Reconfiguring Translation as Intellectual Activism:
The Turkish Feminist Remaking of
*Virgin: The Untouched History*

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Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. … A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh. … We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.

Adrienne Rich (1979)

This paper explores the multi-faceted *praxis* of feminist translation in an effort to reconfigure translation as a re/generative and transformative source and form of politics and scholarship. In doing so, it challenges the age-old assumption that translation is a purely imitative and unproductive work, as opposed to the assumed originality and creativity of “authored” texts. This paper argues that, despite the largely unrecognized and underappreciated role it plays in the generation and dissemination of critical knowledges, translation, particularly politically marked works of translation like feminist ones, are key operations of discourse making. That is, translations enable the formation of local and transnational scholarship and sociopolitical movement-building. To that end, this paper attempts to redesignate and reposition translation as a legitimate and indispensable mode and tool of knowledge and ideology production within and outside the established contours of academia. It also argues for the analytical inseparability of theorizing and practicing translation as these two presumably distinct methods of relating to the world coexist.

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within the contingency of any translation project. In short, translation is reconceived here as a productive and essential form of epistemological and political praxis. I illustrate these two interrelated arguments through an in-depth analysis of my Turkish translation of Hanne Blank’s *Virgin: The Untouched History*, a feminist historical account of sociocultural constructions of virginity in the West, which, in the context of the book, includes the histories of the ancient Greek, early Christianity, Europe, and the contemporary U.S. By examining the performative processes of this feminist translation project and the effects of the feminist translator’s political agency on these textual processes, I discuss the ways in which a Western-identified feminist text has been cross-culturally mobilized to unsettle virginity politics of Turkey, which flesh out at the crossroads of nationalist and heteropatriarchal discourses.

**A Brief History of Virginity Politics in Turkey**

The Turkish nation (and Turkish nationalism), in the wake of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s modernization project of the early 20th century, has largely been founded on Western ideals; Atatürk re-identified the new nation-state as Western (as opposed to Ottoman, which became Turkey’s Other in the nation-building process). Accordingly, women were cast as the “iconic embodiments” of the nation and were deployed to symbolize the newly designed national identity (Sinha 255). That is, women became the chief markers of Turkish modernization *qua* Westernization; their social roles and embodied gender and sexual identities were constructed and constrained by the state under the general rubric of “the New Turkish Woman.” The ideal Turkish Woman was to be “modern” like the Western woman in the Turkish imaginary (e.g. in terms of dress codes, political rights, and opportunities for education and employment). Yet, unlike the (presumably) sexually liberated Western woman, she was designed to be “modest” in an attempt to resolve the public anxiety over her “dangerous” sexuality and assumed potential to cause moral “degeneration.” The “Modern But Modest Woman” ideal demanded state control over women’s bodies and sexualities as well as a renewed emphasis on virginity, marriage, and motherhood (Cindoglu et al.; Sancar; Sinha). The construction of this national/ist gender identity assigned Turkish women the role of asexual “comrades,” “whose honour and chastity remains intact in spite of her active participation in the struggle to liberate and improve her nation” (Sirman 12). It is in this context that concerns about premarital virginity in Turkey crystallized – not only as a heteropatriarchal discourse, but also as a nationalist trope that legitimized the nation-state’s authority.

Indeed, in Turkey, virginity has always been kept under close state surveillance mainly through the institutions of family, marriage, law, medicine, language, and
education. The practice of virginity tests\(^1\) has played a key role in this disciplining and was one of the first issues problematized by the rising women’s movement of the 1980s. Throughout the 1990s until 2004, the issue sporadically erupted in the national and international press and was critiqued by feminist activists.\(^2\) Despite public rebuke of the practice, the Turkish state refused to take any legislative action to end virginity tests until 2004, when in the course of the Turkish Penal Code (TPC) amendments, the government’s reluctance to end virginity tests had to subside to some extent in the face of growing pressure from the women’s movement and the European Union. The TPC is the most important legal document on virginity in Turkey, but unfortunately, the amendments have not been sufficient with regards to the issue. “Virginity examinations” are not even mentioned (therefore, not criminalized) in the TPC; in fact, they are legitimised under Article 287, entitled, “Genital Examination.” The article effectively puts the practice in the hands of prosecutors and judges, who can legally force women to undergo virginity tests. In other words, the state provides its judicial agents with irrefutable power to control women’s bodies and sexualities.\(^3\) Moreover, this document wrongly assumes that the hymen, which is key to the ideological construction of virginity in Turkey, offers proof of virginity. In doing so, the TPC reinforces the scientific myth of hymenal virginity.

In Turkey, virginity has been effectively medicalized and reified\(^4\) through virginity examinations, virginity reconstruction surgeries, and scientific discourses on women’s bodies, wherein virginity is materialized in the form of the hymen.\(^5\) Such naturalization is not uninvested; it is a politically-charged gesture and should be

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\(^1\) These are gynecological examinations where physicians interpret the condition of the vaginal membrane called the hymen to determine whether the woman in question has ever had vaginal penile penetration.

\(^2\) For more information on the history of virginity tests in Turkey, see Chapter 6, “Virginity and the Institution of Law,” in Ergun, *Dismantling Virginity*.

\(^3\) For a more detailed discussion of the legalization of virginity examinations in Turkey, see Chapter 6, “Virginity and the Institution of Law,” in Ergun, *Dismantling Virginity*.

