Problematising Historical Relevance for the Study of Women Agencies in Translation: Methodological Insights and Research Proposals

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Abstract[1]

Departing from Rundle's proposal (2012) to conceive translation as an interpretive prism for history, this paper advances an understanding of Translation Studies, and of Feminist Translation Studies in particular, as a transdiscipline, a crossroads for the feminist efforts pursued by different disciplines. In the means of analysing normative and non-normative female agencies across time periods and geographies, a series of methodological synergies are proposed between Feminist Translation Studies and Feminist social history. The goal is thus to suggest less constrained concepts of historical relevance, possibilitating the study of female agencies through the interpretive prism of translation. In a subsequent section, a case-study is proposed, illustrating potential interpretive shifts in the historical analysis of female agencies in the Bible. The multiple and often oppositional (re-)translations of this text have been at the core of crucial breakthroughs in both Eastern and Western thought. Given its instrumental role in the perpetuation of patriarchal systems, gender constructs are an essential analytic category for historicising purposes (see Scott 1999). Taking a gender-informed stance on Bible translating, the methodological and ideological (re-)positionings suggested here shall attempt to provide alternative explanations and research venues for a feminist political history of knowledge.

1. Introduction

The point of departure for this paper is Rundle's crucial call for interdisciplinarity when defining the potential synergies between translation and history. For this scholar (2012), Translation Studies, a young discipline, is generally portrayed as indebted to the well-established methodological and notional frameworks of fields like History. This hampers an understanding of the capital role of translation praxis for historical evolution. Upon a critical exploration of the timid, implicitly historiographical scope of Translation Studies, authors like Bandia and Bastin (2006) have contributed to this new perception of the translation phenomenon as a prism fore more consolidated fields, while promoting the disciplinary autonomy of Translation History.

It is in this ground-breaking line of inquiry that the paper work intends to problematise translation-mediated female agencies throughout history. Here, I shall advocate for the establishment of Feminist Translation History as the ultimate transdiscipline, an epistemological crossroads where feminist efforts from different fields of study may converge. For this propose, I shall suggest certain synergies between Feminist Translation Studies (Castro and Ergun 2017) and Feminist History (Scott 1999), in the means of effectively tackling both discourse and context when surveying female agencies across time periods and geographies. Through this, I expect to underscore the need for a new concept of translation-bound, historical relevance (see Pym 2014). As an illustration, a case-study proposal shall follow regarding historical female agencies in the Bible, whose multiple and oppositional translations are at the core of crucial breakthroughs throughout History. By employing, upon Scott's suggestion (1999), the notion of "gender" as an analytic category, I

intend to suggest various lines of research where gender constructs are fundamental in order to explain the political history of knowledge through translation.

2. Fruitful Synergies: Interadisciplinary Methodologies for Feminist Translation History

The present work advocates for the consolidation of a new transdiscipline, Feminist Translation History, in which many of the current, gender-informed efforts made from different fields of study may converge. This assertion takes as a point of departure an understanding of translated texts as the "melting pot" of history, the production of which entails non-stop negotiations among agents who now collude with, now oppose to, dominant social conventions. According to Berman (1984: 51ff), besides the undeniable "historicité générale de la tradition", particular translation projects have been at the core of major historical breakthroughs, playing a role "(...) d'inapparente médiation qui contribue bien évidemment au mouvement de l'histoire". This "pur pouvoir historique de la traduction" (Berman ibid: 53), unsurprisingly exemplified by Berman through Luther's heretic translation of the Bible into German, is often subject to "retraductions", or re-negotiations of the originals' symbolic premises and ideology on the basis of other groups' interests.

It is my belief, in line with Scott (1999), that the male/powerful-female/weak dichotomy is the ultimate signifier of power relations underlying patriarchal discourse production. Its implication in ideological forms of reported speech like translations, where relational differences between communities have been negotiated throughout history, has received little attention from mainstream historians and translatologists alike, remaining within the often distrusted scope (Eshelman 2007) of Feminist translation theorists (see Chamberlain's seminal, 1988 paper). A first goal of this paper is therefore to reflect on the potential synergies between two established disciplines, whose methodologies could certainly inform a historical deconstruction of female agencies through translation: Descriptive Translation Studies, from now DTS (see Toury 2012 for an overview), and Feminist History (for an overview, see Scott 1999).

