languages within the subtitles presented to viewers (**161**).

Critical Reflections

Just the one critical reflection this issue, from **Jonathan Vickery**, on a topic close to *Exchanges*' heart. In *Critical Reflections on Universities, Publishing, and the Early Career Experience*, Vickery looks at the changing relationships between institutions, publishing and young researchers, emerging from work at Warwick.[vi] Inspired in part by seminars hosted at the local Institute of Advanced Study (IAS), the paper provides critical commentary into the current academic publishing field and knowledge production. It also offers insights into a current project centred on university journal publishing endeavours, alongside highlighting related issues for early career scholars to consider (**188**).

Books Reviews

Finally, we are able to share a book review by **Liam Greenacre**, entitled *Postdisciplinary Knowledge, Edited by Tomas Pernecky*. In the paper Greenacre considers how Pernecky's book theorises postdisciplinarity as a 'rebellious and subversive' movement. In response, the author interrogates Penecky's text to isolate what elements make postdisciplinarity unique, postulating a question concerning if there is even a need for it. However, Greenacre concludes in the lens of considering the nature of the academy, a necessary contribution from this field does offer considerable benefits (**203**).

Calls for Papers

As always, we would like to remind all readers and potential authors of our open calls for papers. Authors are also encouraged to register for our email newsletter along with following our social media feeds for announcements and opportunities: see the links towards the end of this editorial.

Open Calls for Paper

Thematic call aside, *Exchanges* continues to invite and welcome submissions throughout the year on any subject. There are **no manuscript submission deadlines** on our open call and submissions will be considered throughout the year. Manuscripts therefore may be submitted for consideration via our online submission portal at any point.

Articles passing our review processes and accepted for publication will subsequently appear in the next available issue, normally published in late April and October. *Exchanges* readers have a broad range of interests, hence articles from any discipline or tradition written for a broad, scholarly audience will be considered. However, articles which explicitly embrace elements of interdisciplinary thought, praxis or application are especially welcome.

Manuscripts can be submitted for consideration as a peer-reviewed research or review article formats or alternatively submitted for consideration as one of our editorially reviewed formats.[vii] There latter, briefer formats are often able to transit to publication faster. [viii] They can also be for authors who with limited publication experience or who are those looking to embrace reflexivity, posit an opinion or share professional insights. All article formats receive extensive reader attention and downloads.[ix]

As *Exchanges* has a core mission to support the development and dissemination of research by early career and post-graduate researchers, we are especially pleased to receive manuscripts from emerging scholars or first-time authors. However, contributions from established and senior scholars are also welcomed too. Further details of our open call requirements can be found online (**Exchanges, 2022**).

Special Issue Sustainability Culture: Call for Participation

We recently launched our latest collaborative special issue call for participation, as noted above. This time the special issue seeks to further the debate on how culture defines our drive and thrust toward sustainability from an interdisciplinary approach. It aims to advance the dialogue on what sustainability culture exactly means in the 21st century. Additionally, we hope the issue and papers within it will be able to further explore the issues which hinder the achievement of the Great (Agro)Ecological Transition, and what cultural change is needed to advance this in general. This call is particularly interested in exploring our relation to food and the concept of sustenance, as well as to the process of how we produce and consume food, as a pathway towards this a 'Great Transition' in living more ecologically.

Suggested manuscript themes may include, but are not limited to:

- Agricultural TEK and evolving beyond the post-colonial discussion
- Agroecology as a new climate action approach
- Building ethical and sustainable connections with our direct environment and living communities
- How do we overcome 'business-as-usual' and anti-social morals in our (agri)culture?
- New climate ethics and agriculture, a necessary tandem?
- New morality education for sustainable living and agriculture
- Sustainability, a matter of green care?
- What are new climate ethics and can they be universal?

- What is sustainability culture exactly, its definition and aspects?

You can read the full background of the call, along with details of how to get involved on the *Exchanges*' website (**Exchanges, 2024a**). However, key deadline dates are:

Expressions of Interest: **Sunday 16th June 2024**

Manuscript Submissions: **Sunday 15th September 2024**

All correspondence should be directed to the Editor-in-Chief, with contact details at the start of this editorial. Good luck, and we look forward to reading your article proposals and outlines!

Informal Approaches

As Editor-in-Chief I welcome approaches from potential authors to discuss prospective articles or article ideas for *Exchanges*. However, abstract submission or formal editorial discussions ahead of a submission are *not* a prerequisite, and authors may submit complete manuscripts for consideration without any prior communication.[x] Authors are always encouraged to include a *note to editor* indicating the article format or call under which their manuscript is to be considered along with any other matters they wish to bring to my attention.

Exchanges is a diamond open-access, scholar-led journal, meaning there are no author fees or reader subscription charges and all content is made freely available online (**Fuchs & Sandoval, 2013; Bosman et al, 2021**). Furthermore, authors retain copyright over their work but grant the journal first publication rights as a submission requirement. *Exchanges* is happy to support translations of our published articles subsequently appearing in other suitable journals, and requests only that a link back to the original piece is incorporated for completeness. Authors may wish to familiarise themselves with *Exchanges'* journal policies for further information on how we handle author contributions (**Exchanges 2024b**).

All submitted manuscripts undergo initial scoping and originality checks before being accepted for editorial review consideration. Manuscripts seeking publication as research articles additionally will undergo one or more rounds formal peer-review by suitable external assessors. Editorial decisions on manuscript acceptance are final, although unsuccessful authors are normally encouraged to consider revising their work for later reconsideration by the journal.

Further advice for prospective authors can be found throughout the *Exchanges* and IAS websites (**Exchanges, 2024c, IAS, 2024**), as well as in our editorials, podcast episodes and blog entries.

Forthcoming Issues

Our next issues as outlined in the editorial above should be the twin special issues for the MRC@50 and Research Culture over the summer months. Then it would most likely be the regular October issue (vol 12.1) – for which there's still time to contribute a critical reflection or conversation piece. Then as we move towards and into 2025, we should hopefully be bringing you our various special issues currently under development, as discussed above – although the exact dates for each of these will be decided closer to publication.

Acknowledgements

As noted earlier, my particular thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue. I would like to especially celebrate those associate editors who worked diligently over the past two years on the prospective *Pluralities of Translations* special issue. Hence, I would like to highlight the contributions of **Katy Humberstone, Mantra Mukim, Marion Coumel** and **Raghad Melfi** as associate editors, along with **Melissa Pawelski** as special issue lead. I hope you all gained some valuable experience and development through your involvement.

My thanks as always goes out to all our authors and reviewers for their vital and often timely intellectual contributions towards this particular edition. Without these people, producing a quality-assured, peer-reviewed, scholar-led publication would not be possible. Likewise, my thanks to the members of our Editorial Board for their continued support and efforts on behalf of *Exchanges*. A special acknowledgement to long time Board, and former special issue lead and associate editor, **Nora Castle**, who has moved on to exciting new challenges in her life and has consequently stood down from the team. Having worked with Nora in various capacities since 2019, I can honestly say her insight, good humour and scholarship will be much missed on the title.

Finally, particular gratitude to **Fiona Fisher** and the Institute of Advanced Study for their part in continuing to support *Exchanges*' mission strategically and operationally.

Continuing the Conversation

Exchanges has a range of routes, groups and opportunities for keeping abreast of our latest news, developments and calls for papers. Some of these are interactive, and we welcome comments from our readership and contributors alike. Our newest being a channel on the microblogging platform Bluesky.

Bluesky:	@ExchangesJournal
Mastodon:	@ExchangesIAS
Twitter/X:	@ExchangesIAS
Editorial Blog:	blogs.warwick.ac.uk/exchangesias/
Linked.In Group:	www.linkedin.com/groups/12162247/
Newsletter:	www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A0=EXCHANGES-ANNOUNCE

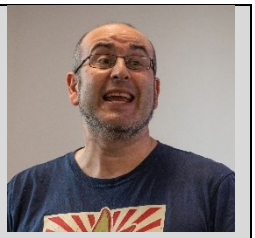
The Exchanges Discourse Podcast

exchanges.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/exchanges/podcast

This year is our fifth season of the podcast, and with over 50 episodes there's plenty to dive into in our back-catalogue as you wait for new episodes to drop. There's a handy list of past episodes available or you can stream the content from most popular podcasting platforms – and specifically our host at Spotify for Podcasting.

Contacting

As Editor-in-Chief I am always pleased to discuss any matters relating to *Exchanges*, our community, contributions or potential collaborations. My contact details appear at the start of this editorial.



Gareth has been *Exchanges'* Editor-in-Chief since 2018. With a doctorate in cultural academic publishing practices (NTU), he also possesses various other degrees in biomedical technology (SHU), information management (Sheffield) and research practice (NTU). His varied career includes extensive experience in running regional and national professional bodies, academic libraries, project management and applied research roles. He retains professional interests on power-relationships within and evolution of scholarly academic publication practice, within social theory and political economic frameworks. He has

aptitudes in areas including academic writing, partner relationship management and effective communication praxis. An outspoken proponent for greater academic agency through scholar-led publishing, Gareth is also a Fellow of the *Higher Education Academy*, and regularly contributes to a various podcasts and vodcasts. He is also the Director of a property development company.

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Endnotes

[i] There are some exceptions, *Exchanges* being one example naturally, as is one of my own favourite titles, *tripleC* – another even more venerable and long-lived community originated title.

[ii] Subscribe to or access our monthly newsletter to keep up-to-date on all the exciting developments here at *Exchanges*. www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A0=EXCHANGES-ANNOUNCE

[iii] It is perhaps too early to tell for sure for sure how many of the papers will emerge from review consideration to be accepted for publication. I do have a good feeling about the vast majority of manuscripts based on initial impressions. We shall have to see though.

[iv] **IAS**: *The Institute of Advanced Study* – *Exchanges*' host department, publisher and sponsor on behalf of the University of Warwick. We have even been known to be found in person around their offices from time to time!

[v] Officially, *Exchanges*' only staff resource is a 0.6FTE Chief Editor, with all other contributions from editors and associate editors given on a voluntary basis. Although, we have high hopes we can review this level at some point as our publishing commitment has more than doubled in the last couple of years.

[vi] In the interests of transparency and full disclosure while Exchanges has been involved in this work, the paper was assessed and considered for publication by one of our non-Warwick Board members. In this way it was possible to arrive at an impartial publication acceptance decision, independent of the Chief Editor's views..

[vii] **Editorially Reviewed Formats**: e.g., Critical Reflections, Conversations (interviews) or Book Reviews. As these do not undergo external peer review, they are also usually able to be more swiftly published in the journal – provided they pass our editorial scrutiny.

[viii] **Word counts**: For the purposes of considering a submissions' word count, we do not typically include abstracts, references, endnotes or appendences. While submissions just over or under their word count will still be initially considered for review, any significantly in excess will normally be declined and returned to their authors with advice for revision.

[ix] **Top Articles**: This diversity of format interest is frequently reflected in our annual Top Articles list, which appears in the IAS annual report, and on our blog pages early in the new year.

[x] **Expressions of Interest**: We do on occasion operate expressions of interest ahead of submissions for special issues. For regular (open or themed) issue submissions though, authors may submit their manuscripts without any prior contact.

Pushing the Boundaries of Reflection: The Answer's on a postcard

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-anonymised peer review process.

Abstract

This article presents a correspondence project completed during the 2019-2020 academic year. To encourage reflection and create divergent modes of expression, teaching staff paired undergraduate students across modules and gave them a blank postcard each week. The students' brief was an open one - to reflect on their educational experience surrounding the modules with textual and visual representations. The emotionality and expressions of identity that flowed through the postcards were striking. This lent itself to a personally impassioned criticality, meaningful dialogue and more holistic observations on how learning took place.

Keywords: reflection; reflective practitioners; arts-based research; co-operative inquiry; multi-modal communications

The importance of reflection has long been recognized in educational literature (**Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1991**), including literature on Higher Education (**see Ryan and Ryan 2012; Tan, 2021**). Now, in the 21st century and in the context of fast-paced societal change (**Schwab, 2016**), Lifelong Education, as education that continues beyond any classroom or workplace (**Faure et al., 1972**), is more relevant than ever. Universities do recognise the corresponding need to equip students with skills to enable their learning beyond official education institutions - see for example, the Learning and Teaching Strategy of the university in which this project was based (**Imperial College, 2018**). Therefore, how we can further develop students' aptitude to reflect on their learning and develop their meta-learning skills – their ability to understand how they themselves learn - is a valid focus of attention for this article.

In the pages below, we use our project to draw attention to how approaches to reflective practice could be added to with a new method. Ironically, we turned to the postcard, as a medium popular in a bygone era to offer insight. Our method required students to exchange postcards reflecting on their educational experience, where they created both the text and image on the different sides of the postcard. It was therefore a multi-modal activity that benefited from the potential of arts-based research, combined with an interactive peer-to-peer dialogue.

Through their shared reflections, students could develop their own learning practice, and in this respect, the students were acting as reflexive practitioners. The project therefore had pedagogical value as the students improved their own capacity to learn. The project also served as a *research* project investigating how reflective practice and meta-learning could be expanded upon more broadly. More specifically, as our method focuses on improving practice through research, it can be considered action research. Furthermore, as the students were analysing their own learning, the students can be considered to be 'auto-action researchers' (see Hauke 2022 for further discussion of the term). The four students on this project are accordingly named as co-authors. In this article, we are therefore documenting how such an interactive multi-modal method can meet the twin objectives of enhancing individual pedagogical experience and providing insightful research for a broader audience.

In conceiving this project, we were inspired by two previous projects. Firstly, the Dear Data project (**Lupi & Posavec, 2016**) an example of where weekly postcards were created and exchanged by two 'pen-pals' to represent data concerning an aspect of their lives. This analogue format demonstrated the potential for expressing new perspectives through this medium. Secondly, one of the authors, Elizabeth Hauke (**2018**) had previously presented research on authentic co-production that involved

students across year groups discussing their experiences on different modules. This demonstrated how dialogue across modules could facilitate rich analysis. The postcard project that we present, was informed by these two projects in that it involved an analogue postcard exchange and reflection on learning experiences across student cohorts in different year groups.

Our Open Approach

We would like to frame our approach to this project with an acknowledgement of how it sits in the context of relevant literature and practice. John Dewey (**1910/1933**) is widely cited as an early influential theorist on learning and reflection. Dewey (**1933: 1**) summarised his position on reflective thinking by stating that it was 'the kind of thinking that involves turning a subject over in the mind and giving it *serious and consecutive consideration*' (emphasis added). In turn, Graham Gibb's (**1988**) reflective cycle proposes that reflection progresses with six stages, starting with description through to a new action plan, and David Kolb's (**1984**) experiential learning cycle proposed that reflection was one of four key steps in continued improvement and development. Finally, Donald Schon (**1991**) introduced the notions of 'reflection-in-action' undertaken during the period of learning; and then 'reflection on action' as reflection that is undertaken after the period of learning. All of these influential theorists emphasise the link between reflection and learning, and also of the learner being an active participant in determining what they learn. While we strongly support these ideas, we feel that the approaches above adopt a rather linear approach to reflection through the implication that reflective thinking can be segmented and follow a predetermined series of steps (James and Brookfield, 2014). Moreover, while a strictly rational approach is invaluable for reflection and critical thinking, it can also leave room for alternative approaches that are better placed to foster a holistic and contextualised appreciation of learning.

The approach we adopted here is more in line with Alison James and Steven Brookfield (**2014**). They call for educators to move beyond viewing reflection as a solely cognitive process and to engage with the messier ways in which it can take place. This involves a recognition of the embodied, non-linear, multi-sensory modes of reflection. James and Brookfield (**Ibid**) cite Guy Claxton's distinction between hard and soft thinking and argue that hard thinking is too often prioritised. Hard thinking is where the thought is deliberate, structured, and purposeful. Soft thinking involves relaxed, contemplative thought where ideas might arise now or later and there is less of a strict structure. Whilst aligning with James and Brookfield (**Ibid**), we believe that our project is distinguished from others by the high level of freedom provided for the students, and its

promotion of softer thinking, combined with the requirement to engage in multi-modal dialogue with a peer.

Another study of interest to us was presented by Pretorius and Ford (**2016**) who provided their students with open prompts for a reflective journal, and they complemented this with peer discussion. By empowering students to lead themselves they reported the students appreciating the value of reflection for their own learning – and they therefore called this approach 'reflection for learning'. They succeeded in facilitating a method founded on self-discovery and interactive reflection. Such openness appealed to us and we aimed to facilitate it in our approach. However, in the studies mentioned above, there is still a lack of research into how arts-based or affective domains can aid reflection, and we set out to explore this potential.

Exploring the reflective potential of arts-based approaches

Arts-based research employs the many tools of 'the Arts' to engage in research. This could include anything from fine art to narratives, poetry or performance - and we believe that the method that we adopted allowed us to benefit from some of its key qualities.

We aimed to capitalise on how arts-based approaches to evaluation, reflection, and research can prompt *different* perspectives (**McNiff, 1998; Allen, 1995; Skukauskaite et al., 2022; Simons & McCormick, 2007**). By employing a visual medium, we aimed to facilitate new ways of thinking, as suggested by Ward and King in their comments on how drawing and art can be liberating:

> *Methods rooted in verbal and textual modes of communication require linear representations of time and causality. Providing participants with, what is literally an entirely blank canvas, liberates them from boundaries imposed by other methods. They are free to depict events, feelings, ideas and reactions in ways that are non-linear, non-binary and non-logical.* (**Ward & King, 2020: 20**)

Creating an image can free the students from structures or constraints that modes of expression based on verbal discussion or writing can impose.

We were informed by the work of Sandra Weber (**2008**) and thereby aware that our employment of arts-based research could facilitate greater expressions in the affective domain. In addition, Simons and McCormick (**2007**) note how arts-based research can simultaneously facilitate the communication of both the intellectual and the intuitive – as the researcher invests their whole selves into the work, or as the viewer interprets their creations. By traversing rational-intuitive distinctions, boundaries can be transgressed and the research produced can be unique

and richly detailed (in a different way from the detail provided by written modes of communication). Aligned with this, Brown et al., (**2021**) found that by creating 'zines' – as both text and visual-based media – young learners expressed personalized reflections on educational experiences in new and liberating ways, as the makers of the zines became the creators and the 'expert' on their experience.

Leary et al. (**2014: 230**) note that the freedom of such creative methodologies does bring a degree of risk as the role of the researcher changes; also through the creation of art the researchers effectively put their 'personality on the line'. We embrace this risk, and its potential for new insight, with some qualifications (see below our discussion of ethical issues). Whilst this novelty and focus on creativity can be intimidating, Sean McNiff (**1998: 16**) proposes that: 'the truly distinguishing feature of creative discovery is the embrace of the unknown'; and we were convinced by his argument against a prescriptive or standardized approach to arts-based research in order that we could maintain openness and creativity.

Exploring the reflective potential of dialogical approaches

Our researchers present their ideas through two modes - image and written text. In addition to the presentation through two modes, we propose that with the sharing of these through correspondence, the opportunities to discuss, reflect, and develop distinctive ideas are again increased.

Correspondence has been used as a method to facilitate participatory research before, and notably on sensitive topics (e.g., to engage with prisoners – **see Stamper, 2020**). Paulina Rautio (**2009**) also highlights the special impact that correspondence has due to the longer period of time required to create it and then also for the interlocutors to read it and reply.

We wanted to capitalize on this potential for meaningful dialogue to enhance reflection and our use of correspondence as an interactive medium draws on the principles of co-operative inquiry, as advocated by John Heron (**Heron & Sohmer, 2019**). Like our project, co-operative inquiry is collaborative. It brings together people with a common interest and one of its key tenets is that 'good research is research *with* people rather than *on* people' (**Reason, 1999: 1**). Co-operative inquiry also adopts what Heron (**Heron & Sohmer, 2019: 209**) calls an 'extended epistemology' – that goes 'beyond the ways of knowing of positivist-oriented academia'. Accordingly, we aimed to assist our students to reflect on all aspects of their learning experience and to present it through modes that go beyond solely abstract theoretical knowledge. For instance, we facilitated the use of more of what Heron calls 'imaginal knowing' (**Heron & Sohmer,**

2019:209), derived from the production of imagery, art and other creative elements.

Co-operative inquiry also involves rounds of reflection and action, thereby aligning with our project as our students acted as 'auto-action researchers' (**Hauke, 2022**). However, our method offers more freedom than Heron's approach in that co-operative inquiry advocates clear 'cycles of inquiry' (**Heron & Sohmer, 2019: 208**) where participants consecutively reflect and act in a number of set phases.

By engaging in a more open written and visual dialogue with another student on a different module, our method aimed to use the multi-modal format to provoke deeper evaluation and reflective thought. The discourse would be generated and very much led by the participants across different cohorts, with them comparing and contrasting their different learning experiences. We anticipated that such an interactive comparative approach could facilitate more criticality and we set out to investigate how well we achieved that. Following on from this, a key objective was to enable students to organically engage in 'domain generality' in their metacomprehension. The importance of this is highlighted by the former Editor of the journal *Metacognition and Learning,* Roger Azevedo (**2020**). 'Domain generality' in metacognition can be used in a variety of domains and situations and it contrasts with 'domain specificity' where metacognition would need to be learned for each task or domain in which it is used. The need for flexibility, adaptability, and capability to transfer skills and knowledge to a range of situations in the 21st Century means that such transferable metacognitive abilities are particularly useful today (**Ibid**). Moreover, with this holistic approach, our project can be better defined as facilitating 'meta-learning' and understanding of how learning more broadly happens, as opposed to specifically metacognition.

To summarise, we provided an open approach. Open in terms of what we told the students to include. As Ruikytė (**2021: 89**) noted on her co-creation project with students at Warwick, and as supported by Palmer's (**1998**) work on Arts management, sensitivity is required with artists 'not to interfere with and disturb their creative freedom'. In our project, in order to provide appropriate space for the students, the content was therefore not prescribed for our students – however, it was our choice of medium and our set up of how participants could communicate that was structured. One of the justifications given for more structured or interventionist approaches to developing reflection in students is that it can allow educators to rectify overly descriptive tendencies, particularly when students are writing individual journals (**Hume, 2009**). However, we wanted to explore whether our cross-cohort, multi-modal, interactive

method would provoke criticality and insight that was generated and developed dialogically between the students themselves.

We believe that this review of the literature demonstrates the potential for how arts-based research can open up students' perspectives to consider different elements of their learning, particularly surrounding the affective domain. This, combined with the dialogicality of the project, led us to two research questions which could demonstrate the value of our method.

Research Questions

First, does our interactive and multi-modal method of reflection lead to more emotional expression; and, second, does it lead to new forms of criticality.

The Set Up for Exchanging Postcards

The essential participants on which this whole project was contingent were, of course, the four students who exchanged the postcards on their educational experiences. We were given a small amount of funding from our university that was sufficient to pay for postage stamps and to compensate a maximum of four students for their time. The students were recruited by inviting all students studying Dr Mark Pope's modules to apply to take part and then selecting four students based on their application emails. Two of the selected students were studying a Third/Fourth Year Undergraduate module called *Creative Futures* (Rasika Kale and Ting Lee) and they were paired with two more students studying Second Year modules called *Global Village: Innovation Challenge* (Anastasia Kolesnikova) and *Global Village: Visual Arts Challenge* (Nadia Davis) respectively – with these pairings, students wrote to someone in a different year and studying a different module. The module *Creative Futures* aims to introduce students to qualitative tools to help them approach the future more proactively; whilst the Global Village modules provide students with a case study to inspire them to produce either an innovative design (*Global Village: Innovation Challenge*) or an art exhibit (*Global Village: Visual Arts Challenge*). All of the modules are provided under the Change Makers umbrella of interdisciplinary modules (**Imperial College, 2022**). The modules predominantly employ active learning strategies and involve student-led enquiry-based learning, where students choose their exact focus – but it is a focus on a real-world case study or theme. This distinctive mode of study can be challenging for students, as they are given greater autonomy, decision-making responsibilities, and opportunities to be creative.

The modules were 20 weeks long and we asked the students to exchange one postcard each week reflecting on their educational experience, creating an image on one side and writing on the other. Students addressed their postcards to our staffroom and sent them through the postal service. Dr Mark Pope would deliver the postcards to the partners at their next class. This also provided the teaching staff with the opportunity to monitor the cards and speak to students if there were any concerns regarding their content. On occasions when there were delays in sending or receiving the cards the teaching staff could therefore communicate with both partners to keep them informed. Otherwise, when delivering the postcards, Dr Pope limited his comments to open or reaffirming statements that were mostly aimed at ensuring the students had the confidence to continue as they were.

This project received ethical approval from the university before it commenced and in an introductory session staff and students discussed issues concerning the revelation of personal information. We discussed how the postcards would enter the public domain - to be read by their partners, by those involved in their postage, and by a wider audience at the end of the project. Therefore, the students were advised to only include comments and themes that they were comfortable sharing. In addition, the students were asked again at the end of the project to provide consent to share their work. Finally, for this article, students read drafts and approved the use of the quotes and images used. We did also intend the project to be one that would support student well-being. Therefore, we asked students to not spend too much time each week on the postcards and made clear that we understood the need for delays in completing them at some points.

Postcards were photographed by the recipients and by Dr Pope. Then the entire collection was shared electronically before the very end of the project so that the students could reflect more broadly on the whole experience with their final postcards. By this time in Spring 2020, the university was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and these reflections were therefore made on final postcards delivered electronically.

The key aim in this setup was to encourage students to choose to focus their postcards and reflections on what they felt was most relevant to their own particular learning. Dr Pope provided an initial introductory session eliciting from the student researchers how they might share their experiences. This resulted in the student researchers suggesting dozens of possible themes that might be covered, and ways in which they might be conveyed, visually and in writing. Continuous detailed feedback from staff or obligations to use designated categories was something that we wanted to avoid. The brief was intended to be liberating, and the focus was

developed by the students as they responded to each other's correspondence.

We emphasised that the students were free to comment on and depict the aspects of their educational experience that they wanted to, and although the focus was likely to be on the corresponding week of that module, any context that impacted their experience from their other studies or life outside of university would be welcomed. Therefore, the students, acting as auto-action researchers, were tasked to interpret what was relevant and appropriate. They could use whatever resources they liked, as long as the postcard could be sent through the postal service. For instance, one student, (Ting Lee), regularly discussed his experience with an additional student, (Vy Lai), and she helped create the visuals with him. Arts- based research does encourage the employment of expression that moves beyond the rational, including at the analytical stage, and we set up our student researchers to embrace this in a safe process that we monitored throughout. Students commented that they enjoyed the project and we hope that you will now enjoy their work that is presented and analysed below.

Postcards as multi-modal reflective practice

We found that the postcards did facilitate the expressions of diverse types and intensities of emotionality and criticality - not commonly seen by teaching staff in reflective journals. These elements were also not exclusive to each other, as much of the criticality was imbued with passion and was developed and enhanced through the exchanges. However, in order to frame our analysis in relation to our research questions we have divided the analysis below into two sections focusing first on emotionality and then on criticality and dialogicality.

Emotionality

At times the feelings represented on the postcards were intense and raw. The expression of tension created by assessment was explicit on both the written and visual sides of the postcards. This was notable in reference to the examination weeks on students' core degree programmes but was also evident in the lead-up to assignment deadlines.

Figure 1: 'My patience is Breaking', by Anastasia

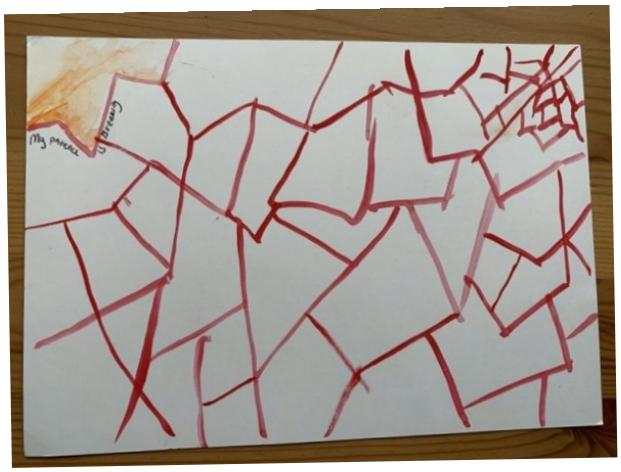
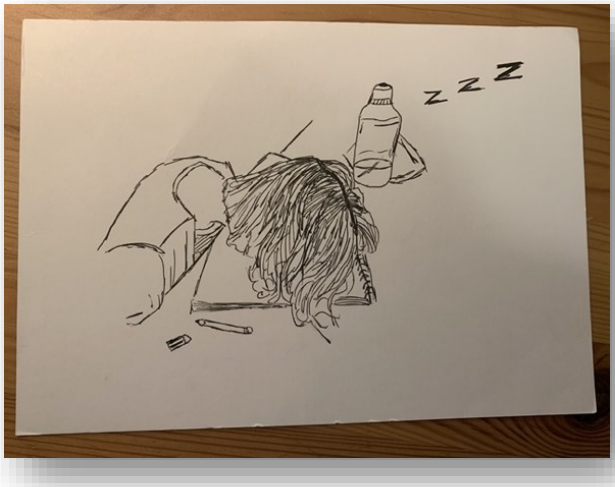


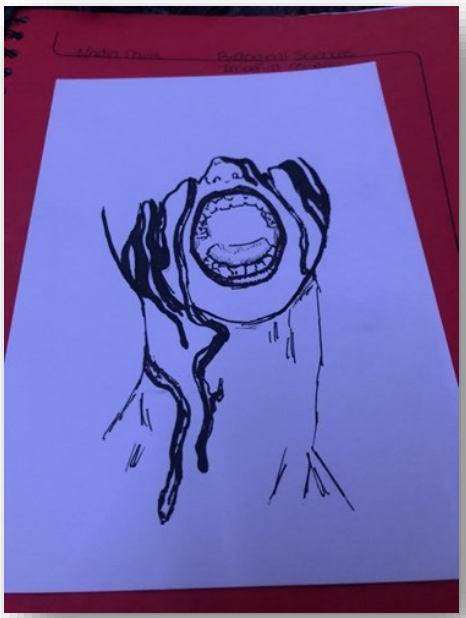
Figure 2: 'Examinations Exhaustion', by Nadia



These images convey the physical impact of studying for a STEM undergraduate degree and we found that the postcards effectively represented affective impact. Sarah Weber (**2008: 44**) suggests that the use of visuals can indeed prompt an 'embodied approach' that recognises how people are 'flesh and blood beings learning through their senses'. This can be seen more explicitly in the images below.

Figure 3: 'Together', by Nadia

Figure 4: 'The Emotion of Pain', by Nadia



In contrast to the tension in the above postcards, there was also a clarity surrounding the positive emotion portrayed on the completion of an assignment. Rasika and Ting (below) celebrated the completion of projects with the symbolism of colour, finish lines, completed jigsaws and balloons.

Figure 5: 'Final Piece of the Jigsaw', by Rasika

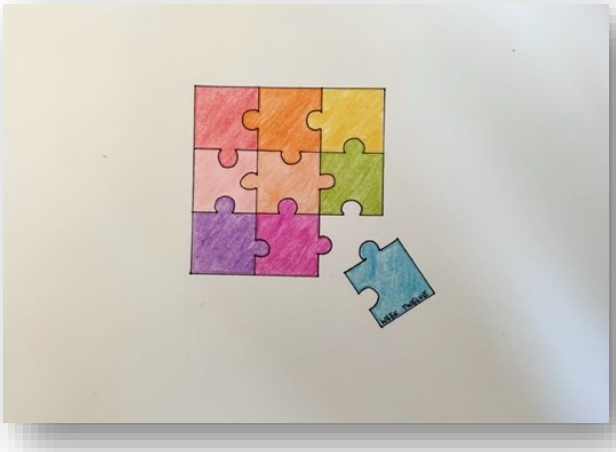


Figure 6: 'Completed Assignment', by Ting

Figure 7: 'The Finish', by Rasika

This prominence of emotions throughout the collection was conspicuous, partly because emotions are often overlooked in academic analysis. When they are evaluated or reflected upon, the accompanying analysis can be encouraged to be 'rational and distanced' (**University of Edinburgh, 2009**). Therefore, it was striking that in their visual depictions of the educational experience centred around academic modules, the students appeared especially free to convey them emotionally.

The emotions that were expressed through the images were also referred to on the written sides of the postcards. For example, on both the written and visual sides of the postcards, students expressed how they felt. In the postcard Nadia sent after the first week of her module she wrote: 'I can already feel this course will challenge my interpersonal and creative skills (...) The artwork I produced on front is a representation of how I felt.'

Figure 8: 'The Faces of Change', by Nadia

However, through the visual mode, some of the delineation and boundaries contained in the written medium appear to have been opened up. Although complementary to the text, the images could be interpreted as providing something more. In the image above (**Figure 8**) they prompt questions about identities, and the identity of Nadia's team that has yet to be established.

Roger Azevedo (**2020**) calls for researchers to investigate whether metacognition involves both conscious and subconscious processing. We believe that the visuals, with their connotations, tap into complexities surrounding more subconscious thinking and *feeling,* and were effective at conveying the less tangible, less certain, or more multi-dimensional.

Figure 9: 'Looking Up', by Ting

The multiple layers of potential meaning can be seen in the above image created for the first week of the *Creative Futures* module. In the top left, the title 'looking up' is just visible. This could represent the feelings experienced by Ting when starting a new module, with new colleagues and embarking on a new mode of learning. And/or, it could be more specific, related to the Futures Studies on the module, and the potential for studying linear approaches to progress that stop before the sky is reached, or simply being daunted by the continued developments of modernity. There is also a strong sense of claustrophobia and overwhelm in the image that could be related to Ting, or the module content. This visual metaphor does not specify, but it can leave the viewer to contemplate – and the postcard above exemplified how the multi-modal format not only enabled the presentation of visceral experience but it could provoke multiple layers of thinking and feeling. The examples above have addressed our first research question and provided indications of how our method facilitated emotions surrounding learning to be depicted in many ways - reflecting those experienced by the creator of the postcard, but also the viewer. As

we shall see below, shared or collective experiences were also represented effectively and in a dialogical manner, and this impacted on criticality.

Criticality and Dialogicality

With regard to our second research question on criticality, we shall now consider how the students expressed themselves and their interests with a criticality that was infused with passion. This criticality was one that students were personally invested in, and our analysis indicates how the students often developed their critical points through discussion and the shared construction of their own identities. Crucially, the correspondence between students on different modules with the multi-modal format was conducive to exchanges and critiques on learning at a deeper level. The dialogue that emerged through correspondence did appear to enhance this further as students pushed each other to think in new directions and validated their collective experiences.

Critiques of social issues evident in the world or the communities that they were studying were made by students, and again with a passion personal to them. Rasika, who was studying *Creative Futures,* was keen to address societal inequality, and she expressed this both in writing and through images.

Figure 10: 'Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2', by Rasika

The above postcard represented two interdisciplinary topics that she was considering choosing to research further for the module - health inequity and pandemics, or menstrual equity. The discussion and depictions surrounding her choice of topic inspired her postcard partner, Nadia, who later reflected:

> *Something that I found useful was when you shared your own discussions and group ideas with me. This allowed me to see your thought processes behind the ideas and gave me an insight into how you personally would approach some of the issues in our case study community.* (**Nadia, Written Comment**)

Nadia said she was inspired by thinking about the approach Rasika would 'personally' bring. Nadia adapted her approach to her case study community and proceeded to produce these images in the subsequent weeks, critiquing injustices that she had researched:-

Figure 11: 'Landlords', by Nadia

Figure 12: 'Revolutionary', by Nadia

Figure 13: 'A thought which I think everyone around the world should have', by Nadia

These images represent key issues on which critical theory can be based – such as anti-capitalism, revolution, or environmentalism. There is also a conspicuous feminine quality to both Nadia's and Rasika's cards. In this way, both students had adopted a personal and critical approach to issues in the wider world that they themselves and their postcard partner might relate to, empathise with, and support.

Criticality was also evident in approaches toward the study and research methods that students were introduced to in their modules. The use of some methods based in the humanities required more qualitative analysis from the students. Through the postcards, the students could evaluate the methods whilst simultaneously affirming their identity as science students. Anastasia wrote:

> *We used Soft Systems Methodology which is something they use in social studies "research". I refuse to call it science out of personal reasons and distaste.* (**Anastasia, Written comment**)

However, Anastasia subsequently praised the benefits of Soft Systems Methodology, evaluating its strengths, including its capacity to enable exploration of how stakeholders interact.

Ting reciprocated with critiques of social scientific methods employed in the *Creative Futures* module. These also utilised a non-positivistic approach. One method proposed that linguistic elements, such as metaphor and myth, construct other layers of the social and cultural world such as ideology and systems. Ting stated that the method is like 'a stack of pancakes – sure, there may be lots of layers but there are no "root causes" of language hiding under the surface keeping everything afloat'.

Figure 14: 'Causal Layered Analysis - A Stack of Pancakes', by Ting

This metaphor provides an interesting visual critique of the poststructuralist method. However, the point we want to highlight here is that Ting also framed his critique with a reference to his identity. He wrote:

> *I find it disconcerting to disagree with something being taught to me, because as a science student the facts and theorems are unarguable, but I guess learning humanities requires us to challenge and evaluate a possibly different approach.* (**Ting, Written comment**)

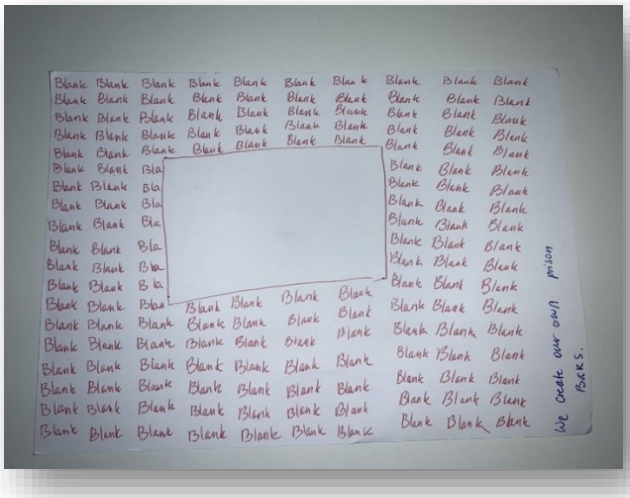
This is an example of how the medium prompted reflection on identity and then the sharing of these reflections – highlighted above through Ting's use of personal and collective pronouns (I, me and us). The shared evaluative critiques went beyond discrete disciplines and noticeably the positions taken by students were linked to identity - either students' own identity, or to those they relate to or empathise with.

Higher Order Skills

Our method led to a significant amount of theoretical analysis and critical comment on higher-order skills. With the different contexts of the different modules being studied – albeit with the similarities between Change Makers modules – there were a number of postcards where students engaged in dialogue on teamwork, working with others, creativity, and feedback.

Figure 15: 'The mind is nothing but a million neurons working together. Creativity is collaboration all the way down', by Ting

Figure 16: 'Creativity: we create our own prison', by Anastasia



For instance, on the above postcard Anastasia conveyed the challenges of generating ideas. Ting and Anastasia pursued this theme on both sides of a number of postcards, discussing the perils of the 'blank page' and the 'scary white paper', and there were recurring references to variations of this trope as they built on each other's ideas for how they could improve their divergent thinking. They provided eloquent multi-modal commentary that evaluated the pressure points of their creative processes.

Through their dialogue, written and visual, Anastasia and Ting covered all the aspects of Gibb's (**1988**) reflective cycle: descriptions of what happened; reporting of feelings; an evaluation of the experience; analysis; a conclusion; and suggestions for how they would deal with similar situations in future. However - they went further, pulling out deeper themes than might have been expected from non-dialogical reflection on one person's individual experience in one class. Their exchanges delved into issues such as the difficulty striving for originality and perfection, and also the potential therapeutic value of the 'creative release'. Pairing the students across modules and across year groups thereby did facilitate commentary on higher-order skills and other themes that were not discipline-specific. Moreover - they had developed their thinking through their dialogue with each other. We can therefore respond to our second research question positively, reporting that students did develop new forms of criticality, that were personal to them individually but also as pairs and as fellow STEM students.

At the end of the project, students demonstrated a capacity for meta-learning. Having shared the whole collection electronically, they recognised the value of holistic self-reflection and practice. This was evident in two written quotes, with which we will finish our analysis. In her last postcard, Anastasia discussed how she held an alternative view of learning following the project:

> *I have one last question. What do you think learning is? From this experience, I think my answer before would have been something like 'acquisition of new stuff/knowledge that you will regularly use as not to forget'. But after this experience, I am tempted to say that learning is much more than memorising and practice. It's the collection of events and jokes and comments made by your peers, the all-nighters you pull, the memories you create through classroom activities, the frustrations and simply the experience of tackling the unknown. What you have learnt is the experience which draws not only on information, but also your feelings and thoughts, and what you think of yourself before and after learning occurred. I don't know if this makes sense, but I hope it does.* (**Anastasia, Written Comment**)

The postcards appear to have enabled Anastasia's evaluation of the more holistic experience that she calls learning here. Suffice to say, she goes well beyond a focus on knowledge retention and practice, even recognizing the importance of continued personal reflexivity.

Also demonstrating a broad consideration of learning and development, Rasika provided this comment in her final postcard:

> *As the weeks go on, my own postcards go from theory and method-based, to more topic-based musings, to an integrated view of my narrative as part of a whole […] While the postcards mainly focus on what we did in class, it is evident that I start to apply what I have learnt when thinking about what is happening in the world around me.* ***These postcards are primarily a personal record but help paint a vivid picture of how we grew.*** *[emphasis added]* (**Rasika, Written comment**)

Here Rasika articulates how the collection of postcards documents the underlying steps of her pedagogical progression, including real-world applications of her learning. In addition, Rasika picked up on the personal and social nature of the cards. She observed how the postcards demonstrated 'how *we* grew', thereby acknowledging the collective nature of the project, and also its facilitation of the recognition of the identity and growth of the participants. These comments were made as students looked back over all four students' postcards. There were no prompts given to them and they demonstrated how the students valued this method of reflection and had developed the capacity to articulate how

it worked for them. Therefore, we believe that the unique form of co-operative inquiry that the students engaged in on this project stimulated evaluation and meta-learning that are rarely seen with other approaches to reflection.

Conclusion

To conclude, we propose that the collection of postcards presented above show the potential for such a multi-modal, interactive method. In terms of emotions, and the first research question, we found that the postcards facilitated strong expressions of multi-layered emotionality relevant to students' contextualized learning experiences. The visual representations of the physical affective impact of experiences were clear, and at points were visceral and embodied. We suggest that the intensity and persistence of emotional aspects indicate that they are integral to educational reflection and failing to give them prominent consideration, or attempting to remove them from analysis too early, could side-line a key aspect of educational experience.

Regarding the second research question, we found the criticality to be distinctive in that it was more personally invested in, as it was often directed towards the students themselves or to an issue in the world that they were passionate about discussing. Ronald Barnett (**1997:1**) has suggested that '[c]ritical persons are more than just critical thinkers. They are able critically to engage with the world and with themselves as well as with knowledge'. We believe that the students demonstrated the capacity for this here. Indeed, Pat Allen (**1995:3**) proposes that art can help us understand our deeper thinking and 'knowing what it is we actually believe'. The postcards did provoke the presentation of deeper personal thinking, which was conducive to an expression of values, empathy with others, and references to identity. We believe that these elements, integral to a holistic reflection on learning, are not often promoted - but the final quotes above demonstrate how transformational they can be for meta-learning.

