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Translating social science

Good versus bad utopianism

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Dedicated to the memory of Daniel Simeoni

Insufficient attention has been paid in Translation Studies to the challenges particular to translating social scientific texts. Of the few who have taken up the topic, Immanuel Wallerstein has argued that one of the distinguishing characteristics of social scientific texts is that they traffic in concepts. Wallerstein wants the translation of social science to further the possibility of a universal conversation in the social sciences. I argue that a universal conversation in the social sciences is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, this article proposes that translating social science can contribute to conceptual clarification and elaboration. In this way, the translation may complement and further the flowering of the 'original' concept. The essay concludes with an extended example — how 'bewilderment' might be translated into Spanish.

Keywords: translation, social science, critique of universalism

Always melancholic, frantic, manic... man is always marching towards failure; human tasks are unrealizable. (Ortega y Gasset)

In Translation Studies, a distinction is conventionally made between literary and non-literary translation. Non-literary translation generally includes technical manuals, rulebooks, scientific articles, medical information, and other 'pragmatic' texts that draw on standardized terminology. Literary translation would be of literature and poetry. The distinction is operative in organizing institutions, professional associations, conferences, and curricula. It reflects a common sense.

Whither social science? In my experience, social science and social theory are generally discussed in Translation Studies as if they belonged to the category of literary translation. But is there anything irreducible about social science or social theory which suggests they should be translated according to another logic?¹

Should there be an autonomous field of Translation Studies to examine these questions of translation in the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Sozialwissenschaften*? If so, how can one theorize the translation of social science texts without treating them as if they were literary texts? What is the job of translating them? Furthermore, should a translator differentiate her approach based on the paradigm from which the source text emerges? In other words, would one theory of translation satisfy the requirements of texts from all disciplines, schools, intellectual movements, including postmodernist researchers, positivist-empiricist investigators, interpretive ethnographers, Chicago School economists, Latin American political scientists, Foucaultian historians, statisticians — all social scientists in good standing? Would one translation strategy work when these texts are predicated on competing notions of language, truth, objectivity, value-neutrality, universality, and so on? Does one size fit all?

The first question or challenge is to make a distinction among kinds of translation. The second challenge is to consider what version or versions of ‘social science’ will be a platform to theorize what is required to translate the social sciences. Considering social scientific thinking on the level of method, theory, and application may be an opportunity to conceptualize and emphasize the potentially interdisciplinary character of Translation Studies.²

Immanuel Wallerstein (1981) argues that what distinguishes social scientific texts is that they communicate through concepts. This implies a set of problems unique to translating social science. For him, concepts are shared, but not universally shared. “The concepts are more or less clearly defined and applied by the author”. He lays down a set of ground rules for the translator:

1. Search for the standard translation, if one exists. By standard translation, I mean the accepted equivalent in the two languages of a technical team.
2. If the best translation seems either to be anachronistic or to miss a nuance, the solution is to add the original in parentheses.
3. If a concept is standard in one language but not (or not yet) in the other, either do not translate, or indicate to the reader the existence of this intellectual difference between the two linguistic cultures.
4. If a term which does have a standard translation is used by the author in a markedly different way which is understandable in the original context, do not translate with the standard term.
5. If a term has different cognitive ranges in the two languages, and the concept is central to the article, the translator ought to indicate that, either by a note or by a parenthetical use of the original term.

6. If a term has different cognitive ranges *within* both languages but parallel between the languages, the safest bet is literal translation, preferably by use of cognates if they exist.
7. When an author seeks to undo a conceptual confusion, the translator must not restore it.

I like these guidelines in many ways, and they are useful as rules of thumb. Wallerstein is particularly helpful in drawing our attention to the centrality of concepts in the social sciences. Their exchange rate with the concept-currencies of other nations must be monitored closely or devaluation, confusion, or some other form of chaos will result. Yet Wallerstein's rules are highly normative. The prescriptive tone makes for a tough row to hoe given the wide range of opportunities and situations for translating social science. Trying to make the translator of social science texts into a rule-follower of these principles, moreover, may make the unevenness of the interlinguistic and multidisciplinary terrain appear more manageable than it is. In this vein, I worry that the rules make social science, and language, look a bit wooden. Fidelity is due to the intentions of the author, the source language, the target language, and their interrelation as they already exist, or are imagined to exist. In that sense, Wallerstein's prescriptive theory of translation has a distinctly conservative cast. He cautions the translator against innovation ("search for the standard translation"; "if a concept is ... not yet [standard] in the other, either do not translate, or indicate to the reader the existence of this intellectual difference between the two linguistic cultures"; "retranslation [of cited texts] should only be a very last resort"). Consequently, Wallerstein sees the translator as following, staying within, or attempting not to venture out of given conventions, practices, and traditions.³