From the inception of the Polysystem school, descriptive theorists have been concerned with what they identify, perhaps in an unfortunate sign of prescriptivism, as literary systems, as well as with the relationships between systemic forms of discursive production. Systemic approaches have provided our discipline with the first historical models to survey the role of translation within each society, displaying a ground-breaking combination of sociological insight and text analysis. Throughout the last decades, they have consolidated a brand-new disciplinary tradition, targeting chronologically and geographically distant literary spaces in their studies. Their suggestion that each system's discursive networks responds to a series of agreed-upon norms (once again, see Toury 2012) has opened up new venues for a socio-critical study of translation (see Brisset 1989), therefore enabling feminists, among other groups, to devise their own critical and theoretical instruments.

Once the Manipulation School managed to raise new concerns over the ideological premises underlying systemic consolidation (see Lefevere 1991), a series of "turns", among which the "cultural turn" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998) and the "power turn" (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002), have progressively shaped a more humanitarian focus for DTS, one able to encompass the vindication of social groups falling outside the Western nation-state scope required for consideration by DTS. Indeed, in another example of interdisciplinary productiveness, Bassnett and Trivedi insist in re-considering translation from a postcolonial

perspective, questioning whether traditional forms of its praxis have actually enabled truthful dialogues across nations. As Lamoureux argues (2001), the fact that unequal power relations are often interpreted though a "gender metaphorics" (Chamberlain 1988), portraying hegemonic nations as masculine and subjugated ones as feminine, seems to point at an urgent need, thus-far ignored by the various disciplines concerned, of re-assessing gender-informed agencies in translation from a historical standpoint.

Women, as an "interpretive community" (Godard 1987: vii) without which (and often against which) both hegemonic and postcolonial nation-states have been configured, have profited considerably from this progressive de-construction of DTS' analytic tools, signaled by the aforementioned 'turns'. Of especial relevance for us are the new subject-oriented approaches to the discipline, and especially Chesterman's "Translator Studies" proposal (2009), underscoring for the first time individual agencies over broader and more imposing collectivities like nations. Today, the finally acknowledged importance of cross-cultural exchanges for the outcome of various power struggles has encouraged new fields of research, problematising unequal transnational relations through translation. Relying on the antecedent of Postcolonial Translation Studies (see Bassnett and Trivedi 1998), Feminist Translation Studies (see Castro and Ergun 2017) has generated a new space for debate about gender-related transnational inequalities, configuring a true transdiscipline in the intersection of Gender Studies and DTS. This new transnational scope has compelled its members to a consistent critique of previous contributions to this line of research, problematising Canadian Feminist Translation (for an outline, see works like Simon 1996 and Flotow 1997) as a form of white, colonial feminism produced from an hegemonic part of the globe (see, among others, Castro 2009).

Understandably, feminist revisionism has prompted various theorists to emphasise the need for a historical re-construction of female subjects and their activities. Flotow, for instance, proposes a clearly historical research question for future advances in our field: "How have women fared in translation?" (Flotow 1997: 90). Ergun (2010: 310), on her part, considers the re-writing of history from a feminist perspective an explicit goal of Feminist Translation efforts. Under the new transnational paradigm in which these and other theorists are currently immersed, one may expect a subsequent de-construction of traditional nation-state hegemonies as the primary source of identity for female and feminist agencies, and subsequently an exploration of specific, subject-centered methodologies replacing patriarchy's notions of relevance. In praxis, this would imply a displacement of the traditional historian's focus from warfare and national milestones to private settings, personal affinities, and individualism. And yet, little to no attention has been paid to pre-existent research venues possibilitating a historically-informed critique of female agencies. Similarly, an often underscored, overtly historical goal of implementing Foucault's archaeology (Foucault and Kremer-Marietti 1969)[2] in order to recover lost matrilineages is yet to be fully explored, either from a methodological or an empirical side[3].

As the previous paragraphs suggest, both mainstream and Feminist Translation Studies are still in a process of devising the necessary tools to analyse agencies from the perspective of gender, a notion constantly subject to historical, as much as geographical, (re-) interpretations and updates. It is here, in my view, where cross-disciplinary synergies may be most useful. Feminist history has lately undertaken a de-construction of traditional notions of historical truth on the basis of post-structuralist theories, re-defining it as a discursive product at the service of patriarchy. As a result of this "linguistic turn" (Canning 1994), the conflicted notion of "gender" is re-considered from Feminist historians' privileged intersection between

history, philosophy, and ideology. A pioneer in this group, Scott (1999: 2) describes this concept not simply as a sociological construct, but as a multiplicity of ideological forms of knowledge, configuring different patterns of oppression across time and space. Drawing inspiration from social history, feminists displace historical relevance from the milestones of patriarchal politics, almost invariably related to warfare and border control, to more quotidian contexts and private spaces, finding support in apparently secondary, and often literary textual sources rather than in typically historiographical ones.

