De/Colonising Through Translation? Rethinking the Politics of Translation in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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Abstract

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The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda emerged to mainstream gender into matters of conflict and peacebuilding. Many WPS narratives share a common understanding of translation as transfer in the sense of transferring international gender norms into local contexts. This scenario emphasises the benefits of translation, silences particular voices, reproduces power hierarchies between actors and forms of knowledges, and enacts processes of in/exclusions. This chapter draws on feminist and postcolonial theory to analyse WPS initiatives in Nepal through a discussion of the underlying understandings of translation. The analysis reveals how translation as transfer initiatives reproduce hierarchies, exclusions and coloniality, and suggests that initiatives based on an understanding of translation as transformation can create spaces that can contribute to decolonising.

Keywords

Gender
Coloniality
Hierarchy

Feminist theory

Decolonisation

Introduction[1]

With the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions,[2] the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda emerged to mainstream gender into matters of conflict and peacebuilding.[3] So far, two competing narratives tend to dominate the debate on the WPS agenda (Kunz 2016, 2017, 2019). Advocates hail gender mainstreaming as a window of opportunity in post-conflict situations[4] for the transfer of international gender norms to promote gender equality, reduce conflict and increase security. Critics argue that such gender mainstreaming initiatives work as a Trojan horse, whereby international gender norms are used instrumentally to legitimise liberal peacebuilding. Thus, many feminist engagements with the WPS agenda focus either on the (inadequate) translation, localisation and implementation of UNSCR 1325 or on the problematic tendencies and implications of the underlying (liberal) feminism—such as instrumentalization, depoliticisation or bureaucratisation.

Beyond their differences, these two narratives share a common understanding of translation: the feminist knowledge transfer scenario (Kunz 2016). In this scenario, translation is mainly understood in the sense of transferring international gender norms into local contexts through gender mainstreaming and localisation activities. Thereby, there is a tendency to emphasise the benefits of translation and to obscure the power relations involved in translation processes. As a result, this scenario silences particular voices at the expense of others, reproduces power hierarchies between actors and forms of knowledges, and enacts processes of in/exclusions, which render mutual understanding and solidarities difficult. In this chapter, I propose to analyse initiatives linked to the WPS agenda through a discussion of the underlying understanding of translation to reveal some of the ways in which these initiatives reproduce hierarchies, exclusions and coloniality. At the same time, initiatives based on a different understanding of translation can create spaces where decolonising becomes possible.

Translation is a highly contested and ambivalent notion, problematique and process.[5] In this chapter, I draw on feminist and postcolonial scholars studying

(cultural) translation from various disciplines (Alvarez et al. 2014; Bassnett and Trivedi 1999b; Chambers 2006; de Lima Costa 2006; Lugones et al. 1983; Niranjana 1992; Simon 1996; Spivak 1993; Young 2003, 2012). This literature emphasises that translation is 'necessary but impossible' (Spivak 2000, p. 13). It is acknowledged that processes of description and interpretation, and circulation of ideas and values are always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries (de Lima Costa 2006; Niranjana 1992). Focusing on these power dimensions, scholars recognise the tensions between translation as an act of domination and erasure on the one hand, and translation as a process of transmitting linguistic and cultural meanings that makes dialogue possible and creates the potential for transformation, empowerment and solidarity on the other hand. Drawing on this literature, I propose a critique of the translation as transfer scenario underlying many initiatives within the WPS agenda, which contributes to reinstate relations of coloniality. Instead, I suggest that a different understanding of translation as a pluri-directional process of transformation that requires all participants in the process to take upon them the task of attempting to step outside their established conceptual boundaries to understand the other sides and create dialogue can create spaces for decolonising.

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My analysis draws on a three-year research project (2013 ~~and~~ - 2016) on the links between gender, conflict and peace in Nepal. In the context of the post-conflict UN Mission in Nepal (established in 2006), and the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and the launching of a 1325 National Action Plan (in 2011), a multitude of WPS initiatives have been established, involving international and Nepali actors, and non-governmental and governmental organisations. This includes various programmes on security focusing on gender issues, such as gender training and awareness raising initiatives in the context of security sector reform (SSR), but also workshops on non-violence and conflict management. Nepal is thus an interesting context to study the various understandings of translation underpinning initiatives linking gender to conflict and security.