Now, it is plainly true that some, even most, social scientists see their texts as merely conveying information. For them, language is instrument. These social scientists may imagine themselves to be participating in a universal conversation, or at the very least a conversation that aspires to universality. (I will return to this question of universality below.) Wallerstein's guidelines seem to apply well to these kinds of social scientific texts.

Our first caution, our first indication that we may be on the wrong track comes from Walter Benjamin. In an opening gambit, Benjamin once remarked that the hallmark of bad translation is that it conveys information ([1923] 1968). Wallerstein might be more right if all social scientists were involved in — if the only thing they were involved in — was exchanging concepts — as if they were in commerce, where concepts are the coin of the realm. However, good social scientists do not so much traffic in concepts as seek their elaboration. The concepts themselves are not fixed.

For instance, in cultural anthropology, my discipline, the practice of interlingual and sometimes intralingual conceptual clarification has been a practice in writing ethnography at least since Franz Boas. To take just one contemporary example among countless others, the anthropologist Roberto DaMatta wrote a lovely essay (1993) in his book *Conta de Mentiroso* called “Antropologia da Saudade”, focusing on the use of that melancholic concept in Brazil. DaMatta sees saudade as a performative that breathes through collective everyday life, modulating its tempo, establishing an internal and external rhythm. His text unfolds as a theoretical excursion, but also as an ethnographic description. He cites Joaquim Nabuco approvingly who wrote that saudade represents a unity of remembrance, love, grief, longing, with a dose of tears (Nabuco uses the English words) (1993: 28). In order to translate this text, we need to see that DaMatta is seeking to clarify the term within Brazilian Portuguese, the language that gave rise to it, but he employs even English words in that conceptual clarification. His essay does not so much presuppose saudade as explore it, supply it as an axis on which to hinge an understanding of contemporary Brazilian life. He does this in a way that straddles several linguistic realms and traditions; for example, he contrasts the uses of saudade — the word and the concept — in Portugal and Brazil. This kind of work, I submit, does not merely describe or assume a language as much as live with and within it, and contribute to its growth.⁴

What if I were to argue that all good social science embodies creative thinking of this kind? What Ortega y Gasset says of writing is apropos social science writing.

To write well is to make continual incursions into grammar, into established usage, and into accepted linguistic norms. It is an act of permanent rebellion against the social environs, a subversion. To write well is to employ a certain radical courage... ([1937] 2000: 50)

The great anarchist physicist Paul Feyerabend attributes a deadening effect to the socialization of (natural) scientists that militate against this ‘radical courage’:

An essential part of the training for scientists is [to restrain the scientist’s] imagination, [so that] even his language ceases to be his own. This is again reflected in the nature of scientific ‘facts’ which are experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background. (1975: 19–20)

Feyerabend sees the scientific presentation of ‘facts’ to be a trick of language alienation, such that the facts seem to dangle independent of the scientist. This is a consequence of the socialization of scientists into a way of seeing, knowing, conducting research, and writing, that curtails their creativity. He also points out that this view of scientific research also mischaracterizes the history of scientific discovery.

It is *possible* to create a tradition that is held together by strict rules, and that is also successful to some extent. But is it *desirable* to support such a tradition to the exclusion of everything else? Should we transfer to it the sole rights for dealing in knowledge, so that any result that has been obtained by other methods is at once ruled out of court? And did scientists ever remain within the boundaries of the traditions they defined in this narrow way [?] (1975: 19)

To these questions Feyerabend's answer is a "firm and resounding NO" (1975: 19). Ortega y Gasset helps us see the consequences of this socialization of scientists for the translation of scientific texts.