The dialogicality evident through the collection was significant too. The criticality appeared to hold meaning and resonate for students both individually and as a collective, and we believe this can be attributed to the collaborative, dialogical nature of the project consistent with principles of co-operative inquiry. As the students exchanged ideas, they validated each other and pushed each other to think beyond their introspective musings. In this way, this visual and written dialogue across modules facilitated learning and meta-learning across domains.

Our method did therefore provide more emotional expression and new types of criticality. In another project, the postcards could be analysed in further depth, or using other analytical techniques. However, we believe we have demonstrated the value of our method here.

We also suggest that this method could be repeated, and at scale. We would recommend that any iterations of this project in higher education institutions follow our practice of sending the postcards via a staff member. In this way, the staff can monitor the project and the expressions presented on the postcards. The students studying these modules were adept at creating visuals, meaning that they were not representative of the student body in their technical and artistic skills. However, we propose that technical skill level should not preclude students from partaking in such a project and gaining the benefits of multi-modal interactions – as it is the personal contribution that is key. Moreover, future projects do not need to be presented as widely as this one and partaking can be voluntary again, so concerns about sharing artwork can be mitigated.

Through the use of postcards, we changed the format, and genre, of communicative practice on reflection. The above article shows that it produced distinctive findings into how learning happened and that this was valuable from both a research and a pedagogical perspective. The students themselves developed their capacity to articulate their experiences, and enhanced their meta-learning; whilst any reader of their postcards or this article could benefit from the broader insights of the research. We believe that this project strikingly demonstrates the potential for more creative and interactive reflective methods. In short, we wanted to push the boundaries of reflection, and we found the answer on a postcard.

Acknowledgements

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Mental Health Exemptions to Criminal Responsibility: Between law, medicine, politics and security

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Abstract

Ill mental health is a key category for exempting individuals from criminal responsibility. Even in cases where a defendant has been found to have carried out the act, if mentally 'ill enough', the person could either be fully exempt from criminal responsibility and found not guilty – or be partially exempt and receive a reduced or special sentence on mental health grounds. Such outcomes might entail diversion into mental health treatment, sectioning – or release. In determining whether a mental health exemption is warranted in individual cases, ordinary practice is that psychologists or psychiatrists forensically assess the severity and nature of the accused's impairment or disorder. While this might seem like a straightforward medical-juridical procedure of establishing evidence, this article uses a modified 'genealogy of the present' to show how mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility involve significantly more complexity. Looking to Norway and the UK, this article highlights differences in frameworks and implementation, including on matters of burden and nature of proof, and on causality. The article uses as an example the particular category of terrorism-related cases to bring out some of the contingencies involved. By doing so, the article shows the tensions inherent to the principle and practice of mental health exemptions, and its location between law, medicine, politics and security.

Keywords: criminal responsibility; insanity defence; terrorism; genealogy

Criminal responsibility – holding individuals who have committed crimes responsible for their actions – is key to the rule of law, and a cornerstone of countries' concrete sentencing guidelines. Conversely, *not* punishing individuals who are *not* criminally responsible is also central to upholding the rule of law, as well as to principles of justice and fairness. In most jurisdictions, certain categories of individuals are exempt from full criminal responsibility even if they are found to have carried out the act in question: Very young children are rarely punished on a par with most adults, nor are adult individuals with qualifying mental impairments or disorders. A similar form of reasoning is behind the 'infancy' and the 'mental health' exemptions to criminal responsibility: if someone demonstrably does not have the required mental capacity to understand or control their actions (or their consequences), their moral culpability and hence also legal responsibility is reduced. The legal upshot in such cases might be a reduction in or elimination of punishment, sometimes with voluntarily diversion into mental health treatment or involuntarily sectioning.

So far, the issue of mental health exemptions in criminal cases has been treated academically and in practice as a relatively straightforward issue of commissioning medical-psychological forensic assessments and adhering to the law in incorporating these into verdict and sentencing decisions. Looked at more closely, however, the issue appears considerably less simple at either the forensic assessment stage, and when incorporating assessments into decisions on individual offenders. This article starts with describing how two seemingly similar jurisdictions, Norway and the UK – both within Europe but outside the EU – operate with different frameworks for operationalising mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility. With different sizes, histories and criminal and threat landscapes, the two countries work well as comparative cases highlighting some of the contingences involved. In particular, the countries differ on issues of burdens and categories of proof, on the commissioning and challenging of forensic evidence, and on rules around proving the potentially *causal* role played by a mental health impairment or disorder.

After having outlined and compared these overall frameworks, the article proceeds to the example of terrorism-related cases in order to shed further light on the complexities involved. This category is chosen for two main reasons: First, crimes of terrorism are by law defined by the perpetrator's political/ideological/religious aims or 'mindset', possibly complicating delineations between such intentions and mental ill health; or between ('sane') ideology – however strange-seeming or unacceptable – and (mentally ill) 'fantasy', especially in cases when *both* ideology and illness could be involved. Moreover, terrorism cases are 'high stakes' due to their by definition targeting of a broader public or authorities, possible national security implications, and high associated public interest.

Although public opinion might be equally exercised by other cases involving similarly brutal acts, such as for instance cases involving paedophilia or sadism, terrorism implicates national security and politics in an even more direct and encompassing manner than cases of these kind. Terrorism-related cases involve making medical-psychological-legal assessments and decisions on possible mental health exemptions in highly 'charged' settings; possibly creating a tension between the needs to protect and treat mentally ill individuals, and to implement publics' sense of justice and accountability.

In seeking to 'complexify' the oft-taken for granted frameworks around mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, this article is disciplinarily anchored in contemporary intellectual history, drawing upon a modified 'genealogy of the present' in investigating the discourse of relevant law, guidelines and practices.[i] This modified, present-day-oriented genealogy does not take the conventional genealogical route in seeking to establish the historical lineage of any ongoing discourse or practice. It also does not seek to explain *why* current practice emerged, or *why* it has turned out to be so complex-ridden. Instead, it complicates current conventional understandings and questions their taken-for-grantedness. This approach assumes that through studying discourse such as statutory regulations, laws, statements and practices – as both encapsulating and shaping the political, legal and societal realities of which they are part – the present state of affairs with regard to mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility will become less obvious or 'natural' (**Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983: 119; Kritzman, 1988: 262; Koskenniemi, 2005**). Inspired also by part of the security studies literature, this approach is especially attentive to the implicit security dilemmas and tensions involved in weighing issues around individual agency and punishment in light of mental health related evidence (**Bonditti et al., 2015**).

While the primary focus of this article is to illuminate the overall issue of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, it also represents a novel contribution to the ever-burgeoning literature on the possible relationship between terrorism and mental health. The past few years' rapidly expanding body of research on this possible relationship has so far typically sought to clarify the *causal* role mental health issues may play in terrorism involvement.[ii] Haunted by this question of causality, scholars have interrogated different mental health issues as potential vulnerabilities and/or risks for terrorism involvement; though as of yet without clear answers. Unsurprisingly, similar questions have preoccupied counter-terrorism practitioners and the wider law enforcement space from early prevention to post-sentence rehabilitation, eager to adopt effective tools and methods.[iii] Some have raised questions as to the accompanying enlistment of psychologists and psychiatrists to counter-

terrorism-related roles, especially with regard to issues of medical ethics, confidentiality and information sharing.[iv]

However, in light of this now-sizeable literature on mental health and terrorism it is puzzling how little has thus far been said about the legal and judiciary aspects involved, in particular when individuals with mental health impairments or disorders are charged with a terrorism-related offence. To be sure, legal and forensic scholarship have insightfully dealt with their respective facets of the issue, but typically in relative disciplinary isolation and in particular with regard to specific, striking cases.[v] The complex, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional nature of the issue may be one reason; the topic stretches across law, forensic medicine - psychology and psychiatry - terrorism studies, criminology, as well as history, philosophy, political science, among other fields. Other reasons might be the sensitivities and confidentiality issues involved in criminal investigations, terrorism, forensic medicine, as well as warranted fears of stigmatisation of vulnerable individuals. A final issue could be related to countries' seemingly intricate legal-practical-medical-related landscapes of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, presenting a hurdle for non-legal/non-psychiatric scholars interested in the issue.

This article fills some of the gaps in our understandings of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility and shows how the issue is both more complex and more interesting than it might appear; using two countries' jurisdictions and the specific category terrorism-related cases as vectors to break open the issue. It shows that some of what is fundamentally at stake is how to understand and deal with issues of mental health, responsibility, justice and security, in particular in a legal setting relying on expert advice when the public interest is high. Given the sparsity of broad-based interdisciplinary scholarship on the topic, the article starts with describing the general principle and practice of exemptions to criminal responsibility, using Norway and the UK as examples. However, rather than detailing case law or offer technical solutions to actual dilemmas, the article seeks to complicate the picture of criminal responsibility mental health exemptions. The remainder of the article turns to terrorism-related cases as arguably posing a particular challenge when deciding on mental health exemptions, working to bring further to light key complexities and tensions.

Understanding and Complexifying Criminal Responsibility

In legal parlance, both *actus reus* and *mens rea* are generally necessary for holding an individual criminally responsible. *Actus reus* concerns the question of establishing whether a defendant has in fact carried out the act for which they are charged. Is there enough evidence to determine that the person 'did it'? If there is no or not sufficient evidence to say that the

individual has done the deed in question, they are not culpable and should not be held criminally responsible. Finding someone guilty and sentencing them under such circumstances would clearly contravene principles of justice and fairness, be a violation of the individual's human rights, and undermine the rule of law.

This article is broadly concerned with issues associated with the second half of establishing criminal responsibility, the area of *mens rea*. Because establishing actus reus and proving that a defendant has committed the act for which they are charged only goes part of the way in settling the question of criminal responsibility; in addition, it is necessary to show that it was done with a 'guilty mind'. Mens rea hence relates to the 'internal', 'intentional' and 'mind' dimensions of a crime. Connected to this larger domain of *mens rea* (while not necessarily formally impacting on *mens rea* as strictly defined) most jurisdictions allow for regulated exemptions to criminal responsibility, even when an individual has been found to have committed the act for which they are charged. Such exceptions are broadly speaking meant to accommodate for the possibility that not all individuals having committed an act have had the 'guilty mind' or psychological makeup required for being fully responsible for their actions. This is the case also for some of the exemptions to criminal responsibility formally categorised outside of the *mens rea* domain – for instance a finding of 'not guilty by reasons of insanity' in the UK context (**Crown Prosecution Service, 2019**).

Two basic categories for exemptions to criminal responsibility are 1) age and 2) mental disorder or impairment. While the focus here is on the latter, it is worth first briefly outlining the age category, as perhaps the most intuitively obvious ground for exemptions to criminal responsibility. The jurisdictions used as examples here, Norway and the UK, are not alone in having a minimum age for criminal responsibility (MACR), meaning an age limit below which children cannot be held criminally responsible. Across the world, such limits have overall been introduced with the intention of protecting children from being unjustly punished for actions they could not reasonably have been expected to control or understand the nature and/or consequences of. This is based on scientific knowledge of the brain's development and its gradual process of maturation, which provides the rationale for having a 'maturity threshold' for criminal responsibility corresponding to an age at which individuals' brains have acquired the capacity deemed necessary for being held liable.[vi]

It might seem intuitive that babies or toddlers should not be held criminally responsible by being prosecuted and incarcerated on par with adults, but there is no international agreement on the precise age below which children should be fully or partially exempt from criminal

responsibility. In the UK, the minimum age for criminal responsibility is 10 years, in Norway it is 15, whereas in the US state of South Carolina it is 6 years.[vii] The issue has been the subject of debate and concern worldwide, with some scholars and activists calling for raising the age of criminal responsibility, sometimes with reference to its discriminatory effects (**Crofts, 2015**). The issue involves human rights including the rights of the child – and concerns issues of law, science, morality and public opinion. That there may be an element of arbitrariness and/or politics at stake too might be indicated by the usually comparatively higher age for medical consent in the same jurisdictions, with 16 years being the general norm in Norway, the UK, and the USA alike (**National Health Service, n.d.-a; Helsedirektoratet, n.d.**).[viii]

Setting the issue of age to one side, this article's main focus is the other core category for exempting individuals from criminal responsibility, namely mental impairment or disorder. What follows is hence concentrated on the framing and practice of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility with regard to 'adults' (those above the MACR), at the verdict and sentencing stage, and in cases where the individual has indeed committed the act for which they are charged. The basic premise for the two categories for exemption are the same; both the age and mental health exemptions are founded on an idea of a certain mental capacity, especially related to understanding and control, being required for holding someone criminally to account by prosecuting and punishing them. Notably, and as will be returned to, a *full* exemption from criminal responsibility and a finding of 'not guilty' on such grounds is only possible at the verdict stage – whereas a partial exemption resulting in a lesser sentence might be possible at the sentencing stage, that is, after a 'guilty' verdict.

Variously occurring in different countries and at different points of the law enforcement process as questions of fitness to plead, fitness to stand trial, diminished responsibility, criminal accountability, 'insanity' and 'guilt-ability', such frameworks and practices concern how to deal with issues of culpability, responsibility, guilt and *mens rea* in cases where someone has mental health problems. Although countries have different legal and operational frameworks for deciding on mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, determining the nature and severity of the impairment or disorder is commonly key. This is certainly the case in Norway and the UK; in seeking out relevant knowledge, both these countries task forensic experts in psychology or psychiatry with carrying out assessments of the individual in question. In different ways and at different points of the process police, prosecutions, judges, and/or juries then receive, evaluate and take these expert assessments into account as they consider appropriate. Possible outcomes might be that an individual

ends up in prison with or without treatment, in hospital (voluntarily or involuntarily), or is being released and/or discharged. From a common-sense point of view, a mental health exemption seems intended to provide for a reasonable and fair treatment for individuals not fully able to understand or control their actions and who as such are not fully culpable or blameworthy.

General Frameworks: Mental health-based criminal responsibility exemptions in Norway and the UK

Norway and the UK each have law and legal guidelines encompassing conditions and criteria regulating the possible exemption of an adult from criminal responsibility for mental health reasons when charged with a crime, even if found to have carried out the act in question. These guidelines and laws apply to different stages of the legal process, including at the charging stage, court stage, and when sentencers are to determine a sentence or reaction. As indicated, this article concentrates on the verdict and sentencing stage of cases in which adult individuals have been found to have carried out the act for which they are charged. In both Norway and the UK, at the verdict stage, the upshot of an exemption could be acquittal with medical follow-up or with discharge, and at the sentencing stage an exemption could entail a reduced sentence or other form of 'special verdict' or a combination sentence with or without a hospital order, sectioning or some form of medical treatment.

To start with the Norwegian context: Norwegian law quite briefly describes the conditions under which an individual should be granted a mental health exemption to criminal responsibility. In Norwegian legal parlance, this is a matter of not having 'guilt-ability' (*skyldevne*) – a phrase recently replacing the law's previous wording of 'accountability' (*tilregnelighet*); and present law lists the following three criteria: having 1) a severely deviant state of mind 2) a strongly disturbed consciousness and/or 3) a high-level mental disability. In considering whether to make an exemption to criminal responsibility, the individual's degree of (lack of) understanding of reality and ability to function should be given particular weight (**Straffeloven, 2005, §20**). Specifically, Criteria 2) could for instance involve someone acting during an epileptic attack, while sleepwalking, or while being catatonic or poisoned (but not as a consequence of voluntary intoxication), whereas criteria 3) would typically entail a developmental disorder, with a current limit of an IQ of below 60.

Criteria 1) of the three above – having a severely deviant state of mind – was until 2020 formulated in Norwegian law as 'psychosis': somewhat confusingly, with the legal meaning of this term being distinct from the medical term 'psychosis'.[ix] In 2020, however, 'psychosis' was dropped

from the law's text and replaced with the present formulation as a result of a wide-reaching review of Norway's criminal responsibility legislation. The review had been initiated in the wake of the intense controversy surrounding the trial of Norway's 2011 terrorism attacks, to be returned to in brief below, where the perpetrator's mental state became a key point of contention. In particular, the question of whether he suffered from 'psychosis' or not at the time became especially disputed. Following on from the subsequent extensive review, the present-day formulation of the law entered into force in October 2020, with several additional changes (**NOU 2014: 10**).

Norway's present legal and practical framework for settling the question of a possible exemption to criminal responsibility dictates that if the court finds that a defendant meets either of the three criteria above, that person will be exempt from criminal responsibility and found not guilty despite having carried out the act in question. Put differently, if a defendant suffered from a condition at the time of the act that would fit into either of the three criteria above, the evidentiary standard for having established the person's guilt will be considered as not having been met. In this manner, Norway does not a priori assume 'sanity' on the part of a defendant in such cases – but places the burden of proof on showing that the defendant *was* 'sane' at the time and thus should be held criminally responsible.[x]

However, even if found not guilty and acquitted in court, the individual could still be sectioned, even indefinitely, on mental health grounds – if assessed to be a risk to themselves or others – or could be released altogether, possibly for voluntary treatment. Moreover, in cases where the evidentiary standard for establishing guilt *has* been met, and the defendant is deemed 'sane' overall, the person's mental health could still be relevant to their sentencing; Norway does allow for less intense mental health issues – approaching but not fully meeting the threshold for what is required for a full exemption – to function as mitigating circumstances in sentencing decisions (**Elden & Gröning, 2022**). If any such lower-level condition can be determined, the defendant would be exempt from *full* criminal responsibility and receive a reduced sentence.

In order to establish whether either of the three criteria in question applies to a specific case, the common procedure in Norway is for the court to appoint qualified experts in forensic psychology or psychiatry to carry out an assessment of the individual in question. This should be done in every case in which there is doubt as to the person's mental health status and on whether the evidentiary standard for proving 'sanity' and criminal responsibility can be met (**Straffeloven, 2005, §20; NOU 2014:10**). Such a 'full' forensic assessment usually follows on from a more limited

prejudicial assessment of the individual before the start of the trial – and is undertaken in cases where such a prejudicial assessment either found relevant mental health issues, or showed equivocality on whether such existed. Usually, the court appoints the forensic experts in a team of two, who work together in assessing the defendant and in producing a substantial forensic report describing the individual's state of mind and, if relevant, symptoms and diagnoses. The forensic experts then present their jointly authored report in court and are questioned by the respective sides and judges. While sometimes subjected to critical questioning, forensic experts are rarely sought undermined altogether in Norwegian trials; courts and sentencers tend to proceed on relying on their evidence as presented.

Notably, forensic experts in Norwegian trials are not by design asked to render an explicit opinion on whether one of the three exemption criteria above is met, nor on how the law may apply to the case. Instead, they are asked for their professional assessment of what diagnoses or symptoms might have been at play at the time of the act, in which ways and at what intensity. Crucially, moreover, the forensic experts are not asked to opine on whether the mental health impairment or disorder, if present, *caused* the individual to commit the act. Instead, the focus is on the severity of symptoms, their character and possible impact on functioning and cognition – rather than on the presence or absence of any causal link between a mental disorder or impairment and the action for which the person is charged.

While seemingly originating in similar principles, the UK seems to have a more complex and multifaceted framework for mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility than Norway, and a denser regulation for its implementation (**UK Sentencing Council, 2020**). Also in the UK, a defendant's mental disorder or impairment could mean a full or partial exemption to criminal responsibility at the verdict or sentencing stage, and might also have significant bearings on their treatment at earlier stages of the legal process.

Issues around representation appear especially central in the UK with, for instance, a more formalised practice around the appointment of Appropriate Adults from the arrest stage of a suspected criminal offence (**National Appropriate Adult Network, n.d.; Augestad Knudsen, 2021**). The UK also has related mechanisms for evaluating a defendant's fitness to plead and fitness to stand trial, which could result in a pausing of the legal process until the defendant is deemed fit, or a decision not to prosecute.[xi] In addition, the UK has distinct provisions for murder, allowing 'abnormality of mental functioning' to serve as a partial defence and ground for a criminal responsibility exemption (**UK Coroners and Justice**

Act 2009 replacing the earlier formulation of 'abnormality of mind', **UK Public General Acts, 1964; UK Public General Acts, 1883; Crown Prosecution Service, 2019**). Should 'abnormality of mental functioning' be established in a murder case, the result might be a finding of 'diminished responsibility' for manslaughter rather than murder (**UK Public General Acts, 1957**). It is worth noting that UK terrorism legislation does not include a crime of terrorist murder, but a murder could still be an act of terrorism if it was carried out with terrorist intent. The UK system also has the option of finding someone (altogether) 'not guilty by reason of insanity' (which notably does not equate the absence of *mens rea*), which in the UK context seems to be a rare outcome for which the bar would be very high (**UK Public General Acts, 1883, Section 2; Crown Prosecution Service, 2019**).[xii]

Despite the size and complexity of the regulatory framework for mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility in the UK, at the sentencing stage the issue appears to boil down to the following: 'at the time of the offence did the offender's impairment or disorder impair their ability: to exercise appropriate judgement, to make rational choices, to understand the nature and consequences of their actions?' (**UK Sentencing Council, 2020**). To aid in the answering of this question, the relevant UK sentencing guidelines list and explain a 'brief' but still fairly sizeable number of possibly relevant concrete diagnoses and conditions (**Ibid: Annex A**).

At first glance, this list seems divergent from the framework in Norway, and as contrasting both to Norway's pre-2020 statutory underlining of 'psychosis' as of particular prominence, and its current formulation of 'severely deviant state of mind' – which also seemingly quite prominently evoke conditions involving psychosis.[xiii] Nonetheless, psychosis appears especially relevant in the UK context too: UK guidelines place 'psychotic illnesses' as first on their list of the many 'disorders likely to be relevant in court'. And the same guidelines typologise disorders according to whether they are 'psychotic' or 'non-psychotic', also indicating the significance and perhaps frequency of such conditions figuring when deciding on a mental health exemption. The possible relevance of this for terrorism related cases will be returned to in brief below.

The UK's long list of the impairments and disorders it considers potentially relevant to a criminal responsibility exemption could be interpreted to signify that a greater proportion of defendants would in fact meet this criteria in the UK than in Norway. UK practice also seems to have allowed for a greater range of conditions – including for instance arteriosclerosis (**Claims UK, 2023**) and adjustment disorder (**RCJ, 2017**) – to qualify as grounds for such exemptions than Norwegian precedence suggests. At the same time, however, the *threshold* for exemptions seems higher in the UK

than in Norway. At least since the establishment of the M'Naghten rules based on a landmark case from 1843 (e.g. **Kaplan 2023**), UK law has started from a presumption of sanity and has required strong evidence for exempting anyone from criminal responsibility on mental health grounds. Importantly, and in a contrast to the Norwegian system, this evidence needs to connect the mental disorder or impairment to the act in question, and convincingly show that the issue in some way caused the act. When considering the relevant forensic expert assessment, UK courts are encouraged to request information on 'how the condition relates to the offences committed' – a key contrast to the Norwegian system, where this is not in focus.[xiv] Moreover, UK law and guidelines make it clear that defendants in all cases must be dealt with in the manner the court finds most appropriate, with mental health impairments and disorders being only one out of several factors to be taken into account.

As a final point on the UK system, its adversarial nature might also be expected to impact on how determinations on mental health exemptions are being made in practice, and may in effect raise the bar even higher for actual exemptions. Whereas UK courts do have the power to commission forensic assessments, common practice is that the respective defence and prosecution teams separately commission different forensic experts who often come to contrasting conclusions as to the defendant's 'sanity'. In cases where the two sides' forensic experts disagree, the most common dynamic is for the defence to argue for an exemption and the prosecution to argue against. After subjecting the two sides' experts to critical questioning, sentencers must then decide who and what to rely on when determining a verdict and sentence. While this to some extent resembles the Norwegian system, mental health related forensic evidence there tends to become less of a 'partisan' bone of contention. The UK's closer association between the defence and arguments in favour of a mental health exemption arguably also gives such an outcome a slight air of being a 'let-out' option, which might not tally with the reduction in quality of life potentially involved with having a mental health issue meeting the threshold for an exemption.

These descriptive outlines of Norway's and the UK's frameworks for making mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility do show that the two countries differ in several respects. They each have different setups and entry points for acquiring and introducing relevant forensic evidence, and dissimilar emplacements of the burden of proof. They also operate with diverging thresholds, standards and concretely listed conditions as possibly relevant for making a criminal responsibility exemption. The two countries' practice also part ways on the key point on whether proving *causality* is needed for making a mental health exemption. And finally, an effect of the UK system seems be to emplace

arguments in favour of making a mental health exemption closer to the defence side of a case.

It is not the purpose of this article to explain the emergence, history or wider implications of these differences, but rather to point out that the fact that they exist shows that deciding on criminal responsibility exemptions are not straightforward products of automatic or 'natural' processes of simply pinning down the right evidence, science or law. Rather than illuminating lineages or chronologies, the present-oriented genealogy of this article underlines that more seems to be involved in settling questions of criminal responsibility exemptions than purely medical-juridical technical-operational calculations. Nor, it seems, is the matter implemented as per a generalisable template. Rather, the relevant frameworks are maintained and enacted depending on the judgement of legislators, law enforcers, lawyers, and sentencers. The variations between Norway and the UK in this regard reveal differing conceptualisations of evidence and standards for not punishing mentally ill individuals as harshly as others. This again seems built on different ideas of what mental health impairments or disorders may mean, especially for individual agency, punishment, implementing the law and realising the public's sense of justice and fairness. While there is no scope here for a deeper conceptual or philosophical dive into these different practices, they certainly illuminate some of the contingencies at stake. The next section of this article will shed even further light on these and other complexities, with the help of the example of terrorism related cases.

Further Complexification: Mental health exemptions in terrorism-related cases

Thus far, this article's complexifying of the often-taken for granted institution of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility has painted an overall and generic picture: the formal frameworks and practices around such exemptions in Norway and the UK are the same regardless of the type of alleged crime in question. In line with this article's rooting in a modified genealogy of the present and interest in this practice's contingencies of today, this section will complicate the issue further by showing how determining mental health exemptions might be a special challenge in terrorism-related cases. By doing so, this section will illuminate some of the additional intricacies of the principle and practice of mental health exemptions as such. It bears repeating that the focus here is on the verdict and sentencing stage of cases where an adult defendant has been found to have carried out the act in question. While both Norway and the UK at this stage utilise the same frameworks for determining mental health exemptions in terrorism-related as in non-terrorism related cases, two distinct aspects of terrorism-related cases place them in a

category of particular interest. These aspects have to do with, first, the 'internal' and definitional dimension of terrorism, and second, such cases' 'external' role and status in society.

To take the 'internal' and definitional dimension first: Defining 'terrorism' has been an issue of controversy and dispute for scholarship and policy for decades,[xv] and it is not the aim here to either provide a thorough account of these debates, nor to propose any definition of its own. Instead, since this article looks to the practices and frameworks of Norway and the UK, it takes as its more narrow starting point these countries' legal definitions of terrorism. And in both countries, terrorism is defined by evoking specific intentions and aims on the part of the perpetrators. As such, the countries' understanding of such cases by definition ventures into some of the same areas of individual psychology and thinking that a mental health assessment would be expected to touch upon too.

More concretely, Norwegian law describe terrorism offences as ones committed with the intent (*forsett*) to disturb fundamental societal functions; to force authorities to act (or refrain from acting) in certain ways; or to create serious fear in a population (**Straffeloven, 2005, §147a**). The UK's dedicated Terrorism Act (TACT) defines terrorism offences as ones involving the use or threat of action which is 'designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation, or to intimidate the public or a section of the public (…) for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause' (**UK Public General Acts, 2000**). Notably, Norwegian terrorism legislation could encompass terrorist murder, while the UK's TACT does not include murder. But someone found guilty of murder in the UK would still be considered and treated as a terrorist despite having been convicted under a different legislation, if the murder had a 'terrorist connection' and/or 'terrorist aims'. Such a connection and aims would then count as aggravating during a sentencing decision (**Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.**).

The law of both countries (and of several others as well as conventional academic definitions) thus define acts of terrorism as per their aims and intended effects. The centrality of pinning down intentions in such cases – and particularly the ways in which these reach and target beyond the specific offence and physical victims in question – binds terrorism offences up with a defendant's psychology and thinking. Assessing a defendant's mindset and motivations are clearly part of all prosecutions and gatherings of evidence, but in this way seems even more central in terrorism cases than with many other forms of crime. Indeed, the defendant's state, content and 'directionality' of mind appear core to the very categorisation of an offence as terrorism, and decisive in how such defendants are

handled from the point of arrest to possible sentence, imprisonment and post-release follow-up.

As described in the previous section, the law and guidelines of both Norway and the UK on mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility partly frame this around concepts of 'abnormality' and 'deviance'. To simplify somewhat, in order to meet the threshold for an exemption, a defendant's state of mind needs to have been sufficiently different from whatever would be understood to be 'non-deviant' or 'normal' in the context of the act. At the same time, the motivations required for the categorisation of an offence as 'terrorism' would typically in themselves be considered as 'abnormal': The aims and intentions required for an act to be classified as terrorism is precisely to force through changes to the 'normal', 'non-deviant' order of things. However, the 'abnormality' needed for an offence to be categorised as terrorism – acting with the aim of changing an existing order through criminal and often violent activity – would certainly *not* qualify for any exemption to criminal responsibility on mental health grounds. On the contrary, if such terrorist intent is revealed, the result would be a harsher sentence rather than an exemption. By contrast, 'deviance' or 'abnormality' resulting from a relevant mental impairment or disorder could mean that a defendant would qualify for an exemption to criminal responsibility resulting in a reduced sentence, medical treatment or an altogether acquittal.

One could thus say that there are two understandings of 'abnormality' at play in the prosecution and sentencing of terrorism offences with a possible mental health element. One having to do with the (political/ideological/religious) character of terrorism, and the other with a defendant's (psychiatric/psychological) mental health. Clearly delineating between these two different forms of 'abnormality of mind' hence lies at the core of making verdict and sentencing decisions in terrorism-related cases. Of course, such delineations would implicitly be a core mission of the forensic experts appointed to assess a defendant in a terrorism-related case. These should use their psychological/psychiatric expertise to assess the defendant in a way that sentencers would find useful when deciding on a verdict and sentence, including establishing the presence, nature and intensity of relevant symptoms, impairments or disorders. While certainly not being formulated in these terms, in terrorism cases this would in part mean to distil the mental health 'abnormality' required for a possible exemption to criminal responsibility from the political, ideological and/or religious 'abnormality' at the heart of involvement in terrorism.

In theory, this might seem to be a clear-cut distinction to both terrorism researchers and forensic experts; in practice, however, the picture might be blurrier. As mentioned above and elsewhere, psychotic illnesses have and have historically had particular prominence amongst disorders possibly relevant to a mental health exemption in both Norway and the UK (**Augestad Knudsen, 2023**). One key symptom of psychosis is delusions (**National Health Service, n.d.-b; Gaebel & Reed, 2012**). The UK's NHS describes a delusion as when 'a person has an unshakeable belief in something untrue', an understanding echoed in Norway's medical dictionary (**National Health Service, n.d.-b; Malt, 2023**). The standard international diagnostic manual ICD-11 adds further detail, describing a delusion as:

> *A belief that is demonstrably untrue or not shared by others, usually based on incorrect inference about external reality. The belief is firmly held with conviction and is not, or is only briefly, susceptible to modification by experience or evidence that contradicts it. The belief is not ordinarily accepted by other members or the person's culture or subculture (i.e., it is not an article of religious faith).*

With regard to terrorism and terrorist intent, the first two sentences here might apply even to 'mentally well' terrorist offenders, as their terrorist-related beliefs would be seen as both untrue and rigidly held by those not sharing them. At the same time, someone could well be delusional, psychotic, severely mentally ill - *and* hold terrorist-related convictions that are not necessarily a product of their mental illness (alone), significantly complicating the matter. When assessing a defendant, forensic experts in psychology and psychiatry should not be expected to have updated knowledge of the nuances of terrorist-specific beliefs, jargon or mindsets that could ease making distinctions: Such understandable lack of up-to-date subject matter knowledge might make it a daunting task to distinguish between, for instance, rigidly held, untrue terrorist beliefs that are *not* related to or produced by psychosis – and rigidly held, untrue psychotic beliefs that have adopted or mimic terrorism-related terminology, ideas and aims. In cases of doubt, forensic experts might find supporting evidence in the presence or absence of *non-delusional* symptoms of psychosis, which could include hallucinations and/or disturbed thought, but even this may not conclusively settle the matter.

What is more, the third and final sentence of the ICD-11 definition, on the belief not being shared by relevant others, may make the matter even more intricate for forensic psychiatrists/psychologists without expertise in the spread and nature of terrorist lingo or networks. Without such knowledge, it could be tricky to establish whether apparently outlandish language or manners of speaking propagated by a defendant are

neologisms, delusions, and/or shared by a terrorism-related subculture. Indeed, similar difficulties could arise from the reverse disciplinary angle: Terrorism experts following terrorism related court cases might recognise a defendant's statements, language and modes of arguing as terrorism-related and *on that basis* and without expertise in forensic psychiatry conclude that the person must be non-psychotic. However, a defendant might well be able to present terrorism-related thinking in a coherent and recognisable manner and *still* be delusional and/or psychotic: Terrorism-related thinking and arguments might be produced by psychosis even while seeming coherent – or could coexist alongside (delusional or non-delusional) psychosis without necessarily resulting from it.

Perhaps the internationally most well-known case in which these issues played out in practice was in the trial in Norway following on from the terrorism attacks of July 2011. In that case, the defendant's mental health, and the possibility of an exemption from criminal responsibility became the subject of intense disagreement (**Kolås, 2018**). Significantly for the present purposes, the perpetrator was initially assessed by a conventionally court-appointed pair of forensic psychiatrists, who concluded that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia (**VG, 2011b**). According to Norwegian law at the time, such a diagnosis would by itself meet the threshold for an exemption to criminal responsibility and would, if accepted by the court, have resulted in a 'not guilty' verdict. However, this forensic assessment – and the psychiatrists behind it – immediately received intense criticism. A poll from the time showed that a large part of the public felt it would violate their sense of justice if an exemption was made on mental health grounds (**VG, 2011a**). Most of the media agreed, and the Norwegian Prime Minister stated that it would be 'easier' if the perpetrator was found guilty and sentenced, with no mental health exemption (**Aftenposten, 2012; TV2, 2011**). Terrorism experts effectively claimed that the psychiatrists' diagnosis revealed a lack of knowledge of terrorist ideology and subculture: Many shared the perpetrator's beliefs and terminology, hence he was not delusional nor psychotic. [xvi]

Extraordinarily for the Norwegian context, the court then appointed a second pair of forensic experts, which found that the perpetrator did not meet the threshold for an exemption. Instead, according to the second forensic report, the defendant suffered from dissocial and narcissistic personality disorders (**VG, 2011b**). In effect, this posited his 'abnormality' as resulting from terrorism related beliefs - and not from psychosis. Deciding on a verdict and sentence, the court ignored the first report, relied on the second, and settled on a guilty verdict with the law's harshest prison sentence with no criminal responsibility exemption. Throughout the case, the defendant had been eager to present himself as mentally well and his actions as motivated by ideology rather than 'madness'

(**Applebaum, 2013**). His defence had argued accordingly, while the prosecution interestingly proceeded on the basis of the first forensic report's diagnosis of schizophrenia and hence had called for an exemption on mental health grounds. This notably contrasted with a 2019 Norwegian terrorism-related trial, concerning a mosque attack and the murder of the defendant's adopted sister: In that case, the defence team argued for a mental health exemption against the defendant's wishes, while the prosecution refuted that he 'qualified' for an exemption.[xvii] Also in that case, no exemption was made and the law's strictest sentence was imposed.

The 2011 perpetrator's mental health resurfaced in his 2022 parole hearing, when several experts expressed concern over what to them appeared to be a psychotic prisoner left without adequate medical treatment (**Vårt Land, 2022; Foss, 2022; Nettavisen, 2022**). The 2019 perpetrator was later hospitalised with severe psychosis, upon which his lawyer requested a reopening of the case (**NRK 2023**).

The 2011 Norwegian case in particular represents an interesting contrast to a terrorism-related case from the UK, namely the one following on from the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013. During that trial, the mental health of one of the two defendants became an issue, although primarily with regard to his fitness to participate in the legal process rather than with regard to a possible exemption to criminal responsibility. In that case's final sentencing remarks, the judge cited a 'pre-existing and ongoing mental condition' on the part of that defendant as an established fact, which later developments suggest would have been a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia (**Judiciary of England and Wales, 2014; Glass, 2019**). This was the same diagnosis which became so controversial in the 2011 case in Norway, and which, if the court and judge had accepted it, would have provided the basis for a full exemption to criminal responsibility. In the Lee Rigby case in the UK, however, the court's acknowledgement of such a serious condition 'merely' resulted in a reduced sentence of 45 years rather than life imprisonment (as was given to the other defendant in the case).

The 2011 Norwegian case is also well suited to bring forth some of the extra, terrorism-related complexities associated with deciding on mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, which serves to further highlight the contingencies inherent to such exemptions overall. For one, the case underlines the sometimes complicated and intensely charged distinction-making between delusions and ideology – between 'abnormal mental functioning' and 'abnormal ideology' – as shown in part through the strong reactions to the first report's diagnosis of schizophrenia. Indeed, an unstated premise here appears to have been that landing on

such a diagnosis with a mental health exemption in that case would have been a 'too easy way out' for the defendant; to let him 'get off' with a not guilty verdict for such mental health reasons would not satisfy the general public's need for accountability, no matter how severe and debilitating his condition might be.[xviii] As mentioned above, it might well be that the adversarial nature of the UK legal system, with the party-based appointing and questioning of forensic experts – might contain a 'structural bias' in the same direction, positioning a mental health exemption as a 'let-out'.

All this is relevant to the second, 'external' dimension of why terrorism related cases may be a special challenge with regard to mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility, affirming the far-from-straightforward nature of the concept as such. This has to do with terrorism's 'external' status, in wider society as well as in law and in relation to other crimes, with dedicated frameworks positing terrorism as a particular sphere of criminality, politics and security. While the public and the law certainly reacts harshly against other types of crimes too – including ones involving children and unusual cruelty – terrorism involves politics, national security as well as separate legal regimes in a manner that in some ways make such crimes 'especially distinct'.

This special status of terrorism would appear to figure when sentencers 'weigh' the possibility of a mental health exemption against other considerations at the end of a terrorism-related trial. Because even after forensic evidence in a case has established the nature and intensity of a mental health issue, such evidence would still have to be interpreted by sentencers and balanced against other principles. In this context, if there is evidence of a serious mental health impairment or disorder, this would point towards an exemption, and often argued for by the defence. Meanwhile, other principles might be placed at the other end of the scales, as aggravating rather than mitigating, typically emphasised by the prosecution (**Straffeloven, 2005, §78; UK Sentencing Council, 2020**). In both Norway and the UK, questions around the nature of the offence, degree of harm, issues of intentions, recklessness, negligence and knowledge, as well as proportionality and risk are all formally relevant to decisions at the sentencing stage, as are less formalised principles of trust in the rule of law, along with national security implications (**Straffeloven, 2005, §5**). UK law states explicitly that a court must handle also cases involving mental health issues in the manner it considers to be most appropriate in all the circumstances (**UK Public General Act, 2020, Chapter 2**).

Importantly, in terrorism-related cases, the very categorisation of a case as terrorism-related would in itself count as aggravating, pointing towards a harsher sentence. This would then lead in the opposite direction of a

possible mental health-based exemption to criminal responsibility. As mentioned above, terrorism is still in both Norway and the UK legally defined as a special – and especially serious – category of criminality. Moreover, such acts both target and affect more than the victims directly impacted, including the general public, authorities and/or the state, and may also have national security implications. Differently put, more is considered to be at stake for a greater number of actors with terrorism-related cases than with many other cases. The public and political interest in terrorism and in holding individuals to account for such acts can also hence be larger than for many other types of crimes. As the 2011 case in Norway may be taken to suggest, a 'not guilty' finding or a reduced sentence for reasons of mental health might in this context seem unsatisfactory.[xix] Sometimes accompanied by an offer or obligation of mental health treatment, such an outcome would also position the perpetrator as a mental health patient in need of care and compassion – which might be difficult to process in view of the brutality of the acts they might have carried out. In short, while a forensic finding of a serious mental disorder might make judges and juries lean towards a mental health exemption, the special status of terrorism would push towards ensuring personalised accountability with a 'guilty' verdict and a stricter sentence than for a non-terrorism related crime.

Against this backdrop, the present-oriented genealogical impulse of this article would prompt questions not only regarding the contingencies of the decision-making processes and procedures involved, but also on the point, purpose and function of mental health exemptions as such. If the idea behind allowing exemptions to criminal responsibility for mental health reasons is to protect those too ill and too severely lacking in their capacities from being unjustly punished, the *nature of their act* – and whether this was terrorism-related or not – would not seem of the essence in deciding on their guilt or sentence. Should this be the main point, decisions should be expected to turn on the defendant's diagnosis and nature and intensity of symptoms as established by forensic evidence. If the purpose, on the other hand, is to satisfy a public's broader conception of justice and fairness in both shielding (only) the truly vulnerable and ensure personalised accountability for terrible crimes, it would make more sense to temper and weigh concerns around mental health against other principles. Possibly coloured by an idea of mental ill health providing a 'lenient' ground for exemptions, the impetus of sentencers in both Norway and the UK seems to be to have a high bar for making mental health-based exemptions to criminal responsibility in terrorism-related cases.

Conclusions

This brief but broad look at mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility has made it clear that the issue involves more than purely medical-legal calculations. The fact that the two relatively similar countries analysed here, Norway and the UK regulate the issue differently show that there is no 'natural' or obvious approach to the matter, even as these countries seem to have based their systems on related principles and assumptions around ideas of responsibility, culpability, and capacity. While making mental health-based exemptions to criminal responsibility may seem intuitive and just, the realisation of this principle is ridden with contingencies. The relevant frameworks in Norway and the UK have different manners of bringing out and examining evidence, different systematisations of the relevant conditions, and different requirements for showing how a mental health issue might have impacted on the act in question. While perhaps seeming minor, these differences could have significant consequences for outcomes in actual cases. They also indicate diverging conceptions of mental health problems, as well as guilt and punishment, and on how best to ensure fairness in process and outcome.

The complexities involved become even more evident if looking to the specific category of terrorism-related cases. First, legal definitions of terrorism-related offences – as ideologically, religiously or politically motivated – by themselves venture into the domain of a defendant's thinking and intentionality and wanders across the same landscape wherein which a person's mental health status is assessed. In terrorism-related cases, the boundaries between terrorism-related (ideological, religious, political) motivation and mentally disordered (for instance delusional) thinking may thus not always be crystal clear. Even after dozens of terrorism-related prosecutions over the past decades, there is no established 'default' way of distinguishing mental health 'abnormality' from ideological and/or religious 'abnormality' when there is doubt as to whether an act was undertaken due to strongly held or 'overvalued' terrorism-related beliefs, and/or as a direct result of psychosis, for instance. Whereas the former scenario would function as an aggravating circumstance and certainly provide for no exemption to criminal responsibility, the latter might lead to a decision not to charge or result in medical treatment rather than a prison sentence.

This article's complexifying of this often-taken for granted institution of mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility has realised an analytical methodology of a modified 'genealogy of the present'; its primary interest has not been in historical trajectories, but rather in revealing some of the *ongoing* contingencies of this present-day practice. Its qualitative, example-based approach has brought out dissonances and

strains in a legal practice and principle often either unquestioned or addressed primarily as a matter of how to 'improve' current decision-making. In line with more conventional genealogies, this analytical approach has been attentive to the implicit 'power struggle' at stake – between different standards, disciplines and societal concerns – in the frameworks and decision-making on mental health exemptions to criminal responsibility. It has shown that decisions on mental health exemptions are not epistemologically 'neutral' medical-legal calculations but involve an implicit battle between considerations of politics, law, security, and scientific medical expertise.