In the context of this project, I conducted more than 100 in-depth interviews with a variety of people, including external and Nepali gender experts; representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organisations working on gender issues in Nepal; representatives of Nepali (women's) civil society and community organisations; male and female security sector personnel; Nepali

government representatives; Maoist ex-combatants; members of various political parties; media representatives; Nepali artists, academics and researchers. In addition, I carried out participant observation of gender training and awareness raising initiatives, 1325 events, and gender and development projects.[6] For this chapter, I specifically draw on two particular initiatives situated within the WPS agenda. First, a gender training initiative developed by an international NGO working on promoting security, peace and gender equality in post-conflict Nepal, collaborating with local civil society groups. Situated within the implementation and localisation of 1325, this NGO provides gender trainings for civil society groups among other activities. The second initiative offers workshops on non-violence and conflict management linked to the WPS agenda. The key objectives of both initiatives are very similar, i.e. increase women's participation in the field of peace and security issues, reduce gender-based violence and conflict , and promote gender justice. Yet, they differ significantly in terms of their content, form and underlying understanding of translation, which is the focus of the analysis in this chapter.

The next section presents the 'translation as transfer' scenario underlying many initiatives linked to the WPS agenda, which is illustrated with the analysis of a WPS gender training initiative in Nepal in the third section. The fourth section shifts beyond translation as transfer and presents alternative understandings of translation as transformation processes that can potentially contribute to decolonising, which is illustrated in the fifth section, with an example of an initiative on non-violence and conflict management in Nepal.

Feminist Knowledge Transfer in the WPS Agenda

With the introduction of the WPS agenda, gender mainstreaming has become part of post-conflict reconstruction and development. Most post-conflict UN interventions now feature a gender dimension. This includes gender-sensitive security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, and gender trainings and awareness raising initiatives for peacekeepers, security sectors agents and civil society. In this context, there have been calls for 'localising' the WPS agenda. This has involved the translation of international gender mainstreaming documents into local languages and the development of strategies to localise international gender mainstreaming norms. Localisation has been highlighted by the UN Secretary-General as a good

practice that ensures the mainstreaming of WPS commitments (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders 2013, p. 7). Most prominently, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) focuses on assisting countries in the elaboration of 1325 and 1820 National Action Plans and localisation guidelines, as part of their work on the implementation of the WPS agenda. It is an implementation strategy 'based on the premise that local ownership and participation leads to more effective policy implementation in local communities' (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders 2013, p. 5).[7] Localisation is an attempt to carry the content of international gender norms across linguistic and cultural boundaries into the particularities of the local context.

As I have analysed elsewhere, there are two main ways in which feminists have engaged with the WPS gender mainstreaming agenda linked to post-conflict interventions (Kunz 2016). Some feminists share the optimism related to the transfer of liberal norms as part of the liberal peace project. They view post-conflict interventions as a key moment of transformation and a 'window of opportunity' for mainstreaming gender concerns and transferring feminist knowledge, such as in the context of gender-sensitive SSR initiatives (Alden 2010; Meintjes et al. 2001; Schroeder 2005; Smet 2009; Valasek and Bastick 2008). This approach is based on an understanding of translation as transfer and focuses on the (successful) translation of international gender norms. Other feminists express concerns regarding what happens to feminist knowledge in the process of being transferred in this particular way (Harrington 2006; Hudson 2012; Nesiah 2012). Thereby, gender mainstreaming is seen as the Trojan horse of the liberal peace project whereby the transfer of feminist knowledge in the context of the WPS agenda is instrumental in smuggling in and legitimising Western liberal norms. They warn of the implications in terms of the marginalisation of local feminist knowledge and practices, yet they do not question the underlying understanding of translation.

Despite their oppositions, both approaches are based on an understanding of translation as transfer (Kunz 2016). Thereby, they tend to exaggerate the power of international norms, to underestimate the agency of local actors, and to erase the power relations involved in translation processes. In this scenario, international gender norms represent the 'original' that is being translated into a 'copy' in a particular context. International gender experts are involved in translating and localising WPS knowledge from the 'centre', local gender experts

are formed (by international gender experts) to translate and localise the knowledge. Women's organisations, women victims or security agents in post-conflict societies are portrayed as either the implementers or beneficiaries of the knowledge that is transferred to bring progressive change and gender equality. Underlying this discourse is a dichotomy between the sender and the receiver of knowledges on WPS, which contributes to mechanisms of in/exclusion and marginalises particular identities that do not fit this dichotomy, such as the 'wo/man troublemaker' who questions 1325 implementation activities, or who choose to engage on their own terms or not to engage at all (Kunz 2016, 2019). This scenario of translation as transfer can be illustrated with the following gender training initiative in Nepal.