For if we ask ourselves the reason certain scientific books are easier to translate, we will soon realize that in these the author himself has begun by translating from the authentic tongue in which he 'lives, moves, and has his being' in to a pseudolanguage formed by technical terms, linguistically artificial words which he himself must define in his book. In short, he translates himself from a language into a terminology. A terminology is a ... *Volapuk*, an Esperanto established by deliberate convention between those who cultivate the discipline. That is why these books are easier to translate from one language to another. Actually, in every country these are written almost entirely in the same language. That being the case, men who speak the authentic language in which they are apparently written often find these books to be hermetic, unintelligible, or at least very difficult to understand. ([1937] 2000: 51)

Ortega y Gasset draws precisely the contrast I want between social scientific writing that is inventive and that which is aseptic, ossified, and trite. Good writers subvert words and language. Good social scientists enliven words, practice alchemy with them, show new facets, bring their readers through a catharsis in their use of language, dust off old words and give them verve. This is 'authentic' language in use. Ortega y Gasset is helpful here because in drawing the contrast, he maps the challenges each language user, the vibrant and the jejune, poses for translation. He offers an explanation for how vivid use of language is much thornier to translate than the insipid, mechanical and mechanized. Technical language that aspires to be a universal terminology, though yielding to more facile translation, also seems to entail, or is at least strongly associated with, the scientist's self-willed alienation from the language in which she lives. Technical language produces an enclosed synthetic code.

Is it possible to produce a universal technical vocabulary? Is it desirable? I understand Wallerstein's impulse to establish terminologies, standards, to make it (all) regular and stable. I understand the impulse, but it seems misguided even if we concede with Feyerabend that such standards or rules can be fixed to a certain extent.

Let me run a little more with Ortega y Gasset to see if he can lead us out of this practical dilemma. For Ortega y Gasset, the desire for impossible things marks us as human. If we understand they are impossible, then we are 'good' utopians. The good utopian, he continues, is willing to give translation a sporting try. The false, or bad utopian believes that because something is desirable, it is possible.

The normative turn and universalist desire in Wallerstein establish him as utopian. What kind of utopian? Wallerstein limns an international community of scholars who trade in concepts, frameworks. Knowing the names of concepts and having command of the technical language are the credentials one needs for entrance to the convention hall. I am not seduced by this dream. For me it is neither possible nor desirable. It is not possible because of the tremendous expanse of incommensurate knowledges (Sousa Santos 2004). This is what Feyerabend alludes to as results "obtained by other methods that are ruled out of court". It is not desirable because of their tremendous wealth, a wealth Western social science overlooks and loses, to its infinite impoverishment (Sousa Santos 2004). It is also not desirable because regulation imposes a stasis as illusive, and elusive, as it is pernicious.

Let me give an example. "By standard translation", Wallerstein writes, "I mean the accepted equivalent in the two languages of a technical term". He imagines that technical terms can have equivalents in different languages that nevertheless mean the same thing. He cites the example of 'surtravail' which, according to him, ought to be translated as 'surplus labor'. Are languages isomorphic in this way? What if the meaning of 'labor' is different from place to place? I commend to you Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2007) brilliant exposition of the hypostatization of the concept of labor in Marxist theory. Taking 'labor' as an example, Chakrabarty argues that attempts to standardize terms in translating social scientific concepts rests on an outdated set of Eurocentric assumptions.

The problem of capitalist modernity ... [is] a problem of translation, as well. There was a time — before scholarship itself became globalized — when the process of translating diverse forms, practices, and understandings of life into universalist political-theoretical categories of deeply European origin seemed to most social scientists an unproblematic proposition. That which was considered an analytical category (such as capital) was understood to have transcended the fragment of European history in which it may have originated. (Chakrabarty 2007: 17)

To illustrate what's wrong with the assumption of transcendental social scientific categories, Chakrabarty contrasts nineteenth century textile workers in Northern India with their contemporaries in England. The Julaha weavers in 19th century India saw work and worship as inseparable activities. The workers called themselves *nurbafs*, or 'weavers of light' (2007: 78; Pandey 2005). Chakrabarty observes

that the worship of machinery is an everyday fact of life in India (2007: 17). On feast days, tools and machinery are adorned with flower garlands.

