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Jiménez Bellver, Jorge: Review of Gertrudis Payàs Puigarnau. (2010). *El revés del tapiz: Traducción y discurso de identidad en la Nueva España (1521-1821)*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 365 pp.

One of the "classroom interludes" in Denys Arcand's 1986 film *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* circles around the currency of the aphorism "history is written by the victors" and the alleged narrowness of scope of the discipline of history. In the scene, teaching assistant Diane Léonard (played by Louise Portal) discusses the imbrications of historiography and power as follows: "*On reproche souvent à l'histoire de s'intéresser aux vainqueurs. Mais au fond la plupart du temps, c'est souvent pour des raisons de documentation. Voyez-vous, on possède plus de documents sur les Égyptiens que sur les Nubiens, beaucoup plus sur de documents sur les Espagnols que sur les Mayas, et bien sûr beaucoup plus de documents sur les hommes que sur les femmes. Et d'ailleurs c'est une limite certaine de l'histoire. Mais il y a peut-être un élément psychologique: c'est qu'au fond on aime beaucoup mieux entendre parler des vainqueurs que des vaincus*".

Over the last decades (particularly in the aftermath of poststructuralism), the foundational bias of historiography (that is, its ontological inclination toward *vainqueurs*) has been approached from a different standpoint: if the aphorism "history is written by the victors" is symptomatic not only of a disparity of sources available for the study of both *vainqueurs* and *vaincus* but also of an implicit predisposition toward the perpetuation of the narrative status quo established by the discipline, then historiography must of necessity question the assumptions built into the very notions of "sources", "history" and "historian" —for instance: How have literacy practices shaped and legitimated the authority conferred to written sources in historiographical inquiry? What influence have the imbrications of historiographical inquiry and power (economic, political, military, and ideological) exerted on the conceptualization of history as a field of knowledge? And how is the historiographical inquiry determined by the historian's positionality or subjectivity?

Whereas questions such as these have indeed become part of the fabric of contemporary thinking on historiography, issues of a historiographical nature take on a special resonance in a discipline of recent establishment like translation studies, especially when approaching a topic of inquiry (i.e. translation in

colonial Latin America) where not only historiography *proper*, but also linguistics, anthropology, and sociology have already provided numerous insights. What contribution can an emerging discipline like translation studies (currently struggling with questions of scope, method, and even object of study) offer—or, at least, add—to a field of knowledge as comprehensively researched by established disciplines as the colonial history of Latin America (and its corollary, translation)?

An insightful answer (however tentative, given the infancy of the discipline of translation studies—particularly in matters of historiography—and the more than likely profusion of methodological questions and historiographical studies in the coming decades) is found in *El revés del tapiz: Traducción y discurso de identidad en la Nueva España (1521-1821)*, where Gertrudis Payàs-Puigarnau draws from staples of historiographical research "New Spain" and "translation" to approach the process of identity formation throughout the three centuries of colonial domination that followed the fall of Tenochtitlan. More specifically, Payàs-Puigarnau tackles translation as one of the key mechanisms of creation and negotiation of the identitarian discourse that, far from occupying a central position only after independence from Spain had been achieved and the Mexican state had been founded, operated from the very beginning of colonial rule.

The main argument posed in *El revés del tapiz* is that translation in the *Novohispano* period not only functioned as a source of representation of the Other but, more significantly, as a *condition* for the constitution of the Self. With that contention in mind, Payàs-Puigarnau draws from a documentary corpus of 712 translations extracted from the 1947 edition of José Mariano Beristáin de Souza's *Biblioteca Hispano-Americana Septentrional* (a bio-bibliography of approximately 4,200 entries a propos of intellectual production in colonial Mexico) and follows a diachronic approach to translation activity in New Spain, arranged into three main identitarian projects: "*los mitos fundacionales*" —aimed at the creation of an identity of origin—, "*la continuidad clásica*" —aimed at the creation of a chronopolitical identity—, and "*la alta cultura moderna*" —aimed at the creation of a geopolitical identity. The study is complemented with a preface by anthropologist Mario Samaniego (Catholic University of Temuco), where he calls for a reconsideration of the dichotomy dominant/dominated (or, differently put, *vainqueurs*/*vaincus*) from the standpoint of the "*palabra fronteriza*" and its effects on identity formation (much along the lines of Homi Bhabha's notion of "cultural translation"), and a prologue by translation historian Clara Foz (University of Ottawa), where she provides some reflections on

method in translation historiography a propos of the definition of sources, the researcher's subjectivity, and metaphorical uses of translation in the social sciences and the humanities.