Translation as Transfer in Gender Training

In the context of Nepal, the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), a political mission, was established linked to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended a decade-long armed conflict in 2006.[8] UNMIN included a Gender Affairs Section,[9] albeit with a relatively limited mandate (Manchanda 2010). In 2011, Nepal adopted the UNSCR 1325, launching a National Action Plan.[10] Post-conflict gender mainstreaming activities by international and non-governmental organisations focused on women's participation in electoral processes and their representation in the Constituent Assembly and the government (Ramnarain 2015, p. 1308). It also included various gender-sensitive programmes on security, such as gender training and awareness raising initiatives in the context of security sector reform (SSR). Gender trainings are among the key instruments of gender mainstreaming and take a key place in the context of the implementation and localisation of the WPS agenda (Ferguson 2019; Holvikivi 2019).

One such gender training initiative was developed by an international NGO working on promoting security, peace and gender equality in post-conflict Nepal, collaborating with local civil society groups.[11] Situated within the implementation and localisation of 1325, this NGO developed and provided gender trainings for civil society groups among other activities. In the context of my research, I carried out in-depth interviews with the director of the NGO, and the head of the training programme. I also conducted participant observation in one gender training event where I was able to participate in preparatory meetings, the training, as well as in the debriefing sessions afterwards, and to

interview the gender trainers involved in the event as well as some of the participants. The two-day training event was organised in 2013 and included a group of 15 participants, seven men and eight women.

The director described the NGO's gender training work in Nepal as follows:

What we would like to see is that the implementation of the 1325 NAP improves local safety. … And then, underneath that umbrella, we focus on the practical work with community safety groups…, but also working with civil society or working with media or with other actors to improve their understanding and knowledge and expertise about gender and security issues. And … the trainings like this one are obviously targeted at improving the civil society's knowledge and then also enable them to be more active and advocate for more gender responsive security provisions. (Interview, director of NGO, Kathmandu 2013)

This statement illustrates the key assumptions related to the translation as transfer scenario. The training initiative is based on the idea that social transformation requires more expertise knowledge on WPS. Thereby, external actors bring knowledge and expertise on gender and security to the communities in Nepal, in order to form local civil society actors to then advocate for gender-sensitive security policies. Indeed, much of the training was held in lecture-style sessions with a strong emphasis by the trainers on 'transferring knowledge' on gender and security. A large part of the workshop was dedicated to presenting and memorising existing national and international laws related to gender equality, international norms such as CEDAW and 1325, and definitions and concepts linked to gender and security. Many of these concepts were not translated into Nepali, but used in English (e.g. gender, SMART , Could we place FN 12 here (instead of having it in the next sentence)? advocacy, etc.). Another part of the training included the elaboration of action plans in small groups, formulating objectives using SMART [12] Could we put this FN just after the first time I mention SMART, which is in the previous sentence? (i.e. in the brackets a the end of the previous sentence). analysis to produce effective messages for social change.

The existing expertise of participants was mentioned during the preparation meetings of the gender training. Yet, rather than as a potential source of knowledge that could be drawn upon, it was understood as ~~of~~ a potential problem

and challenge to the expertise of the trainers, something to be taken into account when planning the content of the workshop. As one trainer put it: 'some of them have more expertise than we do' (Interview with gender trainer, Kathmandu 2013). During the workshop, the trainers used the blackboard and big posters distributed across the room to write down key messages or definitions, sometimes inviting participants to read out loud certain messages. At the end of the first morning, the trainers discovered that there were several illiterate persons among the participants. It took some time for the trainers to think about how to adapt their training to allow everyone to participate. This created a very uncomfortable situation, making the participants feel ashamed and reinforcing existing social stigma and hierarchies regarding literacy and expertise.