\(^4\) The term “reification,” used in social constructionist medical sociology, refers to “the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man [sic] is capable of forgetting his [sic] own authorship of the human world” (Berger and Luckmann 89).

\(^5\) For a more detailed discussion of the medicalization of virginity in Turkey, see Chapter 5, “Virginity and the Institution of Medicine,” in Ergun, *Dismantling Virginity*.
deconstructed as such to reveal its underlying misogyny. This is precisely why I chose to translate *Virgin* into Turkish: the book’s knowledges contesting the scientific construction of virginity on the basis of the hymen have the radical potential to intervene in and disrupt medicalized virginity discourses and practices in Turkey. A “mythbuster,” *Virgin* shatters every seemingly innocuous, commonsensical notion about virginity by exposing the dynamic history behind its hetero/sexist fabrication. It refutes the scientific recreation of virginity via the hymen and reveals medicine’s erroneous “fixing” of virginity as a measurable and provable fact, which makes the book highly relevant for the Turkish context. In light of this background, the main research question that this paper seeks to address is how and why the oppositional virginity discourses and epistemologies offered by *Virgin* – drawn from the geohistorical contingencies of the West – have traveled, via my feminist-identified translation, from the U.S. to Turkey. Specifically, I reveal the trans/formative power of feminist translation to intervene and disrupt the normative discourses of gender and sexuality in local cultures, enabling further local productions and cross-cultural circulations of feminist discourses. Hence, I evince translation as intellectual activism, arguing that theory and practice are not detachable, but rather coexist in a symbiotic relationship of praxis.

My study treats cross-cultural movements of feminisms (as translation) as historicized and spatialized acts of local transplantation, transculturation, and transperformance. Unfortunately, these localization processes have largely been neglected in feminist scholarship, where in-depth studies of cross-border discursive flows and local rearticulations are quite rare. As Sally Engle Merry and Rachel E. Stern note, “Scholars emphasize the global circulation of ideas and images but rarely examine how transnational ideas and discourses become localized” (387). This study aims to address the literature gap on the localization and appropriation of circulating texts while at the same time illustrating the contingencies of the notion of translation as intellectual activism through a critical examination of my translation of *Virgin*. I first introduce and locate my research interests within the relevant geohistorical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. Then, I discuss the notion of praxis and its implications for feminist translation as intellectual activism. Finally, I analyze the ways in which my understanding of feminist translation as a form of theorizing

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6 This term takes its inspiration from Godard’s (“Theorizing Feminist Discourse”) concept of “transformance” (translation + performance + transformation), which emphasizes the feminist translator’s agency in the process of meaning production. I prefer the term “transperformance” simply because it appears more self-explanatory, notably because the “performance” element of Godard’s equation is textually more visible. Thus, the translated text is conceptualized here as a (transformed and transforming) performing text producing both meanings and political effects in its cooperation with readers.
political practice and practicing political theory – in other words, praxis – textually materialized in my Turkish remaking of *Virgin*.

**Situating *Virgin*, the Feminist Translator, and the Study**

Rejecting the dominant understanding of translation as a transparent and “objective” derivation of “original” texts and a straightforward transfer of “fixed” meanings, this paper approaches translation as a complex sociolinguistic, cross-cultural, and, most importantly, political/ideological phenomenon that is shaped both by individual actors involved in the transperformance process (translator/s, editors, publishers, reviewers, and readers) and by the discursive and material conditions of textual production, circulation, and reception at mutually implicated global and local scales. Here, the translator is a situated agent whose voice necessarily becomes part of the translation she produces as a result of her active engagement with the text and discourses surrounding her and the text. In short, translation refers simultaneously to an interlingual and intercultural textual recreation, a form of activism grounded in and in-between political histories and movements, and a means of cross-cultural travels of epistemologies and discourses.

In this conceptual framework, feminist translation refers to a form of significatory and intellectual activism, whereby the translator, as a political gesture, uses language to intervene and deconstruct hegemonic gender regimes. That is, the feminist translator works to disrupt systematic exercises of gender oppression and its simultaneous intersections with other systems of domination in and through her cross-border meaning-making practices. She is an agent of textual travels, displacements, and transplantations of feminist discourses across geographical, national, and cultural borders. Historically speaking, the political praxis of feminist translation originated in Quebec, Canada in the 1970s and 1980s – a period marked by the “second wave” of Western feminist movements and the Quebec sovereignty movement, both of which underlined the centrality of language in politics. The concept of praxis emerged and evolved in line with the growth of feminist experimental works, wherein language was critiqued for silencing women and was reclaimed and reprocessed through innovative linguistic usages that made women and their gendered experiences textually visible. In the course of translating texts (primarily between English and French), these experimental writings required correspondingly subversive and creative rewriting strategies that similarly questioned and transformed language. Through these experimental translations, which were the product of close collaborations between feminist authors and feminist translators, was born feminist translation. The praxis has since then become a prominent part of the critical translation studies framework developed after the “cultural turn” of the 1980s; translation is not regarded as a simplistic cross-linguistic movement of
prefixed meanings, but rather as a complex praxis that inevitably incorporates interpretive transformation and ideological intervention. My feminist translation of *Virgin* came out of my sustained engagement with this scholarship and reflects my embrace and enactment of the theoretical, political, and ethical consciousness of feminist translation praxis.