Compare these ‘weavers of light’ to the contemporaneous but incommensurate experiences of textile workers in Liverpool, “Haunted”, as E.P. Thompson once famously wrote, “by the legend of better days”.⁵ These wistful workers, their bittersweet memories, communalist tendencies, remote Protestant God, and Luddite impulses, the argument goes, cannot be easily compared to the laboring members of the Julaha caste, the latter’s own cosmologies of capitalism, resentment of the British, apotheosis of the instruments of labor, contact with the spiritual world, and so on. The concept of ‘labor,’ and consequently ‘surplus labor’ becomes an increasingly empty abstraction as it is applied as common to both. What it reveals may tell us something, but what it conceals is crucial; the devil, as always, is in the details. How might Wallerstein grapple with cultural differences of this order?

He might reply that the differences in meaning notwithstanding, the ‘surplus labor’ or ‘surtravail’ is objectively determinable in each case. As a trump, he might invoke the rarefied realms of science to argue that the surplus value can be calculated, and thereby demonstrate the possibility of universality and hence of (or is it based on?) equivalence. Or he might argue that notwithstanding the real differences in the experiences and practices the world over, technical *terms* and their translation-equivalents must be kept constant.

In either case, Wallerstein seems to see difference only in terms of its impact on intellectual history. Consequently, when he speaks of culture, he means this only within the sphere of intellectual history; the problems associated with translating Weberian concepts like *verstehen* into English versus French have to do with the differential influence of Weber and his thought in the US and France respectively, rather than cultural differences more widely. In other words, his argument builds on an anemic view of cultural difference: he leaves aside the lives people live, how they work, love, the rituals they perform, the social histories they have, and so on. Difference is framed as difference in the traditions among the intelligentsia of various countries.

This debate on the sociological category of ‘labor’ cashes out in significant ways for a translator. If one were committed to showing, or if one presupposed, general or universal truths — in this case reaffirming a certain Marxist scheme with its categories (surplus labor, capital, and so on) intact — then one would insist that the translator of technical terms must stick to an accepted equivalent. But what of the social scientist, or translator, who, like Isaiah Berlin’s fox, sees only many small things and not one big thing? One would favor a more flexible translation strategy — and translation theory — that takes up meaning and context.

Conventionally, at this point the exchange between culture and history on the one hand and science on the other, what technically might be called the idiographic

and the nomothetic,⁶ ceases to be a conversation. Both sides shrug their shoulders. There can be no communication when aims are so different.⁷

A potential way out beckons. As I am proposing it, conceptual clarification, rather than serving as an investigative and rhetorical task complete prior to translating, becomes a focal point for translation itself, as it is for social scientific research itself. The work of conceptual clarification is never done and is enhanced through translation. Conceptual clarification offers relief from the perils of trusting what Eoyang termed pseudo-universals.⁸ The good utopian wades in the waters, the bad utopian trusts the thin ice of universal concepts.

‘Bewilderment’ by way of example

In *Quoting Caravaggio*, the art historian Mieke Bal has undertaken an ingenious study of a particular sort of aesthetic and historical involution she calls ‘preposterous’. Noting the influence of Baroque aesthetic on contemporary art in Andre Serrano, Ana Mendieta and others, she observes that our encounter with contemporary art alters our perception of the ‘original’ Baroque.

She begins her book with her conclusion. “Quoting Caravaggio changes his work forever”. She explains, “Like any form of representation, art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active reworking... Hence the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead” (Bal 1991: 1). In other words, a contemporary audience of Baroque art is bound to view it through the refractory lens of latter-day appropriations of it.

I am trying to argue for something similar for translations in the social sciences as part of an interdisciplinary direction for translation theory. Rather than fixing the definitions, translating a social scientific concept would rework the earlier concept, superimpose itself. This is not so much bad as inevitable. It can lead, like the history of art itself, not so much to a march towards progress and infinite perfectability, to use Condorcet’s expression, as to interesting switchbacks and growth, appropriations of the past that lead to clever insights in the present.

Let us take ‘bewilderment’. In writing on social scientific methodology, I have begun writing how bewilderment can be a useful methodological disposition or attitude for the researcher in the social sciences. I mean to supply ‘bewilderment’ with an almost technical sense, but also to retain the old, everyday sense of disorientation and feeling unmoored. As I write on bewilderment and methodology, I offer it as salubrious — an antidote to the misleadingly confident pronouncements of positivist social science.

If I were to present ‘bewilderment’ only as an exercise of embracing uncertainty, then I could unproblematically invoke Willem de Kooning to capture what I mean:

When I’m falling, I’m doing all right ... It’s when I’m standing upright that bothers me: I’m not doing so good; I’m stiff. As a matter of fact, I’m really slipping, most of the time, into that glimpse. I’m like a slipping glimpseer.