Among other things, wWhat transpired here are colonial assumptions about expertise and knowledge circulation, what Shepherd (2011, p. 516) has termed the 'imperial logic of a "trickle-down" theory of expertise'. Simply put, the idea is that 'locals' do not have the necessary specific knowledge (e.g. pertaining to security and gender) and therefore there is a need to bring in external experts (e.g. to carry out gender training and to transfer through translation). 'Other' knowledges are portrayed as lacking or even threatening and therefore in need of assistance and intervention, an illustration of the authority of expertise underlying the translation as transfer scenario. This scenario also has implications in terms of the possibility of solidarity, which is difficult to establish in a situation of hierarchy that locates expert knowledge in a privileged position vis-à-vis national women's groups, exacerbated by differentials in terms of access to funding and networks (Kunz 2016). This can be illustrated by the fact that during this two-day gender training event, the trainers kept distant from the participants outside the workshop space, for example during lunch or dinner, etc. even though the whole event took place in a hotel outside the city where everyone was accommodated, a setting that might have allowed for plenty of moments and spaces for dialogue and solidarity.

Yet, for this to happen, it is not enough to fault failed or distorted translation of WPS norms, or the instrumentalisation of liberal feminism, as existing critiques tend to do. Instead we need to move beyond the transfer scenario to think differently about translation in the context of the WPS agenda. Before moving on to this task, it is important to note that translation as transfer does often not happen as planned or imagined. Existing international norms get transformed

through their travelling and translation, they take on multiple meanings depending on the particular local context and are the object of contestation and rejection. Local actors subvert them, appropriate them for various purposes or resist localisation efforts. It is important to acknowledge these multiple and context-specific practices of appropriation, subversion and resistance (Kunz 2019).

Beyond Translation as Transfer

In the translation as transfer scenario linked to the WPS agenda, there is a tendency to emphasise the benefits of translation and to obscure the power relations involved in translation processes. Yet, feminist and postcolonial scholars studying translation from various disciplines emphasise that translation processes do not take place in neutral spaces, but are always embedded in power relations (Alvarez et al. 2014; Bassnett and Trivedi 1999b; Chambers 2006; de Lima Costa 2006; Lugones et al. 1983; Niranjana 1992; Simon 1996; Spivak 1993; Young 2003, 2012). Focusing on these power dimensions, this literature recognises the tensions between translation as a process of transmitting linguistic and cultural meanings that makes intercultural communication possible, and translation as an act of domination and erasure. Scholars warn of the risk of romanticising processes of translation and argue that translation is a 'manipulative activity' that 'rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems' (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999a, p. 2). Demonstrating the ways in which translation has long been 'entangled in the web of imperial power' (Chambers 2006, p. 4), Young (2003, p. 140) argues: 'Translation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture and people being translated'. The metaphor of cannibalism has been used by some to capture the potential power dynamics inherent in translation processes (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999b).

In the translation as transfer scenario linked to the WPS agenda, there is also an implicit assumption that translation is, or should be, possible. In contrast, Spivak (2000, p. 13) argues that 'in every possible sense, translation is necessary but impossible'. Yet, she also urges us to 'resist the necessary impossibility of translation' (Spivak 2000, p. 22), recognising the need and the potential of translation to create communication, mutual understanding and transformation. Drawing on longstanding practice and theorising of translation, feminists have

long been aware of this fundamental paradox of translation as impossible, while also necessary and potentially transformatory. De Lima Costa, for example, asks 'How can we think through the gap of translation and account for the multiple forces that overdetermine translation practices along with its strategies of containment?' (de Lima Costa 2006, p. 75). Thus, in all attempts to translate, we find an irresolvable dynamic of negotiating 'this void in representation or understanding, temporal and spatial at once' (Young 2012, p. 172).

Various ways to negotiate this 'void' or 'inbetweenness' have been suggested. One move is to understand translation as 'foreignising' (Benjamin 2000; Bhabha 1994; Young 2012). Thereby, instead of translating other languages and cultures into our own to make them understandable to us (i.e. domesticating translation), it becomes incumbent on us to move towards understanding other languages and cultures. Aas Young (2012, p. 171) argues: 'if you want to understand you have to step outside your established conceptual boundaries to do so'. In another approach, the void of translation can be understood as a productive and transformative space that allows to move beyond one's own situatedness. In this space, hegemonic narratives can be questioned and power relations can be made visible: 'feminists in the North and South can disturb hegemonic narratives of the other, of gender, and of feminism itself through practices of translation that make visible the asymmetrical geometries of power along the local-regional-national-global nexus' (de Lima Costa 2006, p. 75). Moreover, this in-between space offered by translation can also produce sites and moments of relating and become a site of resistance and empowerment. Instead of transferring meaning from one language and culture to another, translation then is about 'creating a new language we both share' (Fultner 2017, p. 320). This can lead to create the conditions for dialogue or even a 'fusion of horizons' (Weir 2017, p. 266). Yet, dialogue has to be understood in a way that 'does not require complete agreement in background understanding as either a precondition or a result, especially if the goals are political action and solidarity. Rather, as transformative practice, dialogue transforms interlocutors and their differences and thus can be a dynamic means for bringing about political change' (Fultner 2017, p. 314). Therefore, the process of translation is transformative, but does not necessarily have to lead to consensus. It is the process of sharing that is itself transformative. This 'can be achieved neither by mere empathy for the other nor by imposing one's own standards on her', but requires using the creative