As Gordon, Buhle, and Dye claim (1976: 89), "(...) the writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities". Understandably, as soon as gender is taken as the notional prism in historical research, patriarchal notions of historical relevance must be reconsidered. Researchers must then tackle the seemingly anecdotal, private realms where female agencies have mainly operated, which nevertheless prove to be the environments where each society's symbols and values are first negotiated (Scott 1999). In line with Pym's assertions (2014), then, historical relevance, or "importance", his preferred term, is not an absolute concept, but a relational one, subject to convention, the discursive (re-)negotiation of which in translated texts becomes a subject matter of FTS under this new light.

In my view, however, Pym's problematisation of relevance is not limited to re-defining the pertinent aspects for a portrayal of traditionally marginal agencies. Indeed, it is very much concerned with the very agency of the scholar conducting the study. According to the procedural discussions of feminist historians (see Scott 1999), a major methodological breakthrough lies in asserting the agent's subjectivity in his or her analysis, which is nothing more (and nothing less) than a purposeful discursive utterance, suiting a particular set of interests or social conventions. In contrast, patriarchal scholarship has traditionally asserted methodological neutrality, the impossibility of which becomes especially apparent as soon as their work requires dealing with historical female agencies. In his famous work *After Babel* (1975), for instance, George Steiner recognised that "[i]n most societies and throughout history, the status of women has been akin to that of children" (Steiner 1975: 99). And yet, in the preface to *After Babel*'s 2nd edition (see Steiner 1992: 16), he accuses feminisms of having "(...) brutalized or made trivial the complex, delicate fabric of evidence". Steiner's distrust in feminism thus seems to be methodological, fearing an explicitly subjective, and therefore compromised or biased scope. His own approach, however, is no less compromised or biased, portraying translations as feminised products undergoing metaphorical violation through "trust", "aggression", "embodiment", and "restitution" (Steiner 1998: 571*ff)*.

In effect, Feminist Translation Studies, as much as feminist history, constitutes a subjective interpretive framework, delivering subjective interpretive results. However, as Eshelman accurately contends (2007), all kinds of studies rely on different interpretive premises, some dangerously concealed or even unnoticed by the researcher, as it frequently is the case of patriarchal premises in traditional scholarship. Therefore, in this scholar's view, the differential advantage in an explicit form of interpretation like feminism lies in the visibility of the commentator's agency, allowing a second interpreter to confront his or her particular research results with the explicit goals and methodologies purported by this agency. Hence, feminist scopes in any discipline do not run the risk of deceiving other subjects as to what the particulars of an inevitably compromised analytic standpoint are.

As we are about to see, discrediting the neutrality of traditional scholarship, particularly in its treatment of gender-related evidence, implies embracing new concepts of

"relevance". What is more, a gender-informed critique of agency allows for the re-assessment of translators as "non-evenemential" actors by definition, and of translations as the greyest of literatures (Bastin and Bandia 2006: 120*ff*). Patriarchal critical discourse, as Chamberlain has contended (1988), has established a metaphorical bond between femininity and translation as merely re-productive, passive concepts, as well as between authorship and masculinity as active and creative ones. And yet, as we are about to discuss, the practical role played by translation in the perpetuation of patriarchy, one of clear manipulation, is inconsistent with the preachings of most theoreticians throughout history.

On this basis, Chamberlain (1988: 456) perceives a "double standard" in the gender metaphorics of translation, ultimately deterring women and other disempowered groups from being as unfaithful as patriarchal elites in their constant tempering with discourse: "(...) the infamous "double standard" operates here as it might have in traditional marriages: the "unfaithful" wife/ translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing" (Chamberlain ibid: 456). In my opinion, this "double standard" responds to the premises established by the translation(s) of seminal texts for patriarchy, and especially the Bible. In the third section of this paper I intend to survey how Bible translating has contributed to consolidate the prescriptive basis of traditional translation theory, relying on gendered metaphors in order to consolidate discursive power inequalities. The fourth section will apply a feminist notion of relevance in order to shed new light on historically-bound Bible translating practices.