Yet this oceanic feeling⁹ is only one part of what I am recommending. The other part has to do with an epistemic shock from an encounter with theory that has emerged from Latin American philosophy and critical race theory (see Price 2004). The Western social sciences, as the West itself, are built on dualistic ontologies, mind/body, reason/emotion, and so on. As a researcher meeting theories that do not emerge so centrally from Anglo-American traditions, I cross to places that do not uphold those dualist ontologies. I encounter, embrace, and am engulfed by other conditions, lives, and histories. It is overwhelming, this searching outside the canon and outside the categories and terms of a Western form of life (chimerical in its own way). Sensing, glimpsing, then breathing in other ways of being, availing myself to them, has engendered the bewilderment. Bewilderment is meant to be honest to the sense of having one’s confidence shaken as one plunges into one’s work and follows all the contradictions it engenders. The contradictions are often tidied up in the rhetoric of the literature as the bewilderment is swept under the rug.

Let us leave aside the question of whether this concept, ‘bewilderment’, has any intrinsic interest to it. It is, after all, just an example. Instead, let us just focus on the translation task. How would we translate it? One of the most rewarding parts of this exercise has been to try to figure out how to translate bewilderment into Spanish — how to communicate to Spanish speakers my sense of ‘bewilderment’, or something like that, might be enriching as an attitude in conducting social science research. Thinking through the challenges of translating not only ‘bewilderment’ but also the methodologies bewilderment might imply, can change and evolve how I conceptualize bewilderment itself.

For bewilderment, ‘*incertidumbre*’, or uncertainty, seems a bit general and does not communicate the sense of total disorientation of a deep sort. The term ‘*desasosiego*’ might do some of the work; for certain readers, it would evoke the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa’s *The book of disquiet* (*Livro de desassossego*). But that is not the connotation I would like to have, since that odd and wonderful collection could be characterized as an album of musings, one might say idle musings, by a solitary man, Bernardo Soares, one of Pessoa’s many heteronyms. I want to employ a term that can be used as a predisposition for rigorous research, although with a rigor tempered by an epistemic humility. Moreover, the condition

of bewilderment is an encounter with thinking emanating from the Americas, it is about encountering, and crossing, a divide in the Americas and has within it a critique of unthinking Eurocentrism. ‘*Asombrar*’ and ‘*desconcertar*’ are good possibilities. They get to the general sense of disorientation. But though they leave open, they do not specify the hesitancy engendered by catching a glimmer of the alternative constructions of the world one has walled off in the name of allegiance to an imagined, deplete, and rather narrow account of rationality (see Sousa 2006). They do not get me to recognize the other side of what Santos termed “the abyssal divide” (Santos 2007), by which he means that vast terrain outside the reason held up as sovereign in a spent Western tradition, that reason predicated on excluding the presumed irrationality and inferiority of its alterities. I want the term I am using to connote engaging the abyss, the divide, and what one finds beyond it.

But then, our original, ‘bewilderment’ does not do that either. The problem in finding an adequate translation points to a more basic problem. The term ‘bewilderment’ does not implicate this clash of epistemologies, West and non-West. This concern leads me to Cabeza de Vaca’s shipwreck and his subsequent peregrinations. Permit me a short voyage down that tributary stream before we return to translation as conceptual elaboration for the social sciences.

A preposterous history of bewilderment, by way of conclusion

In the sixteenth century, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, with three hundred other would-be conquistadores, was shipwrecked off the coast of Florida. The shipwrecked group of Castilian adventurers (perhaps one could say marauders protected by the legal figleaf provided by King Philip) starts out arrogantly robbing native villages, making war on them, impressing native people into service as guides. They trek up the coast but soon they realize they are lost. Although they start with three hundred men, eventually, through starvation and through unhappy skirmishes with indigenous people they had provoked through theft and kidnap, the party is reduced to fewer than ten. These few Cabeza de Vaca presents as a sorry lot. As their situation deteriorates, they become quite desperate. They try to go out to sea in shaky, handmade boats, but they fail miserably: one boat capsizes, one ship is lost at sea, and they swim back to shore, losing two more of their number. He writes in his *Chronicle*:

The survivors escaped naked (*desnudo*) as they were born, with the loss of all they had; and although the whole was of little value, at that time it was worth much, as we were then in November, the cold was severe, and our bodies were so emaciated the bones might be counted with little difficulty, having become the perfect figures of death. ([1542] 1907: 46)

Let us focus on this concept of *desnudo*, nakedness, because it presages something important. Ilan Stavans draws our attention to Cabeza de Vaca's use of '*desnudo*' (2002):

Readers from the sixteenth century to the present have gotten used to adventurers of courage and domination from the likes of Pizarro and Hernán Cortés. Adjectives like *gallant*, *intrepid*, *assertive*, and *outlandish* easily come to mind. But not naked, which stands as an attribute of vulnerability and misfortune ... The self-portrait that emerges ... is one colored by stupefaction. (Stavans 2002: ix)

Leaving aside Stavans' rose-tinted associations with Pizarro and Cortés, he does seem to get Cabeza de Vaca right. To his credit, Cabeza de Vaca does expose how he and other Spaniards were *maladroit*, reduced to helplessness and in abject misery. At this point in the narrative, in their elemental state of nakedness, stripped of the institutional, military, and symbolic power of Castile, wounded, cold, they lose their pride and aloofness from the aboriginal people.

As we were in the condition I have mentioned, the greater number of us naked, and the weather boisterous for travel, and to cross rivers and bays by swimming, and we being entirely without provisions or the means of carrying any, we yielded obedience to what necessity required, to pass the winter in the place where we were. ([1542] 1907: 49)

On Cabeza de Vaca's urging, the group humbly seeks refuge with the local indigenous people. This is the beginning of a turn for Cabeza de Vaca. The shipwrecked sailors live there for a time with the Indians, eating with them, gathering food. Then they wander on, lost, at times offering themselves in service to native peoples, at times pressed into service, then escaping or wandering off, continuing their itinerancy, sharing the trials of the aboriginals they live among, even providing healing care. He notices their mores, their ways of interacting, which he documents in his Chronicle. The four, including one enslaved Moroccan they brought with them, Esteban, wander for more than six years.

Cabeza de Vaca emphasizes his nakedness throughout: "I was in this country nearly six years, alone among the Indians, and naked like them"; "We always went naked like them". At the end of his journey, having crossed through parts of present-day Texas and Mexico to arrive in Mexico City, Cabeza de Vaca discovered, to his shame and horror, his fellow Christians, as he referred to them, massacring and enslaving indigenous groups. He quarrels with them and condemns them in disgust.

But let us return to the moment when he is in the thick of it as he confronts indigenous people. Shipwrecked, wracked by hunger and cold, reduced to being '*desnudo*', naked, stripped of defenses, he opens himself and takes on the indigenous people shorn of his previous superciliousness and indifference. This newfound

attitude, taking stock of them, as if noticing them — really noticing them — for the first time, regaining a fragile equanimity, seems important.

The encounter with Cabeza de Vaca could offer a solution to translating the concept of bewilderment. Taken alone, 'bewilderment' can refer to any sense of being flummoxed, befuddled, confused, unsure, disoriented. '*Desnudo*', though, for Cabeza de Vaca, connotes more exactly what I would like: a vulnerability once one is immersed in another reality, playing on another's set of terms with which one is scarcely familiar, though with the acute sense that they are another's. I refer specifically to those realities here in the Americas eclipsed by Western traditions of thinking. Once outside and on another's terms, one is unsure how to proceed, one is stripped of one's armor and stratagem, or one's stratagem may work at cross-purposes to one's interest (also see Lugones 2003:77–103). One can seal oneself off from this experience as, say, development experts or tourists might, or one can open oneself to it. Bewildered, *desnudo*, could presage the opening of oneself to engage in others as equals, as contemporaries. The translation in this case helps me capture the sense of the 'original' more than the original taken alone. The translation provides an important, almost necessarily complement. Moreover, it chips away at artificial divisions that exist: the geographic, linguistic, and historical line that we *gringos* are accustomed to put up, to distinguish ourselves as Anglo-Americans from the rest of the inhabitants of the Americas, and that allow us to participate in the illusion of an uninterrupted pedigree of and continuity with European thought (see Price 2004). The bewilderment, *desnudo*, is also a way to question one's own need for protection, and for conceiving of translation as merely the transposition of meaning from one linguistic tradition to another, or to others, without conceiving of the possibility of being changed by those others.