While the purpose of this endeavour stops at this point of questioning and complexifying, this issue is clearly not only of theoretical interest, but has direct implications for the fate of individuals and the functioning of countries' justice systems. The diverging paths chosen by states also hold different promises for the medium- to longer-term effectiveness, fairness and appropriateness of law enforcement as well as specific counter-terrorism measures: misguided approaches could lead to either preventable recidivism or the violation of rights of individuals with severe mental health problems. While determinations on a possible mental health exemption brings several conceptual principles and values into contestation, the resolution of such conflicts in a context of high political, security and public interest stakes also have real-life consequences for both the individuals in questions and the societies they are part of.

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[xvii] The trial against Philip Manshaus, broadcast by the court and followed by the author live at the time.

[xviii] See also Gröning et al., 2022.

[xix] See also Regjeringen: *Proposisjon154 L*, Endringer i Straffeloven og straffeprosessloven, 2016–2017, Oslo, 69; Gröning, 2021, p.200.

Assembling with VR: Dancing in a more-than-human world

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Abstract

In this paper, we consider the claims that constellate around the concepts of immersion, presence and empathy that have been made about virtual reality across many disciplines of study, including psychology, criminology, immersive film and media. These claims are applied to an interdisciplinary, collaborative project: VR Dance; which engaged young people (11-16 years) in hip hop and immersive technology workshops over a six-week period. We discuss the ways in which co-created immersive environments which centre the body offer potential to tune into and re-calibrate our sensitivities and modes of engagement with each other and the environments we are in. We argue that this is not simply as a result of technology's effects on individuals but constituted in wider assemblages of human and nonhuman actors. We make the case for virtual reality, not as a tool for 'becoming other', but as part of wider assemblages in ongoing transformations, relocations, and calibrations.

Keywords: virtual reality; dance; embodiment; empathy; immersion; presence; Barad; intra-action; assemblage

Introduction

This article, we consider the 'unrealizable promise that we might *become the other* body' (**Jarvis, 2019**) through immersive experiences with virtual reality (VR). '[T]he capacity the medium has to make our bodies part of the experience of a story is what creates a stronger entry point to engage a deeper emotional response and to connect us empathetically to the events being portrayed (**Sánchez Laws, 2017: 125**), is a claim that has been articulated by VR experience makers (**de la Pena, 2016**). In this article, we build on previous critiques and scepticism around the claims and assumptions made on the purported capacities of VR technologies to foster empathy 'in addressing social issues' (**Sora-Domenjó, 2022**) and the ethical implications that arise (**Ramirez, 2022**). We acknowledge the 'considerable amount of attention' (**Sánchez Laws, 2017: 215**) that has been brought to the term 'empathy' across such disciplines as philosophy and psychology, and the problematisation of the term in the complexities of a move from 'a visceral bodily response to a rational understanding' (**Sánchez Laws, 2017: 221**) of another's experience – body and/or world - portrayed through a VR headset. The extent to which the promise of 'knowing' other bodies is ever actuated within [individual] acts of immersion requires critical scrutiny' (**Jarvis, 2019: 4**), with 'little empirical evidence of a correlation between VR exposure and an increase in empathy that motivates pro-social behaviour, and a lack of research covering VR films exposure eliciting empathy' (**Sora-Domenjó, 2022**).

The promise of VR as a means for providing 'participants control and transcendence of (real) bodies, things and distances' (**Gemeinboeck, 2004: 52**) can be challenged, as this author suggests, as 'the dialogue with such technological media and their "virtual environments" … not only transforms but rather provokes issues of presence, identity and embodiment' (**Ibid**). Similarly, authors Bollmer and Guinness (**Bollmer & Guinness, 2020**), unpacking the intersections of art, VR, and physiological reaction through Jordon Wolfson's *Real Violence* (2017), conclude that claims around empathetic exchange through the mechanism of VR lie at the heart of assumptions about the social value of VR. The social justice potentials of VR are limited by the simulated and prescriptive nature of the technology, which removes critical elements that are required in enacting engagements with others.

In this paper, we offer a new perspective on human-VR encounters, which further complicates existing scepticism in the literature about VR's empathy potentials, fore fronting the arrangements and relationalities of bodies, technologies, and perspectives in such encounters, as dynamic assemblages of human and nonhuman elements unfolding via multidirectional 'intra-actions' (**Barad, 2003: 817**). We theoretically, and

uniquely, ground our analysis in feminist philosopher Karen Barad's conceptual framework, which emphasises these entanglements between matter and meaning (**Barad 2003; 2007; 2014**),

> *[t]he world [as] a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies* (**Barad, 2007: 140**).

Intra-action posits agency not as an inherent property of an individual or human (body) but as a dynamism of forces constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing, and working inseparably: 'agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world' (**Barad, 2007, 141**). In applying her ideas to body-VR entanglements, we draw particularly on her critiques of *representation* (**2003**) that call for less focus on linguistic representation of phenomena. A rejection of representationalism is evident across Barad's work, who has argued for a perspective that does not force a Cartesian separation between representations and things but is rooted in performativity:

> *Unlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorising as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being* (**Barad, 2007: 133**).

Recognising that VR experiences are material-discursive phenomena, not simply matters of language, we find parallels with Barad's critique of cultural representation in many of the more individualistic/ therapeutic claims that are made about the potential of VR and the separation that is assumed between representations in the VR world and the belief that people can somehow translate what is experienced into real world interactions.

Barad claimed this *posthumanist performativity* provided: 'a reworking of the familiar notions of discursive practices, materialization, agency, and causality, among others' (**Barad, 2003:, 811**) and a materialization (rather than representation) of all bodies, whether human or non-human in a relational ontology of *agential realism*: that is an appreciation of co-dependent, entangled and mutually constitutive relations that exist in nature- whereby all matter has the potential to affect (**Barad, 2007**). We argue that this ontology of *agential realism, performativity* and *posthumanism* enables insightful questioning of prevailing notions that immersive VR elicits empathy effects within individual users, shifting focus toward distributed agencies across embodied, technical, and discursive relations.

The article does not follow a traditional structure and warrants some signposting. In the section that follows (background), we provide contextual information on VR experiences and consider the move from the use of solitary to social VR and some of the ethical issues that arise in this space. The methods section consists of a layered empirical-conceptual methodology. An extensive literature search, and findings from an empirical project 'VR Dance' are diffracted against each other (**Barad, 2007; 2014**) to reveal five themes. The first of these unpacks some of the assumptions around VR and empathy, the vulnerability of bodies placed inside VR worlds follows and leads into issues of framing and representation in VR content, we then explore the residual effects of the technology and opportunities for critical distance, and, lastly, consider the ways in which performance offers modes and sites of disruption through VR experiences.

Background

Virtual reality technology

VR is an emerging immersive technological medium 'in which subjects use a head- mounted display (HMD)/ VR headset to create the feeling of being within a virtual environment' (**Madary & Metzinger, 2016: 2**). The term virtual reality is used to refer to a wide range of technologies which range from simple 360-degree camera systems to fully immersive, interactive, simulated virtual environments (e.g., the latest version of Apple Vision Pro). VR sits within the paradigm of extended reality (XR), which refers to all real-and-virtual combined environments and human-machine interactions generated by computer technology and wearables, i.e. augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR) and virtual reality (VR). Each of these technological media offers distinct experiential qualities and affordances. Whilst technologies such as AR and MR layer digital/virtual information (e.g., environments/bodies/objects) over/onto physical environments/bodies/objects or are placed (as objects, screens, or worn as digital items) within acknowledged/seen physical environments, VR, distinctly, replaces the visual environment completely. Researchers, Michael Madary and Thomas K. Metzinger working across the philosophy of mind and the ethics of emerging technology, remark that '[u]nlike other forms of media, VR can create a situation in which the user's entire environment is determined by the creators of the virtual world' (**Ibid: 5**). VR sits at one end of the Reality-Virtuality Continuum as designed by Milgram and colleagues (1995), the levels of virtuality on this spectrum ranging from partially sensory inputs on one end to immersive virtuality on the other. VR technology 'necessitates absolute inclusion within a 360-degree digital environment, the user metaphorically stepping inside the

computer' (**Dixon, 2007: 365**) and introduces 'dramatic new ways of disrupting our relationship to the natural world' (**Madary & Metzinger, 2016: 2**).

Whilst VR manifests notions of embodiment and immersion, it impedes/ limits modes of sensing and only engages with specific body parts, typically the hands, as 'interaction' devices. Bodies are not 'stable things or entities, but rather are processes which extend into and are immersed in worlds' (**Blackman, 2012**), and, as such, bodies are shaped by and shape worlds. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, Abram writes about the 'continuous dialogue' between his material, felt sensing body and the material world which 'unfolds far below my verbal awareness' (**Abram, 1997: 52**). This sense of awareness is physical, sensorial, virtual - coalescing with and through the virtuality of the imagination (**Ingold, 2013**). The technological medium of VR problematises 'the relationship between "the real", "the actual" (or "concrete"), and "the virtual" in ways that exceed other media' (**Saker & Frith, 2020: 1431**).

> *The ability to visually simulate something physical separates this technology from the virtual sensibility of a child at play. And the experience of being placed in a virtual space that ocularly appears disconnected from the physical environment is precisely the phenomenological effect of this technology, and what makes it feel distinctive from other media* (**Saker & Frith, 2020: 1431**).

Whilst there is a layering or merging of sensory information derived from the physical world in which the physical body is located, and the digital virtuality – the body and world as seen from within the VR headset, it is typically the visual world inside the headset that takes precedence (due to the visual dominance of the sensory system). The body reacts and the sensory system rallies to 'fill in the gaps' whilst the brain relatively slowly catches up at which point it's too late, as the bodily reactions have already occurred. As VR experience maker, ZU-UK Artistic Director Persis-Jadé Maravala writes: '[t]he body will believe something and the conscious mind can't. Our involuntary systems are stronger' (**Dunne, 2018: 216–217**). This affordance of VR enables the participant to experience a sense of immersion and presence in the simulated world. This feeling of presence is further enhanced by using additional sense cues, with sonic and haptic technologies (driven by visual cues), and by the production of a body 'there', i.e., through the visual presence or avatar in the virtual environment.

From solitary to social VR

With newer, lighter, faster, and more affordable technologies (such as the Oculus - now Meta-owned - VR Quests), VR is increasingly being used to explore, measure, and capture data around social experiences and interactions. For example, most VR headsets now include integrated eye tracking, leveraged to 'optimize the user experience' (**McNamara & Jain, 2019**). Since COVID-19, there has been a dramatic uptake of remotely shared VR spaces, e.g., for social, work/networking, gaming, and performance events[i]. This shift 'necessitates new explorations of the theoretical and social importance of VR' (**Saker & Frith, 2020: 1428**). Vishal Shah (Head of Metaverse) speaks about a future metaverse as the 'next phase internet', a space in which we can 'feel like we are there with other people…in a way that we can't "feel" in our digital experiences today'[ii]. Whilst these claims around the Metaverse are posited as alternatives to not a replacement of the physical, real world, notions of 'living, working, and socialising in VR (citation) operate to replace / replicate real-life scenarios[iii] . The promissory claims of Meta's Horizon Worlds envision an 'embodied internet' in which we are all 'connected' using multiple sense modalities, with agency to create our own worlds. This is not an insignificant or unproblematic shift, as the envisaged experience moves from the participant body in a VR encounter to multiple bodies in shared, social, collaborative VR spaces. As Roquet explores in his writing on outsourcing the space of everyday social interaction '[w]hat changes with the more "embodied" internet of the metaverse and social VR is that this becomes not just a question of anonymous social media posts, but anonymous bodies interacting in three-dimensional spaces' (**Roquet, 2023: 1505**).

Does what happens in real life simply transfer over into a simulated virtual environment? On one hand, the body's hardwired response to the visual stimuli in a VR headset directly translates from phenomenon experienced in the physical world. For example, the body flinches when a virtual entity is moving towards it. However, VR mediates behaviours that are not possible in 'real-life', expanding and making more fluid the boundaries of what is deemed socially appropriate or acceptable. Farmer and Maister highlight notions of 'bodily' self, as 'the basis of subjective experience', and 'conceptual' self, which 'develops through our interactions of other' - deemed as 'one of the most important concepts in social cognition and plays a crucial role in determining questions such as which social groups we view ourselves as belonging to and how we relate to others' (**Farmer & Maister, 2017: 323**). They also highlight the opportunities and risks of VR for 'harnessing' the 'malleability' of both bodily and conceptual self to 'achieve a reduction in social prejudice' (**Ibid**). Loaded with multiple assumptions around behaviour, in terms of what is deemed appropriate

or acceptable, ethical issues arise in the typically unregulated, spaces of social VR (**Allen & Macintosh, 2022**), with a lack of best practice or industry standards and contextual, cultural insight around those participating. An example of which is the phenomena know as 'griefing' that refers to the act of one player intentionally disrupting another player's game experience for personal pleasure and possibly potential gain (**Achterbosch et al., 2017**).

Issues such as this pose ethical dilemmas, and it is critical is to help mitigate and educate people on the implications of the use of such technologies. Acknowledging these dilemmas take us into the territories of moral theory, moral education, philosophy and philosophy of education which, whilst important areas for consideration, are beyond the remit of this article. Meeting the multiple critiques and concerns outlined so far, we investigate different applications of VR cutting across different fields of research and diffract these insights with our case study *VR Dance*, exploring the outcomes, benefits, and values of the technology. In doing so, we problematise bodies in dynamic intra-actions with VR technologies, attending to more-than-human material-discursive relations at play, as 'it is through specific intra-actions that phenomenon come to matter – in both senses of the word' (**Barad 2007, 140**). We diffract perspective shifting/ enhancing claims of VR, 'affective experiences of a self that hyper-extends beyond the protective layer of the skin to incorporate experiences of otherness' (**Jarvis, 2019: 7**).

Methodology: Diffracting insights of VR

The methodology used in this article links project data to theoretical formulations on distributed agencies. We cover this methodological territory through three sections: outlining the literature review that was undertaken; detailing the empirical work undertaken on our case study VR dance, including the thematic analysis of data; and the 'diffraction' of these data underpinned by Barad's theories.

Literature review

We conducted a robust review of literature drawn predominately from Psychology, Psychiatry, Sociology, Criminology, Film and Performance Studies to understand the claimed value of VR technology and the forms of enquiry and critique within each discipline. Searches were conducted in 2020 and then repeated in 2023 from the year 2000 onwards with a clear search strategy. The databases used were ACM Digital Library, JSTOR, PsychINFO, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Web of Science, Scopus and Project MUSE. Google Scholar was also utilised as was the [ANON] Library search facility. The search terms were *Immersive Technology* or *Virtual Reality* or *Augmented Reality* paired with one of the

following applications *Research* or *Social Science* or *Performance* or *Journalism* or *Futures* or *Mental Health* or *Poverty* or *Diversity* or *Social Justice* or *Social Inequality* or *Crime* or *Youth* or *Risk* or *Education* or *Social Work.* Literature was also review via searching the bibliographies of relevant papers. Exclusion terminology included *Treatment* and *Medical and Engineering Education* and *Entertainment* and *Gaming* and *Code and Coding.* The search strategy technique used was truncation. Such as Virtual Reality OR Immersive OR Augmented Reality AND Performance OR Journalism OR Futures. This was continued using various combinations of the search terms as stated above. Examples of these literature are discussed alongside the case study *VR Dance*.

VR Dance case study and qualitative analysis

The *VR Dance* project was developed by East London Dance (ELD), together with technology partners Maskomi X PlayLab.Z, dance organisation, BirdGang and researchers from [ANON], to engage young people at risk of educational exclusion and/or criminal exploitation in two London boroughs, Redbridge, and Newham. The programme was designed across three years and supported from the Lord Mayor of London funding which had an explicit focus on reducing risk of criminal exploitation amongst young people in London.

On securing the funding, ELD were keen to explore the impact of offering technology enhanced dance instruction to young people. Dance brings a physical-sensorial engagement to VR, enabling forms of participation that surface embodied-material experiences and felt relations between bodies, technologies, and spaces (**Thomas, 2022b, 2022a; Thomas & Glowacki, 2018)**. ELD have a long history of providing dance in East London, particularly through the genre of hip hop and had identified this as a dance approach that had been previously well received by young people participating in their youth programmes and their perspective reflects claims of the role of hip hop as a form of critical pedagogy (**Campbell, 2022**) and as a form of identity resistance (**Payne, 2024**).

The project aimed to engage young people (herein YP) aged 11-16 years in secondary schools and pupil referral units in creative and co-designed activities comprising hip hop dance instruction, VR, and other immersive technologies (including avatar creation and body motion capture). From a research perspective we also built inartistic reflection for the YP in the form of a weekly journal and creative activities aimed at encouraging reflection. The programmes research aims were to explore whether there were any changes observed in the YP in terms of decision-making, peer relationships and wellbeing and we used the reflective activities to explore these soft outcomes. A central premise of the project was also to support YP in technology and dance skills and to be content creators. They co-

designed dance sessions, collaboratively designed avatars, and made collective decisions about the virtual worlds their performances inhabited.

The programme had three phases and began during the COVID-19 lockdowns with a series of online workshops, followed by two further rounds of a 6-week in-person dance and virtual reality experience. The data presented here is drawn from the second in-person phase. Each phase engaged 60 young people from four secondary schools (two in each borough) and included a mainstream secondary school and a pupil referral unit from each borough. The workshops were delivered jointly by BirdGang dance instructors, technologists from Maskomi X PlayLab.Z and a youth worker employed by ELD. The young people experienced the workshops in school specific groups and were referred to the programme by their school (and provided time off school lessons) if school staff felt they would benefit. Young people who participated had either been excluded from mainstream education or were deemed at risk of exclusion and most had difficulties engaging with traditional lessons. There were nearly equal numbers of young people who identified as male and female with a wide range of ethnicities representative of the local demographics in East London.

The research team from the University of Bristol, together with ELD staff, used the reflective journal and a range of creative methods to assess the experiences of the YP participating in these activities including drawing, vox-pops, postcard creation where they were provided with a series of prompts and materials (see **Figure 1**) for reflection. In research with CYP, arts-based or visual methods have been successfully used to attempt to 'flatten' power dynamics (**Holland et al., 2010**) between the researcher/researched. The project received ethical approval from the School for Policy Studies Ethics Committee (University of Bristol). At the end of the project, individual interviews were conducted with each YP who consented (n=44/60) in which they were asked to bring their reflective journal as a prompt to general questions about their experiences. Their creative reflections provided a focal point or neutral space on which participants could concentrate if they did not wish, or were not able, to hold eye contact throughout the interview (**Banks, 2001**). All YP have been given pseudonyms and other identifying information changed.

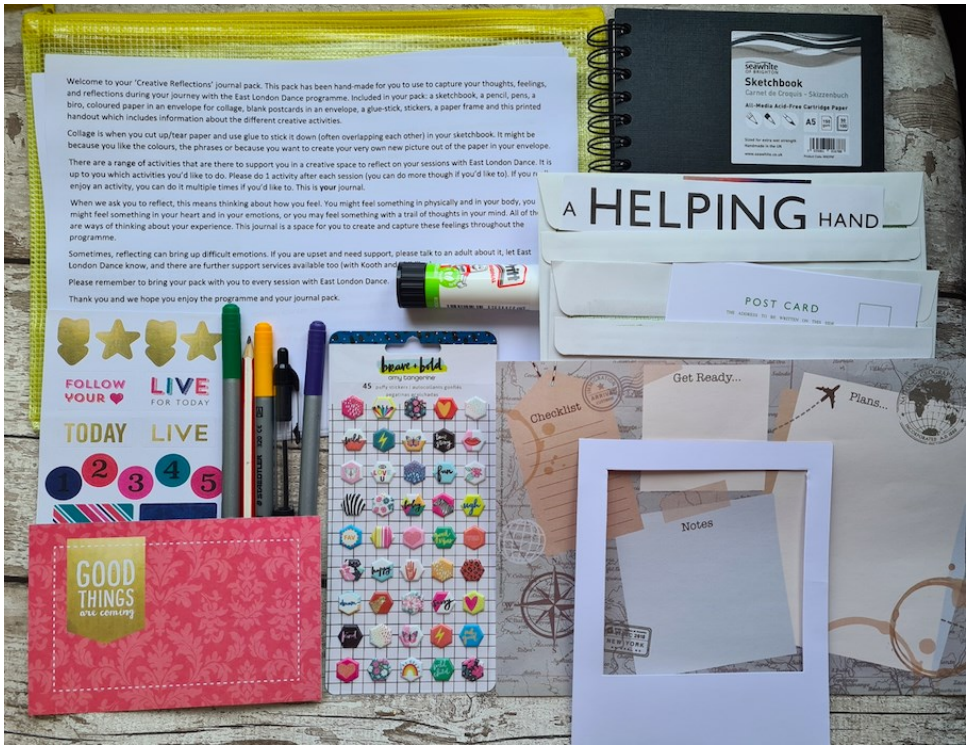
Diffraction

Haraway initially defined diffraction as 'a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction' (**Haraway, 1992: 300**). We have taken these ideas and Barad's (**2007**) claims that diffraction can be seen as a method whereby ontological, epistemological and ethical elements of the world are inseparable and form an 'ethico-onto-epistemology' (**Barad, 2007: 409**). This is important in the context of Barad's rejection of

representations of reality as she argues that instead of representing an observed phenomenon, a researcher diffracts what is observed and actively constructs reality. This practice of diffraction is only made possible through the relationality of humans and non-humans.

We engaged a diffractive method to (re-)turn (**Barad 2014**) to data produced during *VR Dance* (their narratives in the individual interviews) alongside our mapping of the literature across a number of themed sections. The purpose of this is to trouble assumptions that placing people 'inside' virtual environments may afford 'empathy', provide critical distance, or engineer pro-social behaviour within their minds-bodies and worlds. Whilst we have not directly analysed their reflections recorded in their journals and in creative activities we do draw on some of this material to illustrate the claims made in interviews.

Figure 1: Creative reflection 'kit' supplied to all YP



VR Empathy Machine: Assumptions and Vulnerabilities

In many of the articles reviewed in the literature review, the focus was on the production of VR to place viewers inside an event, that might be previously inaccessible, to enhance emotional responses and generate empathetic response, with emphasis on a positive social implication. As mentioned in the introduction, these claims and the ethical issues that arise in response are complex. It was noted in the literature that the vernacular used, and value placed on VR to elicit empathetic responses in the viewer/ participant shifted between disciplines. VR is commonly used in Psychology in individualistic treatment-based approaches, e.g., for

aversion/ exposure techniques for phobias and anxiety in therapeutically oriented contexts whereby behavioural and attitudinal change is often pinned down to the notions of 'body ownership' and 'full body illusion' (**Banakou et al., 2016; Farmer & Maister, 2017; Schoeller et al., 2019; Tajadura-Jiménez et al., 2012**). There are studies in Psychology and Criminology focused on rectifying prejudice or criminal behaviours through interaction in VR or bodily ownership and a coinciding shift in perspective where 'perspective' 'bias' 'prejudice' and 'behavioural change' are emphasised (**Banakou et al., 2016; Farmer & Maister, 2017; Gonzalez-Liencres et al., 2020; Hasson et al., 2019; Southgate et al., n.d., 2017**). Whereas studies in immersive journalism and film were often tagged with notions of 'empathy' as 'an understanding or connection to the feelings of others', that 'involves caring, validating, and understanding' them, and which always serves a positive outcome, the 'basis for further relief action toward them' (**Sánchez Laws, 2017: 218**).

VR Dance, perhaps unintentionally, drew upon similar assumptions around VR to those found in the literature: the project sought to target vulnerable YP, motivated by the potential for technology and dance experiences to enhance their emotional responses, transform their perspectives of themselves and of others, hopefully resulting in positive social outcomes. Across the media industries, (such as gaming, immersive journalism, and non-fiction film), the premise of transference into another perspective and body that VR affords is used to provoke people into imagining what other people's lives or experiences might be like (e.g., Jane Gauntlet's VR experience *In My Shoes*, 2017). For a body to be 'merged' with another (virtual body) in VR, there requires an openness - to be 'changed', and therefore there is the potential for vulnerability in this merging of the lived body and the VR content. This was a critical factor in considering the needs of the YP in the *VR Dance* project. There was some anxiety from them about using the technology, about engaging in a dance-based activity, as well as the social aspect of the experience. They came with some assumptions, both in terms of what they considered a VR experience entailed: *'the VR was good. Not proper VR (I have that at home)'* (**Nathan**, **participant**), and in how dance and VR might work constructively together:

> *The VR and Dance...I didn't think it would work because in my head I thought it would be that you would put on goggles and dance with them at the same time but instead of that it was like you dance and then you can watch yourself with the goggles. And you end up in a whole different surrounding...It felt kinda weird but mesmerising at the same time because I'm watching myself through some glasses* (**Dayana, participant**).

The YP involved in the *VR Dance* project were simultaneously part of the world represented and outside of it: they were able to perform and move with/in their bodies in both the physical and virtual spaces whilst wearing the VR headsets, and to 'step back', accruing distance, whilst watching themselves back through the headsets. The perspective of 'other' was enabled in a less prescriptive way, encouraging a shift or transference of 'self', mediated by the technology:

> *When you watch it back it's like you are really there as an audience member and you get to see how bad it was or how good it was. It made me feel good cos I had done this and I could watch it back* (**Jamal, participant**).

Young people became part of the virtual worlds their dances were situated within, but also, as Jamal pointed out, they became their own audience members. They navigated being inside-outside the physical-virtual environment of the workshops and their bodies in a variety of ways. This was not always a positive experience. For example, Aaliyah commented on the anxiety they felt within the VR-dance workshops:

> *Aaliyah: I'll be real, I did enjoy it but the fact that these certain things played on my mind, that like ruined it init.*
>
> *Researcher: When you say certain things what do you mean?*
>
> *Aaliyah: Like the fact that I feel people just watching and feel like I'm making a fool of myself init.*
>
> *Researcher: I'm sure that you didn't though*
>
> *Aaliyah: No I mean in the end I know that we didn't init, everyone's doing it but it's still that thing that plays on your mind.*
>
> *Researcher: What emotions did you feel?*
>
> *Aaliyah: Anxious.* (**Aaliyah, participant & researcher dialogue**).

For some YP the technology enabled them to engage with the dance elements of the sessions, finding it easier to move their bodies, as bodies that were mediated by or captured through the technologies:

> *I felt like it's easier to dance like whilst doing the technology at the same time because then you feel like no one is watching you and you're in your own little world...you can focus on something else* (**Aaliyah, participant**).

Some of the young people found ways to focus inward on themselves rather than the environment they were in:

> *I don't like being on camera a lot...I just danced like, I pretended that no one, that there wasn't a camera there...just like pretend that there's only you there, and that no one else is there and it's just you dancing* (**Shannon, participant**).

Others used different techniques to disguise themselves and disrupt feelings of discomfort.

> *Lara: when we were putting the dance together you had to think about what everyone wanted to do and what they were comfortable with...a few people were uncomfortable with recording themselves, that was an issue.*
>
> *Researcher: How did you overcome that?*
>
> *Lara: we put facemasks on...everyone did manage to record themselves to see what they were doing by the end of the project*. (**Lara, participant & researcher dialogue**).

Writing from a non-fiction immersive filmmaking perspective, Rose argues that VR may offer a sensory experience of 'other', but 'cannot reproduce internal state' (**Rose, 2018: 142**). Technologies designed to foster empathy presume to acknowledge the experience of another, but inherently cannot. The user of these technologies, instead of acknowledging another's experience, hastily absorbs the other's experience into their own (**Bollmer, 2017: 64**). As the remarks of the YP evidence above, their participation in the performative elements of the workshops occurred as different kinds of immersion, in their be(com)ing with/out others. Through their attempts to be(come) detached from technologies such as cameras and to be(come) de-individualised by creating uniform characters, detaching themselves from the environment or their identity through becoming other, disguised by COVID-19 face masks. The entanglements of bodies and technologies, digital and physical phenomena, disrupted notions of VR 'immersion' as an individualistic practice and challenged binaries of self and other. The YP expected to be dancing alongside an-other, an avatar to duet with, but found themselves as it captured their movements. They were dancing along with themselves, their bodily experience distributed across physical and virtual spaces. The intra-actions between these agential forces at play, made redundant the notion of an experience of empathetic connection to 'other' as distinct from 'self', and opened towards a more playful arena for shared empathetic exchange.

Immersive bodies and sensorial proximities

By bringing the participant into a closer proximity or more direct relationship with the VR content, and by incorporating more of their senses, a more novel effect of 'realness' can be 'achieved', and, with this, a reduction of the discrepancy between 'representational reality versus experienced reality' (**Kool, 2016: 4–5**).

The VR Dance project employed sound and haptic sense cues alongside the visual during the workshops, providing multiple sensory routes into the body, and perhaps a more visceral relationship to the content. The multi-sensory nature of the technologies, the entanglement of sound, vibration, and visual content, was an element which the YP frequently fed back on. Sometimes, the sensory information was overstimulating: *'it made me feel sick [in a good way] ...like pumped up'* (**Nic, participant**). The haptic jacket used which vibrated as it converted electromagnetic signals from objects into pulses and sounds, prompted a variety of responses:

> *Nah that was fun, because you got that thing that you have to put on your back init, and it vibrates, and then you got the VR that you put on with headphones, that was really fun...at one stage I didn't like that backpack thing because it made me feel sick, it was vibrating loads... you can feel it go through your whole body, like your arms, legs, chest, head* (**Hannah, participant**).
>
> *[I liked] the sound pack where it like vibrates to the sound you are listening to so you get like a great flow* (**Ben, participant**).
>
> *I wasn't expecting it to be so immersive, you could like feel everything going on around you* (**Agathe, participant**).

Focusing on increased proximity to a situation or social group in a controlled setting, it is claimed a third-person perspective offers a more intimate relationship to the 'action', as this 'decreased psychological distance allows for the manipulation of empathy, which has been found to shift behaviour toward more generous or others' focused decisions, both hypothetical and real' (**Southgate et al., 2017: 73**). Some first-person scenarios, (**Banakou et al., 2016: 33; Tajadura-Jiménez et al., 2012**) explore body ownership over a differently raced body and consider the effects of such embodiment diminishing on implicit racial bias as well as how long a potential 'affect' might last. An example of this can be seen within studies exploring the Palestinian and Israeli conflict (**Hasson et al., 2019**) and the impact of intimate partner violence (**Gonzalez-Liencres et al., 2020**). In the latter study, the authors claim that participants taking the first-person point of view of the female victim experienced a sense of vulnerability, intensity, and sense of realness; whereas they felt more detached and less threatened in the observer role (**Ibid: 341**).

The perspective of the VR participant, their (avatar) presence within the virtual environment, their proximity to events occurring in that environment, and capabilities for interaction there, are key factors in designing experiences which orient around provoking behavioural change. In the *VR Dance* project, it was the processes through which technology and dance came together within the project that enabled the embodied and social shifts that participants made. These were not prescriptive outcomes, but softer changes in bodies and minds, which brought about social shifts. For example, many young people commented on their increased confidence through performing with others in the real-virtual environments, and improved social skills such as communication, trust and decision-making generated from the collaborative practices and interaction which were encouraged in the sessions. Others commented on how the sessions had solidified or encouraged new friendships: '*I bonded with my friends through dance. I bonded with them really well*' (**Agathe, participant**). Whilst we did not directly analyse the creative outputs of young people, their creations in their reflective journals do illustrate some of these outcomes:

Figure 2: Example reflective journal entry.

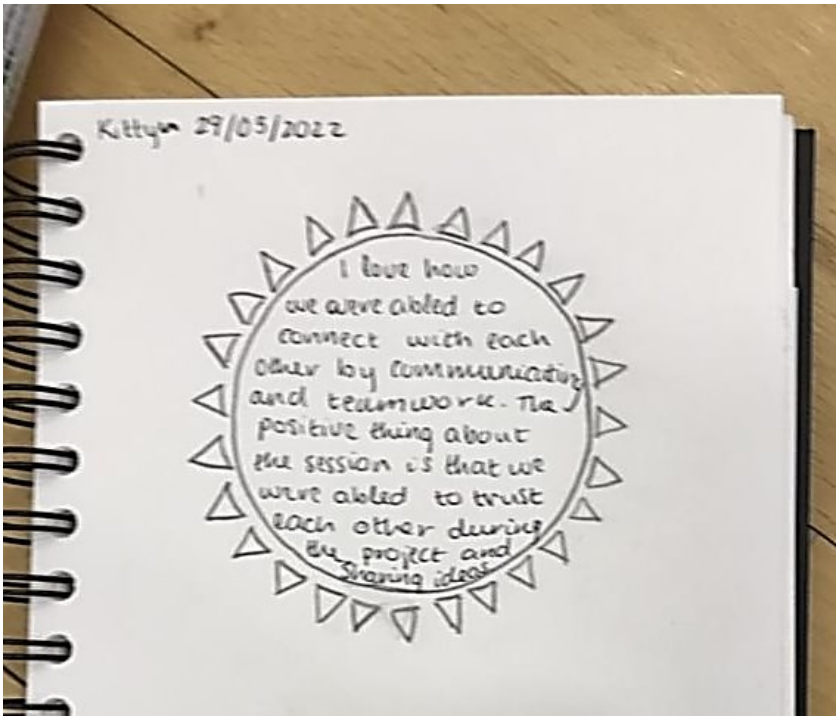
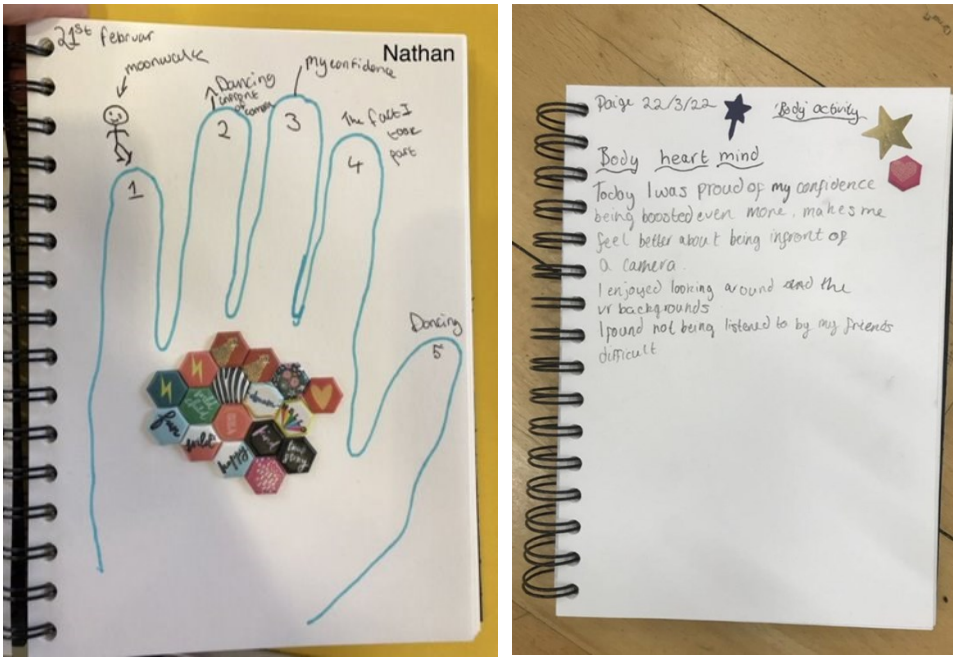


Figure 3: Bodies, hearts and minds.



Framing and representation: Non-neutrality, (in)-visibility, agency, and co-production

Questions of framing and representation in VR content and in crafting participation are crucial in examining and reflecting on the capacity for VR to shape perception and, whether and how this offers the potential for behavioural change. Attention must be paid to the contextual processes and agential forces involved in the assembling of human-VR encounters. We consider the invisibility of the designer and experience-maker, and the perceived agency of the participant, and how opaque design processes might be problematic in the context of highly persuasive content. Whilst VR provides an immersive, 360-degree experience, equipping its participants with complete agency to look around and move around the virtual world; everything about that world has been developed through the 'lens' of its creator(s). Furthermore, there are typically visual or aural cues, which are designed to direct the gaze (and therefore the attention) and movement of the participant to 'painstakingly construct highly focused scenarios with socially and technically constrained mechanics of interaction' (**Murray 2020, 24**).

Overestimating the power of VR is problematic, especially when considering it to be a powerful illusionary tool. If we decide to represent VR as an 'ultimate empathy machine'[iv] or take for granted highly speculative claims about the nature of consciousness, we are essentialising the way that VR functions without critically analysing the process of creating scenarios and the proceeding effect on the participant: 'VR environments could very well become incubators for propaganda and

exploitation, and for this reason, being unaware of the journalist orchestrating highly persuasive content can be dangerous' (**Kool, 2016: 8**). The danger is that we do not take into account the placement of the VR designer, nor framing, nor existing biases in creating 'a situation in which the user's entire environment is determined by the creators of the virtual world' (**Madary & Metzinger, 2016: 5**): '[u]nlike physical environments, virtual environments can be modified quickly and easily with the goal of influencing behaviour'. The technology introduces / affords potential for 'powerful forms of both mental and behavioural manipulation', (**Ibid**) which are exacerbated by the range of political and commercial interests that influence content creation.

In the *VR Dance* project, many YP commented on how the virtual environment seemed 'other worldly', describing an experience of their sense of being transported to another 'place'. The dance, they were doing, in contrast, occupied both the physical and virtual environments, whereby the movement of their bodies was available to them across both 'realities':

> *…it was weird man, because you go into these things, and it takes you to a whole different world but you're still doing dance. It's crazy* (**Ryan participant**).
>
> *[What will you remember?] watching myself back in a completely different place, it's not like I'm not on earth to be fair, in the VR goggles* (**Dayana, participant**).

The experiences of the participants in their inhabiting of 'another world' raises tensions around the potential stripping of their located-ness and of the physicality and context of the 'real' world around them, the potential for making them susceptible and vulnerable to the influences or perspectives of designers, creators, and other users of the generated content of these spaces. Taking account of the (in)visibility of various actors in the creation of these worlds, the project tried to actively involve the YP in the application of the technologies, including the design of avatars and environments, although this was inevitably limited by some practical aspects such as time, expertise, and access which reduced the extent to which YP could claim control over the content creation.

Figure 4: One of the avatars created by the YP.

Focusing on representational ethics that assert the ultimate unknowability of someone else's experience, Bollmer (**2017**) advocates against any claims that VR serves as a tool for empathy. Alongside the problematics of the invisibility of the maker of an experience, he flags a further concern, in the way in which 'VR leans heavily on a user's own habitual understanding of what they perceive' (**Ibid: 64**), even as users are often prompted to believe they have been 'standing in someone else's shoes'. For those already inhabiting at least part of the 'universal' subject position, the VR empathy machine can provide the comforting illusion that the user's existing emotional perspective is, after all, universally shared, albeit founded on normative assumptions:

> *This familiarity will occur more easily to the degree a user fits into the hegemonic subject position modelled by the system (most often white, male, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied, neuro-typical, with head, hands, and body of average physical dimensions, and so on)* (**Roquet, 2020: 68**).

Roquet argues for a better understanding of how VR channels empathy towards VR creators, and points to the need to ensure a broader range of people can take up the role of 'VR game master' for themselves (**Roquet, 2020**). Is VR less about empathy and more about appropriation? Whose

perspective is it anyway? VR experiences that claim to give users access to the lives of others, employing their voices, images, and spaces used, often as a form of political activism, claiming that a user has experienced authentic empathy for 'other' is problematic, and arguably a form of 'identity tourism' (**Nakamura, 2020: 47**). As Black feminist theorists have known for some time, the desire to experience empathy for the sufferings of Black people while leaving structural racism in place has long underwritten pleasurable forms of cultural appropriation and projection.

VR imprints and critical distance

In this section, we consider the ways in which the experience of VR can be digested, reflexively and critically in the space of the VR-engagement itself; more reflectively, as 'residual imprints' (**Thomas, 2022a: 14**) in the immediate 'after-space' of encountering the technology; and as a longer-term imprint on the body-mind. Grau raises the critical question, 'whether there is still any place for distanced, critical reflection – a hallmark of the modern era – in illusion spaces experienced through interaction' (**Grau, 2004: 10**) and, in doing so, 'does the 'invisibility' of the VR interface reduce our ability to maintain critical insight?' (**Dare 2019: 234**). If we are to immerse ourselves in VR, what can we do to find criticality and transparency in our understanding of its assembling, the perspectives involved, and the necessary 'return from immersion, [which] implies a dialectical relationship – both a turn to an altered state and return to a more bounded and reflective one' (**Jarvis, 2019: 13**).

Critical reflection was a key principle embedded throughout the *VR Dance* project, with numerous activities providing a mechanism for finding a 'critical distance'. These moments were co-created by, and illuminated through, the entanglement of intra-acting human and more-than-human entities. One young person commented on using a creative journal:

> *Interesting, you know, because I could like express myself in different ways…using different colours to show what different moods I was in...* (**Ben, participant**).

Reflective activities included designing a trainer based on the young person's experience, recording vox-pop style videos showing dance moves, interviewing one another, and writing postcards to themselves in the past/future. These activities highlighted the ways in which a range of human and more-than-human bodies and materialities were involved in the *VR Dance* experience, which stretched beyond the obvious encounters between digital technologies and young bodies: the supporting adults, sketchbooks, stickers, pens, postcards, post-it notes, sports hall floors, cameras and…. In this way and linking back to Barad's thinking around posthuman performativity (**Barad 2003 & 2007**), these activities were not

about reflection as distance (between knower/knowledge and 'thing' being represented) but the entanglement of materiality, embodied attention, technology, paper, and sticky residues (of the gluey and immaterial kinds) involved in a process of intra-active becoming.

Whilst VR is employed as an agent for shaping behavioural change, the lasting effect of the technological content is not fully understood. Farmer and Maister highlight a series of studies demonstrating that social attitudes towards various social out-groups (e.g., racial groups) can lead to a reduction in prejudice towards that group (**2017: 324**). Whilst this was the reverse in a study exploring sexism that found more sexism exhibited by participants after a VR encounter than in the real world (**Fox & Bailenson 2009**).

Many such studies measure effects of embodiment on attitudes immediately after the VR session with no indication of longer-term effects (**Farmer & Maister, 2017: 343**). In their ethical code for conduct in VR, Madray and Metzinger (**2016**) review initial evidence indicating that immersion in VR can have psychological effects that last after leaving the virtual environment. They argue that VR 'will eventually change not only our general image of humanity but also our understanding of deeply entrenched notions, such as "conscious experience", "selfhood", "authenticity", or "realness"' (**Ibid: 20**). Conversely, Murray argues against the notion of 'VR as a magical technology for creating seamless illusions' (**Murray, 2020: 11**), in which bodies and minds are 'overcome' and changed by the simulated worlds and bodies through their own plasticity. Situating VR, instead, as an emergent medium with evolving media conventions, he writes: 'The future of VR is not an inevitable and delusional metaverse but a medium of representation that will always require our active creation of belief', providing 'new human powers of representation' (**Ibid**).

If engaging with VR technologies (positively and/or negatively) can be conceived as a relational encounter rather than individual pursuit, the ethical arguments made above call into question the power of representation. This becomes important in considering the residues felt by or imprinted on the bodies and minds of the young participants involved in the *VR Dance* project. As outlined, the motivation for the project included supporting behaviour change in disaffected and 'at risk' young people. The hope was that the combination of VR, dance and reflective activities might encourage them to become more empathic, confident, and socially engaged decision-makers through engagement with digital, performative, and creative experiences. Although this wasn't explicit, perhaps the traces of these aims were felt by the YP. As Tabitha

commented when asked about what they thought about the combination of dance and VR:

> *Mythical! [Researcher: how did it feel?] …exciting to do the VR and dancing you get to experience different things in yourself and when you do them together it takes the bad stuff out of you... I dance to make myself happier* (**Tabitha, participant**).