productivity of language and translation (Fultner 2017, p. 320).

Inspired by these insights, we can move beyond an understanding of translation as referring to the transfer of an original into a copy, a process of one-way and top-down transfer. It leads us away from an understanding of a process of translating the original sender message (e.g. international gender equality norms) into languages and cultures of beneficiaries (e.g. through localisation or gender training processes, involving brokers who attempt to make these norms intelligible to local actors). Instead, translation can be understood as a process of transformation, as a space or moment of interaction and relating that necessarily involves power relations but also the potential to produce transformation. In this understanding of translation, there is no need for an original, translation becomes a pluri-directional process in which languages, people and cultures are transformed as they move across places (Young 2003, p. 29). All parties involved in translation need to make an effort to step outside their established conceptual boundaries to understand each other and bridge the void, all the while keeping in mind the paradox of the impossibility, necessity and potential of translation.

These insights allow us to explore the possibility of translation as a process that can contribute to decolonising. Decolonising can be described as 'unveiling the logic of coloniality and delinking from the rhetoric of modernity. Knowledge and truth in parenthesis, epistemic geopolitics beyond absolute knowledge, restitution of colonised subaltern knowledges, and diverse visions of life are some of the keystones of decolonial thinking and doing' (Mignolo 2012, p. xvii). I suggest that if understood based on the above insights, processes of translation in the context of the WPS agenda, could potentially contribute to produce moments and sites of decolonising in a number of ways:

1. By exposing logics of coloniality involved in the WPS agenda and 1325 localisation activities and delinking, for example, from the Western expert or international support

2. By creating space for multiple ~~diverse~~ visions of the world and ways to create knowledge that do not involve imposing or transferring international gender norms

3. By reconceptualising spaces of interaction beyond the notion of an original that needs to be translated or localised, and exploiting the

potential of the in-between spaces where translation unfolds its creative productivity

4. By transforming people involved in the translation process, and working as spaces of empowerment and resistance

Decolonising the WPS Agenda Through Translation?

Alongside the above-described initiatives that are based on a translation as transfer scenario, in the context of Nepal, we also find initiatives that understand translation as transformation processes. This can be illustrated with the example of an initiative that offers workshops on non-violence and conflict management linked to the WPS agenda. I selected this initiative because its key objectives are very similar to the gender training initiative analysed above (i.e. increase women's participation in the field of peace and security issues, reduce gender-based violence and conflict, and promote security and gender justice); yet the two initiatives differ radically in terms of their content, form and underlying understanding of translation. I analyse this initiative using the four elements of translation as decolonising identified above, with a focus on both the content and form of this initiative. My analysis draws on conversations with Subash, whom I met at an international workshop on gender and conflict.[13] We started talking about our interests linked to the WPS agenda and he mentioned his activities on gender and non-violence. We continued our conversations for hours over several days when I was in Kathmandu.

Subash distances himself from the prominent approach within the localisation of 1325 in the context of Nepal, which he argues is based on an 'aggressive claiming approach' associated with international interventions:

What is happening with women's empowerment is like it is about claiming. When you claim something, you are competing. But it is not about competition. It is about fulfilling, supplementing. When you compete, you are not working on relationships. When you are enriching, you are working on relationships. (Conversation with Subash, Kathmandu 2015)

He suggests that different, less violent forms of interaction might go further to address gender-based violence and conflict and he emphasises the importance of

relationships. In his activities, he uses a different approach. He is involved in workshops on non-violence and conflict management (unpaid volunteer work), inspired by the international Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) that initially started in the United States (US).[14] Gender issues are integral part of these workshops, yet they are not explicitly declared as a form of gender training. Subash explains the methodology and content of these workshops:

Workshops are usually for about three days, involving many activities. … What is different compared to other workshops is that it is an experiential workshop. It is not a lecture-based or theory-based workshop. We build on the participants' experiences and their sharing of … daily life situations and the challenges they are facing or they have faced. It is completely based on where the participants come from. It is not about where the facilitators are coming from…

The participants learn in two ways. One, they learn by participating in the exercise. The other way they learn is from hearing from other participants what they learned. It is not the facilitators saying, 'You should do that. This is the answer. This is the solution of this problem'. What we do is we bring local experience and the wisdom of the group, and we create that environment. We try to create that special environment in order for the participants to bring that out, the wisdom in the group. …

Another very exciting factor in this workshop as a facilitator is, in the same workshop, we can have a completely illiterate participant and a PhD holder together. It makes no difference at all in the quality of the workshop. Rather, they help each other to understand the experience of conflict and nonviolence between those educational gaps. …

We examine issues of gender and masculinity as well in that process. We do not use topics, per se, as masculinity and gender, but we have exercises that give an experience and feeling to the people who have strong patriarchal mindsets and attitudes and behaviours to think themselves about it and reflect on that. How does it feel for others when I do this? Typically, there is an exercise called 'masks'. That deals with what happens, how it feels to be in power and what happens to be powerless. We ask them sometimes to switch the roles. Like we ask male participants to become female and play the role of female and give that experience for them for a few minutes and ask them later how it feels, what

happened for you in that exercise. That gives them an opportunity to really experience how it feels to be powerless and dominated and things like that …. (Conversation with Subash, Kathmandu 2015)

We can see that even though the objectives of these workshops are very similar to those of gender trainings, they differ from the training analysed above in terms of their content, form and underlying understanding of translation. The content is clearly linked to the WPS agenda in terms of recognising and aiming to transform the links between gender, conflict and security. Yet, Subash cautions against isolating the focus on gender and women's empowerment and encourages us to think of gender in relation to other power hierarchies. He also points to the problematic implications related to certain forms of 'claiming' feminisms in the context of Nepal, and he proposes non-violent forms of interaction to address gender and other dynamics of social inequalities and power. Thereby, this initiative contributes to challenge mainstream translations of the WPS agenda into initiatives that focus either on empowering individual women as victims or peacemakers in isolation, or on disciplining men as essentially violent and in need of gender training to become peaceful (Kunz 2014), or on reinforcing the role of men as the voice for women (as illustrated for example in the *He for She* campaign initiated by UN Women[15]). Through understanding gender relations as part of broader context-specific power relations and hierarchies and thinking in terms of relationships rather than individualist claiming and empowering, these workshops might contribute to addressing some of the problems attached to existing WPS initiatives, yet without proposing simple solutions of best practice.

~~Suchir~~ Subash pushes us to challenge the transfer scenario whereby 1325 gets localised in Nepal, and instead proposes different forms of knowledge production and circulation. Instead of top-down lecturing of the principles and concepts of 1325—which is something we have observed in the gender training described above—his workshops propose a different approach. His pedagogy takes experiential knowledge and existing conflict management knowledge of workshop participants seriously. In this context, learning can take various forms, is acquired through experience rather than 'being taught' and includes exchange and mutual learning among participants. The knowledge of every participant, as well as the knowledge shared and produced in this group setting is valued. Through this approach, boundaries and hierarchies, such as those related to

education, are challenged and broken down. This differs from the approach we observed in the gender training above, which reinforced social hierarchies and the stigma related to illiteracy. It also goes against the commonly assumed authority and prevalence of expert knowledge in the WPS agenda, whereby the authority of producing and circulating knowledge is attributed to international institutions and (gender) experts. More broadly, this requires resisting the colonial urge to 'change the other' and a critical (self-)reflection on the position of participants and facilitators. All participants are encouraged to go beyond their own conceptual boundaries to understand each other and bridge the void of translation, putting themselves into the situation of others, feeling and experiencing others' emotions, while also being conscious that these are not fully translatable. These workshops create sites where relating and dialogue becomes possible. There is no original to be translated, but translation is pluri-directional; and participants get transformed through translation. It is about connecting people, while also disconnecting from the centre, from the expert.