3. A Gender-informed Critique of the Notional Legacies of Bible Translating

As already argued, DTS is generally considered the inception of a historicising concern for past discourses on translation. It emerged in the 70s, a decade of social and intellectual turmoil, witnessing the rise of new concepts of readership, authority, and text, from Foucault's problematisation of the connection between discourse and knowledge (once again, see Foucault and Kremer-Marietti 1969), to Derrida's deconstructive work. Inspired by an unprecedented concern with textual authority, this pseudo-historical field committed itself to a deconstruction of classical, prescriptive differences between translation and original. Importantly, this task entailed, according to Holmes (1975: 67-68), a revision of the apparently subsidiary role of translation in its related fields' past scholarship:

> After centuries of incidental and desultory attention from a scattering of authors, philologians, and literary scholars, plus here and there a theologian or an idiosyncratic linguist, the subject of translation has enjoyed a marked and constant increase in interest on the part of scholars in recent years, with the Second World War as a kind of turning point.

The fact that translation was for the first time being conceived as a distinctive discipline, however, did not imply that, as Holmes suggested back then, it had only received "incidental, delusory attention" on the part of previous epistemological traditions. Indeed, the capital importance of translation for the exertion of transcultural power has generated a series of necessarily prescriptive discourses throughout history, with the purpose of protecting its exclusive exploitation by patriarchal elites. Inevitably, these discourses have constituted the traditional basis on which most historicising efforts in our discipline have been produced, with an often unnoticed bias in their outcome. Subsequently, as shall be argued in the

following lines, translation's disguise as historically irrelevant and epistemically subsidiary is explained by a will to conceal the very different reality observed in patriarchal discursive operations, frequently operated through a symbiosis of religion and state. One of the aims of a feminist translation history, therefore, certainly involves exposing the discursive trap of translation's "non-evenementiality" (Bandia and Bastin 2006), and of the historical relevance standard by which it has thus far been judged.

There has been a perception in mainstream DTS that translation-enabled global discourses and mass communication interests are only recent, relying on new technologies and the creation of international institutions from the mid-20th century onwards (Holmes 1975). Conversely, the use of translation, especially by ecclesiastical elites, appears to have been mass-communication oriented since ancient times, in the means of attaining global power and control through discourse. While one may agree with the first descriptivists in that most theoretical preaching on translation has been "delusory" (Holmes ibid: 67), several pre-christianity discussions advanced quite liberating notions of translation, surprisingly similar to the de-constructive, post-structuralist views of reader, writer, and text on which feminist translators' agency strongly relies (Godard 1989). For instance, in his paper on imitation as a form of translation, Douglas Robinson (2001: 112) reflects on Cicero's groundbreaking understanding of translation, based on his experience rendering texts by Greek orators into Latin: "Exprimere literally means "to squeeze out"--a powerful image for the translation process as Cicero describes it, akin to giving birth. Figuratively, especially in connection with imitando, exprimere means to mould or form one thing in imitation of another". Translation here is understood as a process of reported speech or quote, a procedure of re-circulation of previous discourses through a new lens. Similarly, in the same paper by Robinson (*ibid*: 112), the following excerpt proves how mild but definitely anti-prescriptive approaches to translation have silently coexisted with the prevailing, tradittore-traduttore discourses of fear: "As [John Dryden] later remarks, ‘imitation of an author is the most advantageous way for a translator to show himself, but the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead".

Since "(...) here as elsewhere, Dryden was only popularizing a sense of the word that had been well-established in tradition" (Robinson ibid: 112), one may suppose that a number of theorists throughout History have understood translation as a crucial tool for the definition of identities across borders, a praxis typical of empowered subjects and hegemonic organisations. However, by virtue of these same performative attributes, translation is also a space where such identities may be (re-)negotiated, allowing non-normative agencies to challenge imposed conventions. It is perhaps this what Dryden feared to the extent of fierce condemnation. As a result, rather than inciting readers to an exploration of translation as re-writing, a majority of patriarchal commentators have obsessively attempted to monopolise the definitions of "fidelity" and "equivalence".

On its part, translation fidelity is a historically constructed "politics of transmission" (Simon 1996), often portrayed explained through marital images in line with Chamberlain's aforementioned gender metaphorics (1988). Strict faithfulness to original texts has thus been demanded of translators as much as systematically disobeyed by patriarchal elites precisely in the establishment of such originals, often embodying, as already argued, crucial turning points of Western history. Upon approaching the translation of texts on which patriarchal authority resides, a sense of moral duty "feminises" translation agencies on account of their merely re-productive role. Those texts' masculine seed of "universal" truth relies on such feminised mediators in order to ensure a perpetuation of patriarchal values. As a result, the

slightest temptation of "unfaithfulness" by approaching unofficial (metaphorically "extramarital") texts, traditions, or practices has been historically discouraged by theoretical paraphernalia. This manoeuvre constitutes a "double standard" (again, see Chamberlain 1988) in as much as textual infidelity is constantly being committed by patriarchal elites, precisely upon establishing the textual authority of foundational texts like the Bible.