Whilst this, and other findings from the project, suggest positive experiences and outcomes from the project, critiques suggest that we should be mindful of the longer-term effects such engagements may have and the assumptions surrounding the potential to illicit empathy needs greater consideration for assuming empathy as an individual pursuit afforded by these activities which reveals the desire to humanise (in particular ways) specific groups of people, in this instance YP, through VR (and dance).

Performative disruptions

Whilst the 'empathy machine' narrative is evident and critiqued in earlier sections particularly across literature in Psychology and Criminology, literature in Performance studies tends to move away from binary notions of full body illusion, seeking value in the spaces in between the real and virtual as a site of disruption:

> *Through this disruption there is the possibility for an awakening of non-normative modes of perception, and subsequently a possibility for choices around ways in which the body can re-learn, through its plasticity, new modes of perception* (**Thomas & Glowacki, 2018: 20**).

Puig de la Bellacasa (**2017**) argues for a 'revaluing of touch' in human encounters with technologies of vision, as a way to 'reclaim' these assembled spaces, of bodies and technologies, which are driven through vision-led modes of encountering the world, through processes of reappropriation of the sensory system towards synaesthetic modalities. She writes on touch as a 'neglected mode of relating with a compelling potential to restore a gap that keeps knowledge from embracing a full embodied subjectivity' (**Ibid: 98**) and through 'optic arrangements that generate disengaged distances with others and the world' (**Ibid**).

Through performative rituals and on-boarding and off-boarding processes which centre the user and the body, tooling participants in 'somatic awareness' (**Thomas, 2022b: 24**), and by engaging the participant in a process of critical reflexivity within the artwork itself (e.g., *Can You See Me Now?* by Blast Theory, 2001), VR performance provides opportunities to unpack and to challenge VR empathy claims. These practices and modalities in performance allow us to understand that perception shaping

does not have to come from an over-emphasis on loosening the boundaries between self and other but can instead be shaped by loosening the boundaries between the real and virtual:

The specific modes of spectator-ship enabled by virtual reality uniquely allows us to relocate ourselves as embodied beings, allowing us to ask questions about embodiment and humanity through the experiences of our individual bodies in a way that has never been possible before (**Popat, 2016: 359**).

On VR Assemblages and Matters of Care

Drawing from a more-than-human perspective, we have suggested that the humanising intentions of VR as an 'empathy machine' are reductive, missing the complexities of entangled human, nonhuman, material, digital, virtual, and discursive elements in the generation of embodied, sensorial, affective, and emotional reactions towards others within VR. We also note that the driver of VR empathy claims lies in the reduction of the senses to the visual, at the expense of alternative, multimodal, and performative ways of seeing, being and caring. By attending to VR experiences as more-than-human entanglements, which traverse not only place but also time, we may enliven/constrain certain possible futures and ways of living in an increasingly sociodigital[v] world whereby: 'The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities' (**Barad, 2003: 817**).

A recalibration into VR is not a 'becoming other' - it does not reaffirm notions of the unrealisable promissory claims of VR, but acknowledges that transformations, relocations, and calibrations are ongoing, intra-active activities. In the *VR Dance* project, the dance aspect enabled the participants to navigate or loosen (superficial) boundaries between real and virtual - allowing YP to experience embodied engagements across physical-digital-material realities, as well as take on specific 'modes of engagement' (**Popat, 2016: 360**) in spectatorship which disrupted further boundaries between participant and observer. Diffracting the literature and the *VR Dance* data through one another has demonstrated how co-creative practices with participants may offer up marginal stories, disruptive perspectives, and re-configurations of self/other, mind/body, participant/observer. This challenges more simple notions that in placing people 'inside' a VR event it is possible to foster empathetic reactions and behaviour change. Instead, in *VR Dance*, boundaries were loosened and became blurred through the combination of dance and virtual reality technologies which were performed in simultaneously real-virtual spaces by real-virtual (and human and more-than-human) bodies and technologies. As a result of the felt presence of 'others' – including the

technologies such as cameras, other human participants in their group or their more-than-human 'virtual' selves, the YP negotiated their agential (intra-active) relations of and between 'self' and 'other'. Although these experiences were not exclusively 'positive', with some moments generating anxiety within the young people, their comments relay the need to provide experiences which enliven participants' embodied attention and capacities to flex somatic agency and engage in critical reflexivity. Moving away from individualised and humanistic perspectives of VR as 'empathy machine', the project revealed that practices of care, the 'rituals' of on/off boarding and the negotiation of differences (including different requirements for different bodies), warrant further consideration as:

Situations of care imply non-symmetrical, multilateral, asymmetrical, asubjective obligations that are distributed across more than human materialities and existences (**de la Bellacasa, 2017: 221**).

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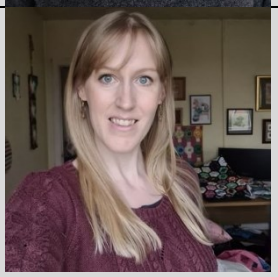

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Endnotes

[i] In 2021, the percentage of UK adults to have experienced VR has more than doubled, rising from 10 percent of internet users in January 2021, to 22 percent in December 2021. Almost one in 20 internet-using adults now use VR at least once a week. One in 14 young people (aged 18 – 24) use VR on a weekly basis (Allen and Macintosh, 2022).

[ii] See: https://www.facebook.com/Meta/videos/are-we-there-yet-episode-1-the-metaverse-will-be-built-by-all-ft-vishal-shah/795697994923424/

[iii] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sziU6-NKiMQ

[iv] See: https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine?language=en

[v] The term Sociodigital is used within the ESRC Centre for Sociodigital Futures based at the University of Bristol and refers to the increasing inseparability and entanglement of digital technologies in our social world and lives.

Voices and/of Places: The English translation of Helga Ruebsamen's Het lied en de waarheid (The Song and The Truth) as a case study of identity and plurality in translation

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Abstract

After Indonesia's independence was officially recognised by the Netherlands in 1949, several former members of the colonial élite repatriated. Many among the Indies-born repatriatees' generation used writing to come to terms with their own controversial, multifaceted identity. While they belonged to the colonial élite, they can be studied as writers geographically and temporally displaced as their colonial land of birth no longer exists. Their desire for belonging is arguably exemplified in the way their novels' protagonists' linguistic identity is depicted. While these authors write in Dutch, their characters are embedded in local cultures, languages, traditions, questioning fixed labels and dichotomies. Taking as example Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel Het lied en de waarheid [The song and the truth], this article explores how linguistic identity is represented in Dutch literature of repatriation and how this is tackled in translation into English. This novel is chosen not only because it allows to explore plurality in literature and translation in the selected context, but also because it takes the issues of linguistic plurality in literature and translation a step further: the five-year-old Dutch protagonist leaves the tropical (colonial) environment with its enchanting nature behind and arrives with her family in the Netherlands in 1939 as the daughter of a Jewish doctor, unveiling a third identity layer beyond the Dutch-East Indian dichotomy. After positioning this novel within Dutch literature of repatriation by means of a close reading analysis, this article discusses why and how it can be studied as a heterolingual, diasporic (in this specific case, neither colonial, nor postcolonial) text. The translation strategies used to tackle representations of cultural and linguistic hybridity into English are then analysed by means of a comparative textual analysis. Looking for recurring trends, the results are finally briefly related to the findings of a

doctoral project about the English and Italian translations of Dutch-East Indian novels by Hella S. Haasse, which suggest that shared tendencies to generalisation may risk distorting images of linguistic hybridity.

Keywords: culture-bound items; Dutch repatriated literature; Helga Ruebsamen; heterolingual texts; identity; linguistic hybridity; plurality; translation strategies

Introduction

The Netherlands's official recognition of the Indonesian Republic's sovereignty in 1949 marked the turning point for the former Dutch colonial empire in the East Indies. Despite widespread anti-colonial sentiments among the local population in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation (1942-45), Indonesia's 1945 declaration of independence seemingly came as unexpected for the Dutch people, who had controversially perceived themselves as 'model colonists' (**cf. De Mul, 2011; Salverda, 2011a, 2011b**) and was conceded only years later after violent colonial struggles and the so-called 'police actions', unsuccessful Dutch military operations in 1947 and 1948-49 to regain power in their former colony (**cf. Allofs et al., 2011; Beekman, 1996; Salverda, 2011a; Van Zonneveld, 1995, 2002**). In this period, an estimated 300,000 people decided or were forced to 'repatriate' to the Netherlands: for many members of the colonial élite, however, this meant leaving their childhood homeland for what often was a 'distant', 'foreign' land (**De Mul, 2010: 416, 2011: 50; Doomernik, 2011: 569; Heering et al., 2002: 251; Koch, 2012: 713; Penninx et al., 1993: 8-9; Van Zonneveld, 1995: 59, 2002: 150**).

Writing helped many younger repatriatees cope with such a 'collective trauma' and with their controversial, socio-historical position: the generation born in the colony before its independence spent their childhood as part of the privileged colonial élite; however, they use literature to come to terms with issues of involvement in the colonial oppression as children of colonisers and the difficult definition of personal identities. In their works, they question the traditional 'colonial vs postcolonial' dichotomy with their experience of spatial and temporal *displacement*, as their land of birth no longer exists (**cf. Van Gemert, 2013, 2016**). They are only able to access it through recollections of the past which yet appear *distorted* and *uncritical*, as they inevitably *filter* the historical developments through colonisers' eyes, mixing memory with imagination (**cf. Pattynama, 2012; Salverda, 2001, 2011c**). Literature can thus become a tool to reflect on and accept the events and feelings of guilt for their colonial past.

This is exemplified in the works of Hella S. Haasse (1918-2011), for instance, one of the internationally best-known and most translated Dutch-East Indian authors, who can be taken as a case in point. The daughter of a Dutch colonial government official, Haasse was born in Batavia, today's Jakarta, in 1918, later moving to the Netherlands to study. In her 2002 psychological novel *Sleuteloog* [The Eye of the Key], the protagonist's painful recollections of life in the former Dutch East Indies are symbolically hidden in a chest to which she lost the key. Once the container (metaphorically, her memory) finally gets opened, it is found empty, as to demonstrate that her childhood reminiscences are untrustworthy and that what she experienced as a child was not reality but her interpretation of it as a member of the colonial élite (**as argued in Peligra, 2020**). This generation's tropical homeland is in fact generally portrayed by these authors as an exotic, 'enchanting' paradise lost (**Salverda, 2011c: 591-592**): these authors 'present us with an escapist longing for a past place and time, which is highly idealized' (**Pattynama, 2012: 98**), recalling a sentimentalised and idealised colonial past in line with the colonial concept of *tempo doeloe* (Malay term for 'good old days') (**De Mul, 2010: 413-414, 2011: 55**) and therefore offering readers an image of the past which is inevitably partial and nostalgic (**cf. Meijer, 1996 on Haasse**).

Yet, the works of many Dutch-East Indian authors who share a similar experience are still underresearched – particularly the works of other female authors, such as for example Helga Ruebsamen (1934-2016), Aya Zikken (1919-2013) or Margaretha Ferguson (1920-1992). More specifically, what remains largely underexplored is how this generation's problematic position as children of colonists takes shape in their novels at the textual level and the problems this poses to translators. In fact, while these authors write in Dutch, their characters are embedded in local cultures and traditions, and therefore languages, expressing their identities and sense of belonging – and therefore questioning fixed colonial representations – through the way in which they speak. From this perspective, these novels can arguably be studied as multilingual, or better, applying Grutman's (**2006**) terms, as 'heterolingual' (**cf. Peligra, 2019a, 2019b**). This helps go beyond definitions which draw from sociolinguistics to look at *literary* 'foregrounding' (**Grutman, 2006**): in this sense, terms such as bi- or multilingual may in fact not fit literary analysis as literary fiction not necessarily aims to show an accurate picture of reality and of the depicted (or imagined, or, in this case study, *recalled*) society (**cf. Grutman, 2006; Meylaerts, 2006**) but rather how it is subjectively perceived or portrayed by an author.

In (post)colonial contexts the depiction of linguistic identities can unveil power relations and stereotypes (**cf. for example Aschroft et al., 1989**). The protagonists of these works in fact mix and play with colonial and local languages to give voice to a *claimed* hybrid self: agreeing with Johnson that the way in which languages are interwoven in a literary text should be analysed as 'a statement of identity […]' (**Johnson, 2018: 428**), it thus becomes crucial to study how these novels are translated. As 'translators must make choices' (**Tymozcko, 2000: 24**) when transposing a text to another language and culture, it is important to explore how they act when facing not just one but two source cultures and languages (here: the Dutch and the East Indian one, which interact in the colonial environment) as the applied strategies might affect the representation of characters' identities (**as argued in Peligra 2019a**).

This article aims to explore further how linguistic identity, as expressed in Dutch-East Indian novels by repatriated writers, is tackled in translation, taking Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid* [*The song and the truth*] as a case study. Ruebsamen's text is chosen because it arguably pushes the notion of heterolingualism in literature and translation beyond the classic Dutch (coloniser's) vs. local languages (colonised people's) dichotomy, allowing us to explore depictions of cultural and linguistic *plurality* from a more comprehensive point of view. More specifically, the author adds a third layer to the main character's identity, who is not only a Dutch child living in the colonial East Indies but also has a Jewish family background.

In the following sections, Ruebsamen's novel is firstly positioned within the context of Dutch-East Indian literature by means of a close reading analysis (see section **Helga Ruebsamen and Het lied en de waarheid**). Specifically, it is justified why and how *Het lied en de waarheid* should be read as a heterolingual text. It is also questioned whether this novel should be studied as a colonial or a postcolonial text, arguing that neither label fully applies. Secondly, the Dutch source text is compared with its 2000 English translation by Paul Vincent (titled *The Song and the Truth*) (See section **The Song and the Truth**). In particular, different instances of heterolingualism are identified and categorised according to my own categorisation. A comparative analysis of the translation strategies applied to tackle images of cultural and linguistic identity is then pursued, applying Aixelá's (**1996**) translation strategies taxonomy for culture-specific items. Finally, the findings are briefly compared with those of previous doctoral research on the translation of Dutch-East Indian novels to look for recurring patterns regarding the translation of instances of heterolingualism in the studied context.

Helga Ruebsamen and *Het lied en de waarheid*: a case study

Helga Ruebsamen was born in Batavia in 1934 to a German father and a Dutch mother. She lived in the Indies with her family until the age of six, when they moved to The Hague. She later worked as a journalist and writer, debuting in 1964 with the short stories collection *De Kameleon* [The Chameleon] (**Raat, 1991; Van Bork & Verkruijsse, 1985: 501-02**). Her 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid*, i.e., the fictionalised account of her early years in the former Dutch East Indian colony, is considered her literary masterpiece.

The novel is firstly presented in the following section (**Voices Through Places**) paying particular attention to the meanings attributed to the different *places* described throughout the narration and their role in shaping the protagonists' identity. The significance of this preliminary analysis is twofold. One the one hand, it allows us to clearly frame the novel as the work of a Dutch repatriated writer and thus define cultural hybridity in this particular context. On the other hand, it helps us give specific meanings to the different *languages* spoken by the novel's characters and to how they relate (later explored in the section **Intertwining Voices**), which is the focus of the subsequent translation strategies analysis (see section **The Song and the Truth**).

Voices Through Places: Multi-layered hybridity in Het lied en de waarheid

Ruebsamen's *Het lied en de waarheid* narrates the tangled and tragic story of the young Louise (Lulu) Benda and her family in the late 1930s in the former Dutch East Indies, and, later, in Europe. The novel is divided into four parts, presenting different stages of Lulu's life (from 1938 to 1945), which are also set in four different *places*. Part 1 (1938 – March 1939), is set in Bandung, Java. Lulu is only five years old. She lives in her fantasy world and is too young to yet fathom adults' actions. However, she soon has to grow up and face the cruel historical reality as she travels back to Europe with her family as the daughter of a Jewish doctor right before the outbreak of the Second World War. After a 6 weeks-long sea journey (Part 2: April – May 1939) and a stay in France, the family arrive in The Hague. There, they stay at Lulu's paternal grandmother (Part 3: Summer 1939 – March 1942), but, after the latter passes away, Lulu and her father move in with the maid outside of the urban area to avoid persecution (Part 4: 1942 – May 1945). In this final section of the novel, Lulu recalls their three years of hiding until the end of the war.

Places are attributed specific meanings throughout the novel. In Part 1, Lulu's relationship with the luxuriant Indonesian environment takes the foreground. In line with the typical representation of the former colony's nature in Dutch-East Indian novels, this is described as an 'enchanted',

'mysterious' and 'imagined' idyll (see the introduction above, **cf. Salverda, 2001, 2011c**). Yet, as argued above regarding the works of Dutch repatriatees such as Hella S. Haasse, while this depiction of the tropical landscape is undeniably exoticising, colonial, these recollections are presented as *deceitful* through several literary devices. Firstly, recollections of the past are doubted (**cf. Pruis, 2020**): in occasional flashforwards, an adult Louise tries putting together the pieces of her complicated life puzzle, probing her interpretation of the events of her childhood. In the novel's first chapter she wonders: '[Or] are these memories false?' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 9**), and later confirms: 'My memories are like crows, they land in swarms, wherever and whenever they choose' (**Ibid: 304, cf. Raat, 1998**). Secondly, this wariness is taken to the extreme by the fact that all events are told and thus focalised by the *child* protagonist, blurring the boundaries between truth and imagination even further.

The childhood idyll (arguably representing Lulu's *innocence*) is abruptly interrupted by a family crisis. The moment Lulu naïvely gives away the liaison between her mother and uncle by describing to her aunt the strange 'game' she sees them 'play' during the night on the black table, her life changes forever. This affair provides Lulu's father, who is already worried about the political developments in the old continent and fears for his relatives there, with the ultimate reason to travel back. The ship they board and the sea they cross (Part 2) can possibly be seen as places *between* past and present, where identities first get questioned, and, as will be explained further below, *between* dream (childhood: the Indies) and the harshness of reality (adulthood: the Netherlands).

Although the author and her young protagonist are unarguably recognisable as what we can define as colonial subjects, as descendants of white colonists who interpret the world from an inevitably partial perspective, much more needs to be taken into account to fully understand their controversial position. In fact, it can be questioned whether Ruebsamen is trying not to fixate her characters on the colonial vs postcolonial dichotomy, to contextualise and possibly justify the controversial position of her repatriatee generation, as Haasse seemingly does too in her East Indian novels (**cf. Peligra, 2019a**). In the case of Dutch East Indian literature, there is still ongoing debate about whether labels such as colonial or postcolonial should be used (**D'Haen, 2002: 8-9**), as neither can fully apply (**also cf. Peligra, 2019a**). I therefore ask whether a different framework should be considered, focusing instead on the personal experience of *dislocation*. While, in these works, the events are clearly filtered through the coloniser's perspective (**D'Haen 2002: 9**), writers of repatriation express their inability to define their own sense of identity, as they are 'outsiders' in both the country they repatriate to and

their childhood homeland which no longer exists (**cf. Van Gemert, 2013**, **2016**). If we see identity as 'a category of *belonging'* to a particular group (**Bielsa, 2018: 49**, **emphasis added**) formed in confrontation (**cf. Bhabha, 2012**), the identity of this generation of authors is arguably *denied* at multiple levels. And such denied belonging is reclaimed in literature through images of multiple 'embeddedness', hybridity in a very unique sense. If hybridity is generally defined as the denial of fixed and homogenised identities to deconstruct imperialist viewpoints (**Ibid; Young, 1995**), it can be seen here as to mean the 'coexistence' of multiple selves.

Ruebsamen's protagonist's self is indeed portrayed in this way. On the one hand, while Lulu is a Dutch girl born and raised in the former colony, she is brought up in an extensively international, multicultural, multifaith environment, which is also, as discussed in detail in the next section, multilingual. Her relatives live scattered around the colony and Europe, bringing together their different backgrounds. On the other hand, her Dutch (colonial) identity is shaped by her early years in the Dutch East Indies, where she is strongly influenced by the local culture, spirituality, and, as introduced above, its environment and climate.

It is in fact by comparing the European *nature* with the tropical one she is more familiar with that 'otherness' first strikes her once in the old continent: Part 3 opens with Lulu's surprise at seeing 'big hats, long coats, black umbrellas' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 187**), dead leaves and pale sunlight. We read for example:

> *…It was as if we were traveling by moonlight, but it wasn't the light of the moon. It came from the sun, which hid behind a veil of clouds. It wasn't our burning sun: this one was small and pale* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 188**).

In particular, *distance* from nature is now stressed (**cf. Pruis, 2020, Raat, 1998**):

> *Black and gray and brown houses and towers and streets and squares and statues, all stone, no trees with leaves on anywhere—it was impossible* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 198**).

According to Pruis (**2020**), the opposition between the enchanting tropical nature and 'grey' Europe coincides with that between *freedom* and *restriction*. More specifically, the former is embodied by memories of the Indies, arguably a metaphor of childhood and carelessness; while the latter is be understood as the limits of the new reality, possibly also the *unreachability* of the past. These two aspects could perhaps also be seen in terms of freedom of self-expression and of fluid identity formation which no longer appear possible once in Europe, and which might

therefore become a metaphor of growing up, confronting a colonial past and questioning loyalties. Hybridity and plurality are challenged once the little girl experiences the 'real' world. On the one hand, that is when she is firstly confronted with colonial geographies and labels. Trying to grasp meanings which still go beyond her comprehension from conversations with her parents, Lulu makes statements as for example 'Holland was the old country for [my mother] and hence for me too […]' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 157**) or '[t]he tropics, I learned, were where we came from' (**Ibid: 203**). On the other hand, in Europe her identity and that of her young, mixed-race aunt Cristina, who travels with them, are seen as 'problematic'. They are perceived as 'different' – Cristina will even feel so homesick and unwelcome to walk into the sea to end her own life. In the Netherlands they are named 'tropical children', 'brownies' (**Ibid: 240-241**), they are outsiders with 'mixed and exotic' blood (**Ibid: 236**).

As previously introduced, Ruebsamen's novel is taken as a case study here because it adds further complexity to the typical Dutch-East Indian literary representation of identity. In light of the historical situation described in the novel, readers slowly find out that Louise is also Jewish. It is crucial to note, however, that this additional layer must not necessarily be understood as an autobiographical trait. Ruebsamen's claimed Jewish background remains unconfirmed, in fact: her brother denied it and disputed her version of the narrated events a few years after the novel's publication (**Etty, 2018; Jensen, 2006: 67; Pruis, 2020**).

This additional layer of the novel's protagonist's cultural identity (which thus gains a *literary* rather than a historical meaning), can therefore arguably be seen as an authorial fictional device to stress a generation's unexpected clash with the (post-)colonial truth even further. As introduced above, the family voyage across the ocean and their European experience may arguably symbolise the repatriatee generation's need to come to terms with past and present after 1949. At the end of the novel, in fact, the now ten-year-old girl, traumatised but matured, no longer hides in her dream world of childhood and no longer fears the harshness of *reality* – emblematically associated here with something as concrete and fathomable as the war – now saying to herself, while listening to her father's voice:

> *I hoped he would tell me what was going to happen to us next. I didn't want any more fairy tales. It had to be reality* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 339**).

Intertwining Voices: Linguistic plurality in Het lied en de waarheid

Claiming that the protagonists of Dutch-East Indian novels by repatriated authors are depicted as culturally hybrid implies that they are also depicted as linguistically hybrid. Generally speaking, in the works by Dutch

repatriated authors, the children of colonists born in the East Indies speak Dutch with their parents and at school, and the local languages, Sundanese and Malay, with the servants and in the streets (**Peligra, 2019a, 2019b**). It can be argued that this representation of linguistic identity emphasises the generational clash and distances the younger, Indies-born generation from their colonist parents. These protagonists, as children who are portrayed as still too young to be conscious of colonial relations and meanings shaped through language use, often openly claim to be more familiar with the local languages than with Dutch, for example. It is not unusual to read that their (highly hybridised) Dutch needs to be improved to be admitted to (the Dutch colonial) school (**Ibid**).

This particular relationship between the young protagonists and the local languages can also be found in Ruebsamen's novel: at the beginning of the narration, Lulu is also shown as more at ease with the language of the servants, referred to as 'the night people' (**Ruebsamen, 2000**), who introduce her to the local customs and traditions. We read:

> *They were my best friends, the night people. I knew their turns of phrase and their ways of doing things almost better than those of my mother, my aunt, and my father* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 27**).

The former colony, as a symbol of the innocence of childhood, as explained in the previous section, is where colonial boundaries blurry for the child protagonist. While a separation in the use of space and time on part of the colonisers and the servants is introduced, this has implications little Lulu is not yet able to understand. She instead identifies with the language of the 'night people' – whose perspective is, however, never acknowledged (**also see Meijer, 1996** on Haasse's *Heren van de thee*). This is the language she speaks with her mixed-race aunt Cristina – who is at one point given Dutch lessons to improve her position within the colonial society – and which she calls 'our language' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 228**) but starts to forget after some time in the Netherlands. Interestingly, while through the character of Cristina a mixed-race character is somehow given a 'voice', she belongs to the protagonist's family and her feelings are not fully comprehended by the still young and naïve Lulu.

Before exploring how linguistic hybridity is tackled in translation, it is important to identify how linguistic identity is represented in these novels at the textual level. While, as explained above, we define these works as heterolingual to stress the *literary* function of such representations (which do not necessarily aim to mirror society, **cf. Grutman, 2006: 18-19**), what type of instances of heterolingualism can be found in these texts must be discussed. What said so far shows us that, at the textual level, linguistic hybridity is exemplified in three ways. Firstly, these novels' characters say sentences or phrases directly in languages other than Dutch. This is mainly

noted in dialogues, revealing the characters' natural way of speaking. Secondly, they insert words in a foreign language within their Dutch sentences, arguably positioning themselves inside a liminal (linguistic) space. In the third line of the novel, for example, opening with a view on the tropical landscape from the family's veranda, we read '[l]ook, the *tjtjaks* [lizards] are here' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 3, translation added**). Or, in Chapter 7 Lulu witnesses a sad scene with her drunk uncle, who adds Yiddish borrowings to his speech:

> "We chose our own Persian life carpets again," he grumbled. "*Meshugge* [crazy] as we were! (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 116, translation added**) […] Our own carpet. Our own very own *nebbish* [poor, unfortunate] carpet."' (**Ibid: 119, translation added**).

Finally, language use is described qualitatively. In the case of *Het lied en de waarheid*, it is actually more often just hinted at within the narration. For example, Louise's family members seem to be polyglots, having lived in different countries or because of their personal history and origin. However, readers are often sent clues about people's linguistic identities. It can be argued that this may allow to recreate the sense of the child's lack of understanding of complex concepts such as religion or culture. At the beginning of the novel, in fact, Lulu struggles to label languages and identities. The most evident case regards the hints given as regards to the family's Jewish background. We are told by the child protagonist, for instance, that her father and paternal grandmother, of German origin, speak a language she does not recognise. As soon as the family disembark after their sea journey, Lulu explains that her father:

> *[…] embraced his family, serious gentlemen […] who […] talked in singsong tones in a language I couldn't understand* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 187**).

Later, when Lulu and her father lie at his mother's bedside, it is hinted that:

> *They murmured to each other in a language that was like German but wasn't, which sounded soft and floppy, toothless, so mysterious that I understood little of it, although I'd heard it spoken so often above my head, at the big table, by the men with the hats, who could also sing and shout in it* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 294**).

As argued in the previous section, this additional cultural 'voice', which makes Ruebsamen's novel unique among other ones by Dutch-East Indian repatriated writers, could emphasise the author's clash with the historical reality. It can also be said that it allows the writer to query the definition of identity even further, by contrasting fixed stereotypes (here: colonial vs postcolonial) with images of plurality (here: a multicultural, multilingual family). Analysing how these representations of the characters' linguistic identities are approached in translation (see section **The Song and the Truth**) helps us give answer to whether and how these meanings can be duplicated when transposed for a new audience. Taking for granted that manipulation is 'unavoidable' when facing specific linguistic features (**Dukate 2009: 104**) and when translating literary texts which can be interpreted differently by translators (**Ibid: 122**), it becomes important to question what *effects* are created by such inevitable shifts in the analysed context.

In the following sections, the 2000 English translation of Ruebsamen's novel by Paul Vincent (*The Song and the Truth*) is explored, focusing on how it represents the characters' linguistic identities. For the purpose of the analysis, the heterolingual instances considered are divided in two groups: (A) non-Dutch language references to material and non-material culture and (B) utterances or speech acts in languages other than Dutch. In practice, these appear as (A) isolated words depicting identifiable elements in a foreign language within the source text or (B) speech or idioms in languages other than Dutch, including ways of saying and both longer phrases and short idioms or one-word intensifiers.

The Song and The Truth: Translating plurality into English

In Translation Studies literature, the items that have been grouped in Category A are referred to as 'culture-bound' (**Florin, 1993: 123**), 'culture-specific' (**Aixelá, 1996**) elements, or 'realia' (**Grit, 2004, Florin, 1993, Leppihalme, 2011**), defined by Aixelá as:

> *textually actuali[s]ed items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text* (**Aixelá 1996: 58**).

Although, considering their relatively low number and the fact that they are found in isolation within the Dutch text, it could be questioned whether these borrowings can be studied as true heterolingual instances, this does not appear to be uncommon in literary texts (**Grutman, 2006, 2009**). Zabus' notion of 'visible traces' (**1991**) can be applied here. According to her, 'words or phrases describing culturally bound objects

and occurrences' (**Ibid: 157**) do highlight the presence of other languages within the colonial one (**Ibid, also cf. Batchelor, 2009**). This means that the protagonists' use of terms from a specific (non-Dutch) cultural background in their speech can be seen as a sign of embeddedness in that same culture.

For the purpose of the analysis, these elements have been divided into three different thematic categories, with own subcategories (**see Table 1 below**): nature (A1), material and non-material culture (A2) and markers of colonial relations (A3). It is important to note that in the source text there are considerably more references to the East Indian culture, particularly the Indonesian environment, than to the Jewish culture – the latter also only appearing as references to religion in particular (A2.2). This quantitative disparity does not appear surprising, firstly as Part 1 of the novel is entirely set in the Indies. Secondly, Lulu's family is arguably presented as multifaith or non-religious. Thirdly, the latter can also be explained considering that the protagonist is not yet able to identify and name her family's cultural religious practices. The fact that their Jewish background is mostly 'hinted at' in the novel arguably stresses Lulu's age and naivety. Finally, it must be said that the child embeddedness in the Indonesian culture and nature in particular is arguably a literary device to question stereotypes and give voice to a generation's diasporic experience and which symbolises the (lost) carelessness of childhood. In fact, references to the tropical nature appear most frequently, emphasising in this way the child's (partial, naïve) perspective. One of the most repeated terms is (A1.1) *waringin* [banyan tree]: one of the most central elements in Dutch-East Indian literature, this plant is considered sacred by locals and is thought to have magical powers. While in the former colony the *waringin* in Lulu's garden is personified, being the central figure in her fantasy world, this contrasts with the fact that in the Netherlands she finds a little banyan tree in the house of a relative and watches it dying slowly, as a metaphor for the loss of innocence and her growing disillusion (**Raat, 1998**). **Table 1** below shows the full taxonomy applied, with an illustrative example per subcategory.

Table 1: Categories of culture-bound terms (definitions: Van der Sijs, 2010).

Culture-specific references		**Examples**	
		Colonial identity	**Jewish identity**
(A1) Nature	**(A1.1) Flora**	*melati* (jasmine flower)	
	(**A1.2) Fauna**	*tijtjaks* (lizard)	
(A2) Culture	**(A2.1) Objects**	*goeling* (bolster)	
	(A2.2) Tradition	*gamelan* (Javanese ensemble)	*Mischnajoth* (Mishnayot)
	(A2.3) Food	*ketan* (sticky rice)	
	(A2.4) Urban	*kampong* (local village)	
(A3) Colonial	**(A3.1) Status**	*djongos* (houseboy)	
	(A3.2) Ethnicity	*belanda* (Dutch)	

Looking at how these elements are translated, applying Aixelá's (**1996**) translation strategies taxonomy it can be said that culture-bound references (A) referring to the East Indian colonial environment are at times 'substituted' with their target language equivalent (**Ibid: 63-64**), but mainly 'repeated', meaning they are kept in their original form (**Ibid: 61**). Repeated references are at times italicised and at times explained by the addition of a very short 'intratextual gloss' (**Ibid: 62**) within the main text. They are always adapted orthographically (**Ibid: 61**) to the target language's conventions. An example of an element transposed in both ways is the term *slendang* [shawl/sling], firstly translated with an explanatory gloss as 'the carrying sling or *selendang'* (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 8**) and later substituted with its English equivalent 'sling' (**Ibid: 88**).

The choice of strategy seems to depend both on the textual context and on the element type and function (**cf. Aixelá, 1996: 69-70**). Firstly, references which are kept appear not to be italicised in two cases: when they can be considered as part of the English vocabulary (this is the case of *sarong*, for instance) or when job-related terms identify a specific person (servant), as for example in the case of *baboe* [governess]. The sentence 'a *babu* sponged me down' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 110**) (meaning 'one of the many' governesses) is italicised, while 'Babu Susila who always forgot the shoes when she dressed me' (**Ibid: 7**) (that specific *baboe*) is not. Secondly, it seems that repeated references often appear coupled with a gloss to ensure that they are comprehended by the readers. For example, the term *waringin* is transposed as '*waringin* tree' at his first appearances, while it is never glossed afterwards. Also, in line with what I argued just above, this term is not italicised when it is personified. Lulu explains: 'This tree is not lifeless. It is sacred and everyone will call it the Holy Waringin' (**Ibid: 57**). The two terms *tjitjak* [lizard] and *tokeh* [night

lizard] are never glossed, instead. However, their translation supports what hypothesised here as their meaning is clear the first time they appear in the source text. With the former, its non-Indonesian equivalent is introduced right above the Indonesian word, avoiding ambiguity: 'Every day, as soon as the sun went down, tiny **lizards** climbed up the walls of our veranda. "Look, the ***tjitjaks*** are here"' (**Ibid: 3**). Similarly, the first time *tokeh* is introduced, its meaning is explained to the readers: 'I waited for the ***toké*** every night. He was **the big brother of the *tjitjaks***' (**Ibid: 4**).

Thirdly, it is argued that the choice of substitutive strategies aims at keeping manipulative interventions as invisible as possible to ensure a pleasant reading experience. It may be hypothesised that references are not repeated extensively when deemed as unnecessary or perhaps overburdening. On the one hand, it seems that highly recurrent elements are at times 'naturalised' (**Aixelá, 1996: 63-64**). *Tokeh*, for instance, is translated as 'lizard' in passages where it occurs frequently (**cf. Ruebsamen, 2000: 70**). On the other hand, the (very few) terms that are *only* substituted are elements appearing sporadically or arguably identifying objects with no central meaning.

With regard to the identified culture-bound references (A) to the protagonists' Jewish identity, these items are very few and do not yet allow generalisations. However, they nevertheless help raise interesting points. On the one hand, the terms *Sjabbes* [Sabbath] and *Sabbat* [Sabbath] are both 'repeated', although only the former is italicised. Previously mentioned explanations seem to apply. The non-italicised term is commonly used in the target culture, therefore presenting neither comprehension issues nor the need to be somehow highlighted as 'foreign' for the readers. While the italicised term may however not be as transparent for the average reader, as the Yiddish-derived Dutch term for Sabbath, its contextual position at the beginning of chapter twenty-one makes understanding unproblematic: 'On Friday evenings **Sabbath** was celebrated in the mill. Selma and old Mrs. de Vries insisted. "***Sjabbes*** in a cupboard," muttered my father in astonishment' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: ch. 21**). Furthermore, considering the fact that a short dialogue is reported here, it could be argued that italicising the term considered emphasises the cultural and linguistic mix as it makes it more 'detectable' for the readers. On the other hand, the term *Mischnajoth* (**Ruebsamen: 1997: 328**) shows the application of an isolated translation strategy. In this case, instead of using its target language equivalent (Mishnayot) or a gloss, for example, the reference has arguably been 'generalised' (using a term by **Grit, 2004: 283**) as 'Talmud' (**Ruebsamen: 2000: 295**), referring to a whole (Talmud) instead of to a part (Mishnayot).

The analysis of the translation of speech acts (B) in local Indonesian languages shows similar patterns: the majority of the analysed utterances are repeated in their original form, with or without the addition of an explanatory gloss within the main text. These elements *always* appear italicised in translation if kept, as to visually emphasise that the speech is being expressed in a different language (as discussed above for items located within a dialogue). The repetition of such elements is arguably crucial for the representation of the protagonists' identities. As already argued, the translator however makes sure that readers' comprehension is not affected (e.g. with a gloss). In the following example, aunt Margot's speech is characterised as Dutch-East Indian, rightly tracing the textual description of her and Lulu's mother cultural identities, indeed without any effort on the readers' part:

> '" . . . hasn't cried for days, *njang ketjil*, little darling," Auntie Margot joined in and burst out laughing. "You see? *Terlalu bagus*, very good"' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 23**).

It is important to note that, on the one hand, the translator has endeavoured to alternate different glosses for the same expressions to recreate the *effect* of speech and dialogue. For instance, the intensifier *betoel* [really] is firstly glossed as 'certainly' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 12**) and later as 'yes, indeed' (**Ibid: 159**). On the other hand, when these expressions are not openly explained, their meaning, or, more precisely, their impact, is still made clear in other ways. *Betoel* is not glossed in the following sentence, but its change in position in the target text recreates the sought-after effect:

> '*Dat is **betoel** geen pretje om op haar te moeten letten'* (**Ruebsamen, 1997: 200**).
>
> 'It's no fun looking after her, *betul*' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 180**).

Or again, in the following example, Lulu's narrating voice introduces the foreign expressions' translation:

> "Better not," said Auntie Margot too, and she usually nipped the quarrel in the bud by explaining to my father at length what was wrong with Dutch food. "*Makanan belanda* doesn't taste right here and it swells up and makes us feel bloated"' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 19**).

As in the case of culture-bound elements (A), certain East Indian utterances are also 'naturalised', again because perhaps not considered central or useful but therefore potentially overburdening.

As above, Yiddish or Yiddish-derived utterances (B) within the Dutch text are very few and do not yet allow generalisations. However, the analysis of how they are tackled in translation provides again interesting examples

and cases in point. Different characters from Lulu's father's side of the family use Yiddish borrowings such as *mesjogge(nazen)* (crazy) (**Ruebsamen, 1997: 113, 229, 282**) or *aggenebisj* (poor, unfortunate) (**Ibid: 134**) in their speech. Apart from the term *gannef* (thief) (**Ibid: 328**), naturalised as 'gangster' (**Ibid: 2000: 295**), these expressions appear to tend to be repeated and italicised, therefore arguably visually stressing the character's linguistic hybridity. However, a higher number of refences needs to considered to be able to look for actual recurring patterns.

Interestingly, this article backs up the results from a doctoral research project (**as Peligra 2019a**) showing that in the 'attempt to balance faithfulness to the source text[…] and readability of the target text[…]' (**Ibid: 212**), translators follow trends which appear to be universal of translations (**Baker, 1993**): i.e., the tendencies to both explain (ibid.) and generalise (**cf. Vanderauwera, 1985**, for a study on the translation of Dutch literature into English). In the mentioned doctoral research (**Peligra, 2019a**), which compared how cultural references and depictions of colonial, ethnic and linguistic identity are transposed into English and Italian translations of selected Hella S. Haasse's East Indian novels, it was observed that different translators followed a comparable approach when tackling the texts analysed, which actually seems similar to the one identified above in this article. Specifically, results from previous research (**cf. Peligra 2019a**) on the translation of culture-bound terms (A) and textual images of linguistic hybridity (B) show that translators balance between conserving and substituting terms on the basis of their centrality and to favour conventions, comprehension and readability (**Ibid: ch. 6**), which clearly aligns with what just discussed above regarding the translation of East-Indian references (A) in *The Song and the Truth*.

On the one hand, explanatory trends arguably risk distorting or softening depictions of linguistic hybridity. This is because the total number of expressions kept in the local languages is reduced (**Peligra, 2019a**). On the other hand, it should be questioned whether the extensive use of italics generally applied in the translations of such texts when foreign references are kept does not emphasise cultural and linguistic *difference* (as stressing 'distance') rather than hybridity (**cf. Batchelor, 2009: 50**). As typical of Dutch-East Indian literature (**cf. Peligra, 2019a**), East Indian references are in fact not italicised in the source text. While, according to Batchelor (**2009: 69-71**), stressing their status as something 'different' may distort images of identity, and while current research is now starting to offer new professional frameworks in an attempt to decolonise (**Jones: 2022**), it must be acknowledged that a text such as the one analysed in this article presents manyfold difficulties which may require that it is treated and studied differently. One of these is Lulu's identity additional layer. While the final number of borrowings and utterances in languages other than

Dutch is lower inevitably lower than in the source text, the reasons behind the chosen translation strategies choices generally seem to converge regardless of what culture is being portrayed. Furthermore, the examples analysed above in this section generally suggest that the translator is both stressing and clarifying the protagonist's background. One crucial thing must be considered to this regard: while Dutch-East Indian novels often come in translation with an explanatory end matter glossary of non-Dutch terms, *The Song and the Truth* does not, thus leaving the translator with no paratextual explanatory device and therefore arguably justifying the detected occasional tendency to explication.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how linguistic identity is represented in Ruebsamen's novel *Het lied en de waarheid* and in its English translation, aiming to justify the need to explore such topic further within the study of literature by Dutch-East Indian writers. The authors of the generation born in the former Dutch colony who repatriated after Indonesia's independence explore in their works their controversial, multifaceted identity. While they grew up as part of the colonial élite, they can no longer access their land of birth. Furthermore, they cannot fully belong to their land of repatriation as their identity was formed elsewhere, influenced by a different environment. Hella S. Haasse said in 2013:

> *Ik beschouw mezelf absoluut als een niet-Hollandse Nederlander. Ik heb natuurlijk de Nederlandse nationaliteit, maar mijn bewustzijn heeft zich ergens anders gevormd en ontwikkeld*. […] [I consider myself absolutely a non-Dutch Netherlander. I have the Dutch nationality, of course, but my consciousness formed and developed elsewhere]. (**Pattynama, 2013: 157-158**)

In this article it is argued that, because of this double impossibility to belong, these writers should be studied as displaced subjects, rather than trying to place them in the colonial vs postcolonial framework, which cannot fully apply (**cf. Peligra, 2019a; Van Gemert, 2013, 2016**).

Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid* [*The Song and The Truth*] has been taken as case study here to explore how plurality is depicted and translated. As explained in this article, the literary representation of the experience of lesser-known authors, how they explore their sense of identity and how they claim belonging at the textual level, still remain underexplored. In particular, it is maintained here that these texts should also be studied as heterolingual ones, as issues of identity and belonging are seemingly exemplified in the way in which different languages interact in the novels. If we define translation as the act of transferring information from a source language to a target one

(**Hatim & Munday 2004: 6**) it becomes clear that adding a source language complicates the picture, especially if the relationship between these source languages entails specific cultural, colonial as well as literary meanings. Ruebsamen's novel is therefore chosen for the analysis because it even adds a third layer to the protagonist's identity, who is also Jewish, repatriating to the Netherlands right before it is invaded by Germany in 1940.