I was already involved in the feminist movement in Turkey before I came to the United States in 2003 to pursue a graduate degree in Women’s Studies. It was in this time and space of displacement that my fascination with feminist translation began to grow, an interest that was kindled by the very act of my transatlantic traveling. My professional experiences as a translator began in college, but it was after I came to the U.S. that I consciously named and performed *activist* feminist translation. Soon, I started translating news articles on global women’s issues for the feminist periodical, *Pazartesi*. While volunteering for *Pazartesi*, I realized that translation enabled me not only to stay connected to but also to serve the feminist movement in Turkey and its local feminist causes by assisting in enriching its repertoire of knowledges, cultivating its political grammar, and expanding its geo-epistemological horizons. That is, translation helped me do feminist activism in my “home” country while I lived in the U.S. Hence, my politically-motivated interest in conceptualizing feminist translation as intellectual activism.

It was also during this time that I met Hanne Blank and read her inspiring book, *Virgin*. I was working on my thesis on the medical, legal, and cultural constructions of virginity in Turkey and was struggling to find credible feminist sources to support my deconstructive virginity theories. Although there are several feminist scholars in Turkey who write about virginity, they focus their critical attention on virginity tests and condemn the practice as a form of state-sanctioned violence against women, but do not question the concept (or the measure) of virginity itself (Cindoglu, Frank et al., Parla, Sahinoglu-Pelin). That is, Turkish feminist scholars do not address the ideological and scientific assumptions that surreptitiously validate the legal and medical discourses on virginity in Turkey. In the course of my research, I found no public challenge posed to the apparent, yet concealed, reification of (and fixation on) virginity in Turkey. Virginity was accepted as a naturalized concept; nobody asked where this concept came from, why it existed, when it came into existence, what it meant, whether it always meant the same thing to the same people, who benefited from it, and who was harmed by it. Therefore, when Blank gave me an unpublished copy of *Virgin*, I realized that I had found the source that would confirm my thesis of virginity being a politically motivated, inherently misogynist historical fabrication, in Turkey and elsewhere.
Virgin, which has been categorized as a popular history book in terms of genre, is a feminist account of the historical configurations of virginity “within the vast and complicated framework of what we loosely call the West” (Blank 8). Virgin has been promoted as the first comprehensive history of western virginities. The reader first meets Virgin via the bold, yet humorous, opening sentence of the prologue, “Extra Virgin: A Note to Readers”. Blank writes, “As I worked on this book, I joked with friends that I was going to give it the subtitle Everything You Think You Know About Virginity Is Wrong” (ix). The sentence is bold because it sets the epistemological tone of the book as a counter-discourse. Moreover, the next sentence, which situates Blank’s work in “women’s and gender studies”, hints that the counter-position taken in the book is a feminist one. The prologue invites readers to discard their preformed notions of virginity to engage in the text with an open mind, simultaneously giving the book an adventurous tone. It ends by asserting the importance of the study, thus justifying the existence of the book, noting, “Virginity has been, and continues to be, a matter of life and death around the world” (Blank xi).

The first chapter of Virgin begins with the striking statement,

By any material reckoning, virginity does not exist. …We invented it. We developed it. We disseminated the idea throughout our cultures, religions, legal systems, bodies of art, and works of scientific knowledge. We have fixed it as an integral part of how we experience our own bodies and selves. And we have done all this without actually being able to define it consistently, identify it accurately, or explain how or why it works (3).

Blank effectively dismantles every taken-for-granted notion about virginity by revealing the vibrant and violent history of its continuous re/making in the West. She emphasizes the rich diversity of formulations of virginity across cultures and times, confirming that there has never existed a universal way to define or test virginity. The book also traces the scientific construction of virginity and problematizes its flawed association with the hymen, revealing the key role that the institution of medicine has played in “fixing” virginity as an “objective” fact.

It is in large part because of these deconstructive epistemological gestures that Virgin is conceived here as a project of feminist “re-vision”, as the epigraph by Adrienne Rich urges us to consider. By rewriting the vast Western history of virginity from a critical feminist perspective, Virgin invites readers to interrogate their own place within this historical discourse and enables them to see the male-dominated ideology of virginity “afresh” in order to imagine themselves differently in relation to this ideology. Blank’s subversive reconceptualization of virginity as “non-existence” undercuts the heteropatriarchal and authoritative assertion of its definable and
diagnosable existence. Likewise, it activates readers to imagine or “re-vision” social scripts of gender and sexuality as ones that disregard virginity or its measure, the hymen. That is, the book opens up an alternative discourse on virginity, one that is subversive and disruptive. The book’s capacity to generate interruption – of the apparent naturalness, uniformity, and continuity of the hegemonic virginity regime – was the main reason I chose to translate *Virgin – Bekâret* – for a Turkish-speaking audience. This paper will address some of the textual strategies that I used as part of my feminist translation *qua* transperformance.

Studying the transperformative specifics of politically-marked translation projects is key since what makes translation a form of intellectual activism lies in the contingent “behind-the-scene” details of its making, which harbor the political motivations and practices of the involved actors (particularly, but not exclusively, those of the translator). In this paper, I identify the strategic details of my translation practice through the most-widely used method in translation studies, a comparative analysis of the English source text and the Turkish translation at the lexical, paratextual, and discursive levels. I reflect on how I consciously structured and composed the text to facilitate oppositional readings and subversive virginity politics in the sociocultural landscape of Turkey. More specifically, I examine my text choice (why I translated *Virgin* in the first place), my lexical choices (I focus exclusively on the translation of the term “hymen”), and the paratextual commentaries that I added to the book (here, I examine only my preface). A comparative analysis of the textual translation process, which self/reflexively positions the translator simultaneously as the “subject” and “object” of the study, aims both to reveal the meaning-making practices carried out for the production of *Bekâret* as a political project of “re-vision”, and to emphasize feminist translation as an activist praxis. To borrow Barbara Godard words, this analysis aims at a “demystification of translation as a transformative process of production of meaning,” which is key to uncovering the activist workings of (“Translating (With)” 113).