As for the concept of "equivalence", of particular relevance have been, indeed, the standards set by Church-appointed Bible translators, on the basis of the very careful projects officially undertaken by the Christian authorities from early times. As this paper's departing premises have announced (see section 2), bible translations are the key factor in various major turning points in the history of both Eastern and Western thought. Subsequently, the Bible's constant "re-translations" are acts of interested re-negotiation of its meaning and the social constructs thereby presented, confronting nations beyond the East-West axis usually employed in mainstream history. In particular, the Christian foundational texts are mutually-opposing results of compilation, establishment, and reception on a wide variety of premises, constantly inaugurating interpretive traditions for the political gain of different patriarchal elites. It is nevertheless in early Christian translation practices, aimed at establishing both the Biblical source text and its reception, where our field's traditional original/translation dichotomy lies.

As the fiercest example of systematic manipulation, a sort of transediting (Marinetti 2012) combining politically-driven canonizations with controversial re-wordings, the translation projects for the Septuagint (200 BCE-50 CE) and the Vulgate (4th century) are among the greatest, most ambitious translation projects of ancient time. Their goal was to produce, in line with evolving cultural hegemonies, politically profitable versions of the Scriptures into the Ancient World's epistemological koinés: Greek and Latin. The so-called Patriarchs'[4] tempering with Middle-East lines of textual transmission in Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, and Armenian ultimately determined which interpretive frameworks were heretic and apocryphal.

This placed translation at the crossroads of Early Christian power struggles, as much as, subsequently, of those in early-modern ones, when new readings of the source texts took place for their translation into European vernaculars. Indeed, Latin being the official language of knowledge transmission throughout the Middle Ages, the Vulgata's textual authority was undisputed for centuries. It was by the end of the medieval period that the progressive consolidation of cultural and political dissent, of prototypical nations, required protecting the Vulgata from the new interpretations and particular purposes to which vernacular translations could subject it. While the Roman Church's alliance with the feudal regime was unquestionable, its idea of absolute cross-cultural power was founded on the inviolability of the Latin version. It is in the first projects of Bible translation into the vernaculars where a new order of alliances between christianity and the emerging nation-states were negotiated, with the subsequent appearance of new religious denominations fighting for cross-cultural hegemony.

This phenomenon of state-church alliance, by which Catholic and Protestant models of patriarchal societies strived for cross-cultural influence, is by no means devoid of manipulative interests. In the means of protecting power exertion through religion, it did not entirely challenge foundational myths on the "miraculous unanimity" (Simon 1987: 429) of sense allegedly reached by the various translators of the Septuagint, inspired by the ultimate, steadfast source of sense: God (Tymoczko 2006: 34). As a result, hermeneutics, a process inherent to translation, has successfully remained a purely scholastic prerogative till recently

(see Hermans 2009), with the emergence of feminism, among various other explicitly manipulative frameworks. However, Protestant Bible translations did indeed erode what feminist theorist Barbara Godard (1989: 42) defines as a "poetics of transparency", producing more approachable renderings for autonomous, unmediated Bible reading.

4. Gendered Agencies in Patriarchal Bible Translating: New Perspectives to Classical Interrogations

The point of this section is to suggest certain lines of research into the treatment of Biblical female agencies through translation, as well as, ultimately, to prove how gender relations have been crucial (re-)signifiers in Bible translation. Despite several disclaimers from reputed feminists like Beauvoir or Kate Millet (see Simon 1996: 105), discouraged by the seminal role of this set of texts in patriarchal societies, various translation-related issues in the treatment of Biblical female agencies have been dealt with from a feminist, historical perspective. In her book *Gender in Translation* (1996), Sherry Simon has offered a comprehensive survey of gender-relevant phenomena both in the general textual characterisation of the Bible, as well as in particular aspects of its translation. In regard with the Bible's overall textual layout, a crucial aspect for feminist critics lies in a deconstruction of Biblical authorship, especially considering the various narrative voices entangled in its production and the relevance of certain female protagonists like Ester or Judith. (see Millgram 2007). As Simon explains (ibid: 164), the earliest source traditionally identified in the Hebrew Bible is the Yahwistic Document (J, 10th century BCE), followed by the Elohistic Document (E, 9th century BCE); the Deuteronomistic Document (D, circa 7th century BCE), and the Priestly Document (P, 6th-5th centuries BCE). In line with renowned, mainstream critics like Bloom (1990), it has often been suggested that the 10th-century Yahwist author could have been a woman (Simon 1996: 117).