Comparing Ruebsamen's text with its 2000 English translation by Paul Vincent has allowed to qualitatively analyse how so called culture-specific items referring to both her backgrounds and speech acts in languages other than Dutch have been translated. On the one hand, both elements referring to the protagonist's East-Indian experience and utterances in the local Indonesian languages mainly seem to have been kept in their original form, and at times italicised and explained intratextually, arguably on the basis of their function within the text and their level of transparency for average readers. On the other hand, when these references have not been kept, this appears to be because of their less central role in the text or because they are recurring references. These tendencies, which overlap with the results from previous research on the topic (**cf. Peligra, 2019a**) actually seem to be universal ones in translation.

On the other hand, although references to the protagonists' Jewish background and Yiddish borrowings are very few, it is possible to say that these have also generally been repeated when they are comprehensible for readers and have not been kept on the basis of their textual function. Comparing the detected overall trends with the results of the specific analysis of examples relating to the protagonist's Jewish identity arguably helps hypothesise that the translator is focusing on the readers' experience, managing this without paratextual help. This can be for instance supported by the fact that arguably less well-known Jewish terms are made clear by the application of substitutive strategies. Furthermore, it has been noted that the translator is generally making an effort to recreate the effect of heterolingual speech regardless of the language in question visually too, thus giving the characters' linguistic plurality textual prominence. An overall tendency to explication has in fact been detected. An example is the following phrase: '*gelovig te worden*' (literally: to become a believer, to believe) (**Ruebsamen, 1997: 371**), which is translated into English as 'to become a practicing Jew' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 333**), making its meaning clearer for the novel's readers. As previous research (**cf. Peligra, 2019: 212-219**) highlights the importance of also considering paratextual tools and framing when analysing translation strategies, a paratextual analysis of this translation's different editions (**Harvill, 2000; Alfred A. Knopf, 2000; Vintage, 2002**) would shed light on how the representation of the characters' plurality is introduced to the

readers in the books' packaging and contextualise the translator's choices further.

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Plurilingual Perspectives, Pluricultural Contexts: A case study on Agence-France Presse news coverage about the plurinational State of Bolivia in Spanish, French, and English

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Abstract

The present article is concerned with the multilingual news coverage from Agence-France Presse (AFP) about the South American country of Bolivia. Firstly, the theoretical and methodological approaches are outlined in order to characterise the plurality of contexts giving rise to AFP's coverage of the Bolivian 2020 general elections. Secondly, an analysis is proposed that contrasts these multilingual versions in terms of framing devices and translation shifts, aiming at exploring the ways in which media stakeholders represent the Bolivian reality. Thirdly, the findings of this analysis are contextualised with reference to a cross-linguistic comparison of newspaper corpora. When comparing the Spanish, French, and English versions, the first two are found to be more aligned at the level of discourse patterns. The ultimate purpose of this case-study is to observe the presence of translation in plurilingual news settings, where the role of translators often goes unacknowledged within the plurality of authorship and of journalistic practices at play.

Keywords: Bolivia; Agence-France Presse; representation; translation; cross-linguistic corpus-assisted analysis; framing devices

Introduction and Definitions

Global News Agencies are a key source of journalistic coverage about events happening geographically and culturally far from their global audience, as is the case with the South American country of Bolivia. The Plurinational State of Bolivia enshrines 36 official cultures and languages. This diversity transcends Bolivian borders thanks to global media coverage in three main languages—Spanish, French, and English—of which only Spanish is officially spoken in the country. Furthermore, the portrayal of Bolivia, as an example of a remote country that is not part of mainstream discourse, is variously shaped by journalistic priorities and pressures that are not always evident to the reader, nor the researcher. It is therefore essential to seek simultaneously the multilingual and cross-cultural 'translation' of the country's plurality at the textual and contextual levels.

This article aims at presenting preliminary findings deriving from the implementation of an interdisciplinary framework to investigate the locus of translation in plurilingual news production. It offers a case study about the representation of key socio-economic and political topics by Agence-France Presse news agency, as portrayed in a set of news dispatches in Spanish, French, and English, which summarized the Bolivian electoral situation in October 2020 and were intended for an international audience. A balanced focus on text and context lies at the core of the framework: the concept of Framing devices (**Tankard, 2001**) serves as the analytical tool to identify representative nodes of information in the multilingual versions of these news dispatches, to later contrast their textual features.

The Council of Europe (**2007**) defines 'plurilingualism' as 'the ability to use more than one language' by an individual or group of individuals in contrast to monolingualism. Meanwhile, 'multilingualism' refers to 'the presence of several languages in a given geographical area' (**Cavalli et al., 2016: 20**). In this sense, within news agencies, the notion of being 'plurilingual' may include the practices of news creation as well as the teams of journalists, editors, and translators involved. On the other hand, 'multilingualism' refers to a space where different languages coexist, where two or more languages coincide in a society, text or individual, as Grutman states (**2009: 182**). Given that multilingualism describes a space and plurilingualism describes a practice, this document uses 'plurilingual' as the overarching term describing news creation processes at news agencies, whereas 'multilingual' will be restricted to the analysis of the different linguistic versions of the news dispatches here analysed, where single monolingual versions of texts coexist and contrast with each other.

As concerns the role of translation, this article ultimately aims at positioning translation practices within the broader umbrella of news

production, which happens remotely, plurilingually, and almost instantaneously in the case of Global News Agencies. Inasmuch as this type of plurilingual news production entails plural authorship, it also involves translation while not necessarily acknowledging it. This article therefore also addresses the methodological complexities of this research domain and the need for converging research frameworks. Here, 'news translation' is a blanket term for 'journalistic translation', 'press translation' and other scholarly terms referring to the phenomenon of translation in a variety of journalistic genres (**Schäffner, 2017: 328**), such as news items from news agencies.

Taking on the focus of this Special Issue, Derrida's notion of plurality invites us to 'go beyond' a binary notion of translation (**1992**), here discussed at the following two levels. First, this article analyses coexisting news dispatches in Spanish, French, and English, in a situation where the Spanish versions predate French and English versions and, presumably, the English versions derive from the Spanish and French ones. Second, the phenomenon of translation in news settings is ripe for reflection on the basic tenet of 'equivalence': comparability is challenged by the complexity to identify a source and a target text in a context where text production combines a multiplicity of sources and of authors (**Davier & van Doorslaer, 2018: 242**) that rarely carries by-lines, since the institutional source is prioritized over the individual news workers (**Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2000: 140).**

Finally, translation in plurilingual newsrooms conveys cultural representations that transcend interlingual transfer. As Schäffner argues, the processes involved in transnational news reporting are complex and entail more than making sense of a cultural Other (**2017: 331**). As technology has progressed, the practices of news agencies have evolved since they became legitimate sources of international news back in the nineteenth century (**Williams, 2011: 91**). This enables them to efficiently circulate information across geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries (**Schäffner, 2017**) in a context where timing is pivotal.

This article covers the notion of Plurality in and about Bolivia as the context of origin in *section II*, along with the type of coverage it is subject of; then, *section III* addresses Plurality through Agence-France Presse's (AFP) news practices; *sections IV and V* present theoretical and methodological concepts concerning the role of translation in news production, framing devices and cross-linguistic corpus-assisted studies; which leads to a tentative framework of analysis for news translation about culturally distant realities in *section VI*; *section VI* discusses central findings from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Plurality In and About Bolivia

Bolivia is a South American country with vast cultural and linguistic plurality. Although the country has the largest presence of indigenous people in the region the existence of 36 nations, as well as their languages and system of beliefs, was only officially recognized when the country established a new constitution in 2009, when it became the Plurinational State of Bolivia (**NCPE, 2009: 4**). This allowed the population to embrace their rich multicultural roots, deriving from their indigenous and Spanish origins. Since then, the Bolivian state and society have begun a national empowerment process, giving more visibility to what was formerly considered a stigma that prevailed since the colonial period: the indigenous population's diversity of languages, cultures, and world-views. Consequently, international economic, commercial, academic, and media stakeholders have begun noticing the country at different levels.

This has brought a considerable increase in international media coverage about Bolivia at specific points in time, more particularly, during Evo Morales' administration 'which captured international media attention' (**Silva, 2009: 30**). Reporting mostly from a general perspective, Global News Agencies—Agence-France Presse, Reuters, Associated Press, and EFE—are key sources that are later reproduced by national media outlets worldwide. Other types of more specialized coverage exist, on recent economic reforms, political analysis, and extended cultural articles, which can be found in the newspapers *The News York Times* and *The Guardian*, amongst others.

Coverage from news agencies has typically focused on *hard news*—timely and informative news dispatches on political and socio-economic issues (**Sterling, 2009**)—and *soft news*, featuring human-interest stories, where immediacy is not as relevant as for the first category. These categories often overlap on a practical level, melding in an inverted pyramid approach, more specially, in online media (**Sterling, 2009**), since political and economic concerns might intrinsically include culture-bound elements of domestic social interest. This is the case of news dispatches presenting *full summaries* about specific events, such as the news coverage examined here, which concerns an electoral *dossier*.

Plurality in AFP News Coverage

To understand the specificities of news translation, it is necessary to be aware of news agencies' evolution. In this case, the precursor of AFP—the Agence Havas—was created in 1835 as an agency specializing in foreign affairs and international press. It is considered the world's first Global News Agency. Back then, AFP put in place a 'network of correspondents and translators' (**AFP, 2022**), laying the groundwork for the future

structure of news agencies and the practices of journalists and translators together to produce multilingual news.

Since their locations are scattered across the globe, global news agencies have different structures and working practices. The working practices of AFP, which operates in 151 countries (**AFP, 2022**), vary according to regions, the amount of news coverage produced, and the size of its local 'bureau' or local desk –the one in La Paz, Bolivia, being rather small.

This local desk coordinates its coverage in Spanish with the *Cono Sur* regional desk, based in Lima, Peru. This coverage is then sent to the AFP regional headquarters in Montevideo, Uruguay. The latter office is responsible for regional content in Spanish, Portuguese, French and English (**AFP, 2016**) and coordinates the output of twenty-one Latin American offices (**Bassnett & Bielsa, 2009**). As the information is processed, its content is edited and translated into French and English by in-house desk editors at this centre. The Latin America desk in Paris also edits some dispatches, especially when the office in Uruguay is closed due to time zone differences (**Ibid**). Spanish is AFP's third most important language in terms of global distribution, after French and English (**Ibid: 77**) and 'Latin America is the fastest-growing region' for AFP's operations (**AFP, 2016**).

As previously mentioned, global news agencies are the major source of international news coverage about Bolivia, an example where 'the agenda-setting role of news agencies seems undisputed' (**Davier, 2021: 184**). This is precisely why the framing of their coverage and the discursive news values at stake are of utmost importance, particularly when analysing their representation of countries, events, and social actors that are geographically and culturally distant from their global audience.

Back in 1978, the UNESCO General Conference and the UN General Assembly adopted two resolutions, suggesting the need for a 'New World Information and Communication Order' (**UNESCO, 1980**), because a number of observers in the developing world felt the information flow by Western media—and international news agencies—misrepresented the 'Third World', as it was then termed. Reports deriving from this debate suggested that developing countries were depicted as unstable, violent, and irrational. As Williams states, 'with neither context to give to these events nor any countervailing picture of the day-to-day life, viewers and readers were left with stereotypical images of developing societies' (**Williams, 2011: 22**) and 'where conflict is generally made the main subject' (**Martini, 2002: 2, author's translation**). Considering these agencies' predominant agenda-setting role, one might wonder the extent to which these statements are still at play.

News Translation, Framing Devices and Cross-CaDs

The notion of equivalence has been a central concern to conceptualize translation due to its inherent contrastive nature. However, this notion was primarily based upon 'the paradigm of the book' (**Gambier, 2021: 104**), paradigm that has transformed into one that is digital and of the Web, where multiple and multimodal versions of texts coexist. News translation—and more specifically, translation at news agencies—embodies this transition into a more flexible mode of translation that goes beyond the material dimension of printed texts, traditional concepts, and translation practices. In news translation, multilingual versions of journalistic texts are available to the reader.

Both in printed and electronic media, news translators and editors face constraints in order to ensure the quality of texts, such as following in-house style preferences, where news workers 'cannot help but rewrite, reframe, recontextualize, summarize, cut, clarify, reformulate the news with a readership in mind' (**Gambier, 2021: 103**). Thus, the notions of readability and relevance are prioritized over the ones of faithfulness and fidelity to the source text. Additionally, in the news setting, translation has long-been perceived as a subaltern and invisible task that today is performed by professionals 'whether qualified as translators or not' (**Ibid: 91**).

Furthermore, digital texts are permanently updated and offered in different versions. A 'start text' (**Pym, 2015: 68**) exists, but there is no clear target text as an exclusive referent. This seems true of AFP, which not only produces news dispatches based on its previous texts, but also continually updates published texts, establishing an inherent intertextual relationship, where 'reused' paragraphs commonly provide recontextualized 'background' (**Davier, 2015**). This 'uncertainty' (**Davier & Van Doorslaer, 2018**) can also be found when contrasting the multilingual versions of news dispatches in an attempt to identify full equivalence with each other.

Throughout plurilingual news creation processes at news agencies, translation is instrumental to adapting texts to the needs of a very heterogeneous worldwide audience. This is likely to require not only reorganizing and contextualizing information, but also rewriting the news dispatches in order to enhance the comprehensibility and effectiveness of the original text for the new context(s) that may be culturally and geographically distant from that of the texts' origin.

Moreover, journalists at news agencies make the unfamiliar familiar to their audiences on a regular basis. As Williams argues, 'crossing cultural barriers and interpreting cultural difference is central to the activity of foreign correspondence' (**Williams: 2011, 42**). In much the same way, the

effects of technological progress in the transformations of media and the profession of journalism 'are not without analogy with the transformations of translator's work' (**Gambier, 2021: 92**), which are accelerated in digital settings.

In general terms, previous studies on translation at news agencies suggest there is common ground about the values guiding the journalists' work, the relative absence of translators at newswires, and the coexistence of seemingly contradictory practices, namely, rewriting and literal translation (**Davier, 2021**). In AFP's multilingual coverage, Bassnett and Bielsa identified the conventionalized Inverted Pyramid structure in news agencies' style is conserved in the translation process (**2009**). They also found the following recurrent translation strategies: change of title, omissions/deletions, additions/clarifications, recombination, and reordering/rearrangement of paragraphs.

Likewise, the literature on translation strategies points out that, in order to meet the expectations of a plural and global readership, explicitation and specification often occur in the case of source-culture-specific referents with regards to *realia*, names of politicians and places (**Schäffner, 2017**). As we will see, this point is particularly relevant to this article.

In terms of stylistic conventions, news typology, and textual structure at stake, the agencies' guidelines and media literature seem insightful, for instance, about the use of the 'inverted pyramid model', a convention institutionalized in journalism (**Palmer, 1998; Franklin, 2005**) and at global agencies (**Davier, 2017: 107**), that contrasts with a chronological report of the events. This model 'is ideally suited to the fundamental principles of speed and hierarchy (…) in which the elements of the story are written up in declining order of importance, so that essential information comes first and is developed in subsequent paragraphs, which add background information' (**Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009: 69**).

Moving on to media studies, based on contributions by Goffman (**1974**) on Frame analysis, a number of framing theorists have claimed that the media frame reality and shapes the way people 'should think' about an issue (**Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000**), by giving salience to certain aspects of it, thus being active in constructing such reality (**Zanettin, 2021**). Accordingly, Framing refers to 'how' we understand an event by virtue of emphasizing some elements over others (**de Vreese, 2005**), where certain parts of news texts are focal points that contain frames and function as central nodes of information.

More specifically, Tankard (**2001: 100**) proposed a comprehensive typology of Framing devices to identify common frames in news:

headlines, subheads, leads, source selection, quotes selection, *concluding statements* and *concluding paragraphs.* These elements seem pertinent to study variation in the translation of Framing devices, such as *headlines* and *leads,* since they reach a broader range of readers than the texts that accompany them (**Riggs, 2021**), especially considering the global readership of international news.

Caimotto and Gaspari argue that given the important 'amount of interlinguistic and intercultural editing' (**2018: 213**) present in translated news texts, cross-fertilizing studies on news translation with close disciplines might proof useful to analyse key issues concerning translation, multilingualism, and journalistic discourse. In this sense, Cross-linguistic Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (Cross-CaDS) may support triangulation when studying discourse patterns beyond cultural and linguistic boundaries (**Taylor & Marchi, 2018**), where a dialogue with translation studies is central. Thus, using corpora can inform translation studies by focusing on specific linguistic patterns present in translated texts 'with respect to comparable non-translated texts' (**Bernardini, 2022: 489**) in the target language.

Consequently, the identification of Framing devices, coupled with a Cross-CaDS perspective (**Taylor & Del Fante, 2020; Partington, 2004, 2006**) may provide a method for studying representational aspects present in multilingual coverage. Here, the notion of semantic preference is central to understand the relation of certain lexical items and frequent sets of semantically related words, where collocational patterning (Bednarek, 2008) shows associations, connotations, and assumptions these items embody and the how readers may be 'primed' about represented groups (**Stubbs, 1996: 172**)

Methods

The *dossier* (**Laville, 2007**) of *full summaries* here analysed was published by AFP and covers the topic of the 2020 Bolivian general elections. It reflects the blurring distinction between *hard* and *soft* news: it provides general background of the country; economic, electoral, and socio-political analysis; a depiction of the main presidential candidates and the vote results; and direct quotes from local citizens. It summarized these different angles in the span of five days surrounding the actual event (the Election Day), namely, between the 15th and the 19th of October, 2020. It includes 20 dispatches in Spanish, 11 in French, and 9 in English, from which 5 multilingual news dispatches published in Spanish, French, and English were selected (*i.e.,* 15 parallel texts) since they were available in the three languages and had temporal, taxonomic, and thematic correspondence. They were accessed through the Nexis Uni database

(formerly known as LexisNexis), restricting the search to AFP as the source and to the time-span mentioned above.

The selection of this dataset endeavours two purposes: first, to observe and contrast the multilingual coverage in terms of translation and, second, to inform a study corpus (SC) to explore concrete discursive aspects that will be later contrasted in a reference corpus (RC). Thus, this article considers first each linguistic version independently—in Spanish, French, and English—by means of close reading, in order to observe its structural features. Then, paratextual evidence (**Batchelor, 2018**) surrounding each news dispatch is considered, *i.e.* precise time and date of publication in order to track down the multilingual versions' genesis. Next, central nodes of information are selected via the above-mentioned typology of Framing devices (**Tankard, 2001**).

The second stage focuses on the depiction of Bolivia and of social actors, by examining the relationships between their discursive construction and potential newsworthiness when framed in salient textual segments within the news dispatches' multilingual versions. Here local translation choices across the texts are analysed from a Cross-CaDS perspective.

For this, a list of recurring terms that represent Bolivia and social actors are identified across the study corpus built with the 5 sets of the multilingual versions (*i.e.* 5 corresponding news dispatches in Spanish, French, and English) as a starting point. Then, these recurring terms in the Framing devices are examined in journalistic reference corpora–as an external point– to identify typical discursive patterns surrounding them. The reference corpus that supports the analysis is the Timestamped JSI (2014-2021) web corpora of online journalistic texts in Spanish, French, and English (containing 16 billion, 6 billion, and 60 billion words, respectively), accessed via the SketchEngine platform (**Bušta & Herman, 2017**).

To explore the use of these lexical items in the concordance lines and collocations surrounding them, the Corpus Query Language function (CQL) on SketchEngine is run in separate searches in Spanish, French and English. The query for one recurring term involves conducting three queries—one in each language—to make the discursive analysis supported by reference corpora concise.

Analysis

Table 1 below shows the multilingual versions of headlines from all news dispatches considered in this case-study on AFP's multilingual *dossier* on Electoral coverage. The analysis aims, first, to trace the genesis of these multilingual versions and, second, to show a relationship of the type of translation shifts in Framing devices, albeit in a cursory manner due to

space limitations. At the same time, though no generalizing claims can be drawn resulting from these brief observations, they may indicate the presence of translation across corresponding texts intended for different audiences. The same criteria are applied to one example about the representation of Bolivia and one of social actors in *sections A)* and *B)* to support the discursive analysis with empirical evidence from journalistic reference corpora.

Table 1: Multilingual Headlines from AFP.

No.	Multilingual Headlines	Language and Time of Publication
1	Bolivia, el país de América con mayor cantidad de indígenas	ES - October 15, 2020 7:18 PM GMT
	Bolivie: un des pays du continent à la plus forte proportion d'Amérindiens	FR - October 16, 2020 5:05 AM GMT
	Bolivia: Turmoil in Latin America's indigenous heartland	EN - October 16, 2020 10:10 AM GMT
2	Bolivia golpeada por la pandemia y la economía vuelve a las urnas	ES - October 15, 2020 3:14 PM GMT
	Les Boliviens rappelés aux urnes après l'échec du scrutin présidentiel de 2019	FR - October 16, 2020 4:45 AM GMT
	Bolivia set to vote for president after polarized campaign	EN - October 16, 2020 5:31 AM GMT
3	Mesa y Arce cierran en Bolivia campaña electoral polarizada por la figura de Evo	ES - October 15, 2020 2:18 AM GMT
	Derniers meetings de campagne pour l'élection présidentielle en Bolivie	FR - October 15, 2020 3:56 AM GMT
	Socialist candidate Arce riding on Morales popularity	EN - October 16, 2020 6:12 AM GMT
4	Candidato de Evo Morales se impone en primera vuelta de presidenciales de Bolivia	ES - October 19, 2020 5:14 AM GMT
	Bolivie : Luis Arce, dauphin d'Evo Morales, vainqueur de la présidentielle	FR - October 19, 2020 5:29 AM GMT
	Bolivia 'has recovered democracy' says Arce as exit poll suggests win	EN - October 19, 2020 8:30 AM GMT
5	Presidenta interina de Bolivia pide "paciencia" por lentitud de escrutinio electoral	ES - October 18, 2020 11:15 PM GMT
	Bolivie: la présidente demande de la "patience" devant la lenteur des résultats	FR - October 19, 2020 00:40 AM GMT
	Outgoing president calls for Bolivia patience with slow vote count	EN - October 19, 2020 08:00 AM GMT

As datelines in Table 1 suggest, the three versions of each set were published within 15 hours of each other. The Spanish versions are published first, followed by the French ones, then followed by the English ones. Based on this paratextual evidence only, we might argue that English is the final target text, deriving from the Spanish and French versions, whereas French is based solely on the Spanish versions.

As for the textual features of these multilingual headlines, the Spanish and French versions appear to remain closer to each other in all examples, whereas headlines 1 and 3 in English show traces both from the Spanish and French versions. Equally, the English versions appear to add evaluative information that goes beyond the descriptive headlines that characterize the Spanish and French versions. From a translational perspective, we may argue the language of headlines 'is heavily mediated and recontextualized' by 'transeditors' that render them (**Zhang in Riggs, 2021: 353**) in a process of multilingual news production marked by plural authorship.

Representation of Bolivia

With this background on translation strategies embedded in this multilingual news coverage in mind, this section draws on the use of the reference corpora on SketchEngine to support the analysis of recurring discursive patterns found in the study corpora. Framing devices allowed us to identify one representation of Bolivia that appears to be central in the English study corpus, firstly, along with its equivalents in the French and Spanish versions. We focus on the word 'landlocked', the most frequent description of Bolivia in the English texts (in four out of five) within framing devices. It appears 6 times and is positioned in salient parts of the texts, *e.g.,* first word of leads, first word of paragraphs, subheads, and closing statements. The functionally equivalent terms in French, 'Enclavé' *[landlocked],* and in Spanish, 'Sin salida al mar' *[without access to sea]*, appear only in one corresponding text in subheads and subsequently paraphrased. Due to this prevalence of 'landlocked' in the English texts, the following results will be displayed first in English rather than in Spanish.

The six appearances of 'Landlocked' in the English texts are listed in **Table 2**, along with the two occurrences of the equivalent terms in the French and Spanish. The first three examples in English depicting Bolivia as a *landlocked* country are related to evaluative pieces of information, such as it *being a poor* country despite its rich natural resources (repeated in two texts), it *being home to* the largest *indigenous* population, or it being *shadowed* by the *landlocked country's first ever indigenous president,* references that do not entail an obvious positive or negative evaluation. Meanwhile, the fourth and fifth examples rather objectively describe geographical aspects of the country in all three languages. These renditions seem closer to the content of the source(s), as would be the case in more standard translation practice. It is therefore worth considering the effect of choosing 'landlocked' as the equivalent of *'enclavé'* and *'sin salida al mar'*. To do so, we will describe how these expressions are generally used (and consequently, understood) in the three languages.

Table 2: Contrasted occurrences of 'landlocked', 'enclavé' and 'sin salida al mar' in SC.

Version	Bit of text	Text No.	Framing device
English	1. "Landlocked Bolivia, (...), is home to one of the largest indigenous populations in Latin America"	No.1	Lead
	2. "Yet not only does the shadow of the landlocked country's first ever indigenous president loom large over the poll (...)"	No.2	Lead
	3. "Landlocked Bolivia, one of the poorest countries in the region despite its rich natural resources (...)"	Nos. 4, 5	Closing statement
	4. "Landlocked and forested"	No.1	Subhead
	5. "(...) now sits landlocked, bordered by Brazil (...)"	No.1	Subhead
French	1. "Pays enclavé et boisé" *[Landlocked and forested]*	No.1	Subhead
	2. "La Bolivie (1.098.581 km2) est enclavée entre le Brésil (...)" *[Bolivia (1,098,581 km2) is landlocked between Brazil (...)]*	No.1	Subhead
Spanish	1. "Sin salida al mar" *[Without access to sea]*	No.1	Subhead
	2. "Bolivia (1.098.581 km2) está enclavada entre Brasil, (...) sin salida directa al mar para sus productos" *[Bolivia (1,098,581 km2) is landlocked between Brazil, (...) without direct access to the sea for its products]*	No.1	Subhead

Equivalent CQLs were run on reference corpora to explore the functional equivalents 'Landlocked', 'Enclavé', and 'Sin salida al mar' followed by a proper noun within an optional span of 3 words and excluding results that contained the terms *county, town, city, province,* and *valley* in all three languages. These queries were devised to identify the expressions in question in the vicinity of proper nouns referring to countries, nations, or states.

Out of 21,852 results in English, the most frequent countries co-occurring with 'Landlocked' are: *Afghanistan, Nepal, Laos, Uganda, Bolivia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Armenia, and Ethiopia*. These results reveal two relevant points. First, Bolivia is ranked fifth in terms of co-occurrence (with 298 results), representing a frequency of more than 1%. Second, these co-occurrences show that the descriptor '*landlocked*' is typically applied to countries in Asia, Africa, and South America. However, 45 nations worldwide are officially *landlocked* (**Khanal, 2017**): 16 in Africa, 15 in Europe, 12 in Asia, and 2 in South America (Bolivia and Paraguay). It can be concluded that European countries are less often represented as *landlocked* in English journalistic texts, even though they represent one third of 'landlocked' countries.

Out of 1,818 results in French, the countries that typically co-occur with the equivalent term 'Enclavé' are: *Afrique de l'Ouest, Mali, Tchad, Burkina Faso, Gambie, Ethiopie, Lesotho, Rwanda, Niger, Botswana, Malawi, Burundi, Zambie, Bolivie,* and *Paraguay*. Here, African countries appear most frequently, followed by the two South American nations. Bolivia co-occurs with this adjective 19 times, about 1% of the results.

Out of 222 results in Spanish, the equivalent term 'Sin salida al mar' most frequently co-occurs with the following countries: *Bolivia, Paraguay, Malawi, Africa Occidental, Etiopía, Uganda, Armenia,* and *Burkina Faso.* Bolivia ranks first (followed by Paraguay), with 42 occurrences, or around 19% hits, a sizeable difference if compared to the results in English and French. One could conclude that the results in French and Spanish journalistic texts show a strong relationship of co-occurrence with the regions and countries that were formerly colonies of France and Spain, respectively. The same cannot be said of the texts in English.

These initial queries were then filtered to study the type of adjectives modifying these search terms within a context of 3 words around them. In the case of 'Landlocked', the 10 most frequent adjectives are: *mountainous, least-developed, energy-rich, land-linked, war-devastated, better-known, small, poor, geographical,* and *remote*. Meanwhile, 'Enclavé' co-occurs with the adjectives *petit [small], anglophone, australe, pauvre [poor], désertique, dépendent, rurale, montaigneux [mountainous], minuscule,* and *vulnerable.* Finally, 'Sin salida al mar' co-occurs with the adjectives *posible, montañoso, pequeño [small], interior, soberano [sovereign], andino [Andean], pobre [poor],* and *democrático.* Thus, references to poverty, size, and topography seem prevalent across corpora in all three languages.

Since the JSI-Timestamped corpus in English is substantially larger than the other two, a specific further search was conducted restricting it to adjectives co-occurring with 'Landlocked' and 'Bolivia'. Taking into account the right- and left-side co-text, the most frequent adjectives that modify 'Bolivia' are: *direct, poor, poorest, impoverished, small, smallest, indigenous, rich, lithium-rich, potato-rich, copper-rich, subtropical,* and *naval.* While a few words in this list refer to neutral geographical notions (*e.g.,* coastal, subtropical, and naval), most match the semantic field where 'landlocked' appears in AFP analysed texts, which could be summarized as referring to *poverty* (in general) and *richness* (in natural resources). Nonetheless, the presence of 'indigenous' here and in the texts under analysis is especially surprising, since the word does not appear to fall into either semantic field.

Representation of social actors

The second category of analysis concerns the representation of social actors, more specifically, the main electoral candidates across this AFP's multilingual *dossier*. The five multilingual news dispatches analysed here focused on three main social actors: Evo Morales (106 mentions–*former Bolivian president until 2019, MAS Party, left-wing*), Luis Arce (77 mentions–*2020 candidate for MAS Party, left-wing*) and Carlos Mesa (43 mentions–*2020 candidate for CC Party, centre-right*). Even though

mentions of Morales greatly outnumber mentions of Arce and Mesa, these were not considered since Morales was not in fact a candidate in 2020.

On the one hand, the electoral candidate Luis Arce is mostly described across texts with the multilingual equivalent epithets of 'delfín de Evo Morales', 'dauphin d'Evo Morales', 'heir to Morales', in Spanish, French, and English respectively, with slight variations in its phrasing, as shown below in **Table 3**. The most common wording in Spanish and French is 'delfín de' and 'dauphin de', respectively, followed by Evo Morales' partial or full name, the title *former president,* or preceded by the personal pronouns *su* and *son [**his** dauphin]*. Yet, the French versions show more repetitions across texts, while the Spanish versions display more variation, *e.g.*, 'su hombre' *[his man]* and 'candidato de Morales' *[Morales' candidate].* Meanwhile, the English texts use more metaphors, like 'hand-picked successor', 'Arce riding on Morales' popularity', and direct quotes from other political actors that depict him as 'cashier of waste' and 'puppet of the dictator Morales'.

Table 3: Contrasted Representation of social actors in SC.

Version	Luis Arce *(MAS Party)*	Text No.	Carlos Mesa *(CC Party)*	Text No.
Spanish	1. delfín de Evo *[dauphin of Evo]* 2. delfín del expresidente *[dauphin of former president]* 3. delfín de Morales *[dauphin of Morales]* 4. su delfín *[his dauphin]* 5. su hombre *[his man]* 6. candidato de Evo Morales *[candidate of Evo Morales]* 7. "Arce no es otra cosa que Morales" *[Arce is nothing but Morales]*	2 1 3 2 4 4 3	1. el exmandatario centrista Carlos Mesa *[centrist former head of state Carlos Mesa]* 2. el expresidente Mesa *[former president Carlos Mesa]* 3. el centrista Carlos Mesa *[centrist Carlos Mesa]*	1, 2 3, 5 4, 5
French	1. dauphin d'Evo Morales *[dauphin of Evo Morales]* 2. son dauphin *[his dauphin]* 3. dauphin de l'ancien chef de l'État Evo Morales *[dauphin of former head of state Evo Morales]* 4. "Arce n'est rien d'autre chose que Morales" *[Arce is nothing but Morales]*	3, 4 2, 5 4 3	1. un ancien président de la Bolivie *[a former Bolivian president]* 2. le centriste Carlos Mesa *[centrist Carlos Mesa]* 3. l'ex président Carlos Mesa *[former president Carlos Mesa]* 4. l'ancien président centriste Carlos Mesa *[centrist former president Carlos Mesa]* 5. l'ex président centriste Carlos Mesa *[centrist former president Carlos Mesa]*	3 3, 4 4 2 5
English	1. the leftist heir to Morales 2. his hand-picked successor 3. Socialist candidate Arce riding on Morales' popularity 4. has campaigned on his record as Morales' minister 5. but owes his popularity to his mentor 6. "cashier of waste" 7. "a puppet of the dictator Morales"	4 2 3 3 3 3 3	1. centrist former president Carlos Mesa 2. centrist Carlos Mesa	2, 3, 4, 5 4

As van Leeuwen argues (**1996**), the representation of social actors deals with their inherent agency—in sociological or linguistic terms—by conferring on them the roles of agents or patients. A social actor may be *passivated*, more specifically, *subjected*, by linguistic means when treated as an object (**van Leeuwen, 1996: 44**). Under this category, depicting the electoral candidate Arce as 'puppet of the dictator Morales' in English and '*delfín de'* or '*dauphin de'* followed by 'Morales' in Spanish and French exemplify a *possesivation* (**Ibid: 44**), where the prepositional phrases with 'of' relegate the actor's agency to a passive role.

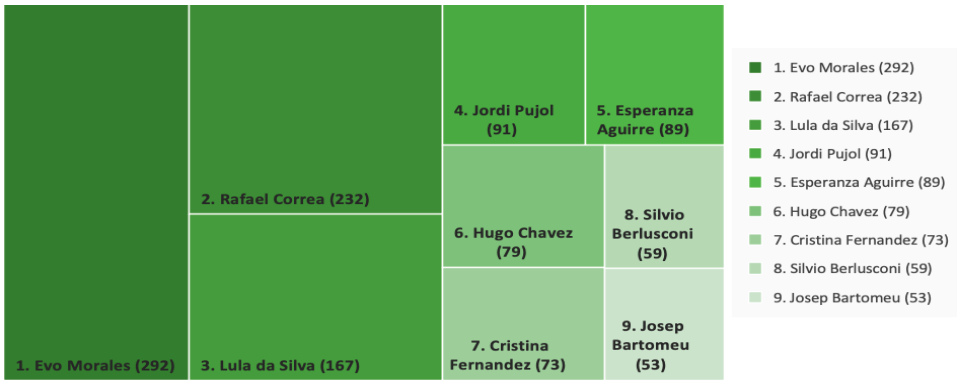
Another representation of Arce in Spanish and French is a direct quote from the rival candidate Mesa, where he mentions 'Arce no es otra cosa que Morales' and 'Arce n'est rien d'autre chose que Morales' *[Arce is nothing but Morales].* Not only does this reinforce the depiction of Arce as being subject to Morales and lacking agency; it also provides Mesa with an advantageous platform, legitimizing a negative evaluation about his electoral rival. The representations of Arce as 'nothing but Morales' or 'a puppet of the dictator' are at odds with AFP's ethics charter for electoral coverage, which advises caution with regards to defamatory remarks (including insults or rumours), especially those spread by one candidate about another. Whenever this type of remark is reported, 'it must be put into context and the person concerned must have a chance to respond to it.' (**AFP, 2016: 11, author's translation**).

On the other hand, the representation of the electoral candidate Carlos Mesa remains similar across the three versions. The phrase '*centrist former president Carlos Mesa'* in English translates to *'el exmandatario centrista Carlos Mesa'* in Spanish and *'l'ex président centriste Carlos Mesa'* in French. These depictions repeat across most texts in Spanish, French, and English with slight nearly synonymous variations, *i.e.,* by using *head of state* or *president*, or by removing this title. Then, we can tentatively conclude that fewer translation shifts occur when the social actor being described is less newsworthy.

For the second phase of the analysis and given their frequent use of the equivalent terms 'delfín de', 'dauphin de' *[dauphin of],* and 'heir to' on the study corpora, these were run with multilingual CQLs on journalistic reference corpora. These expressions were sought when followed by a proper noun within a span of 4 intervening words. The main results in each language are shown in **Tables 4, 5 and 6**, respectively. Out of 4,443 results in Spanish, the lexical item *'delfín de'* is most frequently followed by *Evo Morales, Rafael Correa*, and *Lula da Silva* (former left-wing South American presidents). Amongst the most frequent collocations, five refer to politicians from South America (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7), three to European politicians (Nos. 4, 5, 8), and one to a soccer entrepreneur (No. 9).

Table 4: Top results of collocates to 'delfín de' + proper noun in Spanish.

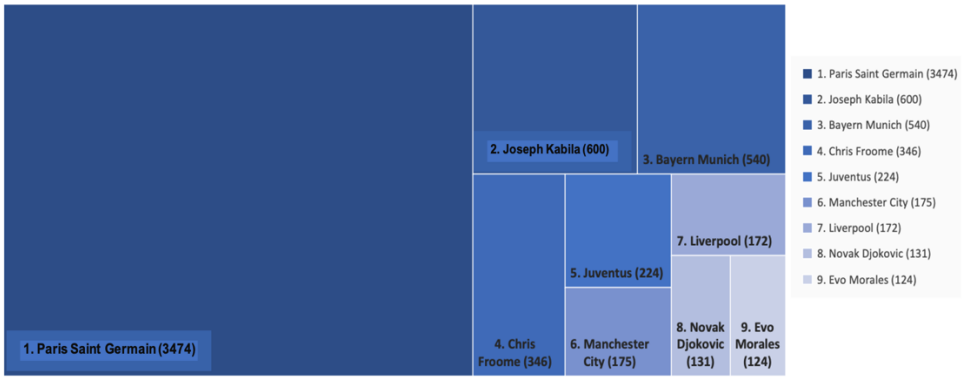
DELFÍN DE + PN



Out of 17,405 results in French, the equivalent phrase *'dauphin de'* is typically followed by the proper nouns *Paris Saint-Germain* (representing a large majority)*, Joseph Kabila* and *Bayern Munich.* Amongst the most frequent collocations, the overall results are predominantly sport-related, referring to soccer teams (Nos.1, 3, 5, 6, 7), to a cyclist (No. 4) and to a tennis player (No. 8). Two results refer to politicians (Nos. 2, 9), one being African (Joseph Kabila) and one South American (Evo Morales).

Table 5: Top results of collocates 'dauphin de' + proper noun in French.

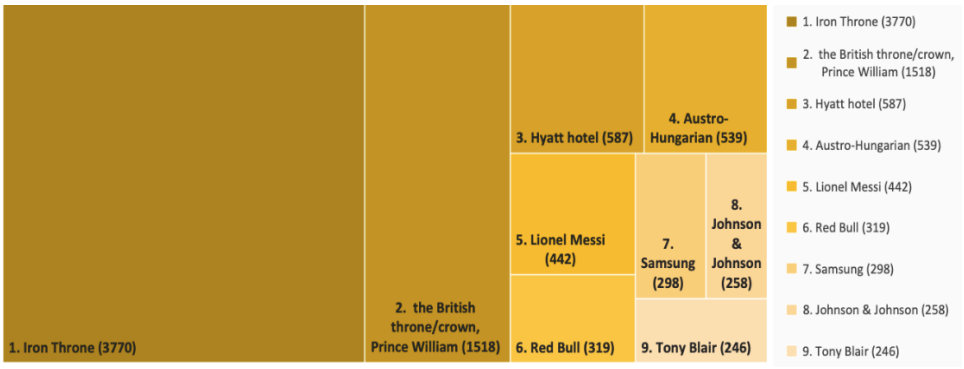
DAUPHIN DE + PN



Out of 61,418 results in English, the term 'heir to' predominantly precedes the proper nouns '*Iron Throne'* and *'British throne/crown',* in table 6. The former refers to a fictional throne (from the Game of Thrones TV Series) and the latter to the British monarchy. Notably less frequent, the remaining collocates may be grouped as enterprises (Nos. 3, 6, 7, 8) or renown individuals (Nos. 5, 9).

Table 6: Top results of collocates 'heir to' + proper noun in English.

HEIR TO + PN



This brief yet detailed contrastive analysis supported by journalistic reference corpora shows that, on the one hand, 'heir to' and 'dauphin de', in English and French, hold a semantic preference for enterprises and sports, as well as the monarchy itself, and that politicians are not commonly described as such, except for Evo Morales and Joseph Kabila. On the other hand, the Spanish equivalent 'delfín de' most commonly describes politicians, more specifically, left-wing South American leaders. It might be argued that Spanish readers are more often exposed to this depiction of a leader's successor than English and French readers. This might shed light about decision-making during the 'transediting' (**Stetting, 1989**) process for these multilingual news dispatches.

Discussion

This contrastive textual analysis forms the backdrop for the findings about translation. As scholars in this subfield of research commonly claim, a crucial methodological constraint is the difficulty of identifying source and target texts (**Valdeón, 2015, Davier & Van Doorslaer, 2018**) because news dispatches are multi-authored and continuously updated, what Hernández Guerrero considers 'unstable' sources (**2009, 43**). Nevertheless, the analysis of this *dossier* suggests that it is possible to trace corresponding texts within a controlled number of news pieces by the same agency, though this is a time-consuming, painstaking task. These multilingual news dispatches have topical, temporal, taxonomic, and textual correspondence. They usually have matching blocks of information and framing devices.

Yet, it is possible to assert that texts vary at the macro-structure, involving the strategies of title change, reordering of paragraphs, deletions, and additions. Once reorganized, the information 'reused' within news dispatches from the same *dossier* is translated almost literally, with local additions and explicitations, especially in contextual background paragraphs. This continuum of major and minor intervention shows that

'equivalent' translated paragraphs can very often be traced in the different linguistic versions, especially in the combination Spanish and French, which seem to be closely interrelated.

By tracing the datelines of the multilingual versions, as well as matching paragraphs, it was observed that the resulting English versions tend to derive from both the Spanish (first text) and the French versions (second text), incorporating several additions that go beyond contextualization and seem to involve a significant number of evaluative statements, as was shown in the analysis of *headlines* and *representations* of Bolivia and social actors. These evaluative statements may ultimately lead to a text that elicits opinions and values that differ from those in the starting text. This crucial aspect makes it relevant to intersect translation and corpus analysis when studying news translation.

Additionally, studying the plurilingual genealogy of the news dispatches might be a promising approach, especially considering the English versions, which seem to derive from two source texts at the same time (Spanish and French) and point to a particular translation phenomenon. In the same vein, Baker argues that translation should no longer be considered the reproduction of a stable, bounded 'original', but should be 're-conceptualized as an ongoing rewriting of an already pluralized "original"' (**Baker cited in Baer, 2016**) as is the case of the multiple sources for each multilingual version analysed in this article.

Conclusion

The present case study on AFP's news production about Bolivia found plurality at different levels. First, the multilingual versions of each news dispatch may be understood as a net of coexisting texts, which point to a flexible process underlying the creation and publication of news texts. This is because paragraphs in the different languages are selected, re-used, and rewritten through texts published sequentially and that draw from the analysed *dossier*, whether in the same language or translated into another language (*e.g.*, Spanish as the source, followed by the French version and later by the English one, which presumably derives from the previous two).