I should note that it is not a common practice among translation scholars to study their own translations, which could actually be regarded as a conceited behavior flouting the expected norms of the translator’s humility and invisibility. As Venuti (“Translating Derrida” 257) notes, in doing so, a translator/scholar risks “the cynical charge of self-promotion that tends to be leveled at any translator who attempts to describe the choices and effects of his or her work.” Moreover, analyzing one’s own work might give rise to a charge of “subjective bias”. However, this study does not share an empiricist understanding of objectivity, which assumes an unsituated researcher whose work reflects an immediately-present, transparent reality unmediated by discourse or ideology. Rather, emphasizing the critiques and

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7 In the rest of the paper, the Turkish translation of *Virgin* will be referred to as *Bekâret*. 
deconstructions of the institution of science from the perspective of feminist theories, this study accepts that the sociopolitical, geohistorical, institutional, and experiential positionality of the researcher – as well as the translator – shapes the way she builds situated and partial knowledges (Haraway).

This, however, does not mean that reliable and legitimate knowledges about the social world cannot be produced. On the contrary, as long as they are not designated as definitive and complete, but rather produced accountably – that is, admittedly open to internal and external revisions – both the validity and the explanatory (and political) power of knowledges can be expanded. As Paula Moya, notes in “Chicana Feminism and Postmodernist Theory,” the incorporation of “self-critique” in one’s research brings her however “fallible” truth claims closer to a state of epistemological justifiability and reliability, as such self-reflexivity locates her “in a better position to question and revise those claims” (478). It is the hope of this paper that by self-reflexively narrating and analyzing the specifics of my translation project, I might invite other translators and scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds to recognize and engage in dialogues about the politics of translation. Likewise, I hope to encourage the academic community to attend more closely to the de/activating role of translation in the formation and transformation of scholarship and politics. It is only through such critical conversations that the political power of translation can be further validated, better explained, and more consciously and accountably performed.

**Feminist Translation as Praxis**

Feminist translation is a praxis that conceives translation as a political and creative act of meaning making with transformative power, and the translator as an active situated agent of sociopolitical change. Contrary to the hegemonic conceptualization of translation bounded by fidelity (to a supposedly fixed “original” text) and equivalence (between purportedly fixed meanings), feminist translation reconstructs the notion of fidelity in a poststructuralist sense by highlighting the fluid meaning production in the translation process and the translator’s mediating agency and ethical responsibility to the translation project. “Project” here refers to the political goals pursued, articulated, and promoted by the translator in her textual practices (Simon viii, 29). Fidelity in this new formulation implies a sense of political co-commitment to the translator’s own interpretation of the text, to the author and the “original” text, to the target audience for whom the translation is produced, and to the political mission attributed to the translated text. As Sherry Simon notes in *Gender in Translation*, “For feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project – a project in which both the writer and translator participate” (2). In this regard, feminist fidelity recognizes
interpretive and textual interventionism as not only a justified but also an inevitable part of translation. In Simon’s own words, “far from being blind to the political and interpretive dimensions of their own project[s], feminist translators quite willingly acknowledge their interventionism” (29). In translating Virgin, I similarly transperformed a feminist “re-vision” project defined by oppositional virginity politics and took the ethical stance of feminist fidelity, which emphasizes both the impossibility of unmediated reading/interpretation/rewriting and the necessity of self-reflexive accountability for the meanings produced. In my translator’s preface, I included such an ethical “confession” and openly marked the translation as a political project; I did so in an attempt to call the reader’s attention to my feminist handling of the text, which (I hoped) would reinforce the counter-discourse of the book.

I have been referring to feminist translation as a form of “praxis,” by which I mean the dynamic and entwined relationship between theory and practice, or reflection and action. Praxis denotes the simultaneous acts of practicing theory and theorizing practice; it is the recognition that theory and practice dialectically inform each other. As Paulo Freire notes, “Within the word, we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers” (87). Indeed, translation is praxis built “in word, in work, in action-reflection” (88). In Marxist thought, where it is perhaps best known, praxis is developed as a constitutive part of sociopolitical transformation. Similarly, feminist translation praxis is imagined as a project of social change, despite the fact that some feminist translations have been disputed on the grounds that they have textually failed to establish a balanced act of reconciling or amalgamating theory and practice. I argue that these accusations are unfair; feminist translation is a form of praxis whereby theory, practice, and politics are often so intertwined that they may not be analytically separable and easily traceable to readers and reviewers. As José Santaemilia writes in “Feminists Translating,” “Although there is a clear, explicit activist agenda on the part of the translator, it is always difficult to point to the materialisation of this intention” (75). His emphasis on the difficulty of discerning and pinpointing the textual elements of the transperformance of feminist goals in translation is key here. This is particularly so given that feminist translation promotes social justice not only through textually overt and more easily detectable linguistic and paratextual actions (e.g. lexical and syntactical interventions or the use of critical prefaces and footnotes), but also at the more covert and less visible discursive, ideological, and sociopolitical levels (e.g. introducing new concepts and practices, opening up alternative counter-hegemonic discursive spaces, and activating critical consciousness in the sociocultural landscape of the receiving audience). That these significant contributions are not always readily identifiable within the instantaneity or the immediate textuality and materiality of the translation does not mean that the feminist translation project has failed to transperform itself.
In fact, the political potentiality of feminist translation projects stems from the very fact that the unsettling meanings and interpretive frameworks they generate overflow the textual boundaries of their instant format and interrupt the operations of the gender regimes of the local (receiving) audience. Observing these discursive interactions may not be as easy as observing text-bound elements since they often are not immediately emergent or visibly tangible. Yet, these different forms and levels of translation strategies – and the divergent political effects they generate – must be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of feminist translation praxes. The fact that not every politico-discursive element of feminist translation is easily identifiable makes comparative analyses like this one all the more valuable for the ways in which they reveal both the visible and invisible aspects of translations. Every textually detectable translation choice has in fact a concealed or unconcealed ideological motive and effect. It is, indeed, at this junction of text and ideology that I locate feminist translation as praxis.

