

Christene d'Anca. Review: *Translation Narratives in Englishes of Exile*. Edited by Florescu, Catalina Florina and Sheng-mei Ma.¹ New York: Lexington Books, 2017. Hardcover, 263 pp.

What does it mean to speak a language? How does language forge identity? Does speaking the language of the land where you live automatically make it home? These are the predominant questions posed by *Translation Narratives in Englishes of Exile*, coedited by Catalina Florina Florescu and Sheng-mei Ma. However, as the multiple texts within the collection center on approaching these questions, among many others, from myriad perspectives, they evince the fact that there are no definite answers. The prologue and introduction set the stage for this inconclusiveness as Margarita Georgieva and Catalina Florina Florescu outline the various ways in which a language and culture are acquired, internalized and regurgitated in unequal quantities. The incongruence between input and output remains a recurring theme throughout the subsequent chapters.

The disparate ways in which these topics are approached is reflected in the organization of the book that follows a circular pattern; the thirteen chapters mirror each other from opposing ends, culminating in chapter seven that in a sense offers a consolation for all the unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions posed by each of the other parts. However, this is not immediately made apparent since most people would read the book from beginning to end, only to find the embedded similarities between the two sides of the book as they make their way past the halfway mark. Whether or not this was intentional, or simply a happy coincidence, it adds another layer to overarching narrative, providing the reader with another method for considering the text.

Immigration is often associated with financial betterment, and the first two chapters overtly discuss the economics of migration and the ways in which globalization has effected transnationalism. Tim Gauthier's "Mobility, Virility, and Security in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*" focuses on the endeavors of Kunzru's protagonist, Arjun Mehta, as he strives to become successful in America in order to build a semblance of self. Arjun is juxtaposed with others who have fought their own battles and, while migration provides many solutions, success becomes a pluralized, indefinable concept that takes on a different meaning for each individual. Oana Chivoiu in "Mothers Without Frontiers and Their Affective Maps in *The Flower Bridge* by Thomas Ciulei and *Code Unknown* by Michael Haneke" decentralizes the individual and approaches the economics of migration from the perspective of the larger group's needs. Migration in these instances is not concerned with finding success abroad, but rather with providing the means of achieving it at home. Mothers strive to find employment across the globe to send money back home, however, spending their lives away from the people they seek to help question where their home is. The numerous examples Chivoiu provides in support of the two major pieces she studies illustrate the ubiquity of the practice and how globalization has facilitated the unraveling of the family unit so that it may span entire continents. These mother's values are intrinsically tied into their absence and the benefits others reap through it and ultimately, through migration, "maternal duty is reduced to an economic expression." While Gauthier's piece ends optimistically with the idea that a constantly migrating home can still provide a sense of self if such an existence is embraced, Chivoiu's message is more bittersweet, underscoring the necessity of such an existence when few other options present themselves.

Finding one's home and deciding whether being a citizen of the world can bring satisfaction are again revisited in the last two chapters of the book. In "[F]oreigners, Foreigners, My God' Language and Cinema in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*," Yanoula Athanassakis follows the exploits of Rhys's main character, Sasha, as she attempts making sense of her environment that is removed from her native Caribbean, but also England, the land that she had come to call home. As she meanders through France the realization slowly sinks in that none and all of these places are her home and, like the women in Chivoiu's chapter, her presence is marked by her absence, to which she acquiesces, but never fully accepts. The last chapter, Catalina Florina Florescu's "Mise en abîme with My Immigrants," mirrors Gauthier's first chapter with its optimistic outlook of multiple identities. Through the use of nine sources that encapsulate a variety of mediums, Florescu traces her own process of acclimating to America while exploring what it means to be an American. She questions if one can ever fully shed their heritage and language, or if a native language will constantly aggressively assert its presence in the face of the newly acquired tongue, forever marking a person.