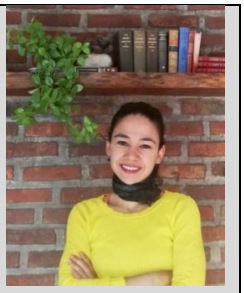
A process of plural authorship is thus established, where news translators and editors from different desks publish their multilingual versions for a plurality of readers, prioritizing information relevant to each version. Here, Framing devices are central to analysing how news content is organized – especially which information is selected, emphasized, or excluded (**Tankard et al., 1991**) in the multilingual versions. The examples in this article show that headlines carry salient information and construct the

newsworthiness of the issue being represented, where translation shifts bring key variations, especially in the English versions when compared to the Spanish and French ones, which seem to interrelate closely.

Translation thus goes hand in hand with journalistic functions in multilingual news production, although the role of translators is not openly acknowledged. As van Doorslaer states, in journalism 'the role of the author in the discursive variation of representation is a fundamental feature', context in which news translators are cultural mediators (**2021: 209**) and can be considered 'gatekeepers' (**Valdeón, 2020, Hursti, 2001**).

In addition to the methodological difficulties mentioned in *sections V* and *VI*, researchers have limited access to the news organizations (**Boyd-Barrett & Palmer 1981**) in order to be able to triangulate findings from contrastive analysis of multilingual coverage with the perspectives from journalists about the news coverage they produce. As Davier argues, this limited access may partly explain the small number of studies about news agencies in general and, particularly, translation at those agencies (**Davier, 2021**). However, triangulation with journalistic reference corpora can support textual and translational analysis to study specific text excerpts by contrasting the analysed news pieces to larger sets of texts to find discursive patterns. This might be one way to converge interdisciplinary frameworks to elucidate multilingual journalistic choices and facilitate future research in translation.

Finally, the choice of multilingual news coverage about Bolivia aimed at studying journalistic discourse about a specific context that does not pertain to mainstream discourse, which transcends geographic and linguistics boundaries to become global. Representation about a plurinational and diverse country brings a unique value for translation studies by broadening the range of data available—especially, when in relation to culturally-bound texts—to be explored in further research in this evolving domain of study.



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Translating Ramayana: Plurilingual to pluricultural

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Abstract

Embedded contexts and improvisations in bhasha Ramayanas with its nuances of plurality attribute to its influences of respective linguistic and culture of multinational and multicultural countries: Ram-story of Ramayana, considered primarily a work of smriti , has travelled a long journey in the land of multilingual and heterogeneous cultural spheres. Indian bhashas – Assamese, Thamizh, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, and so on – have rendered Rama-katha within the very Indian society under different paradigms which have overshadowed the original, i.e. Valmiki's Ramayana in Sanskrit. In lieu of assimilation of original text in another language that relevant translation promotes, bhasha Ramayanas presents different renderings or retellings , instead of variants or versions of Valmiki, colored with heterogeneous cultural ethos. Discussing three bhasha Ramayana(s) – 12th century Kampar's Ramavataram in Thamizh , 15th century Krttivasi Ramayana or Sriram Pacali in Bengali, and 16th century Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas in Awadhi – this essay explores social and literary function of translation strategies in its poly-lingual and multinational world. Questioning the idea of original and relevant Ramayana, it also reflects on how bhasha Ramayanas co-exist in multilingual and multicultural society with its distinguished autonomy and differences. The tripartite comparative project of this article critically investigates their structures, sequential arrangements, bhasha cultural color, and story overlaps. It also calls attention to coalescence of Rama-story through plurilingual renderings with respect to its pluricultural valences in South Asia. Focusing on the polyvalences, it also argues that such retellings problematize the relevance of a genuine translation by questioning translational canonical principles for bhasha texts.

Keywords: pluralism; retelling; translation; bhasha; Ramayana

Indian Cultural Pluralism and bhasha Ramayanas[i]

Indian literature with growing debates between literatures in *margi* (Sanskrit, now English) and *bhasha*[ii] (Indian language) is discussed on grounds of its appeals to Indian sensitivity and Indian consciousness which often addresses complexities of nationalism. Plurality of India is indeed embedded with its multilingual and multicultural prosperity with no possible single nationalism of the nation. Indian plurality can be construed in various contexts such as of religion, community, culture, literature, and language. John Strachey once made a staunch remark about Indian pluralism saying, 'that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social, or religious' (**qtd. in Embree 1972, 45**). Embree (**1972**) construing his implications said, 'India possessed none of the qualities of [single] nationality that resembled those of classic examples….Common language, a proudly shared historic experience, common religious traditions, internal political unity, racial homogeneity, a widely shared cultural experience, all of these conspicuously lacking in India' (**Ibid: 45**). Shormishtha Panja (**1999**), in her book *Many Indias, Many Literatures*, affirms plurality of Indian literatures with insistence on retaining pluricultural and plurilingual nuances by translating *bhasha* literatures into English. One of her most significant claims to retain plurality of India literatures is 'to contextualize, in effect to translate and mediate regional cultures, to supply footnotes for the multitude of languages and for all regional heritage' (**Anamika 190**). In similar terrain, Amartya Sen (**1993**) has also spoken of Indian pluralism at Indian International Centre by emphasizing its practice in India and religious diversity in his opinion is only a part of Indian pluralism. The practice of Indian pluralism promotes tolerance of heterogeneity and produces culturally rich society (**Ibid: 46**). Plurality of Indian literatures as discussed here calls attention to translation of regional or *bhasha* or more appropriately *bhasha* literatures not only to expand the readability of Indian cultural plurality but also to regionalize or '*bhasha*ize' master language like English and bringing Indian English, i.e. regional or Indian dialect of English. Makarand Paranjape (**2009**) distinctly argues for the inadequacy of centre-periphery model (*margi-bhasha* / English or Sanskrit-Indian *bhasha* languages / domination-subordination) and calls attention to multiplicity.

> At the least we need to theorize multiple centres and multiple peripheries in order to account for the cultural exchanges today….using languages as locations is one way of reframing the centre-periphery dialectic….the way out of…reinforced binary of domination-subordination is to use *translation* and multilingualism as strategies to promote cultural difference and counter cross-cultural inequalities. (**Paranjape, 2009: 98**)

Translation and multilingualism are better embodied as strategies to promote cultural differences and cross-cultural transactions and this eventually leads one social group to negotiate single nation with its multinational identity. The text of *Ramayana* is no single text; it is multifaceted and multi-represented that has been appropriated and re-appropriated by different cultural groups within India but also elsewhere in South Asia.

Multilingual *Ramayanas* call attention to interaction between cultural pluralism on the one hand and national integration on the other. It is important here to understand that multilingual and culturally plural countries are liable to galvanize national conflict and '*ethnohegemonies*' (**Peleg, 2007**). Although majority and minority hegemonic system are often seen in constant cross conflicts for affirmation of their cultural and national identities; pluralism allows people to 'value social diversity that in fact exists, and to use it in a way that balances social and individual needs' (**Wollenberg et al., 2005, 9**). Cultural pluralism enables 'individuals or groups to maintain their autonomy and still function as members of a larger society' by its attempt to 'achieve cooperation where there are differences' (**Ibid**). *Ramayana* in various lingual and cultural forms appeals to religious, cultural, and Indian consciousness despite being disseminated in other South Asian countries and it is therefore never cumulative but transnational. *Bhasha Ramayanas* therefore are not versions but as Ramanujan (**1997**) called it— 'retellings' that represent subversion in terms of cultural and linguistic transactions through cross cultural and regional interaction beyond Indian locations. If cultural and racial plurality of US is insinuated by metaphor of 'melting-pot', India is cultural 'mosaic' (**Guha, 1997**) or more appropriately as a 'salad bowl' where different social groups with its respective cultural and linguistic diversity co-exist in the larger social hierarchy. This might lead to distinctive multivalent cultural diversity of Indian society but it never curtails the hegemonic hierarchies rather it reaffirms and relocates these hegemonies in new discourses. *Ramayana* as the basis of Indian culture creates discourses in every diverse culture of the country with its idiosyncratic social milieus of different social groups. Therefore, the *bhasha Ramayanas* are not just translations but retellings breaking the center-peripheries and creating new discourses for multivalent Indian cultures and literatures by appealing to Indian

consciousness and local sensibilities. They are the foundational for creation of regional Indian literatures with its distinct identities literary discourses.

> Indian literature, and by extension, India and 'Indianness,' belong to a different dimension than the mere accumulation of texts and tongues. It is somewhat akin to how a translated text is neither original, nor an entirely new text, but a different kind of text, a trans-text….Translation is, of course, central to my argument…. Indian literature is thus not just a literature, but a trans-literature and that Indian culture is not just a culture, but a trans-culture. (**Paranjape, 2009: 99**)

Bhasha Ramayanas construct regional literary discourses, they are not mere translation but retellings, multifaceted representations, or what Paranjape called 'trans-texts' that represent regional and local sensibilities by insinuating Indian consciousness. They call attention to threefold-trans that is transformational-transferential-travail. Through these trans-texts of *bhasha Ramayanas*, the Ram-story travels, gets transformed, and culturally transacted. Multilingualism in India, making it heterogeneous in nature and culture, has contributed to translation by venerating individual-indigenous culture and by creating a reciprocal relation among linguistic diversity of the nation; subsequently, *bhasha* literature and the respective discourses represent the immense influence of plurlinguality. This 'translating consciousness', says Ganesh Devy (**1999**), 'shifts significance from a given verbal form to a corresponding but different verbal form' creating 'openness of language systems' (**Ibid: 185**); however, *bhasha Ramayanas* are not translation but retellings that confirm the rise of modern Indian languages or *bhasha* and therefore multilingualism, using Harish Trivedi's phrase, is not 'conducive to translation' (**2006, 2014: 104**). *Ramayana* has emerged not only in different Indian *bhasha*s and oral forms but also across India in Southeast Asian cultures – Tibet, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Java, and Indonesia. *Bhasha Ramayanas* exploit only *Ramakatha* – phrase to refer to Rama's narrative – in different languages and respective cultures creating a space for its people; the focus is not expanding or experimenting *Ramakatha* but retelling of Ramakatha to expand its audience in different languages and in different cultures. They create a new world for them and challenge the *ur*-text without going against it; Jiddu Krishnamurti's reflection on freedom connects the call for freedom from the authority of the original.

> Freedom implies the complete cessation of all inward authority. From that quality of mind comes an outward freedom – something which is entirely different from the reaction of opposing or resisting. (**Krishnamurti, 1998: 124**)

Bhasha Ramayanas, indeed, calls attention to this 'outward freedom' from 'inward authority' of *ur*-text or original Sanskrit[iii]; the outward freedom, releasing them from Sanskrit, enables them to sensitize readers or spectators from different sides of the text by creating a close link between the raised issues and its function in the social world. For instance, they sensitize its audience with some of the crucial aspects prevalent in a society such as subordination of femininity, rise of female voice, marginalization of one caste by another, politics of power, familial violence, and motherhood; disrupting the Sanskrit text, they present the subverted life of Rama, Ravana, and Sita. Vimalasuri's Jain *Ramayana* and the Thai *Ramakein* focuses on the narratives of Ravana (a demon) while Kannada village telling in oral form focuses on the life of Sita – her birth, trials, social commodification, and subsequent resistance (**Ramanujan, 1999**); coloring the *ur*-text, they represent marginalization of a low-caste, the struggle of Rakshas or demons, and suppression of female voice in the Valmiki *Ramayana*.

More than a thousand *Ramayanas* have been found by different scholars of the *Ramayana* in Indian *bhasha*s and other languages which execute only a shallow relation with the Sanskrit *Ramayana*. Camille Bulcke (1950) is supposed to find around one thousand *Ramayanas* in Kannada only (**Ramanujan, 1999**). The Indian *bhasha* renderings, retelling *Ramakatha* present their peculiar linguistic and cultural aspects that function to strengthen their socio-cultural idiosyncrasies and their peculiar cultural variation in society. Written in Indo-Aryan, Dravadian, and Indo-Tibetan languages, the *bhasha* renderings expanded their communal audience by strengthening their cultural identities calling attention to plurality of *Ramayanas* in India. Kampar's *Iramavataram* in Tamil, Reddy's *Ranganathan Ramayana* in Telugu, *Saptakanda Ramayana* in Assamese, *Vilanka Ramayana* and *Jagomohan Ramayana* in Oriya, *Adhyatm Ramayanam*[iv] and *Ramacharitam*[v] in Malayalam, *Krittivasi Ramayana* in Bengali, *Sri Ramacharitmans* in Awadhi, and *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* in Kannada are some of the illustration of Indian *bhasha Ramayanas*. In pre-fourteenth century Tamil literature, Ramakatha has been found; two Tamilian epics *Cilappatikaram* and *Maniekalai* also present Rama-story differently. Periyalavar, 8th century Alvar poet, appears to have written verses on meeting of Hanuman and Sita in Ashokavana and the first Malayalam *Ramayana* begins with this episode (**Menon, 1991**). The *Ramayana* in Buddhist and Jain discourses also present different narratives of the characters; for instance *Dasarath Jataka* presents Dasharath as the king of Benaras not of Ayodhya. The classical religious Rama story is presented as belonging to the tradition of Theraveda Buddhism (**Reynolds, 1991**). This first telling, Buddhist *Dasarath Jataka*, presents Rama-Pandit, Lakshman, and Sita as siblings and children of king

Dasharath of Benaras who sends them in exile because he fears his second wife, with the demand her son to be the king, could harm his first three children (**Gombrich, 1985; Reynolds, 1991**). The earlier retelling of Ram-story in Buddhist Jataka presents him as a *bodhisattva* in *Anamaka Jataka* or Great Being as *mahatto* or erstwhile incarnation of Lord Buddha. The narrative of Sita as his sister (*kanittha bhagini*) and wife (*agga-mahesi*) emphasizes the significance of retention of purity in ruling lineages of *kshatriya* clans like the Shakyas and the Lichchhavis found in early Pali texts as well as in ruling class of *gana-rajyas* of 6th century BC. 'Interpreting these myths in terms of 'incestuous' relationship', says Suvira Jaiswal (**1993**) 'is an anachronistic imposition of social norms of a later period on myths meant to convey a different meaning' (**Ibid: 90**). In later texts, Ram is seen as incarnation, while Valmiki sees him as divine incarnation only in his book I and VII. The *Dasharatha* and *Vessantara Jataka* add *devi* to Sita's name and her association with Ram and Lakhana is linked to worship of the deity, Ekanamasha. With her brothers Baladeva and Krishna, the motif Indianises the narrative, while in every Second Buddhist retelling–Laotian *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, adaptation of *Dasarath Jataka*–it introduces the 'incest' motif by presenting Dhatarattha having Rama, Lak, and Cantha as children. Dhatarattha and Virulaha are children of Parameswara of Indraprasth (Cambodia); Virulaha succeeds his father on Indraprastha kingdom while Dhatarattha creates his city of Candrapuri Sri Satta Naga (Vietienne). Ravana, Virulaha's son, abducts his cousin Cantha; after traditionally asking her hands and accepting conditions laid down by Rama, he is ritually married to Cantha (**Sahai, 2011**).

The Jain retelling, oral forms, and Southeast Asia present more subverted narratives of Ramakatha presenting lesser Indian influence; a full-fledged local influence is the hallmark of Jain retelling. In Vimala Suri's *Paumacaryam* written in Prakrit the Rama-story is told by Mahavira himself to Indrabhuti (Akhandalbhuti, the first Ganadhara of Mahavira) and is replete with Jain concepts of origin of civilization, creation, ancient dynasties, and even lives of Tirthankaras (**Chhikara, 2007**). Focusing on Ravana's adventures, it presents him as one of the sixty-three leaders of the Jain tradition who has earned power through austerities and he is not killed by Rama who himself is an 'evolved Jain soul' having conquered his passions (**Ramanujan, 1999**). Vimala Suri's conception of Ravana and vanaras as Vidyadharas takes a subverted departure from the Valmiki telling. The Vidyadar dynasty at Lanka was called as Raksasas after one of their king's name and the Vidyadharas of Kishkindha are known as Vanaras due to their custom of wearing totems on their banners (**Chhikara, 2007**). The Kakawin *Ramayana* or the old Javanese *Ramayana*, the Thai *Ramakien*, and the Malaysian *Hikayat Seri Ram* are the prominent illustrations of Southeast Asian retellings or renderings of Ramakatha. The

Kakawin Ramayana or old Javanese Ramayana, written in poetic verses, is a transposition of the sixth-seventh century Sanskrit text *Bhattikavya* (*Ravanavadha*) by Bhatti Svami (**Acri, 2010, Zakharyin, 2013**) but closely follows Valmiki excluding his first and last books as shown in bas-reliefs of Prambanan in Central Java (**Desai, 1970**). The depiction of Javanese indigenous deity, *dhayan*, guardian God of Java Semar and his sons' mishappenings creates the Indonesian idiosyncrasies to the narrative; the substitution of Sanskrit with Old Javanese and Kakawin literature confirms a move towards *bhasha* for enhancing their local power (**Acri, 2010**). The Thai *Ramakien* or *Ramakirti* in Sanskrit, written during the reign of king Rama-I – founder of the Chakri dynasty, presents a non-evil personality of Ravana, named as Thosakan and his abduction of Sita is considered an act of love drawing readers' sympathy (**Ramanujan, 1999**). Thai beliefs and myths and folktales, for instance Kok-khanaak – the demon of Lobpuri province, have influenced the Thai *Ramakien* (**Mesangrutdharakul, 2014**).

Oral forms like myths and folk narratives have rendered the Ramakatha in different ways which localize the telling in their regional surrounding. The Kerala shadow puppet play, based on Kampar's *Iramavataram*, the episode of death of Surpanakha's son Sambukumaran is dealt differently from that of Kampar. His death while doing *tapas* for Siva at the hands of Lakshman presents his mother agonized who addresses her aggressive appeal for justice to Siva not to Rama as avtar of Vishnu (**Blackburn, 1991**). Another example is women's folk songs that focus on actions of women characters; Brahmin Telugu-speaking women sing of the marital relations of Sita, her wedding, and pregnancy. The north-Indian songs even refer to new characters not found in the Valmiki, Tulsi, or Kampar such as midwife giving birth to Rama and a deer killed to make a drum for baby Rama (**Richman, 2008**). The motif of Sita as Ravana's daughter is well-known in Ramayana folk tradition and Jain renderings. One of the south Indian folk narratives sung by traditional bards or *tamburi dasayyas* opens with the unhappy couple Ravula (Ravana) and Mandodari; while performing self-mortification, he meets a jogi or mendicant, Siva himself who gives him a magic mango asking of his intention of sharing it with his wife. He answers that he will give his wife the fleshy side of the fruit and will have seed for himself; being skeptical, Siva asks, 'If you lie to me, you'll eat the fruit of your actions yourself'. The bard also refers to his behavior as one in his dreams and another in his wakefulness. With the greed to have his stomach full before his wife, he eats the flesh of fruit giving her only seed. Subsequently, he gets pregnant and a girl is born from his sneeze named as Sitamma because in Kannada, Sita means 'he sneezed' (**Ramanujan 1999: 146-7**). In Sanghadas Gani's Jain Ramayana, Mandodari Ravana's wife gives birth to a daughter who is put in a jewel-box and the minister is asked to desert the box; however, he takes it to the field of Janaka in

Mithila and placing it in front of plough he informs Janaka that a girl is born from furrow (**Shah 2003, 63-4**). Folk tradition, an essential part of Maharashtrian religion, revolves around the cults of eight Ganpatis and of Nine-Naths or *devis* who are essentially Saivites; however, there are instances of Vishnu worship too. Koli, a Maharashtrian tribe, presents Valmiki as their ancestor by transposing the story of Valmiki as robber in the *Adhyatmaramayanam* (**Sontheimer, 1991**). The Brahmin women of Andhra presents completely different telling from that of Valmiki or any other rendering. Their central character is female; one of the songs narrates the Ramayana story as being told by Santa, Rama's elder sister. Besides that, Rama's birth, Kaushalya's pregnancy, Sita's wedding, Sita's puberty, and Lava-Kusa's battle with Rama are represented in the well known folk songs of Andhra (**Rao, 1991**).

There have always been constant debates and contests regarding the idea whether *Ramayana* is a myth or historical text. HD Sankalia, renowned archeologist, has claimed on based on his research and findings (**1982**) that the epic *Ramayana* is supposed to be taken place in between two tribes of Madhya Pradesh. He has found three Lanka in Madhya Pradesh. KN Panikkar once opined, 'Myths are sources of history; at the same time they are not history. By turning myth into history, the historian is bidding goodbye to history' (**qtd. in Tharuvana, 2014: 19**). The debate regarding *Ramayana* and its history was started by HD Sankalia's question in 'How Old Is the Ramayana?' in 1974 in the *Times of India* and he placed the Ram story between 2850 BC and 1950 BC while DC Sircar placed it in between 1000 and 850 AD (**Patil, 1976: 68**). Sankalia, however, in his lectures 'Ramayana: Myth or Reality' (**1972**) proclaim that Ramayana is no myth and is embodied in historical evidences by withdrawing findings not only from archeological but also geographical, social, and archival research approaches. Regarding Valmiki Ramayana, he says (**1972**), 'What Valmiki created was a heroic poem went on being inflated from time to time, incorporating at least some features of that time. When this poem was created, mythical things – characters and events – were introduced into the story' (**Ibid: 15**). He indeed does not deny the authenticity of the story and probability of the characters present in that time but he does accept play of imagination that functions in poet's mind to create and therefore mythologize incidents that serve as poetic license for aesthetics. To prove *Ramayana* as documentation of the real incidents and people, researchers and scholars are to justify the existence of those people in that historical period. This controversial debate – myth or reality – is still continued; the focus of discussion here will be *bhasha Ramayanas* and their role in social, cultural, and at certain point, religious construction of a multilingual society and how they break center-periphery dichotomy and call attention to its multi-nationality.

Ramayana has been playing the role of historical and cultural contact between Hindu India and Asia. The Ramakatha as narrated in the *Ramayana* is an omnipresent text rendered in different discourses around the world literature. Each retelling has a different narrative to present before the audiences and with different intentions. Referring to ubiquitous phenomena of the *Ramakatha*, the Tamilian author, R. K. Narayan (**1972**) opines, '... I am prepared to state that almost every individual among the five hundred millions living in India is aware of the story of the Ramayana in some measure or other' (**1993: xi**). Indian social and cultural life is greatly influenced by *Ramakatha* '…in one form or another at all times, it may be as a scholarly discourse at a public hall, a traditional story-teller's narrative in an open space, or a play or dance-drama on stage' (**Ibid**). The existence of Rama narrative in different forms–Indian *bhasha*, oral traditions, and Southeast Asian discourses–confirms the existence of subverted stories that revolve around the way of telling its different episodes. Various renderings have inflected the known Sanskrit text by substituting it with local culture of the language and linguistic system. Availability of Ramayana in modern Indian *bhasha* languages, oral and textual forms, promotes their *bhasha* literary discourses, their cultural expansion, and most importantly their determination for creating a literary, social, cultural, even a political place in multilingual India which emphasizes pluricultural aspects of Indian society. *Bhasha* renderings do not function to contribute to creating national literature but to help in expansion of different linguistic and cultural identities without uniting them in a unified whole; 'a 'national' literature, in other words, has to be more than the sum of its regional constituent parts' (**Ahmad, 2000: 244**). Instead of establishing a national literary canon in one language, for instance Sanskrit, the *Ramayana* retellings present pluricultural world in plurilingual world – 'sita' in Kannada means 'sneeze' while the same word 'sita' in Sanskrit implies 'furrow'. The presence of one same linguistic sign in another linguistic system underscores the pluricultural nature of a single linguistic sign and pluricultural characteristic of plurilinguality. The comparison of three retellings in *bhasha* intends to present its contribution in creation of pluricultural heterogeneity with respect to plurilingual systems without uniting them into the category of Indian literature.

Comparative Valences of Ramayana

Kampar's *Iramavataram*, written around 12th century in Tamil under the influence of Tamil *bhakti* cult, has imbued religious, divine, and theological implications for Ramakatha; however, in previous retellings and pre-Sangam literature Rama is addressed as God, Vishnu. Rama from the very beginning of the Kampar-text is presented as the incarnation of Vishnu who has come on earth to end the destruction created by the Rakshasas

having Ravana as an emblem of evil. The author's *bhakti*, drawn from his guru ninth-century Nammalvar (**Ramanujan, 1999**), established Rama as God. Such religious implications are not missing in Goswami Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, written in 16th century in *bhasha* Awadi (a Hindi dialect) under the medieval bhakti movement in north India. He is said to draw the story from his guru Narharidasa and named it *Sri Ramcharitamanas* as Siva called the story while telling it to his wife Parvati. Retelling the Rama-katha under Sagun tradition of *bhakti* (God with form), opposite to Nirgun *bhakti* (formless God), he presented himself as incarnation of Valmiki and Rama as the incarnation of Vishnu upholding *dharma* and going beyond the existing Hindi culture with its influence on other cultures. The medieval *bhakti* movement from the Tamil Nyanmar and Alvar, from sixth to twelfth century, spread in other parts of India. Celebrating revival of Indian scriptures, the bhakti tradition challenged the Brahmanic authority and dependence on Kashatriya royalty, gaining mass support; their social protest attempted to 'purge Hinduism of its accumulated ills' (**Majumdar 1992: 102**). These two retellings present Rama as incarnation of Vishnu differ largely from the Valmiki *Ramayana* which presents Rama as a human endowed with good attributes standing against the evil like Ravana; only the first and last book addresses Rama as Vishnu-incarnation. *Kirttivasi Ramayana* or *Sriram Pacali* by Krittibas Ojha, written in fifteenth century in Bengali, reemphasizes personality of Rama as incarnation of Vishnu by establishing him in devotional and religious discourses. The Bengali retelling is deeply imbued with social and cultural ethos of Bengali tradition; in spite of presenting Ravana as a demonized character, his redemption is able to arouse sympathy and admiration for him. And the birth of Bhagirath is one of the major digressions of the story-line. Sequential analogies, patterns of difference, and narrative valences among these retellings make for the incommensurability of the comparison.

Structural Analogies in Bhasha Retellings

The foremost analogy in these retelling is found in the treatment of personality of Rama as an incarnation of God, Vishnu. The initial descriptions of the retellings of Tulsi and Krittibas show the analogies in referring to religious stories. Tulsi begins the first book, Balya Kand, with Mangalacharan and Vandana before describing Manas and Bhardwaj-Yagyavalk dialogue while Krittibas presents Sanskrit Rama divinity *sloka* before illustrating the Brahma-Narad and Ratnakar meeting followed by Valmiki-dialogue and which describes how the Rama-personality came to Valmiki's mind. Kampar-retelling presents a Tamilian stereotypical description of land and the city before describing the Rama-narrative. The third section of *Tolkappiyam* (5th century), Tamil poetics, categorizes Tamil discourses into two parts – *akam* (*aham*) (inner) and *puram* (outside)

(**Ramani, 1992**). *Akam* explores inner world such as love, devotion, etc. and *puram* war, administration, prosperity, preaching etc. (**Ramani, 1992; Parthasarthy, 2003**). Kampar begins with description of the river *sarayu*, the land, the city *Ayodhya*, the King Dasharath, and then the divine descent or ancestors; however, before these descriptions, he also refers to Rama glory in his prologue.

Rama-glory in Iramavataram

He alone is our head,
Our sole refuge, who, by himself,
Creates, preserves and puts an end
To all the world in ceaseless support.
A milky ocean is Rama's lay
Which I, a lowly cat, would fain lap up—
Its huge waves, refulgent, roaring,
I, a feeble wit, try to take on, led by a fond hope of success. (**Prologue in *Bala Kandam*, 1 in Sundaram translation**)

Rama-glory in Sri Ramcharitmanas

Varnanamarthasanghanam rasanam chandsamapi,
Mangalanam ca karttarau vande vanivinayakau.1.

* * *

Sitaramgunagramapunyaviharinau.
Vande vishuddhavijnanau kavishvarakapisvarau.4.

I reverence Vani (the Goddess of speech) and Vinayaka (God Ganesha) the originators of sounds represented by the alphabet, of multitudes of objects denoted by those sounds, of poetic sentiments as well as of metres, and the begetters of all blessings.

I pay homage to the king of bards (Valmiki) and the chief of monkeys (Hanuman), of pure intelligence, both of whom sport in the holy woods in the shape of glories of Sita and Rama. (**Sloka, *Bala-Kanda*, *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: 1-2**)

The Tulsidas retelling begins with the invocation to Gods and Goddesses and at first he invokes the Goddess of speech Vani and Vinayaka, Lord Ganesha. Invocation of Ganesha, the foremost God to worship for initiating any religious ritual, is typical of Hindu tradition; after invoking Him, he invokes Parvati as Goddess and Sankara as his consort, i.e. Siva-Parvati. Then he pays his tribute to Valmiki to help him in forming the glories of Rama and Sita. Kampar renders a *bhasha* attitude to his retelling. After the appraisal of Rama as a 'spotless' and last of his descent, he expresses his intention to retell the glory in his language – 'I shall take the earliest master for my source/ To render into Tamil song' (Prologue 1). He explicitly informs the readers that he is going to induce his Tamil retelling

with two Tamilian idiosyncrasies – (i) Tamilian cultural ethos coming with the language; and (ii) writing a Tamil poem within the conventions of Tamil poetics. The Bengali retelling emphasizes the worship of Narayan who consequently takes birth as Rama. At first, the sage Krittibas glorifies Rama in a Sanskrit *sloka* – 'Rama Lakshmanpurvaj raghuvar sitapatim sundaram;/ kakutstham karunamayam gunanidhi viprapriya dharmikam// Ramaya ramchandray rambhadraya vedhse;/ raghunathaya nathaya sitayah patayeh namah' (**Adi Kanda, *Krittibasi Ramayana* 27**).[vi] Afterwards he ascribes to Narayan of Baikunthpuri, in the section 'Narayan char ansh janm-praksh', and his intention of taking birth to put an end to destruction done by Rakshasas – '*Ye roop achen hari golok bhitar, janm tite achhe shati sahastra vatsar./ Ravan rakshas habe prithvimandale,/ tahake vadhite janm leben bhutale'* (***Adi Kanda*, 28**).

The Ahilya-salvation episode in these three retelling show close analogies among themselves but they differ from the Valmiki. In Kampar, Ahilya gives in to Indra, despite knowing his disguised form as her husband Gautam, and Guatam curses Indra to be covered with thousands vaginas and Ahilya's transformation into a stone.

> She knew who he was, but inebriate with unfamiliar feelings induced by his ingress, she didn't desist – so low she'd sunk. When her lofty husband hurried home and saw what he saw, he became a second Siva.
>
> * * *
>
> Fire darting from his eyes at what had passed in his absence, his words blazed forth, like one of your own shafts: "A thousand *pundenda* svall cover you," he said, and Indra was so covered that very instant! (***Bala-Kanda*, *Ahalya* 12 in Sundaram, 2002**)

In Tulsidas, she is relieved from her curse with the touch of Rama's 'lotus-feet' and after that she sings a song of appraisal of Rama. The story of curse and incident is not described because Tulsi believes his readers to be aware of the incident. In Krittibas, she is presented as under the control of compulsive desires or some forbidden feelings (as in Kampar) that she is unable to restrain and gives in to the disguised Indra as Kampar presents her. Krittibas also presents the cursing of Indra as one where he is covered with vaginas – '*jati nasht kaili tui ore purandar, yonimay hok tor sarvv kalevar./ Ahilya ke shapilen krodhe munivar, kananet tor tanu hauk prastar'* (**Adi-Kanda, 178**). Tulsi only refers to how she is liberated from her curse and sings a song of glory of Rama – "*parasata pada pavana soka nasavana pragata bhai tapapumja sahi, dekhata raghukanya jana sukhadayak sanamukha hoi kara jori rahi*" (**Bala-Kanda, 208**). 'At the very touch of His holy feet, which drive away sorrow, emerges Ahilya, a true

embodiment of austerity. Beholding the Lord of Raghus, the delight of His servants, she stood before Him with her joined palms' (**Ibid: 209**).

Patterns of Difference

Valmiki Ramayana is divided into seven *kandas* or cantos and his seventh book is said to be a later addition. Following Valmiki, Kampar, Tulsi, and Krittibas have also divided their retellings into different *Kandas*. Kampar divides it into six *kandas* – *Bala Kandam, Ayodhya Kandam, Aranya Kandam, Kishkindha Kandam, Sundar Kandam,* and *Yuddha Kandam*. Tulsi Ramayana is divided into seven kandas – *Adi Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundar Kanda, Lanka Kanda,* and *Uttar Kanda*. The only difference in Valmiki and Tulsi is that Tulsi replaces the *Yuddha Kanda* of Vamiki and Kampar with Lanka Kanda. Krittibas divides his retelling into five chapters– *Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda,* and *Sundar Kanda*.

The metrical variations with respect to their indigenous aesthetic framework are unique to each of the retelling in its tone, texture, and characterization. Tamil literary influences particularly *Cilapattikaram, Tolkappiyam, Tamil Azhlavars, Jivika Chintamani* are eminent in Kampar. He is said to follow the metrical form of *Jivika Chintamani*. His *Iramavataram* is composed of *viruttam* metre. He has employed approximate ninety variations of Tamil poetic metres *viz*. *kali, viruttam,* and *turai* (**Sundaram, 2002**). Out of four *viruttam* forms–*veli, achiriya, kali*, and *vanji*– *achiriya* is predominant and he is said to employ ninety six metrical variations (**Naidu, 1971**). Tulsi *Ramcharitmanas* is composed in *doha-chaupayi* metre in Avadhi, based on Jayasi's *Padmavat*. Tulsi also uses other metrical variations – *matric* forms like *soratha, tomar, harigeetika, chappaya, tribhangi*, and *varnic* forms like *anushtup, rathodata, sangdhara, malini, totak vanshastha, bhujangaprayat, nagaswaroopini, basant-tilika, indravraja, shardoolvikreedit* (**Naidu 1971, 526**). These forms are chief characteristics of Hindi poetry. Krittibas follows medieval Bengali *Sriram panchali* form 'Bengali form celebrating the glory of a deity, generally composed in simple *patyar* metre something like sing-song doggerel, narrated by *kathakas'* (**Bandyopadhyay 1997, 34**). The Bengali metre, *payar,* enhances the linguistic beauty of the retelling. His choice of medieval Bengali metre intends to address not only the learned audience but also the 'simple village folk who understood neither Sanskrit, nor chaste Bengali, which is based on Sanskrit vocabulary' (**Ibid: 35**).

sriguru charan saroj raja nija manu mukuru sudhari,
baranau raghubara bimala jasu jo dayaku phala cari.
(*doha – Bala-Kanda Ramacharitmanas*, 121)

bara bara kaha rau sumukhi sulocini pikabacani,
karana mohi sunau gajagamini nija kopa kara.25
(*soratha – Ayodhya-Kanda Ramacharitmanas*, 374)

rajadwar nikate chalen rama dhire, vriksha arhe lukaiya thaki dui veere,
bali dware sugreev chhadibe simhnaad, tahate avashya bali shunibe samvaad,
karibe tomar sange samar aradhha, ek baande bali ke karib ami stabdh,
bali dware sugreev chhadibe simhnaad, bahir hayil bani dekhite pramad.
(**Bengali *payar* – Bali-Sugreev battle, *Ayodhya Kanda*, *Krittibas-Ramayana,* 380**)

In love he's like the Mother;
In doing good he is like Thavam,
The good fortune of a previous birth);
In guiding people steer
The right course (of deliverance),
He's like a dutiful Son!
He's like Disease
(In punishing the wicked);
He's like Medicine
(In relieving their pain and misery);
And he's like Intelligence and Reason
To those in research engaged
In the subtle subjects of enquiry!
(Dashrath, *Bala-Kanda*, 6 in Mudaliyar, 1970 translation)

Bhasha influences in their renderings are eminent. *Bhasha* linguistic style and aesthetic devices color their structural construction; they also help in localizing the story with its different cultural features. Kampar has followed the poetic style of Tamil poetry as described in *Tolkappiyam*. The blend between *aham* (inner experience) and *puram* (external) makes his poem fall within Tamil poetics. The Bengali *payar* style avails the story even to the folk people, likewise Avadhi becomes accessible to common Hindi speaking people. One of the most significant differences in description of the glory of Rama as an incarnation in these retellings is in their treatment of Rama's own awareness towards his incarnate character. In Kampar, Rama makes no reference to and is himself unaware of the fact that he is an incarnation (**Parthsarthy, 2002**).

Narrative Valences

The narration of different episodes differ in these retellings but they unit themselves through intention of various episodes. The Rama-Sita meeting is described differently by these sages. Tulsi presents how Sita is overwhelmed by the beauty and appreciation that her female companions and after performing *Girija puja* in her garden her eyes meet with Rama's; both behold each other. Kampar makes the couple fall in love at first sight and presents how Rama suffers the pangs of love. Krittibas tells how Vishwamitra while travelling invites Rama to visit Mithila for Sita-*swaymvar*.

Kamb-Ramayanam

Sita of beauty unimaginable,
Standing on the terrace
Of her royal mansion,
And Rama walking
On the road below –
They saw each other!
And such was the love
And passion in their eyes
They seemed o pounce upon
And devour each other!
And that meeting of the eyes,
Like a magic chain,
Pulled their hearts, one toward the other,
And lo! Rama entered
Sita's heart
And Sita Rama's!
(**The birth of love, *Bala-Kanda*, 23-4, Mudaliyar, 1970 translation**)

Oh! My eyes two and mind –
All see her everywhere!
Can it be that lightning,
From heavens descending,
Hath the shape of a maid taken?
It can't be so! (**Ibid: 26**)

Tulsi-Ramacharitmanas

Tata janakatanaya yaha soi, dhanushajagya jehi karana hoi,
Pujan gauri sakhi lai ai, karat prakashu phiraiphulavai.1.
Jasu bilokik alaukik sobha, sahaja punitamora manu chobha.
So sabu karana jana bidhata, pharakahi subhada amga sunu bhrata.2.

Brother, she is no other than the daughter of King Janaka, for whom the bow-sacrifice is arranged. She has been escorted by her girl-

companion to worship Goddess Gauri and is moving about in the garden diffusing light all about her. My heart which is naturally pure, is agitated by the sight of Her transcendent beauty. The reason of all this is known to god alone; but I tell you, brother, my right limbs are throbbing, which is an index of bringing good fortune. (***Bala-Kanda*, 226**)

Krittibas-Ramayana

Ye jana shiver dhanu achhe yei khane, sabha saha gel seyi swayamvar sthane
Henkale Janaka balen kutuhale, sabhaya basiya katha shunen sakale,
Ye jana Shiver dhanu bhangivre pare, Sita name kanya ami samarpit tari.
Ye katha shuniya Rama kamal-lochan, dhanukar nikatate karen gaman
Henkale Sita devi saha sakhigada, attalika pare uthi kare nirikshan.
Janaki balen sakhi kari nivedan, konjana Rama va konjana Lakshman.
Sitar dekhay sakhigada tuli hat, durvvaval shyam oi Rama Raghunath.
(**Mithilagaman, *Adi-Kanda*, 185**)

The three retellings present common wedding of Rama-Sita through swayamvar; however, each of them differ in narrating the incident. The most significant digression is presented by Kampar, who makes the couple fall in love and let the lover suffer the pangs of love. Tulsi also shows how Rama expresses to Lakshaman the ecstasy of emotion that he goes through; but he also mentions how the God knows well the reason behind the sudden overflow of emotion in his heart. Krittibas deviates from the inclusion of the episode of their earlier meeting before swayamvar. Sita gets to behold Rama only in her *swayamvar* and Rama's chief motive is to break the celestial Siva-bow.

It is no doubt that Kampar through Rama-Sita meeting introduces digression from original Valmiki to interweave his poem with Tamil literary style. Krittibas, however, presents a major and subverted digression through the narrative of the Bhagirath-birth. Introducing same-sex love in Indian literary discourses, he makes two women give birth to a child. When Raja Dilip dies living his wife and co-wife childless, Siva, worried for Rama's birth in Dilip's lineage, gives his wives the boon to procreate. The Lord suggests them to make love to each other which eventually results in the birth of a child.

> *Diliper dui jaya achhilen baase, vrish arovande Siva gelen sakashe.*
> *Kahilen donhakar prati Tripuraari, mam vare putravati habe ek nari.*
> *Dui naari kahe shuni Shiver vachan, amra vidhwaa kise haibe nandan.*
> *Shankar balen duijane kar rati, mam vare eker haibe santati.*
> *Ei var diya gel Dev Tripurari, snaan kari gel dui Diliper naari*.
> (**Bhagirath-birth, *Adi-Kanda*, *Krittibas-Ramayana* 62**)

A formless body is born to one of the co-wives and the child remains a boneless lump of flesh until the sage Ashtavakra transforms him into a beautiful and strong child. Tired sage looks at the body and says, 'If you are mimicking me to make fun of me, may your body be destroyed by my curse. If, however, your body is naturally as it appears, may you, by my blessing, become like Madanmohan, the God of erotic love' (**Roy, 2000: 101**). This episode is the author's invention to introduce same-sex love in Indian text and particularly in Bengali discourses.

Bhasha Ramayana – Relevant Translation or Tetellings or 'Trans-Text'?

> What remains is that—trust me—I don't transgress a code of decency or modesty through a provocative challenge, but through a trial, by submitting to the experience of translation to the trial of untranslatable. (**Derrida 2001: 178**)

Addressing plural receptions of one single sign in different linguistic system, the linguists and translators question relevant translation in theoretical and practical frame. Questioning the genuine translation, even before Derrida, Friedrich Scleiermacher (1813) targeted its assimilation or domestication, that is 'an erasure of the foreignness of the foreign text by rewriting it in the terms of the receiving language and culture' (**Venuti, 2001: 171**). The select three *bhasha* renderings of the *Ramayana* represent either shallow adherence to Valmiki or an abrupt break-up with the Sanskrit. None of them intend to assimilate the *ur*-text Valmiki in their renderings which provides them ample space to locate their retellings in *bhasha* linguistic culture. The resistance to assimilation creates *bhasha* literary discourses with an encouragement to amplify their position in Indian literature. *Bhasha* renderings resist homogenization of Indian culture and prefer heterogeneity in Indian literary and cultural discourses. The cross-cultural and literary exchange and the influence through translation enables them to comprehend and spread respective culture in different societies. *Kambaramayanam* exposes little influence of Sanskrit *Ramayana* and tries to embrace Tamil literary style while Tulsi-*Ramcharitmanas* engrosses the Kampar religious essence which questions the very impression of relevant renderings in translation. Addressing the question of polylingualism, Derrida's reflections (**2001**), critiquing the sign

with an attempt to free domesticating strategies, present the engagement of translation with an 'economy of in-betweenness' standing between 'absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance' (**Ibid: 179**); this address to polylingualism calls attention to polycultural valences[vii] found in the linguistic patternical behavior of a language and its respective socio-cultural ethos which is liable to leave its traces in the renderings or retellings of the former text. *Krittibasa Ramayana* refers to the incident where Rama is asked to perform *Shakti puja* before going to battlefield. This incident emphasizes the prominence of worship of Goddess Kali in Bengali culture. *Bhasha* often engages into a constant struggle to create their literary discourse on one hand and to position them within Indian literary discourses on the other with the emphasis on heterogeneity. Therefore, their challenge to assimilation into the original reflects foremost their interest to create a *bhasha* audience and to introduce existing text steeped in their own cultural ethos. Moreover, assimilation is of no use to them when the struggle is to create a unique historical background:

> The concept of the 'original' may not only be essentialist, as Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists have argued it to be but, whether essentialist or not, it may simply not be a concept of any significance in other cultures which have, among other factors, a shorter history of both anti-communitarian romantic individualism and crass print capitalism. (**Trivedi, 2014: 107**)

Ramayanas in folklore or in unwritten forms are replete with illuminating telling by tribal people, dalits, Adivasis, and village women of different regions of Indian states. Folklore grounded on myths and legends reconstructs history on the basis of their lived experiences and worldview of the current times. Recent scholarships on the study of *Ramayana* present how epic like Ramayana has been recreated by local communities of tribal and dalit people; Azeez Tharuvana (**2021**) has brought this rigorous research by interacting tribal-dalit-religious communities of his village Wayanad in Kerala and other villages. Written forms (*varamozhi*) and oral narratives (*vamozhi*) present origins of *Ramayana* in different ways as the former is considered standard and documented while the latter undocumented and nonstandard. *Adiya Ramayana*, *Chetti Ramayana*, and *Sitayanam* are two prominent tribal local retellings of Valmiki-*Ramayanas* and Ezhuthachan *Ramayana* each of the three representing diverse socio-cultural milieus of communities living in Wayanad. K. N. Panikkar considers *Ramayana* a social text and opines,

> They [Wayanad Ramayana] are an indication of the cultural plurality of India. In this sense, Ramayana is not a religious text. It is a social text, a text that reflects the life of the communities in which these tellings are born. (**Panikkar, 2021: xi**)

Wayanad Ramayanas show more subverting and unacknowledged telling of Valmiki narrative by presenting Sita as having fallen in love with Ravana. However, it is significant to know that in Wayanad, Ravana is still presented as a demonized character who deploys maneuver and ruses to win Sita's heart. Sita lives in Pulpally where the local population urges her to leave, as it is the sacred site of their lord Pakkatheyyam (Pakkam); but as she agrees to leave, Ravana comes, woos her, and takes her to his palace in Sri Lanka. Ram also bewitched by her beauty falls in love with her and decides to win her by any ways. Localized with their social and cultural milieus, Adivasi deities like Valliyoorkavu Bhagavathy, Pulpally Bhagvathy, Thirunelly Perumal, and Siddhappa appear in *Adiya Ramayana* while forest fairies like Athirukalan, Arupuli, Kaikolan, and Tampiratti in *Chetti Ramayana* (**Nujum, 2021**).