The Feminist Translation of Virgin as Intellectual Activism

Politics of Text Choice in Feminist Translation

Text choice is one of the most significant political decisions of translation praxis because, as Benjamin and Derrida (in “Living On” and “What Is”, respectively) convincingly argue, translation enables the survival and afterlife of texts. The political motivations behind text choice – whether the decision to translate a particular text is initially made by the translator, as in the case of Bekâret, or by the publisher or author of the original text – usually guide the translational choices that made thereafter. When the feminist translator chooses a text, her choice signals a commitment. This commitment implies not only a subjective, political, and ethical engagement with the text, but also a material investment in terms of time, embodied energy, and mental and manual labor. Given these limitations, it is clear that one can only translate so many texts in a lifetime. Then, every translation decision comes at the expense of other texts that do not get translated. Or, as Lawrence Venuti notes in The Scandals of Translation, “The very choice of a foreign text to translate” is “always an exclusion of other foreign texts and literatures” (67). This question, “which text and why?” becomes critical in explaining the political and ethical reasoning behind the decision to translate.

To repeat a point I made earlier, I decided to translate Virgin into Turkish because I believed that unless the imaginary, yet successfully naturalized, configuration of virginity was exposed and the concept itself was problematized, the feminist critiques of virginity practices, particularly virginity tests, would not go far enough to end the discriminatory and oppressive effects of the concept in Turkey,
where virginity is medicalized and deeply embedded in the normative gender and sexual scripts. The issue, as I saw it, was not only that virginity tests should not be done, but also that they could not be done because as Blank’s text convincingly demonstrates, virginity has no embodied material existence that can be physically examined or “proven.” In short, I wanted to bring the “missing piece” of virginity’s non-existence into the domestic canons and social landscape of Turkey. This served as the motivation behind my text choice. Therefore, as soon as Virgin was published in the United States, I initiated the translation project by contacting İletişim Publishing House – a major publishing house in Turkey with the reputation of publishing critical and oppositional texts in the social sciences and humanities – and presented them with my translation proposal. In my submission to the press, I explained why Virgin would make an invaluable contribution to the intellectual canons of Turkey. Soon after my proposal was accepted, I was invited to write for the book an additional chapter on virginity in Turkey specifically, which complimented my objective to critically enrich the imported book with the realities and particularities of Turkey’s virginity politics.

One of the reasons why I was personally drawn to Virgin is that the text activates in the reader’s mind the “paradigm shifting” question, “What would our world be like if for us, too, the idea simply did not exist?”, as postulated by Anna Jane Grossman in her review. This question has the potential to generate a politically-inspired reading experience, especially when combined with the historical truth claims and analytical tools presented in the book. As Patricia Hill Collins writes,

> Alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate their knowledge claims that in turn justify their right to rule. If the epistemology used to validate knowledge comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the dominant model become suspect. Alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth (270-1).

Virgin, by offering both an alternative epistemological paradigm of virginity and numerous knowledge claims produced from such a critical stance, appears as a useful discursive tool to help feminists undertake activist projects against oppressive virginity regimes (e.g. critical books on virginities in other cultural contexts, informative booklets, documentaries, workshops, lobbying projects, etc.). Hence, as feminist novelist and cultural historian Marina Warner’s writes in her review: “At its
best, this entertaining history is a passionate polemic, brimming with a genuine spirit of emancipatory activism.”

Despite the fact that *Virgin* is not marked as an academic book, but rather promoted and composed as a popular history text that fails by the yardstick of academic standards, it still cogently demonstrates that virginity is an imaginary concept (though with embodied and often detrimental consequences for many women around the world) that has taken multiple forms and meanings across histories and locations. Among these, virginity’s function of keeping women’s bodies and sexualities under the control and in the service of male-dominant, heteronormative institutions seems to be the most consistent and persistent one. This does not mean that virginity is a concept that is always passively complied with. In fact, *Virgin* discusses several cases of women’s negotiations with and even exploitations of virginity regimes for personal use and power. Nonetheless, the book gives its readers more conceivable reasons to resist the ideology of virginity and discursive tools to fight for social change. This is exactly why I decided to translate *Virgin* into Turkish: so that it would offer women alternative and counter-virginity discourses that are non-prescriptive, non-dichotomous, non-phallocentric, non-gendered, non-heteronormative, and non-medicalized. That is, although *Virgin* is not an academic text, I saw in it an epistemological and political potential for intervention that seemed to merit transperformative investment.