In particular, Bledstein's influential contribution to this research line argues that Tamar, king David's daughter (997 BCE-?), was a priestess who authored texts having inspired parts of the Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and the Song of Songs (see Bledstein 2016: 77). Interestingly, according to this scholar, she is presented by Ezra and Nehemiah as HaSopheret, "the female scribe", which is in sharp contrast with an overall, intentional blurring of her agency, perhaps due to her loss of dignity upon being raped by her half-brother, Amnon (Bledstein *ibid*). Her narrative, however, must have been regarded as productive given her positive portrayal of her father, king David, whose various wrongdoings throughout his life kept him in silence for a considerable number of years in the Scripture. And yet, Tamar's heroism is undeniable, especially in her first-person interventions after Amnon's brutal attack: "Unlike abused women who feel somehow guilty, so suffer in silence, shame, and self-reproach, Tamar grieves publically, loudly, in the streets of Jerusalem" (Bledstein *ibid*: 83).

Tamar's condition as a priestess, acknowledged on the basis of her distinctively rich garments in the passages where she appears (Bledstein *ibid*), seems to point at a reality of female agencies only partially presented in the Bible: a number of female priesthoods, composed of literate and cultivated members, like Tamar herself in king David's court, led liberated lifestyles in the Jewish and other neighbouring civilisations. Quite interestingly, according to archaeologist Merlin Stone (1978: 396), they followed "(...) ancient sexual customs", which did not prevent them from marrying afterwards, associated to female divinities completely absent from the Hebrew Bible and other contemporary texts. Especially

on the account of its multiple layers, edited primarily by men (Bledstein *ibid*), the Hebrew Bible 's historiographical scope has unfortunately been conditioned by its role as the seminal text of a patriarchal nation. As a result of the constant transformations suffered throughout history, the Yahwistic Document, potentially attributed to a woman narrator, should not be analysed from the obsessive standpoint of nominal authorship. Quite conversely, this has led many feminist historians to a sort of "Matilda effect" (Rossiter 1993), mirroring the so-called Mathew Complex (Merton 1968), which consists in attributing any potentially female prowess to the most relevant woman of the period in question. Such is the case of Tamar, whose position as king David's daughter and involvement in some prophecies are sadly the main reasons behind her tolerated appearance in the Bible, despite what must have been a truly empowered female agency.

An effective methodological proposal for these texts would therefore depart from the idea that tightly interwoven, "fragmented authorships" (Hurley and Goodblatt 2009) by ancient male and female voices are virtually unidentifiable. This is reinforced by the fact that patriarchy's contemporary concept of nominal authorship does not match ancient considerations in this sense. What is truly discernible in these pieces is the discursive evidence of past female agencies, of the ways in which they operated, their lifestyle and the gender-related perceptions governing their lives. For this purpose, social history methodologies may be a useful input in discourse analysis. Such is the premise at the core of Walsh's approach to the Song of Songs (2000: 1ff), one of the fragmentary pieces potentially belonging to the Yahwistic Document. An apparently non-religious set of poems, featuring an unmarried couple's erotism, its first-person account of a young female's sexuality has received attention by several feminist scholars (see, for instance, Pardes 1992). Its attribution, like in other controversial Biblical texts, to relevant male characters like king Solomon is potentially a quibbling to ensure canonisation (Walsh 2000: 5). After much controversy, the centrality of desire in this narration has not prevented an allegoric interpretation of spiritual love between the Jewish nation, often feminised in the Bible, and its male God. This patriarchal interpretation of the Scriptures, based, as usual, on a patriarchally-productive gender metaphorics, seems strange since, as commonly agreed-upon, "(...) in the Hebrew culture sex had been demythologized", and considered "(...) a proper sphere for man and not for deity" (Phipps 1973: 83). However, it was probably devised in order to grant historiographical significance to a clearly anti-historiographical text, at least from traditional standards, and famous for its absolute lack of contextual detail (Walsh 2000: 7).