Kampar Ramayana encourages growth of Tamil literature and calls attention to contribution of Sangam literature to Indian literary discourses. Therefore, political implication of the renderings is not to be denied because they not only address the rapid growth of modern *bhasha* languages to erase the homogeneity of Indian culture and language but also the increment in their audience. The differences found in their renderings highlight the need to have the same acceptability and respectability as held by the dominant Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi. Lefevere, addressing the need to emphasize differences and thereby plurilingual phenomena of a society, alerts the translators not to remove the difference but to re-emphasize the role of plurilinguality to create a pluricutural world with due respect to heterogeneity.

> Languages are different, and no amount of translator training is ever likely to reduce that difference. Translator training can, however, alert translators both to the relativity of translation poetics and to strategies that may be used not to "overcome" the differences between languages, which are undeniable given, but to project "their" image of the original, which may be influenced by various considerations, not just of ideology and/or poetics, but also of the intended audience of the translation. (**Lefevere, 1992: 100**)

These *bhasha Ramayanas* have immensely influenced social and cultural life of the respective audiences. The episode of Sita *agni-pariksha* or ordeal of fire situates the question of women's chastity as central to familial life. Kampar has presented a literary work by writing a Tamil poem following Tamil poetics. Tulsi, however, intends to introduce a religious

text for his audience by expressing his devotion to Lord Rama. Kampar is said to suggest secular society for his audience but Tulsi following traditional religious scriptures promotes cast-system in Indian social order. In Kampar men-folk and women-folk are not discriminated for following brotherhood. Guha introduces Sita as his sister-in-law and Kaushalya calls him as his son; the author even makes Kumbhakaran tell Rama about his brother Vibhishan, 'My brother does not heed to the petty concepts of caste-system on birth and recognizes only the eternal laws of righteousness' **(qtd. in Naidu 1970: 528)**. Tulsi tries to establish traditional social order based on varna-system for the ideal Rama-Rajya, 'Everyone devoted himself to his duty in accordance with his caste and stage of life, and ever found happiness in treading the Vedic path' (**Ibid: 529**). The woman question is one of the burgeoning issues in these retellings. Sita is an embodiment of ideal woman. The submissive and obedient women like Sita are adored while passionate, bold, and strong women like Surpanakha are to be questioned for their womanhood and liable to be punished. Tulsi explicitly ascribes to such attitude and his text undoubtedly injects the audience with this thought. Television becomes an eminent platform to spread the idea throughout the world. The *Ramayana* series by Ramananda Sagar telecasted on Doordarshan (**1987**) was arguably influenced by Tulsi *Ramacharitmanas*.

Krittibas has induced only women-centered episodes in Bengali *Ramayana*; however, there are women poets who have composed completely women-centered *Ramayana*. The local retellings of Kerala like the Wayanad Ramayanas have confirmed women-centered local narratives among tribal and Adivasi people. In medieval 16th century, there have women poets Chandraboti, an impoverished Brahmin woman from a small village of east of Bengal and Molla, potter's daughter from a small Indian town of Andhra Pradesh; they remained unmarried and earned by writing poetry in Bengali and Telugu respectively. Molla's Ramayana is considered one of the classical Ramyanas in Telugu and ranked after two medieval Ramayans in Telugu by Ranganatha and Bhaskara while Chandrabati's Ramyana is considered weak in style and structure and only two of her ballads – *Sundari Molua* and *Dasyu Kenaram* – are regarded as gems of her Ramayana (**Dev Sen, 1997**). Chandrabati presents Sita as daughter of Mandodari who delivers an egg by mistakenly drinking sages' blood kept in a box by her husband, Ravana. The soothsayers predicted that egg contained destruction of rakshasas race; as Ravana wished to destroy it Mandodari keeps it in a box and throws it into the sea. The fisherman, Mahabijaya's wife Sata finds it gives it to king Janak and aks them to name the girl Sita after her name (**Nujum, 2021**). Chandrabati Ramayan is prescribed in literature curricula in Bangladesh and India's West Bengal (**Dev Sen, 1997**). Local deities of Bengal like Manasa,

Mangalpandi, Banadurga, Sulapani, Shithla, and Shashthi in *Chandrabati Ramayana* (**Nujum, 2021**).

Women in Krittibasa are presented with an independent and strong attitude. Wife and co-wives of Raja Dilip symbolizes how women can be independent. The same-sex parenting adds on to a new paradigm that the author seeks to introduce. There are two versions of *Krittivasa Ramayana*. The first version refers to how two women are asked by Siva to make love to reproduce while in another the two women, Chandra and Mala, willingly makes love to each other passionately under the strong influence of erotic love (**Vanita 2005: 147**). When Dilip dies under a curse, Lord Brahma asks Vasishtha to impregnate his wives but he refuses.

> He requested Vasishtha to help Chandra and Mala get a son.
> "Vishnu Vishnu," said the sage, covering his ears,
> and refused to comply with their wishes.
> After Vasishtva's refusal
> they called upon Madan [God of love],
> as Madan reached the king's palace,
> the two queens began menstruating.
> Three days later they took the purifying bath,
> entered their husband's palace and lay down there.
> * * *
>
> Burninj with desire induced by Madan, Chandra and Mala
> took each other in embrace,
> and each kissed the other.
> * * *
>
> This is how Malavati became pregnant. (**Bhattasali trans. qtd. in Vanita 2005: 147-8**)

This incident is a bold subversion of the tale of Bhagirath's birth not found in the Vamiki text and neither of the *bhasha* renderings. The incident suggests the inference to same-sex love and parenting in Indian medieval lifestyle. Medieval *bhakti* cult which influenced Tulsi and Kampar also influenced Krittibasa however his attempts to deviate from the existing trend indicate the author's freedom in experimenting with the existing literary trend. And the episode indeed makes people either question the author or appreciate him for introducing a different narrative before her audience. The incident can be looked from the perspective of independence and agency accorded to women characters.

Bhasha Ramayanas remain an area of contention and negotiation for promoting and establishing nuances of plurality in multilingual India as well as across South Asia. They do not reconstruct history or manipulate it for creating their autonomous identity rather they help social groups to

shape their culture and language in literary discourses in written or unwritten forms. These texts are no more religious texts but social text, cultural text, and more recent days literary texts or what Paranjape says 'trans-text'. They do not museum-ise their social and cultural plurality but bring them recognition. Ramyanas in Indian *bhashas* in themselves constitute literary traditions and therefore they can never be called a mere translation or version of the acknowledged Valmiki-*Ramayana*; they represent multi-national sensibilities of different nuances of plurality of Indian culture. Commenting on the need of cultural plurality of India, GJV Prasad remarks:

> This seems to be the time to use famed multilingualism and multi-culturalism to further the cause of egalitarianism, to work towards social inequality and provide greater opportunities to the oppressed peoples of the world. The truth perhaps is in the contestation, in the negotiation. (**Prasad, 2009: 164**)

The recent Ramayana studies in Wayanad by Tharuvana (**2021**) distinctly call attention to the Ramayanas of the social groups like tribes and Adivasis or even women that remain on the margins of the social hierarchy. He even goes to bring a balanced and harmonious interaction between Hindu and Muslim religion. He refers to Persian translation of Ramayana by Badayuni and Giridhar Das and cites sources[viii] (Sri Sri Ravishankar and Balram Paniccar) to build a bridge by drawing parallelism between Rahman and Ram, Brahma and Ibrahim (Abraham), Saraswati and Sara, and Rabbi and Ravi (**Ibid: 151-5**). Thus, *bhasha Ramayanas* in a harmonious ways move to construct Indian consciousness among different social and cultural groups to recognize multi-nationality co-existing in Indian society.

Conclusion

Bhasha Ramayanas are at the core of the construction of literary discourses and of regional literatures of India, while also impacting local culture of distinct communities of different social groups. The chief focus of *bhasha* retellings is questioning and subverting the idea of translation by making it a 'trans-text' and therefore calling *bhasha Ramayanas* translation is devaluing its autonomous authenticity in a multilingual. Challenging the *ur*-text of Valmiki, they make improvisations with Rama-story to strengthen their *bhasha* audience, to educate village folk or social groups, and most importantly to assert their autonomous identity co-existing in a multilingual country. These retellings illuminate subverted narratives of Rama-story along with Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman, and Ravana. Some South Asian and South Indian retellings present demonized character like Ravan as humanized. Their different perspectives and focuses call attention to various social issues – marginalization of one caste by the other, women's question, female subordination and their

resistance to subjugation, conflict between fate and free-will. The discussion of three retellings represents differences as a result of their linguistic and cultural valences. Multifaceted representations of *bhasha Ramayanas* in Indian multilingual world allow the unacknowledged groups and communities to come on the surface by drawing attention to multi-nationalist ethos. However, it cannot be denied that while the nuances of cultural pluralism often give rise to conflict they compensate this with the probability of asserting individual recognition of the groups, texts, languages involved, as is the case of *Ramayanas*.

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Endnotes

[i] Author's general notes:

(1) Two prominent turns, 'linguistic turn' and 'cultural turn', call attention to the intersectional relations to language and socio-cultural condition of the community speaking that language; their influence on translation is indispensable.

(2) *Shruti* and *smriti* are two Sanskrit forms of texts; the former refers to 'that is heard' and the latter 'that is remembered'.

(3) Frederic Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche has revealed parody as having some 'sympathy' with the 'original' which it copies while pastiche contests the 'possibility of an "original"' presenting the 'original' as a failed effort to 'copy' an ideal (Butler 1990). This very concept has problematized the possibility of the 'original'; therefore, it is difficult to find whether Valmiki's *Ramayana* (based on *smriti*) is the 'original' directly coming from a Brahmin's mouth or as copy of some other copy.

(4) Scleiermacher (1813), Derrida (2001), Philip Lewis (2004) along with other critics have interrogated the possibility of relevant translation in terms of different renderings of a foreign or the original text.

(5) *Renderings* and *retelling* are typically italicized to emphasize the employment of Derrida's *rendering* and Ramanujan's use of *retellings* (avoiding the words like version or variant), in the essay, interchangeably for showing the semantic-cum-symbolic and syntactic valences.

(6) *Thamizah*: South Indian or Dravidian language, often spelled as Tamil.

ii UR Ananthmurthy (2009) in 'Literature in the Indian *bhashas*: Front Yrads and Backyards' disfavours use of 'vernacular,' 'regional,' or 'ethnic'; he finds them insulting and prefers *bhasha* over other terms.

iii Since Valmiki is supposed to be first to document the Ramakatha; his *Ramayana* can be considered the *ur*-text.

iv It is also referred to as latter Sanskrit *Ramayana* (Richman, 2008).

v It is written in a Dravidian linguistic peculiar style *pattu*, using non-Sanskrit meter and Tamil alphabet and it is written in a strange language neither complete Tamil nor Malayalam, both are dispensable (Menon, 1991).

[vi] The epic, *Ramayana* has been translated in various vernacular languages. The original Valmiki *Ramayana* is structured into seven books viz. *Bala-Kanda* (*Adi-Kanda*), *Ayodhya-Kanda*, *Aranya-Kanda*, *Kishkindha-Kanda*, *Yuddha-Kanda*, and *Uttara-Kanda*. These Kandas are translated as Books which are further subdivided into various Sargas (translated as Chapters or Cantos). Valmiki's *Ramayana* is written in *shloka* (a verse-form), often in *anushtup chhanda* (four-feet of eight syllables each, i.e. 32 syllables). Tulsidas's *Ramacharitmanas* has been written in various Chhanda (meters), *chaupai* (four-line quatrains), *doha* (couplets), and *soratha* (eleven and thirteen metrical feet in odd and even stanzas respectively. Despite being influenced by their respective linguistic and cultural backgrounds, these vernacular renderings have retained the structure of the epic as divided into various Kandas or books. However, they have employed different meters of their respective linguistic structures. For instance, *Krittivasa Ramayana* is written in Bengali *payar chhand* (meter) consisting of fourteen syllables. *KambaRamayana* is written in *viruttam* (a devotional song improvised in one or more *ragas*, i.e. melodic framework) and it consists of only six books skipping the seventh found in Tulsidas and Krittivasa.

vii Philip Lewis has also questioned the relevant translation by calling it 'abusive fidelity'; 'polyvalencies and plurivocities' reveal the problematization of adherence to relevance while rewriting it. See – *The Measure of Translation Effects* in *The Translation Studies Reader* ed. Venuti, 2000.

viii Please see chapter *Muslims and the Ramayana* in Azeez Tharuvana's *Living Ramayana* (2021).

Subtitling Hong Kong Code-Mixing and Code-Switching: The case of Netflix English and Spanish official subtitles for Hongkonese audiovisual creations

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Abstract

Translation has largely been considered a process involving only two languages, source and target. However, plurilingual audiovisual content has proliferated over the last few decades, reflecting, as a result, the world's linguistic intermingling. Such a plurality complicates both theoretical categorizations and translation practices. Even though multilingualism in the media has received scholarly attention, more explorations are needed to ascertain the translation processes and methods adopted to handle linguistically diverse source texts in the streaming era.

The present piece of research tentatively explores the treatment given to Cantonese and English code-mixing and code-switching present in Hongkonese films and TV shows currently streamed on Netflix, the video-on-demand platform. This article probes a selection of such content and compares the original dialogues with official Chinese, English and Spanish subtitles. Preliminary results point towards a loss of linguistic diversity and nuance caused by subtitling processes. The differentiated roles that both languages originally play in creating comedic, stylistic, or emphatic effects are rarely retained, possibly affecting viewers' reception and appreciation. This article argues that further attention should be paid to the translation and adaptation of code-mixing and code-switching present in Hongkonese creations, both by the industry and academia, if such a multilingual reality is to be portrayed successfully via subtitles.

Keywords: Cantonese audiovisual content; Hong Kong audiovisual media; Netflix subtitles; multilingual subtitling; code-mixing and code-switching; multilingual translation strategies

Introduction

Over the course of history, consecutive waves of migratory events, alliances and conquests have merged and broken apart societies, creating mixed languages, pidgins, and creoles. Nowadays, different languages constantly exert influence on each other in a technologically connected world. Multilingualism can be defined as 'the co-presence of two or more languages (in a society, text or individual)' (**Grutman, 2009: 182**). This phenomenon has historically been greatly misunderstood, stigmatised as a potential threat. The concept of the monolingual nation has been essential as a legitimation and standardisation strategy (**Gogolin, 2021**) and signs of multilingualism in literature were first 'associated with a flavour of treachery to the national literature' (**Meylaerts, 2013: 1301**). Nevertheless, its status has drastically improved, being nowadays key part of country-level policies. Its presence has also reached most types of both traditional and digital media. However, we are still 'not sufficiently aware of the importance and omnipresence of multilingualism' (**Meylaerts & Serban, 2014: 2**), and it is only recently that the topic has started to gather significant scholarly attention.

This paper hones its focus on two of the manifestations of multilingualism, that of code-mixing and code-switching, in Hongkonese audiovisual creations. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong is a highly multilingual area, where the official languages of English and Chinese (Hong Kong Cantonese) coexist with other 24 minor languages (**Bolton, et al., 2020**). The most prevalent type of multilingualism in Hong Kong involves native Hong Kong speakers inserting English words and phrases to Cantonese sentence structures, where 'Cantonese acts as the "matrix language"' and 'English acts as the "embedded language"' (**Setter, et al., 2010: 98**). The inclusion of English elements into Cantonese grammar during code-mixing can be attributed to the historical background of Hong Kong as an English-speaking colony. The term *code-mixing* thus refers in this study to 'intra- sentential alternation of Cantonese and English in Hong Kong' (ibid: 96). In turn, the term *code-switching* refers to inter-sentential alternation of Cantonese and English, normally entire sentences. Code-switching can be defined as 'the use of two languages at the same time in one situation' (**Appel & Muysken, 2006: 27**) and plays varying roles according to each specific community of code mixers. Even though present, code-switching is not as prevalent as code-mixing among Hong Kong speakers (**Chen, 2008**).

These two features are commonly represented in Hong Kong's audiovisual content through multilingual dialogue in mostly Cantonese, English and Mandarin Chinese. The present paper examines the treatment of code-

mixing and code-switching present in several Hong Kong films and TV series on the Netflix platform.

Netflix, an audiovisual production company with presence over 190 countries (**Netflix, 2022**), is a key player in the official distribution of audiovisual content at a global scale. Multilingual subtitling, understood as the provision of subtitles in multiple languages for viewers who do not understand the original language of the film, is part of Netflix's distribution strategy. During the last two decades, this platform has contributed to a boost of accessibility to niche content, some of it being multilingual. In recent years, Hongkongese audiovisual creations have reached foreign markets thanks to this over-the-top media service. However, the treatment given by Netflix to different types of multilingual scripts have not been explored. This paper investigates how Netflix's subtitling processes handle the complexity of code-mixing and code-switching in Hong Kong's multilingual content, focusing specifically on English and Spanish official Netflix subtitles, with the aim of bringing attention to the subtitling of code-mixing and code-switching dialogues.

Literature Review

The following literature review covers previous scholarly findings related to multilingualism in Hong Kong, then focusing on previous studies around the topic of translation strategies and multilingualism. Moreover, previous scholarly findings in relation to the topics of multilingualism and Netflix audiovisual products are also located and discussed.

Code-mixing and code-switching in Hong Kong

Multilingualism in Hong Kong has gone through a number of different stages. According to Bacon-Shone and Bolton, 'from the late nineteenth century until the immediate postwar period, the dominant Chinese language in Hong Kong was the Cantonese vernacular' (**2008: 26**), while from the 60s to the 90s there was the 'rise of the modern Hong Kong Cantonese language' (**Ibid: 27**), which is the main source language in this study. British colonialism has played a key role in the influence of the English language in the S.A.R. However, it was only after the 1970s that English spread broadly across society, alongside the emergence of the middle class, thanks to compulsory education policies (**Bolton, et al., 2020**).

According to 2016 data from the Population By-census by the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 68.2% of the population aged over 5 years old could read English, 66.0% could write English and the numbers of those who could speak it went from 44.7% in 2006 to 53.2% in 2016 (**HKSAR Gov, 2016**). Moreover, the 2021 Population Census detected that more than 50% of Hong Kong

people aged 5 and over was capable of speaking either English or Putonghua, and that 'over 90% of persons aged 6-24 attending full-time courses in educational institutions in Hong Kong were able to read and write both Chinese and English' (**HKSAR Gov, 2022**). The data show that knowledge of English has grown exponentially and that such language is nowadays still an essential part of secondary and tertiary education. Moreover, Hong Kong displays a distinctive use of the English language at the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical levels, as noticed by Bolton (**2002, 2003**), including unique accents, vocabulary, and grammar variations (**Bolton, et al., 2020**).

In terms of code-mixing in Hong Kong, it seems to be a strategy of neutrality, allowing Hongkonese people to neither 'appear totally westernised' nor 'uncompromisingly Chinese in orientation' (**Gibbons, 1983: 145**). Code-switching derives from the bilingualism of Hong Kong. Previous researchers have attested their presence in many different types of discourse, including print media (**Yau, 1993**), song lyrics (**Chan, 2009**), secondary education (**Lixun, 2019**) or the internet (**Lee, 2007**). In the case of films, Fan (**2023**) notices that code-mixing and code-switching have been part of Cantonese cinema since the 1930s up to the present time. However, multilingualism and code-mixing or code-switching have very different statuses in Hong Kong. While Hong Kong pushes a trilingual and biliterate policy, it discourages the presence of code-switching and code-mixing in classrooms, both from the part of students and teachers (**Li, 2017, 2022**). This distinction also seems clear in the case of official subtitles for the region, in either Chinese or English (**Cheung, 2020**).

Subtitling strategies for multilingualism

The topic of multilingualism and translation has been dealt extensively in Audiovisual Translation Studies (see **Beseghi, 2017; de Higes-Andino, 2014; Meylaerts** and **Serban, 2014**, to mention but a few). Retaining multilingualism through subtitles is a challenge exacerbated by the space and time constraints associated with subtitling. This section mainly focuses on translation strategies specifically aimed at dealing with multilingualism in subtitles.

Bartoll (**2006**) offered solutions in relation to the subtitling of multilingual films, proposing several techniques to deal with this phenomenon. These solutions originated from subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. These included the use of italics, 'different colours or the paratextual information within brackets' (**Ibid: 1**).

Baldo (**2009**) studied the subtitles of the multilingual TV series *The Lives of the Saints* (2004), which included code-switching between Italian and Canadian-English. The author contends that subtitling allows for better

retention of multilingualism, as well as better conservation of the ideology behind the creation, when compared to dubbing. However, the author also recognises that 'the decision to subtitle some dialogue while leaving other speeches untranslated often represents an ideological intervention' (**Ibid: 131**), a decision that the subtitling team might not have the authority to make.

In the case of the English-to-Spanish subtitling of the multilingual film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), which included English, German, French and Italian dialogues, the tendency in terms of subtitling strategies was 'the deletion of linguistic elements', the language switches being only perceivable 'orally but not through written language' (**Ávila-Cabrera, 2013: 99**).

Moreover, Corrius, Espasa and Zabalbeascoa explored the audio description of multilingual films, finding that 'multilingualism can be rendered with a gamut of strategies, depending on the combination of verbal/non-verbal, visual and acoustic codes at stake' (**2019: 147**). Corrius and Zabalbeascoa proposed the term L3 to refer to 'forms of expression other than a text's main language' (**2019: 72**), as well as a number of detailed strategies for L1 and L3ST segments such as deletion, repetition and substitution, and the possible results of such operations (**2011: 122-127**).

Martínez-Sierra, Martí-Ferriol et al., (**2010**) analysed polyglot Spanish films, detecting the following translation strategies: self-translation, liaison interpreting, subtitling, and no-translation. In relation to multilingual diversity in Spanish immigration films, De Higes-Andino et al., (**2013**) offered both strategies and techniques for such a challenge, following Molina and Hurtado (**2002**). Strategies were twofold, to mark multilingualism or not, while techniques included normal font, italics, colours, intralinguistic subtitle, no-translation indicating language in brackets and no-translation, and were classified following a domestication-foreignization continuum. De Higes-Andino further covered the subtitling of multilingual films into Spanish (**2014**), proposing a model analysis for the study of multilingualism in film, composed of translation modes, strategies, constraints, and ideologies.

Szarkowska, Żbikowska and Krejtz (**2013**) proposed strategies specifically aimed at multilingualism in subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. These included vehicular matching, explicit attribution, colour coding and linguistic homogenisation. The authors believe that a more varied set of strategies, such as adding foreign languages to subtitles, might increase the retention of multilingualism.

After assessing a number of strategy classifications proposed by previous scholars, this article proposes a classification of strategies (see the Methodology section) to explore the English and Spanish Netflix subtitles for Hongkonese creations and determining how and to what extent they were used.

Netflix and multilingualism

Netflix has received attention from scholars of a plethora of backgrounds, including Media Studies, Film Studies, Second Language Acquisition and Translation Studies, to mention but a few. The study of its subtitling and dubbing practices has started to gather momentum in recent years specially in the field of Translation Studies (**Lobato, 2019**). For example, new research is appearing on the subfields of translation process (**Pedersen, 2018**), translation quality (**Ponkala, 2018; Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021**), and subtitle and dubbing consumption and reception (**Ju, 2019; Kuosmanen, 2020; Kuscu-Ozbudak, 2021**) in relation to Netflix content.

Ju (**2019**) explored the consumption of Korean dramas by US audiences by assessing user reviews in the platform, discovering an 'emotional and transcultural engagement in K-dramas' (p. 14), which was made possible and influenced by the subtitles provided by the platform. Kuosmanen (**2020**) focused on Finnish Netflix users and subtitles, detecting that users were 'more satisfied with the service's title selection that the quality of its subtitles' (**Ibid: 2**), while Kuscu-Ozbudak (**2021**) explored the attitudes of Turkish millennials towards Netflix subtitles and translation policies, finding that viewers assume quality subtitles from the platform, and that 'a decrease in subtitling quality may lead to cancellation of the subscription' (**Ibid: 1**).

Previous studies point to subtitles as key enablers of translingual and transcultural consumption, while also drawing our attention towards subtitling quality. However, studies discussing multilingualism, code-mixing and/or code-switching in Netflix subtitles or dubs are scarce.

Jenner (**2018**) mentions that 'despite the multilingualism of many Netflix texts, language can still be a hindrance to any "grammar of transnationalism"' (**Ibid: 231**); that is to say, Netflix might foster domestication at the expense of multilingualism in order to make its content transnational. The author goes on to mention that Netflix mobilises translation to make 'the domestication of texts or their integration into national media systems' (**Ibid: 237**) possible, conceivably reducing the linguistic and cultural complexity of audiovisual creations.

From the field of Translation Studies, Labarta Postigo (**2021**) analysed the translation strategies used to deal with English idioms and idiomatic expressions appearing in different subtitles from comedy dramas and

series offered by several providers, including Netflix. She detected a 'reduction of figurative meaning in translated subtitles' (**Ibid: 15**), in line with the general simplification caused by subtitles. Even though this study included a multilingual analysis and comparison between different languages, the focus was not on the multilingualism present in subtitles, but on a comparative analysis between monolingual subtitles.

Savoldelli and Spiteri Miggiani (**2023**) analysed the strategies and techniques used to deal with the multilingualism present in the Italian dub streams of five multilingual Netflix-produced shows. The authors concluded that the dubbing 'ensured a degree of visibility to linguistic diversity in the dubbed versions, albeit not always consistent with that of the originals', and that 'Netflix's directive to avoid dubbing over foreign language was not upheld consistently', as 'foreign languages were in fact occasionally dubbed over, particularly when code switching and code mixing occurred' (**Ibid: 20**). Even though the topic of study is not subtitling, the results point to outstanding challenges when representing code-mixing or code-switching.

After thorough explorations, previous research on Cantonese-speaking audiovisual creations available on Netflix seems very scarce. Moreover, Cantonese as a source text for Spanish translations has not received extensive academic coverage up to the present, and, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there are no previous studies researching the translation of Cantonese content on Netflix into English or Spanish. All in all, too little is known about the translation strategies employed or the treatment applied to these linguistically diverse source texts.

Rationale and Methodology

The writing of this article was partially motivated by the attention that Netflix gathered after the viral reach of some of its exclusive titles, inadvertently bringing to light subtitling quality issues and indirect translation practices (**Giustini, 2022**). This piece tries to assess the treatment of multilingualism in the English and Spanish subtitles for Hongkonese creations. The main focus is the verbal codes of multilingualism (**Voellmer, 2012**) as part of TV series and film dialogues. Visual codes were only included if they were textual in nature (e.g., a billboard with printed text appearing on it). Furthermore, it analyses translation strategies to explore the constraints and processes that might affect the treatment of such multilingualism. Finally, it (re)proposes a series of strategies to increase multilingualism retention in subtitles.

As mentioned, the strategies and constraints detected by previous researchers were applied to the Netflix indirect subtitling scenario; that is, to the Cantonese-English-Spanish language trio. De Higes-Andino, Prats-

Rodríguez et al., (**2013**) proposed two different strategies for the treatment of multilingualism: marking or non-marking. This key distinction will be employed to assess the level of multilingualism retention. Further subcategories inside the main categories were detected by the authors, which will also be partially used in this study. Moreover, following Martí-Ferriol (**2010**) and de Higes-Andino (**2014**), this study will briefly locate the linguistic constraints specific to the Cantonese context.

First, the Netflix platform was manually scraped in search of Hongkonese/Cantonese content. A combination of different keywords such as 'Cantonese', 'Hongkonese' or 'from Hong Kong', among others, were used to locate the maximum number of titles possible. As of January 2022, the number of Cantonese creations was 190, composed of four TV series and 186 films. The roster covered a period of 40 years, from 1981 to 2021 (**Table 1**). Cantonese content clearly shows a greater presence when compared with the 59 Cantonese titles detected in 2021 by Shi and Zhou (**2021**).

Table 1: Percentage of Hongkonese content on Netflix according to release year periods.

1980-1989		1990-1999		2000-2009		2010-2019		2020-present	
40	21.05%	80	42.1%	29	15.26%	38	20%	3	1.57%

Over 60% of titles' screening or airing date was 1999 or earlier, and fewer than 25% were from the year 2010 onwards, making it a slightly dated collection. From this total number, 49 titles offered Spanish subtitles, equivalent to 25% of all content. The presence of Spanish language variants (dubbing or subtitles), trying to adapt to different locales, such as Spanish for Spain or Spanish for Latin America, was detected in only four titles: *Kung Fusion* (2004), *Time and Tide* (2000), *Ip Man* (2008) and *Ip Man 2* (2010). The distinction was limited to 'Spanish' (*Español*), presumably a neutral variant used for the Latin American market, and Spain's Spanish (*Español de España*) for European Spanish.

In its Timed Text Style Guide: General Requirements, section 12, Translator Credits, Netflix requires the inclusion of 'the translator credit as the last event of the subtitle file' (**Netflix Partner Help Center, 2023a**). Therefore, the names of Spanish subtitlers were included in the TL subtitles (with a few exceptions that might derive from translators having 'submitted a formal waiver of rights to be credited'). The method of indirect translation was easily detected in the case of most Spanish subtitles for Hongkonese creations by searching for information on the linguistic proficiency of the translators involved, either via common Google searches or by checking LinkedIn profiles. Therefore, English subtitles were included in the analysis so as to assess the indirect subtitling process. Preliminary findings showed that multilingualism in the form of code-mixing and code-switching was

more prominent in newer creations over older ones, as well as in TV series over films. Thus, more recent films and TV series were considered as most relevant to the study. In order to include an updated portrayal of Hongkonese multilingualism, only films from the year 2000 onwards were chosen, specially from the year 2013. A total amount of 10 creations available at the time of study in Netflix UK were chosen due to their relevance, three TV series and seven films (**see Table 2**). Relevance was based on the amount of code-mixing and code-switching detected during the first 20 minutes of viewing.

Table 2: Hongkonese TV series and films chosen as case studies.

	Original Title	English Title	Spanish Title	Year	Type
1	性敢中環	*Sexy Central* (2 chapters)	*Sexy Central*	2019	TV series
2	家和萬事驚	*A Home with a View*	*Vista al Mar*	2019	Film
3	衝上雲霄	*Triumph in the Skies*	*Triumph in the Skies*	2015	Film
4	超級經理人	*The Midas Touch*	*The Midas Touch*	2013	Film
5	順流逆流	*Time and Tide*	*Contra la Corriente*	2000	Film
6	向西聞記	*Hong Kong West Side Stories* (4 chapters)	*Amores sin barreras en Hong Kong*	2018	TV series
7	分手 100 次	*Break up 100*	*Break up 100*	2014	Film
8	鐵探	*The Defected* (2 chapters)	*Detective de Hierro*	2019	TV series
9	單身男女 2	*Don't Go Breaking My Heart 2*	*No me rompas el corazón 2*	2014	Film
10	失戀急讓	*Temporary Family*	*Temporary Family*	2014	Film

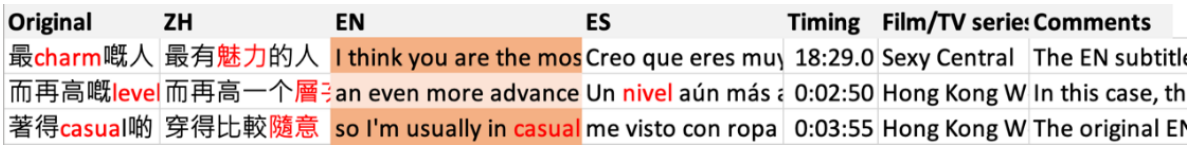
Regarding the TV series data sample, it includes romance, comedy, and action. *Sexy Central* (2019) is a romance and friendship TV drama where five 'young working women juggle work, love, sex and booze' (**Netflix HK-EN, 2023**), *Hong Kong West Side Stories* (2018) is a comedic TV series which tells the loosely interconnected lives of young Hongkonese men and women, and *The Defected* (2019) is an action and crime TV drama which depicts the fight for power in the police force. In regard to films, the genres present are comedy, romantic drama, and thriller. The comedy *A Home with a View* (2019) portrays a disgruntled family whose dream home view is ruined by an unsightly billboard. *Temporary Family* (2014) is a comedic

drama that depicts the lives of four unlikely roommates thrown together by circumstance in the high-stakes world of Hong Kong real estate. *The Midas Touch* (2013) is a comedy about a down-on-their-luck talent agency that gets a chance to turn their fortunes around when they discover a new pop sensation. Based on the popular Hong Kong television series of the same name, *Triumph in the Skies* is a romantic drama that focuses on the personal and professional lives of the crew members of a fictional airline. *Time and Tide* (2000) is an action thriller that follows a young man who becomes involved in the dangerous world of mercenaries and criminals in the underbelly of Hong Kong. A romantic comedy, *Break Up 100* (2014) explores the ups and downs of a young couple who decide to start a cafe where customers can leave mementos from past relationships. Their own relationship is tested as they navigate through their past loves and present challenges. Finally, *Don't Go Breaking My Heart 2* (2014), another romantic comedy, traces a love triangle between an architect, his boss, and a financial analyst.

Only two to four of the first chapters for each TV series, depending on length, were analysed to keep a similar duration to that of a commercial film. When proper names, brands or metalinguistic play in the original dialogue became part of the English or Spanish subtitles, such cases were not considered as active subtitling strategies related to multilingualism and were not taken into consideration. Other languages such as Mandarin Chinese, French and Spanish were also detected in the original dialogue but were excluded from the analysis.

In order to analyse the translation strategies detected, a trilingual Chinese-English-Spanish database was created. From a total of over 4,000 subtitle strings, 350 lines of dialogue including instances of code-mixing (318 cases, 90.85%) and code-switching (32 cases, 9.14%) were extracted. There were four key compiled elements: 1) the Cantonese dialogue with embedded English (the original utterance) or spoken English in the case of code-switching; 2) the Traditional Chinese subtitles (which included neither English content nor Cantonese vernacular characters); 3) the English subtitles; and 4) the Spanish subtitles. The original dialogue mixing Cantonese with English was transcribed manually due to the fact that neither Traditional nor Simplified Chinese subtitles included the English words/expressions uttered in the original dialogue. Each entry line also included two columns for subtitle in and out times and researcher comments. Results were colour-coded according to the marking or non-marking of multilingualism, as well as by specific translation strategy (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Screenshot of the Chinese-English-Spanish database.



Original	ZH	EN	ES	Timing	Film/TV serie:	Comments
最charm嘅人	最有魅力的人	I think you are the mos	Creo que eres muy	18:29.0	Sexy Central	The EN subtitl
而再高嘅level	而再高一个層次	an even more advance	Un nivel aún más a	0:02:50	Hong Kong W	In this case, th
著得casual啲	穿得比較隨意	so I'm usually in casual	me visto con ropa	0:03:55	Hong Kong W	The original EN

This study performed a manual comparative textual analysis to explain 'linguistic and textual structures and their relationship with the system' (**Nord, 1991: 1**), as only then can guidance be provided about the decisions 'which the translator has to make in a particular translation process' (ibid). Such a manual process was required due to the necessity to assess the full context were code-mixing or code-switching appeared. Only through context could this study define the adequacy and effect of specific translation strategies, especially when the data at hand was of a trilingual nature. Moreover, the section of Foreign Dialogue available in the Netflix English Timed Text Style Guide was used to comment some of the results.

Several sub-strategies inside marking and non-marking were detected for Source Language(s)-English and English-Spanish (**see Table 3**).

Table 3: Strategies and sub-strategies to deal with multilingualism in SL-EN and EN-ES subtitles.

SL-EN		**EN-ES**	
Strategies	**Sub-strategies**	**Strategies**	**Sub-strategies**
Marking	Brackets	Marking	Italics
	No subtitle		Quotation marks
Non-marking	Same wording	Non-marking	Spanglish
	Reformulation		
	Active omission		
Multilingual loss		-	

Results

SL-EN direct subtitles and EN-ES indirect subtitles

Findings point towards no subtitling guidelines for the treatment of Hongkonese multilingualism by the Netflix platform. From the 350 subtitle lines collected, fewer than 20% of Cantonese to English subtitles followed a marking strategy, while a great majority of over 80% followed a non-marking strategy. In English closed captions, the main marking strategy was the use of square brackets '[In English]' whenever the whole utterance was in such language (code switching). In the case of English subtitles, multilingualism was marked by not offering any subtitle during the whole

duration of the utterance. In the case of English to Spanish, there were fewer than 5% cases of active marking and over 95% of non-marked multilingualism.

Language combination	**Marking multilingualism**	**Non-marking**
TL-EN	17.7%	82.3%
EN-ES	2.57%	97.43%

Sub-strategies have been ordered top to bottom according to how much they were considered to retain multilingualism (**see Table 4**).

Table 4: Occurrence rate of strategies and sub-strategies.

SL-EN		**EN-ES**	
Strategies	**Sub-strategies**	**Strategies**	**Sub-strategies**
Marking	Brackets	Marking	Italics
	No subtitle		Quotation marks
Non-marking	Same wording	Non-marking	Spanglish
	Reformulation		
	Active omission		
Multilingual loss		-	

In the case of the pivot language, five sub-strategies were detected. The first, the active marking of multilingualism between brackets, was only detected in some Closed Captions (**see Figure 2**). However, it should be considered that the amount of English Closed Captions was lower than those of standard subtitles for the selected audiovisual creations (only Sexy Central and The Defected offered English CC).

Figure 2: Screenshot from Sexy Central (2019), chapter 1, 00:03:50, English CC.

The second, also including marking, made the subtitles disappear during full English utterances (**see Figure 3**). The most common marking strategy according to the data obtained is not providing English subtitles for the English utterances, with a total 12.2%.

Figure 3: Screenshot from The Midas Touch (2013) 00:06:15.
From left to right, Simplified Chinese, English, and Spanish subtitles.

In terms of non-marking, 'same wording' refers to cases where the same exact word or word combination was kept in the English translation. This non-marking strategy is the most respectful toward instances of multilingualism present in original dialogues. Reformulation refers to the cases where deviations took place, in either sentence structure, terminology or both, from the original (normally code-mixed) utterance. Active omission refers to cases where the subtitler decided to completely omit the English embedded in original dialogues. Active omission was the least common sub-strategy inside non-marking strategies.

The high number of non-marking results might be motivated by two main reasons. First, English has evolved in unique ways in the Hongkonese environment. Thus, English viewers from other regions might consider subtitles that include Hong Kong English as incorrect. This might cause the rephrasing or deletion of any Konglish originally present. Indeed, a tendency was detected where English subtitles would 'correct' Hong Kong English. For example, the sentence '你明知我最憎就係 social㗎啦' (*You clearly know that the thing I hate most is 'social*') was translated as 'you know how much I hate socializing' (**see Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Screenshot from Sexy Central (2019) 00:06:05, English CC.

On another occasion, a singular/plural usage difference between HK English and 'standard' English forced the subtitler to apply changes. The original dialogue was '我呢兩個月不停幫你搵 sponsor' (*I have been helping you find 'sponsor' non-stop these last two months*), while the English subtitle read: 'I've been looking for sponsors non-stop'.

Second, non-marking coincides with the simplification trends of subtitle creation, where space and time are scarce (Bogucki, 2004). Text reduction and simplification was detected in English and Spanish subtitles. Examples include KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) being translated as 'celebrities' and then as 'celebridades' in chapter 1 of *Sexy Central* or the abbreviation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) not being retained in Spanish in Chapter 2 of *Sexy Central*, to mention but a few. Also, certain technical words have been altered. In *Sexy Central,* the word 'hit rate' used in the original Cantonese, became 'I am not going to change who I am for clicks', and Spanish ensued with 'No cambiaré por los clics' (*I won't change for clicks*).

Due to this study involving indirect translations (English to Spanish), a proper multilingualism analysis cannot be performed, as the 'source' text (i.e., the English subtitle) is already monolingual. It is only possible to assess the treatment of the English subtitles by Spanish translators in order to analyse variation levels from the original dialogue or to how much multilingualism is the viewer exposed via indirect subtitles (if any). In the case of Spanish subtitles, only 18 subtitle lines included signs of English. The case of proper names of places, people and brands were excluded. Neither brackets nor omission of subtitles were deployed as marking strategies. In this case, italics and quotation marks were used to mark a third language being spoken, with a total of 5 and 2 appearances respectively. There were 11 non-marked cases where English words were kept in Spanish subtitles. This non-marking was possible due to the English

loanwords already present in Spanish countries, especially prevalent in Latin American variants. This inclusion only took place with terms that are commonly used or already incorporated in Spanish (i.e., selfie, show, cool, Youtuber). From these, 3 cases showed spelling adaptation (**e.g., see Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Screenshot from A Home with a View (2019) 00:40:21, English and Spanish.

Indirect translation seems to also be affecting the translation results, including calques, uncommon formatting, or the change of proper names. Sections of foreign languages should be marked with italics when present in Spanish texts. In a relevant number of cases, Spanish subtitles followed English formatting, not marking English content. Furthermore, English subtitles include translated proper names, which in turn might be considered as original names by indirect translators. In the film *Contra la Corriente*, a dog originally called Doudou (豆豆) becomes 'Beano' in English. Spanish subtitles used the English name, failing to attach meaning to it. Indirect translation also serves as a double sieve that further erases any traces of multilingualism left. To give an example, in the film *A Home with a View*, the word selfie (part of the original utterance) was kept in the English subtitles, and then discarded by the Spanish translator in favour of *foto* (picture). This might point to the possibility that the more intermediaries are included, the weaker the final presence of multilingualism in subtitles.