This same idea lingers into the next group of chapters, three and eleven. In Da Zheng's "*Flowering Exile: Chinese Diaspora and Women's Autobiography*," language is used to disturb the family dynamic as Dymia Hsiung's story of her struggle to situate and find a language for her writing is told. She must forge a space for herself while living in the shadows her husband's far more lucrative writing career. Perhaps ironically, by remaining in the shadows and refusing to acquiesce to standard writing conventions that would have her use English, a dominant language, as a preferred medium of communication, she garners the most success. She relies on her command of Chinese to relate her history despite living in England, because she understands that her fluent Chinese will render her message far more clearly than her fragmented English ever could. Additionally, by resorting to her native language, through its authenticity, she frees herself from having to compete with other well-established authors that would cast her writing into an inferior sphere. Conversely, "Cracked Spaces in-between Brackets: An Analysis of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and Trinh Minh-ha's *elsewhere, within here*," by Winnie Khaw, interrogates the space Korean and Japanese writing occupies and the way it has been marginalized. However, unlike Hsiung, Cha and Minh-ha make full use of their acquired English to examine the very American culture in which they have become entrenched and the ways people of other heritages, specifically Asian American female writers, are treated. Each of these authors provides a distinct understanding of their individual experiences: Cha provides a tragic history, Hsiung offers a candid, yet joyful retelling of her past, while Minh-ha provides a positive outlook for the future of women in her position. When read together they narrate the past, present, and future of Asian women's positions as writers in Anglo-speaking worlds.

When language acts as a marker for one's identity, it can also act as an eraser. Sanaz Fotouhi in her "Diasporic Iranian Writing in English" explores what happens when writers, especially women, become aware of the barriers they face as they straddle two languages and can easily become silenced from both sides. The writers she studies work under the assumption that one language will always dominate and subsume another and, in the process, create texts that blend their native experiences into their acquired, dominating language. Few Iranians would read narratives in their native language about immigrating to other lands and just as few English speakers would be inclined, or able, to read about these experiences in anything but English. By superimposing their diasporic adventures from an Iranian point of view onto the English tongue,

the authors' efforts negate those who would silence them and simultaneously produce a relatable experience for their readers. Hsin-Ju Kuo provides a similar, albeit unique, argument in "Strike Their Roots into Unaccustomed Earth' in an Era of New Genetics: Diasporic Identity Politics and Genealogy Re-Considered in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Unaccustomed Earth.'" She acknowledges assimilation as a burden that all too often becomes embraced by immigrants as they fade out of their original existence in order to fit into their new lands. However, by tracing genealogies, she argues that those who have successfully assimilated have carried with them the seeds of their homelands, blurring the lines between "sameness and difference." With each successive generation that has replanted itself away from home, it has in the process carried with it its original roots. Thus even as a person may live and function perfectly well in an English speaking world, their heritage remains embedded within them, in much the same way as Fotouhi's authors were able to use English to keep their native Iranian identity alive.

In this sense, translation is not restricted solely to language, but also to culture, and in my own chapter in this book, "Cultural Hermeneutics: Andrei Codrescu as 'The Romanian who translated himself into an American,'" I interrogate what it means to adopt a language while I argue that it is not sufficient for assimilation. After decades of residing in various locations throughout America, Codrescu continues to struggle with finding a sense of belonging, only to find himself embracing his dual identity. He uses his command of English not only to explore his place in America, but to constantly return to his absence from Romania, drawing the conclusion that these two facets of existence are inextricable and, much like the authors discussed by Kuo and Fotouhi, the more American Codrescu becomes, the more his ties to his heritage are strengthened. Similarly, chapter nine, Adedoyin Ogunfeyimi's "Disabling the Binaries, Enabling the Boundaries: Home-Abroad Divide in European Migration Crisis," offers an opposing experience as he explores what it means to be home and whether the concept is a psychological construct. Through a study of the migration of refugees from several nations he argues that "home" is a myth and, in order to form any understanding of it, we need to move away from a fixed-point narrative. Displacement unmasks the "fluidity" of what home means: refugees simultaneously attempt to shape new homes for themselves in places often hostile to them, while clinging to homelands that originally rendered them just as devoid of peace and led them to migrate in the first place. The idealized notion of what it means to be "home" is constantly at odds with their reality, essentially leaving them to feel as if they live in a tragic homeless limbo. Just as Codrescu, through his displacement, learned to accept his membership within two cultures, Ogunfeyimi's case studies could only imagine such an integration that was often far from their actual reality.

The following chapter pairing explores the spectrum of assimilation and to what extent different immigrants want, or even could integrate into a new culture. In Sheng-mei Ma's "The Forked Tongue of Chinese-English Translation at MSU (Mandarin Speaking University?) circa 2015," he discusses his own encounter with a recent event that forced him to reexamine the relationship foreign Chinese students have with their American environment. As the number of Chinese students rose, it became more difficult to marginalize them, leading those who were opposed to their migration to resort to other more overt tactics for causing discomfort. However, Chinese immigrants were no longer in the vast minority, thus they sought to reclaim their once marginalized voices specifically by rendering their language untranslatable and thus inconsumable by the Western world. During an exhibition meant to depict Chinese culture