For Walsh, the reader's focus should instead be placed on "(...) desire, how pleasures are described and longed for, and how these pleasures offer at least a glimpse into a culture's attitudes and values toward sexual desire" (Walsh ibid: 10). Here, in Walsh's view, social history should assist traditional historiographical sources in accounting for the "(...) facets of Israelite daily life such as livelihood, marital customs, rituals, dining habits, religious and legal beliefs, and the like" (Walsh ibid: 9). All these aspects, understandably, contribute to a re-construction of the voices' potential gender conventions. From a feminist perspective, undoubtedly, it is in the contexts evoked by these practices, and not in those portrayed by warfare chronicles and land occupation, where female agencies have a better chance of emerging. Subsequently, this scholar discusses the female speaker's choice of culturally-bound, natural imagery of both pleasure and hardship as commonly antagonistic feelings in the Bible. A great opportunity is therefore granted in the Song of Songs to leave aside the male pleasures traditionally portrayed in the biblical world (women, wine, God, laughing,

etc., according to Walsh *ibid*), and reflect instead on how female agencies pursued their own pleasure and happiness.

Besides its archaeological value for those feminist critics concerned with compiling a different history of humanity, a gender-informed, historical re-construction of cultural images is of great assistance for the discourse analysis required in Bible translation. Biblical Israel's gendered cultural images are found at the core of the most influential translation dilemmas of early Christianity. For instance, Greek philosopher Origen (253 ACE-254 ACE) supplemented his translated passage of the Temptation of Christ with an explanation on the feminine Hebrew word *ruah*, generally understood as "wind". In the particular context concerned, it referred to a non-corporeal presence which he understood as a holy "spirit", a decision potentially drawing Saint Jerome's later attention to this passage (De Santos Otero 1963: 54). Although properly grounded, what was ultimately not sanctioned was his intuition on the importance of this female image's matching grammatical gender. In Origin's discussion, this *ruah* was presented as Christ's "Mother", and not as the ghostly presence of his Father, generally agreed-on afterwards. Unsurprisingly, in an apocryphal Latin version of the Song of Songs, Saint Jerome (419-420) seemed to follow this interpretation (De Santos Otero ibid: 41). According to Myers (2010: 427), such was the common perception of Early Christian Syriac speakers who, as she convincingly argues, (...) had the advantage of examining the biblical texts in a Semitic language and from a Semitic culture, similar to the environment in which the earliest texts had originated. Thus, "(...) although striking to western readers, [the metaphor of God's spirit as a mother] is a concept that grows naturally out of the feminine character of spirit in Semitic languages". While Simon briefly discusses how *ruah* became "spirit" from its original sense of "wind" (see Simon 1996: 107), she does not delve into the impact of grammatical gender in the re-negotiation of important cultural images for patriarchy.

Nevertheless, the most important contribution of social history for a feminist analysis of the Hebrew Bible is a de-construction of Biblical gender constructs central for exegesis purposes, as well as a critique of their portrayal in later interpretive traditions. Indeed, the main interpretive schism between Rabbinic and Christian exegesis, Christ's identification as the promised Messiah, lies in a potential distortion of the gender conventions standing in past Israelite societies. This Messiah, as predicted by prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7) to king Ahaz around the 7th century BCE, was to be born to an 'almah, a term the basic translation of which would be "young lady", apparently mirroring the masculine form 'elem (Steinmueller 1940). And yet, the etymological studies undertaken in regard with this term do not give much hope to feminist causes. Despite deriving from the verb 'alam, which theoretically meant "to become strong or powerful" (Steinmueller 1940: 41), 'elem and 'almah seemed to acquire very different connotations over time. Probably aware of being before a serious interpretive issue, Saint Jerome provided lengthy explanations on this potential stem for 'almah, defining it as "to conceal or hide": a typical action taken in order to protect young virgins till their marriage (Steinmueller ibid: 30). The meaning of 'alam seems to evolve quite suddenly also throughout Steinmueller's own discussion (*ibid*: 31), from the general definition of juvenile vigour to a gender-marked "to be strong and virile or robust". That this scholar is by no means objective in his argumentation is observed in his comments to the Palmyrene Tariff (137 CE) a bilingual, Greek-Aramaic document where prices for both male and female slaves were established. Here, he argues that the contextual meaning of 'almah is "slave" or "harlot" (Steinmueller ibid: 37), which, besides proving women's universal

semantic derogation (see Schulz 1975), does little to portray virginity as a defining trait for 'almah.