Constraints and compensation strategies

Díaz Cintas (**2011**) argued that multilingualism tends to be hidden during audiovisual translation practices, mainly due to technical reasons and limitations, and only scarcely due to deliberate decisions. In the case of the

Hongkonese creations analysed, the technical constraints involve the use of indirect translation, from Cantonese to English to Spanish, and the use of subtitles. The main linguistic constraints faced by translators were the appearance of interlanguage or code-mixing in the original dialogue, dialogues alternating Cantonese and English, and metalinguistic references, in that order of relevance.

Even explicit mentions to languages might become a possible constraint. For example, in the film *The Midas Touch* (2013), a Cantonese native speaker who now works as a police officer in Korea tells another Hongkonger to speak Cantonese. The Traditional Chinese subtitles read '說你的母語', translated as 'We can speak Cantonese' and 'Podemos hablar cantonés' (*We can speak Cantonese*) respectively. Referring to the Cantonese language in the monolingual subtitles has been successfully avoided in the case of Traditional Chinese, but it is not the case in English or Spanish.

Original utterance	咁講廣東話 (*Let's talk in Cantonese then*)
Traditional Chinese	說你的母語 (*talk in your mother tongue*)
English subtitles	We can speak Cantonese.
Spanish subtitles	Podemos hablar cantonés. (*We can speak Cantonese*)

Another example found in the film *Contra la Corriente* further exemplifies this loss. A man is trying to buy a music box which plays the Mandarin Chinese version of the *Happy Birthday* song. However, the Hong Kong store he visits only has the 'Cantonese' version. Then he replies, in Mandarin, that he wants the Mandarin Chinese one. The shop assistant replies in Cantonese: '這不就是中文嗎？祝你生日快樂…' The English subtitle is 'This is Chinese. Happy Birthday to You.'

Original utterance	呢個唔係中文呀？啊, 祝你生日快樂
Traditional Chinese	這不就是中文嗎？祝你生日快樂
English subtitles	This is Chinese. Happy Birthday to You.
Spanish subtitles	Esta es china. Feliz cumpleaños. (*This one is Chinese. Happy Birthday*)

When characters instantiate multilingualism through several languages or code-mixing, the contradiction of its disappearance creates *non sequitur* situations, and even though the use of foreign language(s) is a common comedic device in the case of Hong Kong audiovisual creations, monolingual subtitles cause a total loss of effect. In order to compensate for and avoid reception issues, it would be desirable to consistently reinforce multilingualism by marking it along the whole creation or to provide a new comedic effect altogether.

Moreover, when English texts play key roles through images, (i.e., billboards or close shots including text), this might bring multilingualism back to the spotlight. To promote viewer understanding, subtitles in full capitalization were provided in most cases, but no marking was made even when the original text was bilingual (**see Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Screenshot from Hong Kong West Side Stories (2018), Chapter 3, 00:03:06, English and Spanish.

Furthermore, when anglicisms were introduced in the Spanish subtitles, italics were used to highlight them (**see Figure 7**). This follows Netflix's requirement of 'unfamiliar foreign words and phrases should be italicized' (**Netflix Partner Help Centre, 2023b**). These two techniques can be promoted to help retain more traces of multilingualism.

Figure 7: Screenshot from The Midas Touch (2013), 00:56:12, English and Spanish.

In the case of the original dialogue, English was used to achieve a range of effects, including the portrayal of status and modernity, the hinting of cultural levels, the inclusion of humour, the naming of foreign terms or concepts, etc. These fictional characters were 'shifting between the often-opposing values of two (or three) different languages and cultures' (**Baldo, 2009: 130**). Most of these nuances are lost in translation, even more when one of the source languages coincides with the target language. With the aim of retaining a certain level of multilingualism, this article proposes compensation strategies such as a better character personalization in the case of English subtitles (slang, dialects, language variants), as well as the thoughtful (re)consideration by streaming services of the strategies proposed by previous scholars.

In the case of Spanish subtitles, the use of direct translation processes is highly encouraged if a relevant amount of multilingualism is to be conveyed via subtitles. Possible strategies include retaining anglicisms from the original dialogue (whenever possible), the inclusion of language codes ([En inglés] (*In English*), [En chino] (*In Chinese*)) along subtitle content, a better character personalisation or the addition of colours for specific languages. This strategy, originating from subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, can make multilingualism be visible at a glance. Related to this, Netflix could offer Closed Captions as the standard option being these more inclusive for viewers with special needs, instead of common subtitles, to further alleviate multilingualism loss. At present, there is only a small selection of English CC for all Cantonese content, and no CC for Spanish at all. Thus, the inclusion of Closed Caption to all pieces of multilingual audiovisual content could prove beneficial.

Conclusion

Code-mixing, and to a lesser extent code-switching, are prevalent in a selection of the Hongkonese audiovisual content present on Netflix. The multilingual reality portrayed in Hongkonese audiovisual creations seems to become diluted through Netflix subtitling processes. According to preliminary data, Netflix provides no special treatment for multilingual

content in the Cantonese-to-English and English-to-Spanish language combinations. These findings are in line with those of de Higes-Andino (2014), Zabalbeascoa (2020) and Savoldelli and Spiteri Miggiani (2023); multilingualism tends to become concealed in subtitled or dubbed films due to the constraints related to these translation modes. This issue might be further compounded by one of Netflix's regulations, which states that 'foreign dialogue should only be translated if the viewer was meant to understand it (i.e., if it was subtitled in the original version)' (**Netflix Partner Help Centre, 2023b**). Moreover, findings support previous empirical studies that have shown how omission and substitution 'are essential strategies within transcreation, localisation or adaptation, especially in AVT modes like dubbing and subtitling' **(Zabalbeascoa, 2020: 131**).

The subtitling processes dilute multilingualism not only through direct translation but even more so via indirect translation. As the problem of value is central to the economics of multilingualism, the value of languages is often determined by their economic utility (**Gramling, 2021**). This might explain why Cantonese is indirectly translated in the case of Spanish subtitles. Indirect translation, in this case with the English language as a pivot, has caused the almost total disappearance of code-mixing, code-switching and linguistic diversity in Spanish subtitles.

However, Cantonese-English code-mixing and code-switching are vital components of Hong Kong identity, as well as of the distinctiveness of Hongkonese audiovisual creations. From a sociolinguistic and psychological standpoint, code-mixing and code-switching have both noticeable and unnoticeable effects on listeners, influencing their construction of the bilingual other (**Yim & Clément, 2019: 3**). The same effects and nuances are most probably not reaching foreign viewers, thus affecting their understanding, reception, and enjoyment of Hongkonese TV series and films.

Two opposing forces seem to be in collision here: multilingualism on one side, and monolingualism on the other. The translator, even though acquainted with a plurilingual reality, is shackled down by the concept of translation as the shift from one pure source language to another, equally uncorrupted, target language. Code-mixing goes against the service that the subtitler is supposed to provide to 'monolingual' viewers. Doing the opposite, offering code-mixed subtitles, might even help reinforce the long-held view of *traduttore, traditore*. By challenging the current definition of translation and subtitle quality, they risk being dismissed from employment. Multilingual audiovisual creations not only challenge but also baffle translators, who would require mastering several languages to deal with one multilingual project.

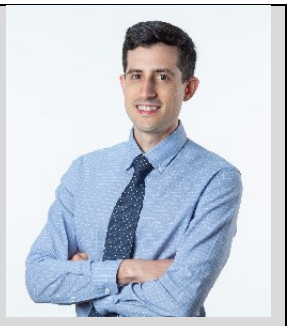
In conclusion, the concept of multilingualism seems to clash with the prevalent monolingual understanding of the translation product. Despite that, translation processes should be promoting multilingualism, not weakening its presence. We share O'Sullivan's view that subtitles should be 'planned from an early stage in the film's production' (2007: 81), especially if multilingualism is present. However, the combination of a constant supply of multimedia content that needs to be subtitled with minimal delay for maximum reach and profit and the fact that pieces of audiovisual media are subject to change until and even after release, makes such changes very difficult to implement.

Even though significant efforts are being recently put into accessibility measures (**Gouleti, 2023**), more attention should be also paid to catering to language variant users and multilingual audiences. Code-mixing subtitles, subtitles including a mix of two or more languages for any line of dialogue, could be considered as a tool to accurately portray the reality we live in. However, the use of code-mixing subtitles is expected to face rejection at first. Lee (**2021**) explored the reception of code-mixing subtitles in Singapore, finding that 'the majority of the respondents preferred subtitles to be expressed in standard language' (p. 2). Notwithstanding this fact, the author also found that there was 'a minority who preferred code-mixing subtitles' (ibid) to preserve national identity, hinting that there might be room for such an approach.

The present article assessed the treatment of multilingualism on the Netflix platform, finding several issues and exploring various translation strategies relevant to multilingualism. This piece of research is of an introductory nature and further explorations are required to accurately ascertain this complex phenomenon. Future studies could explore in more depth the translational treatment of Hongkonese multilingualism by compiling more extensive databases or by covering new topics, such as an exploration of subtitling decisions and processes via interviews and questionnaires to subtitlers, or the reception of Hongkonese multilingualism (specifically code-mixing and code-switching) via subtitles in English and Spanish-speaking markets.

Caveat

Luis Damián Moreno García, PhD, is an assistant professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, a Chinese-Spanish freelance translator and interpreter specialized in film subtitling and video game localization, and an English-Spanish sworn translator. His research interests lie in the fields of software localization, translation technologies and audiovisual translation involving Chinese, English and Spanish as linguistic combinations. His research has been published in journals such as Translation, Cognition & Behaviour, Translation Spaces and Babel, as well as in edited volumes by Routledge and Palgrave Macmillan.



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Critical Reflections on Universities, Publishing, and the Early Career Experience

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Abstract

This paper is a critical reflection on the changing relationship between university institutions, academic publishing, and young researchers. It emerges from a current project in assessing the role and development of Warwick University's research journals (and their editors), but also takes into account two recent Warwick Institute of Advanced Study seminars discussing the practical and strategic challenge of publishing for early career scholars and PhD students. While these seminars concerned publishing in general, and the question of career trajectories, this reflection paper takes into account the current shifts in publishing and our understanding of research as knowledge production more broadly. This reflection maintains that, in part provoked by digital media, the status of research knowledge vis-à-vis its traditional presentation in the discrete products of the 'article', and the book, has become unstable, and this instability has opened up a range of economic and systemic conditions of knowledge production that have long since been concealed. Current shifts thus offer younger scholars and early career researchers significant opportunities: this short paper sets out the initial framework for a current research project focussing on university publishing, then it refers to the two above seminars in order to conclude with some critical issues for academic practice, research and for early career scholars.

Keywords: university publishing; new university presses (NUPs); research journals; interdisciplinarity; young researchers

In the last two decades there has been a rise in 'NUP's, or 'new university presses'.[i] While in part stimulated by the 'academic-led' or the 'Library-led publishing' that has always taken place on any campus, a more strategic interest in publishing has emerged in response to digital media and new low-cost opportunities in reproduction, global internet-based dissemination, new collaborative-editorial arrangements, outsourcing and sub-contracting — especially of design and marketing — and the institutional partnership arrangements as part of an evolving Open Access economy (**Esposito, 2010; Stone, 2017; Adema & Stone, 2017; Taylor & Jensen, 2019**). However, university-based journals, are facing huge challenges with regard competition and sectoral over-production, along with a lack of individual academic participation in what remains a largely volunteer-populated sub-industry of the resource-limited university sector. Indeed, with large US publishing conglomerates owning most prestigious journals and established hierarchies and structuring markets and communities of readership, the general question on 'why journals succeed or fail' is now less important than specific strategic questions on how university-published journals can cultivate strong 'communities of practice' and therefore a strong rationale for self-determination in publishing the research they facilitate (and of other authors, and editors, and invested stakeholders) (**Keene et al., 2016**).

My original research project on this subject took the form of a scoping report for Warwick's Library, which is responsible for the University of Warwick Press, within an institutional 'central service' arrangement called Scholarly Communications (**Vickery, 2023a**). While the Press had been incorporated since 1964 (i.e., nationally registered as an independent company, a surprise to many), it had not been developed in ways comparable to many other university presses. Indeed, after uncovering a whole series of internal, if brief, past strategy briefings on the potential expansion of the Press, the institutional rationale, professional will, and economic argument for a developing Press, was not forthcoming. Apart of the obvious successful university-based presses — Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and UCL — there is no ready-to-hand dataset or evidence-base that would immediately convince a university executive management that a press might be a worthy endeavour or significant source of value. Of course, Oxford and Cambridge are hugely successful, both financially and in scholarly terms, but their corporate development has been historical, unique and hardly offer a model to be replicated. Moreover, since the 1960s (and the wave of 'new' universities in the UK) there have been numerous small university presses that have appeared and disappeared, or that simply remain a 'library-publishing' project, or embedded in 'academic-led' faculty facilities (**Lockett & Speicher, 2016**).

I will not reiterate my initial report. A doctored version of it appears (minus the internal deliberation on Warwick, strategy and staffing) on the Warwick research repository, the WRAP: (**Vickery, 2023b**). I will, however, extend its conclusions, by way of prefacing the current dilemmas and challenges of publishing for younger generation academics and research students.

Since the 1980s at least, we can find chronic political dilemmas provoked by the relation between *the private* (business, market, corporate and financial forces) and *the public* (infrastructural, institutions, social services, citizenship, common goods). Indeed, the rise of digital communications has played a central role in the dissolution of established political binaries of 'private/business/capital' versus 'public/social/welfare': the now pervasive demand for 'Open Access' is a good case study in how public funds can make their way into private capital. But universities, for the past few decades — even public universities in countries with few or no student fees, like many EU countries — are implicated in this binary dilemma as they are situated in the liminal space between the 'public-infrastructural' (of education and publicly-funded research), and the markets (for IP, scientific intelligence and expert validation) (**Cf., the AUP, 2020**, and its 'value' statement).

Governments the world over know that universities are central to the global economic forces of industrial innovation and knowledge flows, professionalisation and corporate capacity-building, but at the same time, they are historic institutions embedded in the socio-cultural, and colonial, evolution of specific places, cities, regions and countries. A fundamental issue, therefore, pertains to the institutional agency of universities — as actors or potential actors in the increasing global economy of knowledge and communications, how they can lead, innovate and, crucially, maintain a certain strategic grip on their own value production (their finance, capital, products and services)? One such way of doing this was to establish a university press — where knowledge can be consolidated, structured, articulated and disseminated, and in ways that strengthen the universities own autonomy and capacity build its research capabilities and institutional prestige (**Jisc, 2021; Taylor, 2019**). Among the many questions and issues that arise from this situation, on the question of publishing, we need to generate more research interest in the following issues: first, 'why get involved in publishing?' Second, 'what's the big rationale for more collaborative university-based publishing activity?', third, the question of skills and what skills set should we be mindful on developing; and fourth, how an institutional capacity-building of knowledge production would offer a different set of priorities than the ones we find ourselves with at present.

Firstly: why get involved in publishing? Why not leave it to publishers? Publishing remains a vibrant industry whose scale runs from small artisan and creative start-up enterprise to large corporate global business conglomerate. Yet, its ancient provenance is in the processes of script and parchment, writing and paper (or numbers, or code), and then of the rise of the scribe, scholar or academic as a professional 'producer of knowledge', and the skills inherent in addressing readers, of distributing the writing, of responding to readers — all of which remain the basic set of ancient capabilities that is publishing. Whatever size or scale the publishing operation, it will involve the same or similar skills-set in working with text and communicating knowledge, reviewing, entering into dialogue, facing questions, objections or alternate ways of understanding, then reviewing, and so forth. Today's digital media explosion and its emphasis on 'content' has only emphasised this fact — i.e., the notion of 'content' implies that knowledge is not indissolubly embedded in a given format, framework, media or set of presentational aesthetics. By implication, we need to recognise that *which is not* format, framework, media or presentation. For the purpose of this paper, this 'that' is simply knowledge — the stuff of research; the rationale for scholarly writing; the current ground on which countless wars and politics are being fought from language, religion and identity in Ukraine, to misinformation and fact-checking in political communications.

While the Sociology of Knowledge has a lot to say on how knowledge is constituted and institutionally mediated (**e.g., Collyer, 2018**), I want to remain focussed on the more practical terms of a discussion on why university-based publishing is both relevant to young scholars and students trying to figure out a career pathway — what knowledge is reproduced, distributed and how. Increasingly, academic careers are involved in the complex relation between the institutional mediation of knowledge and its global economic distribution: that is the nexus where significant value is generated, but that value is fungible (different for the author, publisher and university, and can be transmuted and exchanged).

From smartphone applications to interactive TV, most of a given population will possess a similar range of *knowledge-based skills*, which now have permeated education, research, business and professional development. YouTube is routinely reported as being around 60% 'training' or professional skills development (**Oberlo, 2023**). Whatever the veracity of this statistic, by implication we need a more systematic understanding on how research-based knowledge can be shaped and extend into global digital economy. Even now, 'publications' no longer refer just to 'articles' or books, but can be a range of more creative products, from reports, video symposia, podcasts, data sets, or a range of visualisations. Why university publishing is still fixated on books and

articles is more a matter of how institutions manage their own value production, and the processes of institutional validation, than simply the way media and communications are expanding.

A second implication is the 'political will' of institutions to engage and inhabit this new open vista of choices and the digital explosion with a strategic management aligned with the interests of education and knowledge, not just corporate capital. One of the reasons that individual academics, writers, labs and projects, often prefer non-university commercial publishers, is that they remain once-removed from the public political economy of university institutions, and are creatures of the market and can optimise certain kinds of value — distribution and bibliometrics, and so forth — and are also much more in synchronicity with technological innovation on reproduction and communications media. And also for these reasons, university institutions have effectively sub-contracted responsibility for the formatting, presentation and distribution of the knowledge and research data they produce, to such commercial publishers (increasingly corporate and US-owned (**Cf. Hagve, 2024**)). This may have been a pragmatic choice for the reasons above, but it will have consequences.

The consequences of the now-dominant global publishing economy of corporate conglomerates is not simply a matter of IP and other forms of capital (paid for by their national tax payers and converted into profit by US private business). It is institutional evolution, capability and agency. Universities have become weak in terms of leadership in the public sphere on matters of knowledge, scientific truth, the use of knowledge as 'evidence' in public policy development, and the knowledge-basis of social ethics or political decision making (**Cf. Pellegrini, et al, 2020**). Universities should be a central public agency for truth, development, standards, value and the range of 'social' and 'cultural' capabilities that today are intrinsically involved in knowledge production. This can involve designing, editing, evaluating, critical analysis, convening communities of learning, advocating for public literacy, providing portals for local, public and citizen-directed research, and a platform for local and regional industrial development, IP management and investment, data governance and marketing, liaison and petition of government and international bodies. Of course, universities in the UK do many of these things, but I doubt few will disagree that they are weak as 'agents' or voices in the national debates and dilemmas central to institutional development and governance in knowledge production.

These raise some big questions, notably on how university-published journals are markers for a certain level of capability lost to global corporate expansion of the publishing industry. Nonetheless, it is a capability that

can be regained, though perhaps commercial publishers will always provide a unique service and inhabit the global economy in a way universities cannot or do not want to. Either way, universities need to re-learn and facilitate the development of knowledge production and dissemination and all the socio-cultural and institutional implications of that, involving their researchers and scholars in managing new digital media opportunities strategically.

And to close this first matter —the emergence of digital media has opened a space of learning, research and practice, where developing the above can be done by activating existing digital skills-sets, and establishing digital methods and new formats for knowledge beyond the article and book. Knowledge can be re-defined in the process of knowledge production, and re-situated within the socio-cultural complex of institutional life — the university as a community of knowledge practices as well as knowledge cognition and involving academic community, social engagement, communication, and discussion and deliberation. As noted above, the publishing process is grounded on our ancient cultural capabilities of thinking, writing and communicating with readers; in practice, the activities of publishing identify a valuable professional skills-set: these include commissioning and liaising with authors and creatives, editing and working with text, designing and presenting, peer review and evaluation, production and dissemination, all of which are 'transferable' skills (usually enthusiastically embraced by universities).

Moving on to my second major issue: what's the big rationale for more collaborative university-based publishing activity? A confluence of policy developments on behalf of research funders has seen older concerns for public engagement, social benefit, stakeholders and value, emerge in the more recent demands for 'Open Access' (OA). While there are current economic contradictions with Open Access, a new ethic of the 'public availability' of research is evolving in some very productive directions. Of course, public availability does not mean a 'give away' or that copyrights, IP or contractually-enforced employee rights, will diminish. In fact, universities can reassert their rights to the products of their employees, which they currently do not (academic have hitherto been free to make private contracts with commercial publishers and receive royalties for work already paid for through salaried time). Nonetheless, it is hoped on behalf of Open Access advocates that the 'public' domain will expand along with university agency and institution-based knowledge production (**Cf. the new OIPA, 2023**).

Relatively new or early career researchers and scholars, are not simply looking at a future of work modelled on the 'lone scholar' sitting in deep thought and writing in their book-lined study. Academic labour might be

more modelled on a designer, theatre producer, entrepreneur or orchestral conductor. We should be looking at the following as part of our PhD student or early career scholar curriculum:

- Digital technologies and platforms, social media and digital products and the network of globally active research universities.
- Building Profile and prestige; rankings; bibliometrics.
- Knowledge Brand identity and strategy, design and communication
- Events and promotion (online and offline; institution-based and independent).
- Collaborative production models and current editorial and reviewing work.
- Student Participation, editorial training and professional industry experience.

My third big issue is the question of *skills*. The growing funding agency call for expanding the 'impact agenda' (and more recently, the national REF upgrading of the facility of university 'research culture' within research-active institutions), requires a more assertive approach. We will need to take seriously matters to do with the strategic branding and design of research projects, case study methodologies, mapping and assessing distribution networks or academic value chains, and generating digital media products themselves. A strategically-managed publication project could internally enable university postgraduate researchers and early career researchers a range of professional development and training opportunities, in research media, research networks and global profile-building.

Fourthly, is the way institutional capacity-building around knowledge production would offer a different set of priorities. University published research journals are small microcosms of a potentially new value spectrum: they are a high-value low-cost mechanism for meeting large institutional aims, such as in constructing communities of knowledge within and across universities, partnering with cultural institutions, laboratories or corporations, and gaining the attention of government policymakers (**Cf. Institute for Government 2019; Xu 2022**). And, as Journals are invested in specific regions of knowledge, commanding high concentration and interest from its constituencies, more could be made of both: we should invest some strategic thought in (a) the need for pedagogies of knowledge production and public agency-building; and (b) engage directly with audiences of reader engagement through events (e.g., author interviews; publication launches, talks). Journals could not

only contribute to making globally visible the university's research brand, but act as gateway to the university's industrial economy, for locating and connecting to its members, institutes, projects, products, services, and specialists. Following this, it may beneficially pursue international Knowledge Diplomacy — of diplomatic intervention in the global economy of knowledge production: when was the last time a university challenged the corporate domination of the global knowledge economy?

An obstacle to this, obviously, will be the internal social class system endemic to publishing, one symptom of which is the ignoring of neurodiversity (of the cognitive status of author, researcher, public and reader). In the 1970s it became more apparent (as conveyed by psychological sciences) that 'intelligence' was not singular or one standardised phenomenon — there were many forms of 'intelligence' (**Gardner, 1983**). In our own time we can talk about 'neurodiversity', while seeming jargon does indeed acknowledge a similar and evidently true complexity in human neuro-psychological life. Neurodiversity remains unacknowledged in large areas of specialist publishing, but this needs to happen if the social deficit of neurodiverse pedagogies in education and society more broadly is to be addressed. Indeed, the potential evolution of AI in publishing promises to facilitate a huge expansion of diversity in the digital production and reproduction of knowledge. Other issues that need attention (as identified by our current research project), are the workings of:

- Intelligibility, legibility and accessibility.
- The navigational pathways, gateways and interfaces of Open Access in practice.
- The Global South and global access.
- Diversity in readership, along with Intellectual Diversity in editorial teams (in production).

Finally, we need to think through publication in terms of knowledge production as a research project in itself. Diversity will demand interdisciplinarity when aiming for a restructuring of priorities around public value, and the capacity building of a university institution that must rediscover the real ontology of knowledge. Journals are an effective place to start, for reasons stated above, but are not often stand-alone enterprises. To maintain the editorial standards, rate of scheduled production, and reach of distribution, journal production is usually situated within a publishing enterprise or company staffed and endorsed by a whole range of university validation processes. Some specialist journals (largely in the hard sciences, but sometimes social sciences) are very lucrative. Yet the recent 'Serials Crisis' in journal publication and

subscription flagged up both the economics and 'political economy' of journal production: the Serials Crisis (which even has a Wikipedia page) revealed how lucrative journals were dependent on publicly-funded institutions whose vulnerability to routine increase in subscription costs was greater than anticipated. The supposed 'market' was not so much a market but a partially concealed form of public-subsidy. And this subsidy was playing a less than democratic role in determining the structure of knowledge production and distribution (within institutions, nationally and globally). There remains a lack of research on this phenomenon (**Cronk 2020**).

Nonetheless, the journal, as a knowledge-enterprise, remains dense with possibility. Its small scale allows for local, creative, engaged and multi-level participation, and emerging AI applications for editing, translation and marketing, will allow for even 'local' journals to find a global readership, however select.

Interdisciplinary Publishing and the Younger Researcher

While medical, life or hard science journals are very different from those in arts, humanities and social science (financially, legally, bibliometrically), the emerging scholar faces similar production and procedural matters in getting started, such as the building of a research profile, the conditions of submission, peer review, and recognition.

On the matter of publication as 'strategy', one basic consideration is most apparent — that publication is a psychologically intensive activity, demanding a concentrated investment of time in a skilfully managed process of production. 'Time management' is a fraught feature of all our lives, but now a research subject in itself. In terms of research publications, the rate and quality of the product will become eternal characteristics of our CVs and 'track-record', academic profile and thus candidature for promotion and institutional advancement. Fortunately, today's universities are more expansive and sometimes accepting of both eccentricity, difference and of differing career paths, even for research active staff; but even so, the global economy of knowledge remains traditional in its expectation of frequent high-quality articles and books. The precise value placed on any one product, is relative to a whole range of discipline-specific, institutional, discourse, or professional factors, but the general rule remains.

Any quick search on Amazon will find a whole range of books dedicated to enhancing the understanding, performance and planning of our work. These range from strategic management to popular 'psychology of work' books, the latter nonetheless sometimes distil some useful scientific research in organisational behaviour or neuro-psychology or relevant

fields. Most of us benefit in continually learning and relearning the social and behavioural features of effective working, not least in a continually changing economy. For my PhD students, I often recommend Cal Newport's popular Deep Work (2016) and Greg McKeown's Essentialism (2021), both of which extrapolate and synthesise wisdom from recent empirical research. They both iterate a salutary rationalisation of principles for disciplining our academic production in terms of time, as our most valuable resource; they advocate for a 'design' approach to time as a way of engaging in strategic prioritisation, and they take an analytical approach to optimising the value produced by our design.

While American neoliberalism (individualism, success-oriented, performance-based value, and so on) permeates both of the above books, they nonetheless serve as a salutary reminder of how publishing can be an effective framework of an evaluation for our own individual academic self-management. It is all too easy to mistake an involvement in research or even publishing 'projects' for actual material production. We can invest huge amounts of time in 'uneven' partnerships (where a co-author contributes little), or become involved in events or committees for prestigious organisations, or even 'field-building' a new sub-discipline. Academic life can be full of huge investments of time that are all fascinating and related to research, but, generate little in the way of substantive knowledge or tangible research publications. Our need for 'measurable tangible products' is, of course, a neoliberal phenomenon — involving the commodification of research, the proletarianisation of the academic researcher, the new public management (NPM) inculcation of the university institution and administration, infusing every aspect of scholarly life with American strategic management. Yet, as Marx would say, capitalism is fraught with contradiction, and contradiction is something we need to learn how to inhabit productively. In our academic economy, one contradiction is that the exploitative cycle of research production also allows for some genuine critical thought. And this is still supported with funding, if what is presented is more than just a few discrete published products but a sustained project on a trajectory within a compelling research programme (**Allmer 2017**). Devising a research programme is one of the great challenges of our academic era, as it extends from the formulation of compelling question to equally compelling outcomes and impact. And this demands the setting of priorities, goals or aims, that command your own conviction (a commitment to the exclusion of lots of other potentially more interesting activities). There are, effectively, two categories of publication — interesting studies, and the more dynamic research writing that generates a sense of knowledge being produced (and culminating in a measurable impact in the economy of knowledge production).

While scholarly life should involve a range of professional competencies – I personally believe that pedagogy is a public duty — the modern research university is not a transparent, equalitarian, or often even a coherent enterprise. It is a contradiction, in which the senior academic finds themselves with three part time jobs that do not add up to a coherent professional position (researcher, teacher, administrator). This is a professional landscape that needs to be continually negotiated, but more than that, it requires a strong sense of knowledge-based aims so that all the research and thinking that is inevitably invested in courses, curriculum and bureaucracy, are defined and re-emerge in terms of knowledge production. My most highly cited article emerged from a module I had to teach in a summer term, where anxiety on spending 'research time teaching' saw me writing about pedagogy, and the how the epistemologies generated by student learning could challenge the theoretical assumptions of the subject.

Student-facing work can be avoided by scholars who neglect this public duty (and the intellectual virtues it generates), but it offers a significant gateway to institutionalised knowledge and can result in all kinds of tangible publication (even if these are only scholarly blogs, reflective essays, policy briefings or presentations at professional gatherings). Pedagogy, taken seriously (i.e., theoretically) can refine the knowledge that is embryonic of research writing — your lexicon, methodologies, theory innovation, concept of truth, values and your normative claim on the world outside.

And I conclude by reflecting on the second of the valuable IAS seminars, engagingly entitled 'What the Heck IS Interdisciplinary Publishing, Anyway?'. And this takes us back to my initial insights into the potential of journal production, on the journal as pivotal media in the global knowledge economy. The concept of 'interdisciplinarity' is an unfinished project and indeterminate, ranging from the exploratory end of multi-disciplinarity to international transdisciplinarity, to what my own PhD supervisor once called 'a very British low-intensity cultural studies'. Essentially, 'the interdisciplinary' is less a stable framework than an ongoing epistemological project —the journal Exchanges demonstrates this, modelling knowledge as academic interchange, intellectual interaction, identifying boundaries, conventions, and conditions of meaning and value. This journal allows for both a normative (ethical, principled, position-taking) and pragmatic (production-oriented) approach for researchers facing the complex and politically compromised academic knowledge economy before us.

An interdisciplinary approach to this knowledge economy should be mission-focussed. This means forging an academic profile from your defined programme and knowledge production trajectory, being able to respond to compelling needs or issues, and with a strong theoretical justification for the validity, veracity and relevance of your work. This establishes your own autonomy intellectually and professionally, as you will not have a disciplinary foundation either providing a lot of certitudes, models or proven principles, or patronage from a discipline guru or 'top dog'. Real intellectual autonomy can attract interest, recognition, allowing a role in an academic ecosystem, around which can coalesce like-minded collaborators — an epistemic community that can create solidarity, support and a collaborative production. Interdisciplinarity does not have the traditional bases of academic community, and so can be alienating for the young researcher.

And so, from what I have said in the first few sections, this critical reflection can only conclude by reiterating the opportunities presented by new university-published journals. Emerging researchers and early career scholars have an opportunity to seize the future 'means of production' and found another interdisciplinary fulcrum of academic community, all the while being institutionally grounded, interconnected with pedagogy and engage with public value, in the form of a digitally mediated globally circulating journal.

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Endnotes

[i] The current project is called 'The Future of University-published research journals: local enterprise in the global knowledge economy'; it is led by Jonathan Vickery with Younggeon Byun and Gareth J Johnson of the Warwick Journals Editors' Group project (in collaboration with the University of Warwick Library, WICID, the Media Lab – funded by the Institute of Advanced Study: IAS). The IAS seminars, led by Gareth J Johnson, were, 'Publication Strategies: Approaches, Ideas and Advice' (Feb 29th 2024), co-arranged online with Warwick's European university partnership, EUTOPIA; and 'What the Heck IS Interdisciplinary Publishing, Anyway?' (Wed 6th March 2024), IAS seminar room [University of Warwick campus]. The panellists for the first were Alena Cicholewski (Oldenburg), Jonathan Vickery (Warwick), Kwasu Tembo (Lancaster) and Marcos Estrada (King Fahd); and the second, Ben Schaper (Oxford), Fillipo Cervelli (SOAS), Jonathan Vickery (Warwick), Pierre Botcherby (Warwick) and Rupert Gatti (Cambridge).

Postdisciplinary Knowledge, Edited by Tomas Pernecky

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Abstract

Where does postdisciplinarity stand in relation to the other forms of non-disciplinarity? What critiques of academia does it launch? Postdisciplinary Knowledge edited by Tomas Pernecky, aims to theorise postdisciplinarity as a rebellious and subversive movement. This article reviews this work with the aim of finding out what makes postdisciplinarity unique and whether there is a need for it? It also provides an evaluative description of the individual chapters of the book. I conclude that the input of postdisciplinarity is a necessary contribution to discussions surrounding the nature of academia and the university.

Keywords: postdisciplinarity; disciplines; academia; universities; knowledge

There are an increasing number of non-disciplinarities: interdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity, transdisciplinarity etc. Therefore, an edited book that aims to theorise a movement called postdisciplinarity (I call it a movement because it is not restricted by disciplines or specific combinations of disciplines) begs the questions; is there a need for it? How is postdisciplinarity different from the other non-disciplinarities? *Postdisciplinary Knowledge* edited by Tomas Pernecky (**2019**) is a collection of essays that seem to do one thing: rebel against disciplinary conventions, rebel against the state of Higher Education across the globe. Because of postdisciplinarity's subversive, almost chaotic, boundary-defying approach to research, the essays come across as a bit disparate. Perhaps this is precisely the point: the collection aims to resist against academic norm. In the introduction, Pernecky introduces postdisciplinarity: it comes across as anarchic enterprise. It has no axioms, no rules, no prescriptions. It shares with transdisciplinarity, among other non-disciplinarities, a desire to break disciplinary barriers, but unlike them comes with no guidance on how research should be done. This is in contrast to Nicolescu's (**2006**) transdisciplinary axioms which provide a framework for understanding the world. Pernecky suggests that in postdisciplinarity there are no paradigms like disciplinary standards and conventions or transdisciplinarity's axioms. Postdisciplinarity states that research should be completely free of them. This means, for example, no barriers regarding what separates the natural sciences from the social sciences and also the arts and humanities. Research should not be driven by artificial constructs like disciplines and their 'rules'.

Overall, I think the book offers hope in the way it reconceives the academic project in light of being anti-disciplinary. It offers substantial progress in this area through theorising the art of rebelling against academic norms. The chapters, however, can come across as a bit disparate and disconnected. Maybe this is the point, the book is not meant to be prescriptive. The book is rebellious in spirit through offering multiple perspectives rather than an overarching argument. It practices what it says it does. I believe the book should still receive credit for its largely successful attempt at destabilising academic disciplines. To elaborate further, one needs an insight into the chapters in the collection.

The first chapter by Barbara Lekatsas is called 'At the periphery lies the centre: Women artists and the legacy of surrealism: the case of Ithell Colquhon and Camille Billops.' Accordingly, the postdisciplinary researcher is seen as an artist, someone who challenges *genre*. Particularly, surrealism is chosen as a movement because of its expressive rather than representative qualities. Social justice also plays a role, as seen through the discussion of female and non-white artists. This fits with the rebellious nature of the collection.

In the second chapter 'Undisciplined Thinking: Disobedience and the Nature of Design', Welby Ings discusses his supervision of over 80 PhD and Master's candidates. He suggests that his students conducted projects that did not adhere to the discipline-based structure of the university, Ings focuses on several projects he supervised that did this. Ings also suggests that the growing importance assigned to professional training in universities has led to more ways of non-disciplinary thinking. Outside the academic bubble, disciplines might not be as useful as initially appears. Furthermore, structuring universities around faculties and subjects, the traditional way of doing so, no longer seems to fit with posdisciplinary resistance to disciplinarity.

The third chapter 'Transcape Theory for Designing the Invisible' by Chikahiro Hanamura focuses on landscape design. This looks at the subject-object interaction in creating landscapes and how we can design the world accordingly. A landscape is a space in which we participate or view, it is the connections between the different elements of human and natural geography. This initially seems the least relevant chapter in the collection to the *theory* of post disciplinarity, but its focus on the change we can bring about in landscapes still has the effect of challenging norms: a landscape is not seen as a static entity which we cannot change. Despite this, I would have liked to have seen this and potentially other relations to postdisciplinarity made more explicit, particularly I think it would have been suitable to discuss the postdisciplinary nature of the landscape in more direct terms. Yet, one could take the position that the whole point of postdisciplinarity is not to be prescriptive in terms of what one can write about.

Chapter four 'Desire as a Way of Knowing' by Ana Maria Munar and Lonni Hall aims to liberate us from a negative conception of desire: it should be seen as a good aspect of research and we should not cage it in. The chapter takes an unconventional form in terms of being a set of meditations on the thought of Esther Perel, Helen Fisher, Martha Nussbaum and Gilles Deleuze. An experimental format like this is in harmony with the discussed anti-convention motivations of postdisciplinarity. Postdisicplinarity, in my opinion, is embodied by this innovative take on the traditional academic genre. Resisting against genres, like the research article and monograph, is a core of postdisciplinarity.

The next chapter 'White Leaves in Front of My Window' by Ninette Rothmüller and Fraser Stables again takes an experimental form which challenges poetic and academic norms. In fact, it may not even be called poetry in a sense as Rothmüller suggests. It could alternatively be described as pathing a text in which one chooses which shortcuts to take. The inclusion of citations in a semi-literary work also seems experimental.

Overall, the chapter talks about cages and being outside of cages which fits with the theme of disciplines being restrictive 'prisons'.

Chapter six is called 'Knowledge as Play: Centring on Matter' and takes the form of a dialogue between Tomas Pernecky and Lois Holzman. The aim here is conceive of research, if it should be termed as that, as play. By introducing play, the dialogue evokes the creative and serendipitous nature of research. It argues research should be 'fun' and 'inventive'. Doing something because it pleases our imagination and without fear of making mistakes or being blocked by institutional structures is the way to go when it comes to scholarship. Again, it goes without saying, that viewing research as play rather than as 'work' is something that challenges the traditional mode of thought in academia. Much like many of the theories advocated in this book, the dialogue advocates that we should not be setting artificial barriers that prevent us from experimenting.

Chapter seven by Frith Walker is called 'Do, learn, Do' which suggests we should move beyond a discipline, or project-based approach, to a place-based approach in which we think about places that can be created to make a happy and healthy population. Emotions also play a role in this approach; they are to be ignored at one and the community's peril; places shape us and we shape them. There is a relationship between humans and their places. Walker suggests that the act of doing (e.g. making) is pivotal in this place-based process, but we also need to reflect on what we have (e.g. knowledge, skills or even places themself) so we can learn. By doing, I refer to the act of learning by experience, whether this is seen in terms of developing skills useful for place-making or alternatively building on the knowledge we have iteratively through discovery. This 'doing' idea could also fit with research more generally. We do research then learn from it and then do more research.

The following chapter 'DiY (do-it-yourself) postdisciplinary knowledge' by Emit Snake-Beings and Andrew Gibbons uses, as the title suggests, DiY analogies to describe the postdisciplinary process. DiY is the name given to creating or repairing things on your own without relying on another person's expertise. In DiY and research the maker should have a relationship with the object (i.e. research). Furthermore, one can explore through DiY. There is not necessarily a set of instructions, it can be free-flowing. Next, the DiY-maker can transgress boundaries, the making of the product is not defined by strictly adherence to one 'discipline', DiY requires a diverse set of skills.

Chapter nine 'Q Methodology: William Stephenson and Postdisciplinarity' is by Claire Gauzente and James M. M. Good. As the title suggests, it relates Q Methodology to postdisciplinarity. Q Methodology respects a diverse amount of viewpoints and embraces multimedia: these can be seen as postdisciplinary characteristics. Yet, I found this chapter a bit contrary to what had been argued previously. Suggesting a methodology, regardless of its inclusivity, seems contrarian to the anarchic, rebellious, play, advocated in the previous chapters.

'On Walls and Webs: Contemplating Postdisciplinarity' by Kellee Cation and David J.Hill, the tenth chapter, argues for viewing the postdisciplinarian as weaver of webs and a generalist. They may anchor themselves upon specific points of knowledge, but instead of examining these points in-depth, they should instead try to connect them to get a better understanding of the web.

Chapter eleven, 'The University as a Maquila: Whose voices, Whose Ideas, Whose Knowledges?' is a series of dialogues that involve Marlene M. Ferreras, Duane R. Bidwell and Tomas Pernecky. Provocatively, Ferreras suggests doctoral education is like a Mexican *Maquila* or factory. This is because it prioritises low wages, high expectations, hitting standards and with no guarantee of a job at the end. This assembly-line view of doctoral education and universities is perhaps one of the most rebellious chapters in the book due to its strong use of provocative language. The university is compared to a production line in which one produces work under high pressure and with very little reward for doing so. Academia, according to this view, is like a factory churning out goods.

Chapter twelve is 'After the Love has Gone: Generalists, Specialists and Post-Professional Healthcare' by David A. Nicholls. It imagines a future, due to growing trends in healthcare, where the system of care might become post-professional, which means there are no traditional orthodox professionals controlling and deploying care. Overall, this can be placed in the context of generality, which as discussed in the previous chapters is a hallmark of postdisciplinarity.

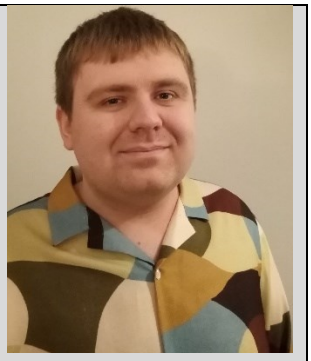
The final chapter is called 'Postdisciplinarity: Imagine the Future, Think the Unthinkable' and it is by Frédéric Darbellay. This chapter ties together some of the knots of the previous chapters and offers a more explicit, perhaps to-the-point, explanation of postdisciplinarity. Despite this, it does not disregard the previous chapters. It rather effectively summarises the ideas behind postdisciplinarity as explored throughout the collection.

With the summary of the chapters in mind, does *Postdisciplinary Knowledge* aim to do what it conventionally ought to do, which is to articulate postdisciplinarity as a movement? While the chapters of the

book vary in topic, there is indeed a current of disobedience and an expression of rebelliousness, perhaps even revolution. Yet, if it were to articulate a single point or have a central argument then it would not be embracing the anarchic play of postdisciplinarity. In other words, the theme of not having a theme is what makes the book postdisciplinary in spirit and essence.

To end this review, I want to go back to the questions I asked at the beginning. Is there a need for this work and does it differentiate postdisciplinarity from the other non-disciplinarities? In terms of the second question, postdisciplinarity seems to be the choice of the rebel who still has not surrendered. Inter, trans, cross-disciplinarities, etc. have all been institutionalised to an extent. Postdisciplinarity instead resists institutionalisation, it keeps its rebellious spirit. This leads to the first question, is there a need for this book? There is nothing wrong with a rebellious spirit and this book certainly entertains this. Its unique perspective can be used as a way to start a dialogue on the structure of academia and universities, which seem all too slow-moving at the minute.

Liam Greenacre is a transdisciplinary researcher and PhD student at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. He is interested in transgressing disciplinary conventions and looks at the nature of the social world through a lens that does not adhere rigidly to disciplines. His research interests are across the natural sciences, social sciences and the arts and humanities. He has presented at several international conferences, including the *WFSF XXV World Conference* and the *Eighteenth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences.*



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