

Translation as Appropriation?

Silencing Non-European Perspectives

Motivation

I am concerned that English-speaking universities do not support the use of non-English language research, presuming the best material (already) exists in English. This replicates colonial power structures and limits the agency of other marginalised voices.

Background and Scope

In 2022-23, I conducted a project identifying key post-colonial Latin American articles not available in English for academics to use and translate in the future. In this project, I translated a particular article from Spanish to English. This poster outlines:

- (1) The concerns the article notes when engaging with Western or 'universal' theories.
- (2) The reflections I had on language and positionality whilst translating the article.

¿Pensar Marx desde América Latina?
El problema de la descolonización del
pensamiento crítico contemporáneo

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Thinking Marx from Latin America? The Problem of Decolonising Contemporary Critical Thought (2022), originally published in *Tabula Rasa*.

Segales argues that Marx proclaimed his writings to be **universal**, yet they are heavily **embedded** within **European understandings** of modernity and class.

Think 'from' a place

To decolonise this is to...

To consider the **historical, economic, social, and political contexts** that shape understandings of the world, and **the language used to describe it**.

Go back to the original texts

To look beyond **core writings and partial or common translations**, in which the

meanings of abstract concepts and theories can be warped or lost.

Any theory that engages with the world is fluid and reflects the societies and contexts they exist within. Translations are therefore also fluid processes, shaped by time, space, and one's positionality.

Reflections on the Translation Process: What I Discovered

- Translation is not straightforward! It is not just a grammar exercise; **cultural, historical, and political contexts need to be considered to understand the meanings of key words and texts**.
- Both languages I was working with (Spanish and English) are languages of colonisers which were used to silence peoples and perspectives, so this process is unique depending on the languages used.



Output

My translation of the article will be published in *Alternautas*, a multidisciplinary journal focused on **counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development in/from Latin America**. This is based on a desire to bridge language barriers by using non-English-language research.

What Can You Do?

- 1 Know your positionality.** Be conscious of the limits of only using English-language texts. Challenge the assumptions of ideas by 'thinking from a place' and how this shapes the context and content of discussions.
- 2** Explain to others the importance of non-English language material in improving the quality and relevance of research.
- 3** If you speak other languages, **make yourself heard!**