*The Feminist Translation of “Hymen”*

Suzanne Jill Levine begins her book (composed of analyses of her own translations) by underlining the importance of translators’ self-reflexive recordings of the translation process, which she argues are “much richer” than the final product itself. Such process-narratives are deemed richer because their explorative and analytical focus on the re/writing process reveals both how the translator reads and signifies the text and how her political motivation is textually operationalized within the confines of the specific translation project. Due to space constraints, in this section, I explore the re/signification process of one specific term in *Virgin*, “hymen,” and discuss my textual strategy of rendering it into Turkish, emphasizing the fact that translation is “both a language art and a committed language act” (Lotbinière-Harwood 168).

Since language as a meaning-making system too often reproduces and naturalizes the male norm, feminist translators have to find innovative ways to refrain from perpetuating phallocentrism. They achieve this by integrating discourse (microanalysis of specific textual elements) with Discourse (macroanalysis in a Foucauldian sense), and attending closely to the interplay between subjective language use and what
Dorothy Smith calls regulatory “relations of ruling” (Conceptual Practices 14). Extending this understanding of language to translation practices that emphasize the ideological and political implications of translation qua activism, here I explain the reasoning behind my linguistic choice to translate “hymen” as himen in Bekâret. Rather than focusing on whether the choice I made is a “correct” equivalent, or loyal to the “original” usage of the concept in Blank’s text, I attend to the micro- and macro-politics of choice. The feminist Turkish translation of Virgin was marked from the very beginning by a lexical dilemma: the seemingly uncomplicated and straightforward translation of the term “hymen”, which in an analytical book on female virginity is unsurprisingly used in great frequency. “Hymen” proved to be one of the most challenging and consequential decisions that I made while translating Virgin.

In Turkish, kızlık zarı, which literally translates to “the girlhood membrane,” is the most widely known and commonly used term for the hymen. This hetero/sexist linguistic usage reflects the definition and construction of women’s bodies in their subordinate relation to male bodies as the distinction between girlhood and womanhood (read: childhood and adulthood) is predicated on whether a penis has penetrated and “marked” the vagina or not. The normative gender script, within which kızlık zarı is embedded, attributes to the penis the role of a mighty gatekeeper that determines whether or not a female can cross over into the category of womanhood/adulthood by designating the hymen as the most “fateful” feature of her body – a boundary marker that assigns her to a secondary social identity and status. The term kızlık zarı implies the reduction of her existence to a tiny (actual or illusive) membrane that is imagined as constitutive to her subjectivity. In this discursive frame of reference, becoming a woman is defined in terms of termination of virginity and through dissolution of the hymen via penile penetration – an identity grounded on loss and becoming less.

Here, I should note that the Turkish word kız (girl), from which kızlık zarı derives, not only signifies age/youth and a “female child/adolescent,” as it does in English, but also refers to a “female virgin.” In fact, kız is used much more widely than bakım, the literal equivalent of “female virgin,” in both everyday and official languages – for instance, official medical virginity examination reports declare whether the person in question “is a girl” or “is not a girl” (Parla 79). Another example that illustrates the hetero/sexism inherent in the concept of kız is provided by the online collective project, “Discriminatory Dictionary,” which aims “to problematize, rather than neglect, the discriminative language” of Turkish. The project documents numerous Turkish idioms and sayings that use the word kız to reproduce the idea that “the-girl-to-be-married” [is] a property to be given away and
taken, as secondary and passive.” ⁸ In fact, “give” and “take” appear to be the most
common verbs accompanying kız in these phrases. ⁹ To that end, kızlık zarı sets apart
a kız/girl (read: to be married/taken/given) from a kadın/woman (read: already
married/taken/given) while simultaneously marking both as male possessions. Of
particular interest is the phrase kız gibi (like a girl), which is used to describe “unused,
brand new goods.” Then, kızlık zar signifies the “untouched” object, “unused”
commodity, and “unopened” package of the female body, which is conceived
exclusively in its institutionalized submission and service to hetero-male bodily
consumption.

This troublesome reservoir of linguistic elements and meanings harbored in the
semantic field of kız (and kızlık zarı) is perhaps best encapsulated by the comments
from the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who invokes the kız/kadın
binary in his official response to a political protest that took place in June 2011.⁴²⁰
Referring to a female protestor whose hip was broken during the demonstration (an
effect of violent police intervention), Erdoğan said: “This morning I see on a TV
channel this – I don’t know whether a girl or a woman [is] climbing a police panzer in
Ankara. And as if the panzer is not enough for her, from there she runs and attacks
with a stick in her hand our police officer standing with a shield; she hits while the
officer patiently stands there” (my emphasis)⁴²¹. Erdoğan’s “I don’t know whether a
girl or a woman” remark might seem innocuous or irrelevant to the English-speaking
audience, but to the Turkish-speaking audience, the comment is highly charged in
terms of gender politics. In an attempt to cover up and justify police violence and
curtail the credibility of the female “victim,” Erdoğan takes refuge in the local
grammar of virginity by invoking the pervasive hetero/sexist kız/kadın vocabulary.
He assumes that by simply pronouncing the words kız and kadın and implicitly
calling into question the protestor’s virginity (and marriage) status, hence her
morality and social legitimacy, he can effectively debunk her demand of social justice
and disregard her experience of police brutality. In other words, Erdoğan is casting

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⁸ Accessed on November 6, 2012 at http://ayrimciosozluk.blogspot.com/2012/02/turkce-
ayrmc-deyis-deyim-ve-atasozleri.html.