The Hebrew Bible contains nine references to the word 'almah (Steinmueller 1940). None of them categorically emphasises virginity as a sine-qua-non trait of the women falling under this category. Instead, patriarchal attraction for female youth seems to be underscored in its use, from the hagiographic description of a young Rebecca (Gen. 24) to the clearly sexual, closing verse of Proverb 30: (...) "And the way of a man with a young woman" (Prov. 30:19). Given the existence of the specific word betulah (see Simon 1996: 164), also present in the Bible, virginity seems to have been at best a peripheral, perhaps desirable, but by no means a defining trait of 'almah, as it was of virgo, Saint Jerome's equivalent in the Vulgate. Traditionally, Catholic scholastics have failed to deal with Isaiah's 'almah as the very subject determining Emmanuel's identification in the prophecy, tempering instead with the gender construct behind it in order to suit a particular contender to the Messianic mission. The Bible itself offers a number of clues into the socio-cultural interpretation of 'almah. As Stuhlmueller rightfully indicates (1961: 172), the "(...) marvelous births of sacred history, from Isaac, Samson and Samuel" usually concerned older, also in other prophecies by Isaiah, barren women, and not young virgins, who unexpectedly conceived great men, mirroring Israel's constant "re-birth" in the face of all trials (Stuhlmueller *ibid*). This makes Mary's virginal conception an unprecedented sign of God's will.

However, the ultimate sociocultural input for an accurate translation of 'almah must come, once again, from social history. Isaiah's prophecy may have easily been referred to the incumbent king Ahaz, who interestingly re-married around that time, his new, younger wife perhaps bringing new hope to king David's lineage, menaced by a foreign coalition back then. Given the actual relevance of Queen Mothers in Biblical history (see Ackerman 1993), the need to discern the gender-related conventions behind 'almah, especially among royal women, requires increased sociocultural attention to their role as state representatives and appropriate mothers for Davidic descendants (for recent contributions in this matter, see Bach 2013).

On the other hand, after examining a marriage contract of the Babatha Archive, unearthed in the Judean desert, Tal Ilan (1993) has argued that premarital cohabitation was a custom in Ancient Judea, consistent with certain passages of the Mishnah, the most ancient written collection of oral traditions. To what extent was premarital virginity a defining trait for young women? It is my impression that various parts of the Bible suggesting premarital intercourse have been re-channeled under the sociocultural conventions of marriage inherited by the Church from Roman society. This is particularly apparent in the Song of Songs, which has often been asserted to portray a married couple in the means of favouring certain perceptions of gender roles in the Bible over others. For Phipps (1974: 83), the phrase "my dear sister (achoth), my dear bride" may well be understood as "my dear wife". A more extensive, socio-historical explanation of Ancient Israelite kinship than the one provided is definitely required to sustain such this interpretation. As a crucial praxis for patriarchal societies, Bible re-translating and exegesis have implied a constant re-negotiation of gender-related social norms.

5. Conclusions and Future Lines of Research

The main goal of this paper has been to portray gender and gendered agencies as crucial spaces of cross-cultural (re-)negotiation in history, as well as to suggest certain

methodological frameworks to analyse such a (re-)negotiation through translation. Feminist Translation Studies has hence been portrayed as the disciplinary crossroads where a wide variety of feminist interrogations and critical procedures may converge. Patriarchal (re-)translation projects have followed different "politics of transmission" (Simon 1996), ultimately pursuing the promotion of particular forms of patriarchal kinship, laying the basis of our contemporary "nations". Since women are essential re-productive objects in those models of kinship, the assertion of cultural differences in translation often implies important shifts in their discursive representation. More realistic notions of relevance would thus do well in targeting traditionally inconsequential (because typically feminine) realms of cultural signification. As argued so far, Bible translating is one of those spaces where this gender-informed concept of relevance could be useful in a multiplicity of aspects.

Nevertheless, the socio-historical approach proposed in this paper should also encourage future research into what we could identify as feminist *Translator* Studies (see Chesterman 2009), pursuing, among other historically-motivated aims, an explanation on women's particular connection with patriarchal translation praxis. Early women translators' agencies like that of Mary Sidneywere often connected with the translation of pious and sacred texts (see Simon 1996). As a consequence of the so-called coloniality of gender (Lugones 2016), women mediators like La Malinche are frequent, sacrificial figures in the history of colonisation processes. What is the relevance of these translator agencies' in patriarchal history? What is the motivation between patriarchal history's reference to these women? The ultimate, gender-informed critique of historical relevance should definitely consider female translators' agencies paradoxically central role in most patriarchal endeavours.

Notes:

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2 Relevant discussions of a feminist praxis of Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge have been provided by Godayol (2011) and Vidal Claramonte (1998).

3 An exception to the rule may be found in the research carried out by the GETLIHC research group Estudis de Gènere: Traducció, Literatura, Història i Comunicació).

4 Etymology is often a most sincere source in order to survey the politics of history. Interestingly, the original "patriarchate" referred to early Christian authorities, as well as to the male lineage featuring the Old Testament's different books.

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