Prima facie, and without context, translating 'bewildered' as '*desnudo*' is to make an idiosyncratic choice and select a deeply misleading term. '*Desnudo*' is an everyday word in Spanish with a similar range to that denoted by 'naked' in English. By recapping the experiences and sensibilities of Cabeza de Vaca, however, I hope I have shed a bit more light on the particular social history of *desnudo* as a concept in Cabeza de Vaca's work — the geopolitics of its enunciation,¹⁰ so to speak — and how I would like 'bewilderment' to register: I am a social scientist aiming for a relation of co-presence with the erstwhile subjects of social science research — that is, with those groups and individuals who would normally have been the 'subjects' of a study by someone like me (see Sousa Santos 2007). I seek a more egalitarian relation in what is often a subject-object relation in the social sciences. This subject-subject relation is precipitated by having one's ground shaken in a deep way. In the 'bewilderment' I am trying to portray, the house of cards that is one's home, one's discipline, institution, tradition, one's bedrock, is cast aloft and comes down a-tumbled. But I am tumbled about productively, constructively.

In reading Cabeza de Vaca this way, a way already adumbrated by Stavans, I help further specify, and provide a context and history to cast off the shelter of science's protective shell, something which Nietzsche might have had in mind, and even recommended on a sunnier day, when he wrote sneeringly of the craven scientist who shields himself:

[T]he scientific investigator builds his hut right next to the tower of science so that he will be able to work on it and to find shelter for himself beneath those bulwarks which presently exist. And he requires shelter, for there are frightful powers which continuously break in upon him, powers which oppose scientific "truth" with completely different kinds of "truths" which bear on their shields the most varied sorts of emblems. (1977 [1873])

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Notes

1. The American Council of Learned Societies has recently sponsored a study that has taken the position that social scientific texts are distinct in significant ways from literature and the natural sciences and hence would need a distinct strategy and expertise to translate them. The ACLS study provides a set of guidelines for translators and editors (see Heim and Tymowski 2006).
2. As is clear from the foregoing, in this essay I refer to translating social science literature. This is to be distinguished from an emerging subfield of translation studies, drawing especially on Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour, that devotes itself to the sociology of translation. For an excellent study in this direction, see Simeoni 1998.
3. In a highly influential body of work, Lawrence Venuti (1986; 1994) has championed making the translator more prominent in the translation process. In an argument now familiar in translation studies, he argues against the commonsense that translated texts should fit seamlessly within a consumer logic of a target culture that prizes fluency and easily assimilation. For him, this aesthetic and commercial demand just compounds the translator's invisibility and cloaks the fact that a text has in fact been translated, much to the detriment of translators. He and others bridle at any attempt to quiet down, diminish, or mute the translator or make him or her handmaiden to the author, in other words that version of the translator that assumes that the translator is best unnoticed if not imperceptible, that paints the good translator as having the grace to vanish into the background. Instead, they have tried to liberate the translator from his or her role as merely faithful scribe, point out the inevitability of a translator's innovation and textual presence, or promoted his or her exercise of agency. For them, the translator's invisibility,

as it has been classically cast, is more honored in the breach than the observance. For a different reason, Gregory Rabassa, the fine translator of Latin American literature, has complained of the ‘Professores Horrendo’, the academics who police his translations, making much hay and scholarly articles by sometimes pedantically monitoring and criticizing his often lyrical choices (see Rabassa 2005).

4. “The trust in the possibility of intercultural translation”, comments the late Tullio Maranhão, “and the efforts to refine its techniques overlook the fundamental difficulty residing in the fact that there is a dialogical process of communication that can never be entirely captured by a given language or a given culture as a homeostatic system” (Maranhão 2002: 76). Concepts like *saudade* are subject to the evolution of a living culture. “It is true that cultural, linguistic, and social systems do shape everyday conduct, but the human freedom to elude that determinism cannot be ignored” (Maranhão 2002: 76).

5. Or compare them to what Tullio Maranhão and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro have written of the ‘Amerindian’. (I put ‘Amerindian’ in quotes because that is the term Maranhão and Viveiros de Castro use. But I do not like it: separate groups exist, each with their own name. ‘Amerindian’ seems to be an abstraction, an ideal-type, fashioned by people from the outside.) Maranhão argues that many anthropologists have missed the boat in defining ‘Amerindian’ hunting practices as ‘productive labor’.