⁹ For instance, “A girl is asked for by a thousand, taken by one,” or in Turkish, Bir kızı bin
kısı ister, bir kişi alır.

¹⁰ The June 2011 protest was spurred by the death of a leftist, retired teacher, who died as an
effect of a heart attack triggered by police use of tear gas.

¹¹ Accessed on September 12, 2012 at the news channel CNN-Turk’s official website:
http://www.cnnturk.com/2011/yazarlar/06/04/basbakan.o.kadin.kiz.midir.kadin.midir/618
955.0/
doubt on the victim simply because her status vis-à-vis the kız/kadın binary is unknown or, more to the point, unknowable (despite the fact that the norms of the hegemonic gender/sexual script demand that one’s position as a kız or kadın be a matter of public knowledge). Thus, his remarks imply that she deserves attention, respect, and justice only if she is properly sexed and sexualized; that is, if she is either an unmarried virgin (girl/kerja) or a married nonvirgin (woman/kadın). As this example shows, the dualistic semantic field of kız and kadın is so deeply entrenched in the sociolinguistic landscape of Turkey that Erdoğan can activate the hegemonic virginity discourse with relatively few words.

Given this brief glimpse into the rich hetero/sexist repertoire of kız/kızlık zarı in Turkish and the collective stock of virginity knowledges and practices it builds and maintains, it becomes clear why I struggled with the Turkish translation of “hymen.” In order not to reenact the hetero/sexism of kız/kızlık zarı or reproduce the masculinist gaze on women’s bodies and sexualities, I decided to translate “hymen” as himen, a word borrowed from English and used almost exclusively (yet inconsistently) in medical contexts in Turkish. In the book, I explained the reasons for this choice both in the translator’s preface and in a footnote. The use of himen was a conscious decision reflecting my pursuit of a feminist translation praxis.

As noted before, I translated Virgin to challenge the dominant discourse on virginity, which is firmly medicalized in the context of Turkey. Virginity is a powerful control mechanism over women in Turkey precisely because it has been medicalized as an unchangeable “fact”, due notably to the medical field’s “scientific” investment in the hymen and in the practice of virginity examinations. The ideology of virginity as a constitutive part of a female subjectivity is problematic not only because it legitimizes gender oppression, violence, and discrimination, but also because a woman’s position vis-à-vis her hymen/virginity becomes the only legitimate way to define women’s sexual experiences and identities. Attempts to medically objectify virginity in Turkey make the translation of Virgin a powerful intervention, since the book claims that the object of virginity tests (the hymen) does not exist. In my efforts to transfigure this message, I decided to translate “hymen” as himen because himen does not bring to mind the gender-normative meanings implied by the use of kızlık zarı. The term himen is more “neutral” because it does not immediately invoke the hetero/sexist connotations of “the girlhood membrane” offered by kızlık zarı. This apparent neutrality is claimed partly because himen is a medical term with associations of “scientificity,” but more importantly because it is an “alien” word lacking a history of widespread sociolinguistic circulation and saturation. In a strange turn of events – my project was, from the beginning, committed to deconstructing the medical discourse of virginity – I used a medical term to describe the hymen; thus, I recognize that my choice to use himen might contribute to the increased
medicalization of virginity in Turkey. Although, I do believe that my decision to translate hymen to himen made the book’s virginity critique more powerful, especially in the context of Turkey, where it ruptured the mythic, yet sturdy, connection between virginity and the vaginal membrane contingently identified as kızlık zarı.

The claim of apparent neutrality discussed above does not mean that himen in Turkish is a thoroughly disinterested word that “can belong to ‘no one’”. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, “there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms … language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. … Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated with intentions” (293). My claim of relative neutrality for himen is based on the fact that the term has not lived “a socially charged life” in everyday Turkish and is not used consistently even in the medical literature where it occasionally appears. For instance, in the Turkish Medical Association’s statements on virginity, virginity tests, and virginity “repair” operations, himen (or “hymen,” which is also used in Turkish although the spelling does not fit in the orthographic rules of the language) usually appears next to kızlık zarı. For example, in “Kızlık Zari (‘Himen’) İncelemeleri” [Membrane of Girlhood (Hymen) Examinations], the ethics committee’s 2009 resolutions on virginity exams, both terms are used interchangeably, though kızlık zarı appears more often than himen.12 At other times, for example in the 2010 “Kızlık Zari Kontrolü ve Onarımında Hekim Tutumu Bildirgesi” [Declaration on the Doctor’s Attitude about the Membrane of Girlhood Control and Repair], himen is not mentioned at all and kızlık zarı is used exclusively.13

Given that even in the Turkish Medical Association’s documents, which have considerable socio-epistemological currency in the country, himen does not enjoy a steady, consistent usage, the term is obviously not thoroughly inhabited by the local accents of Turkey and thus seems to be convenient for critical recapacitation. In other words, if as Bakhtin argues, “the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it,” then, himen is a term that lacks this history (279). Thus, through its subversive deployment and circulation in and through Bekâret, a popular history text that is less intimidating and more accessible than medical texts, himen gets a chance both to be absorbed in the local virginity grammar and to talk back to its situated hegemonic enunciations. It is indeed this function of counter-hegemonic “talking back” that invests himen with the capacity to contest and disrupt the sociolinguistic virginity regime of Turkey. That is, when himen enters into common expressions and

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accented uses of the Turkish language it becomes “ours.” In Bakhtin’s words, a term “becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his [sic] own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (293). Such critical resignifications attempt (at least) to leave subversive traces on the living word, if not to generate a full-scale transformation of its semantic field, in this case, virginity.