In this regard, the claim that translation is not a consequence but a condition for the constitution of identity is certainly reminiscent of recent scholarship of the "identity turn" (as Edwin Gentzler labels it in *Translation and Identity in the Americas*) in translation studies, as well as in its neighboring disciplines, such as comparative literature and cultural studies. The contribution made by translation studies towards an understanding of translation that goes beyond the *idées reçues* of translation activity as a mere supplement to historiographical research rather than an area worthy of research *per se* (historiographical or otherwise) and the exploration of the interplay of translation practice with the configuration of societies and cultures speaks to the role fulfilled by translation in both intercultural and intracultural mediation.

On the other hand, if translation is inevitably constitutive of identity (in other words, if identity is necessarily configured by discourse and the study of discourse cannot be detached from questions of translation), what is the potential contribution of translation studies to the discussion of identity formation? If, as it is often argued (particularly along the lines of the globalization paradigm), all identities are already translated and, furthermore, in a permanent state of translation, what more can be researched on translation and identity (let alone on the history of translation and identity)? Why bother in the first place, if translation is such a given (even more so in the case of Latin America, commonly portrayed as a "translated continent")?

El revés del tapiz stands as a remarkable example of the importance of the systematic study of translation as a norm-governed means of cross-cultural communication for the understanding of the dynamics of identity formation and legitimization. Furthermore, Payàs-Puigarnau's study sheds light on both the relevance of historiographical research in translation studies and the possibilities opened by translation as an area of inquiry in historiography *proper*. As far as the systematic study of translation is concerned, *El revés del tapiz* provides a study of translation in the *Novohispano* period that is both conceptually dense and methodologically consistent. Drawing from nationalism studies (particularly, studies on the function fulfilled by translated texts in the constitution of national identities), Payàs-Puigarnau follows an interdisciplinary approach that, while grounded in a substantial documentary corpus, is comprehensive enough to not abide by traditional translation typologies in an exclusive fashion.

The conceptual flexibility displayed in *El revés del tapiz* becomes especially revealing in the case of documents falling under the category "*transcrituras*" (such as "*vocabularios*", "*gramáticas*", "*diccionarios*", "*sermonarios*", "*manuales de liturgia*", and "*vidas de santos*"). Although not regarded as translations *stricto sensu*, these documents (which make up for approximately 65% of the *Biblioteca Hispano-Americana Septentrional*) reveal the interlinguistic and translational character of the emerging lettered culture in New Spain (which became particularly acute in the decades following the start of the *Novohispano* period) and, accordingly, the power of historiographical research to inform the conceptualization of translation processes and products. Furthermore, the nature and incidence of *transcrituras* in New Spain undermines the widespread perception of translation in colonial situations as centrifugal *per se* (that is, operating away from the center and into the periphery), raises significant questions on translation directionality and power asymmetries (which the author effectively explores in the case of bilingual vocabularies), and supports Payàs-Puigarnau's claim that translation of the Other is constitutive of the Self.

Even if, by the relative infancy of the historiographical strand in translation studies, a number of significant questions remain to be addressed, *El revés del tapiz* stands as an outstanding example of the significant insights resulting from historiographical inquiry in translation studies and the avenues of research opened in matters of historiography by the increasing attention paid to translation. The question of directionality and the dynamics of translation in the *Novohispano* period attest to the conceptual limitation of widespread notions of translation discourse (such as "source" and "target") and the need for a more comprehensive history of translation where the participation of translation in the constitution of identities and systems of belief is explored in more depth. In turn, the increasing attention paid to translation not simply as a corollary of intercultural contact or a metonymic representation of Otherness, but also as a condition for the constitution and negotiation of identity should lead to a reconsideration of the "certainties" of the discipline of history and, ultimately, to new interdisciplinary approaches that explore the intersections of the history of translation and the configuration of societies and cultures.