In this sense, I propose that these workshops illustrate how an understanding of translation as a process of transformation ~~and empowerment~~ can contribute to decolonising the WPS agenda, as outlined above. They expose logics of coloniality involved in the WPS agenda and 1325 localisation activities (e.g. related to transfer scenarios, lecturing and expert practices); they create space for diverse visions of the world and ways to create knowledge that do not involve imposing or transferring international gender norms (such as experiential knowledge and sharing); they propose sites of interaction where dialogue can be created, the potential of the in-between spaces and new languages explored, and participants transformed (e.g. through mask activities[16]); and they contribute to empowerment and resistance (e.g. through working on enriching relationships beyond competition).

Conclusion

Analysing the WPS agenda through a discussion of the understanding of translation reveals how initiatives based on a translation as transfer scenario can reproduce hierarchies, exclusions and coloniality, whereas a different understanding of translation as transformation can create spaces where decolonising becomes possible. As illustrated in the analysis of a gender training initiative in the context of Nepal, the translation as transfer scenario creates a

hierarchy of knowledge that reinforces the authority of the expert who is in a privileged position vis-à-vis other knowledges, which renders solidarity difficult. Moving beyond the translation as transfer scenario opens possibilities for recognising multiple ways of knowing and the co-construction of knowledge, as shown in the case of non-violence and conflict management workshops in Nepal. Such initiatives create space for solidarity and ethical encounters, based on de-centring, mutual learning and possibilities for self-questioning. Yet, in these attempts to decolonise the WPS agenda, we must also acknowledge the fundamental impossibility of translation and allow for the possibility of non-circulation, non-engagement and inaction (Kunz 2019).

Translation as transformation also shifts into focus how such initiatives can unsettle and transform participants. This also includes us researchers. My various conversations with people involved in WPS initiatives in Nepal did certainly transform me and my thinking regarding the production and circulation of knowledges on WPS, social justice and conflict as well as the figure of the expert. Drawing on the insights that emerge from understandings of translation as decolonising, as researchers we can ask ourselves a number of questions: how can we conduct our research in a spirit of translation as transformation? How can we practice a decentring of ourselves as experts while doing research? To what extent can conversations such as the one I had with Subash contribute to open space for various forms of solidarities and ethical encounters that do not require expert knowledge?

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[2] Subsequent resolutions include 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013). It is important to remember that these resolutions emerged out of struggles by (women's) civil society groups around the world and concerted efforts to bring gender issues onto the agenda of international institutions (Cohn et al. 2004).

[3] Established through the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, GM is defined as 'a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally' (ECOSOC 1997). As defined by UN Women, the Women, Peace and Security agenda aims to 'promote peace by supporting women of all backgrounds and ages to participate in processes to prevent conflict and build and sustain peace' https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security (all websites accessed January 2020).

[4] The notion of 'post-conflict' needs to be used with caution, as it suggests a clear break between pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict periods, which fails to account for the complexity of conflict situations and links to gender-based violence (Meintjes et al. 2001; Moser and Clark 2001). I use the term here to refer to interventions.

[5] For a review of the various understandings of, and controversies regarding, (cultural) translation, see the Introduction Capan, Z.G., dos Reis, F. & Grasten, M. (2021) The Politics of Translation in International Relations. In Z.G. Capan, F. dos Reis & M. Grasten (Eds.) The Politics of Translation in International Relations. Palgrave Macmillan.of this edited volume.

[6] Special thanks go to all my interlocutors for taking time to talk, and to my Nepali research partner Lekh Nath Paudel for a very stimulating cooperation and for his help in translation. Unless specified otherwise, all interviews have been anonymised to guarantee confidentiality.

[7] Report available here: http://issuu.com/suba_gnwp/docs/implementing_locally__inspiring_glo/1?e =8954983/6359858.

[8] https://web.archive.org/web/20071213110216/http://www.unmin.org.np/?d=about&p=mandate.

[9] https://web.archive.org/web/20071213110315/http://www.unmin.org.np/?d=activities&p=gender.

[10] https://www.peacewomen.org/nap-nepal.

[11] I have anonymised the information related to this initiative to guarantee confidentiality. The aim here is not to point the finger at one particular initiative or organisation, but to illustrate the underlying understanding of translation as transfer and its implications.

[12] SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

[13] Subash explicitly agreed to have his name mentioned in this chapter. I am grateful for all his support of my research and our invaluable conversations.

[14] http://avpusa.org/.

[15] http://www.heforshe.org/.

[16] It is interesting to note that similar mask activities can also be found in other contexts, such as in reconciliation work with communities in Colombia involving victims and former combatants. Thanks to Mia Schöb for pointing this out to me.