according to the stereotypes designed in the west, by transposing their traditional written characters and inverting the meanings of the titles meant to introduce the exhibits, they demonstrated the “topsy-turvy” nature of what was being shown. It was no longer read as the art of their culture, but their culture transformed into art and thus removed from reality. Whether or not this was intentional, as the script remained a mystery for English speakers, those with knowledge of the Chinese language could interpret such a reading of the exhibit and understand the finer nuances of the Chinese existence in America in which assimilation has not worked out. Ma ends his piece reminding his audience that in order for English and Chinese speakers to ever understand each other and make such an exhibition successful more work needs to be done on both ends. The author and her characters in Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru’s “Translational Perspectives on Romanian Gender and Ethnic Diversity in Ioana Baetica Morpurgo’s *Imigranții*” also preserve their identity in a foreign land through writing in their native language, Romanian. However, unlike those studied by Ma who encountered a lot of friction when they attempted to maintain a semblance of their home-life abroad, Morpurgo’s five characters view migration as a source of comfort as it confirms that their problems are universal. In other words, their immigrant experiences offer them a mode of dealing with similar problems they would be faced with at home. A change in location only means finding new coping mechanisms, but no actual solutions. Further, she can shed light on these very problems in Romania and the way in which the country also deals, or does not deal, with marginalized citizens within its borders, even when they are natives in the land. Unlike Fotouhi’s chapter that argued in favor of using one’s acquired language to relate one’s foreign history, Alexandru studies those who have successfully assimilated precisely by resisting this urge and made the best of their situations in a new world by looking at their lives through the lens and language of the past.

People migrate across the world for a multitude of motives, whether they are taking advantage of advancements in globalization, seeking to better themselves educationally, or to find a safe place for themselves and their families, among other reasons. Each person during their transition encounters similar hurdles that share the common themes of language learning and identity forging. Arguably these two ideas are intricately tied into each other, as the former often reflects upon the latter. Additionally, language can be used as a source of power, and conversely, to render those unable to make use of it powerless.

Nevertheless, despite these struggles, at the center of the collection, Chapter seven, Mary Louisa Cappelli’s “*El Mundo Zurdo* de Gloria Anzaldúa: Healing *Sueños* of *Nepantlera* Activism,” brings the collection to its culminating conclusion, asserting the importance of keeping “the torch of our ancestors alive in our memory to inform our present-day processes.” Those who have migrated to Anglophone countries speak English in various degrees, and there are innumerable obstacles still ahead for those who wish to try, but by sharing stories to which such people can relate, their journey can perhaps become easier to bear. Relating one’s narrative becomes a cathartic activity for the teller, and a well of encouragement for the reader, as well as a form of activism created to bring awareness of these experiences to those who may not understand what their friends, neighbors, and colleagues have gone and are continuously going through. In short, through the interweaving the themes of language and identity tracing the progress of countless real and fictional characters, the thirteen chapters of *Translation Narratives in Englishes of Exile* offer an optimistic outlook for the future of migratory peoples, so long as they persevere and

draw inspiration from others who have walked the same paths. When those who are Othered are silenced, through writing and narrative the silence is broken.

ⁱ Catalina Florina Florescu was born in Romania. She earned her BA from the University of Bucharest, Romania in Romanian Literature, and an MA and PhD in Comparative Literature from Purdue University. She is currently a professor at Pace University. Her other publications include *Transacting Sites of the Liminal Bodily Spaces*; *Disjointed Perspectives on Motherhood*; *Inventing Me/ Exerciții de re-trăit*; and *The Night I Burned My Origami Skin*; among numerous others, including a collection of plays that have been performed internationally. For more information about the myriad courses she has taught, the awards she has received, and her other publications and on-going projects, follow her on LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/drflorescu.

Sheng-mei Ma is a professor of English at Michigan State University, specializing in Asian Diaspora/ Asian American Studies and East-West Comparative Studies. His single authored books in English are *Sinophone-Anglophone Cultural Duet*; *The Last Isle: Contemporary Film, Culture and Trauma in Global Taiwan*; *Alienglish: Eastern Diasporas in Anglo-American Tongues*; *Asian Diaspora and East-West Modernity*; *Diaspora Literature and Visual Culture: Asia in Flight*; *East-West Montage: Reflections on Asian Bodies in Diaspora*; *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*; and *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. He also co-edited three other collections, produced a Chinese poetry collection titled *Sanshi zuoyou* (Thirty, Left and Right), and numerous articles and book chapters on film, literature, and global culture.