Hunting becomes an economic activity linked to the production project of a society managed by a nation-state. This chain of thoughts has a long tradition in anthropology and includes efforts to outline a stone age economics, or to equate Amerindian practices with work, work destined to subsistence and suffused by Marxist analytical categories such as surplus value. (2002: 67; emphasis mine)

Maranhão thinks this is fundamentally misbegotten. He observes that in the West, including within anthropology, ‘hunting’ as in ‘hunting and gathering’ refers to tracking and killing an animal for food or for sport. The ‘Amerindian’, however, regards hunting

As an act of seduction between the hunter and the prey. The man adorns himself as if he were going to a sexual encounter with a woman, wearing festive body painting, feathers, and aromatic essences. The activities involved in the act of hunting are equated with copulation and with killing an enemy ... Before the hunter leaves on a hunting expedition, the shaman must consult the invisible guardian entity responsible for the species of the animal to be felled. The shaman engages in negotiations and pleas, and allows the hunter to go only after striking some sort of agreement with the animal guardian ... What is at stake in the complex and delicate operation called ‘hunting’ is a transference of metaphysical substances such as flesh and blood from an animal to a human. It is an act of appropriation with consent, a consent negotiated before hand by the shaman, surrounded by strict rules of etiquette that can be discussed not only as forms of politeness but also and especially as a religious liturgy and as a philosophical speculation about the nature of the human being vis-à-vis animals and immortal entities.

So, to say that hunting is ‘productive labor’ is to misconstrue or to be relatively indifferent to how the practitioners see it. Maranhão concludes,

It is as inadequate to dub Amerindian hunting ‘productive work’ as it would be to use the same concept to characterize liturgical actions in the great religions of the world and discuss the productivity of a particular priest in baking wafers and consecrating them in the Eucharist ... what I am trying to show is how equivocal is the habit of using taxonomies of cosmopolitan beliefs and practices — economics, religion, politics, and so on — to understand Amerindian beliefs and practices. (2002: 66–67)

6. The distinction is between the aim for universal covering laws in certain directions of social scientific inquiry (the nomothetic), and the goal of describing historical events in their uniqueness in the idiographic. Windelband and Rickert are associated with elaborating this distinction.
7. Marshall Sahlins (1976) made a similar point long ago in his critique of ‘practical reason’ from the standpoint of ‘culture’.
8. “In the burgeoning field of East-West comparative literature, little consideration has been given to questions of methodology and the logic of comparison. Tantalizing and presumably interesting questions — Is there a Chinese tragedy? Why is there no epic in Chinese? — pique interest but produce no real illumination. Of course, one fails to notice the bias in these questions. The obverse questions are rarely, if ever, asked. Why are there no dynastic histories in the West? Why has the West produced no counterpart to the *Shijing*? Are there equivalents to the *lushi* and *zaju* forms in the West? If these challenges to lacunae in the West strike one as slightly absurd, then we must consider the possibility that the original questions might be equally pointless” (Eoyang 1993: 238). Also see Lydia Liu’s (1995) discussion of these points.
9. The term ‘oceanic feeling’ is used in a somewhat different context by Romain Rolland to describe to Freud the religious experience (See Freud 1961 [1930]).
10. On ‘locus of enunciation’ see Mignolo (1995).

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Résumé

Les études de traduction n'ont pas accordé assez d'attention aux défis particuliers posés par la traduction de textes sociologiques. Parmi ceux — peu nombreux — qui ont traité de ce sujet, Immanuel Wallerstein estime qu'une des caractéristiques distinctives des textes relevant de la science sociale est leur trafic de concepts. Wallerstein vise, en stimulant la traduction des sciences sociales, à créer la possibilité d'une conversation universelle au sein de celles-ci. Je soutiens la thèse qu'une telle conversation n'est ni possible ni souhaitable. Au contraire, j'entends, dans cet article, défendre l'idée que la traduction des sciences sociales peut aider à préciser et à élaborer des concepts. De cette façon, la traduction encouragerait l'essor du concept « original ». Je conclus mon essai en fournissant une analyse détaillée de la façon dont on peut traduire 'bewilderment' en espagnol.

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