It is the argument of this paper that following the publication of *Bekâret*, *himen* has in fact been charged with oppositional voices and meanings, which is to say, it has become “ours”. My own conversations with readers indicate that women are adopting *himen* not only as a politically “clean” lexical candidate to replace *kızlık zarı* with, but also (and perhaps more importantly) as a critique of heteropatriarchal virginity ideology in Turkey. That is, these readers have turned the unfamiliarity of the term into an advantage: because using *himen* in colloquial interactions meant that they had to explain what the term meant and why they chose to use it, this occasioned a unique opportunity to express their critiques of virginity discourses and practices and invest the term with oppositional meaning. A similar attitude is also seen in the feminist reviews of *Bekâret*, which mostly refrain from *kızlık zarı* and prefer *himen*. When these reviews do use *kızlık zarı*, it is often presented in scare quotes to help explain what *himen* is and to highlight the sexism inscribed in the phrase *kızlık zarı*. There are also numerous news articles, commentaries, and blog pieces written by readers who use *himen* in their discussions of virginity and/or the book. Even recent feminist writings that do not mention the book at all opt for *himen* in their critiques of virginity and contribute to the process of the critical renaming and resaturation of *himen* in Turkish facilitated by *Bekâret*.

Although the local oppositional adoption of *himen* seems to be limited to non-mainstream venues so far, it is reasonable that the subversively remade term engages with the sociocultural locale first through critical discourses that expand the book’s counter-hegemonic interpretive scheme. One example of the critical and opposition appropriation of *himen* is a 2011 story published on *Bianet*, an online news site. *Bianet* reported the enforced virginity exams of two teenage girls who went on vacation by themselves (without informing their families) – a story that was circulating widely in other news outlets at the time – under the heading, “Himen Vesayeti” [The Hymen Guardianship]14. Thus, by using *himen* in *Bekâret*, it seems that I have facilitated a resaturation of the term with dissident accents and counter-signification. Its key claims are the contestation of the virginity norm and the demystification of *himen* as the falsely assigned material proof of virginity. This positions *himen* as different from *kızlık zarı* since it responds to a different question, one devised by counter-

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hegemonic feminist discourses and motivated by disruptive intentions. Indeed, the translation of “hymen” to *himen* emerged from a political commitment to the feminist re-vision project and from my understanding of translation as a form of intellectual activism whereby even a single word choice can signal the dawning of an alternative critical discourse.

The Feminist Translator’s Preface

Upon the publisher’s offer to add an introduction to *Bekâret*, I wrote the 24-pages long “Preface: The ‘Untouched’ History of Virginity in Turkey” after I finished translating the book (Ergun 11-34). In the preface, I address Turkey’s virginity politics from the 1980s until the 2000s and situate the subversive discourses of the book within the geo- and socio-history of the receiving country. My motivation for writing this introduction was to encourage readers to build connections between the virginity contingencies of their own localities and the Western history of virginity told in the rest of the book. In other words, the preface was an attempt at building a geo-textual bridge between Turkey and the West (and/or the U.S.) to facilitate the cultural crossover of the book. Hence, the chapter sought to spark a localized problematization of virginity and increase the activist potential of the book despite its immediate (and potentially alienating) identification as an exclusively Western account of virginity. It did so by using various textual strategies; for example, I intentionally framed the epistemological composition and contents of the preface in such a way that they complement the critical interventions offered by Blank’s text. In this regard, the translator’s preface serves as a cross-cultural expansion of the feminist epistemological project of *Virgin*. The fact that Turkey’s virginity politics can be thematically and stylistically mapped onto a history of virginity in the West, despite all evidence to the contrary, is a testament to the local adoptability of the critical framework offered by the text. *Virgin*, in fact, invites such local feminist knowledges by positioning itself as a partial history of a geopolitically and historically vast topic that needs further in-depth research: “Anthropologists and historians have made only rare attempts to study virginity, and their attempts provide only spotty coverage: even a survey-style book like this one only skims the surface for a small portion of the world. There is a great deal of information that has yet to be gathered and many books that have yet to be written about virginity” (Blank 256). The translator’s preface to *Bekâret* is a response to Blank’s call to add to the knowledge repository provided by *Virgin* and to expand the epistemological and geohistorical scope of the study.

Although the history of virginity in Turkey documented in the translator’s preface is not as historically or geographically extensive as it is in *Virgin*, it still serves an important function: it re-casts Blank’s truth claims in a local (and seemingly
radically different) context, paying particular attention to the geo-historical contingencies of the Turkish nation-state. In doing so, the preface emphasizes that no matter how irrelevant a Western history of virginity might seem for the Turkish reader, it in fact tells a cross-culturally familiar story. For instance, repeating Blank’s major claim that virginity is a historical fabrication, the preface explains how virginity has been constructed and fixed in Turkey by a vigorous cooperation between the state-sanctioned institutions of medicine, law enforcement, legislation, education, and language. Following Virgin, I also emphasize the intersectional construction of virginity, whereby gender relations reflect questions about ethnicity. The preface is both informative and critically-infused with feminist reconceptualizations of local virginity practices and concepts, such as virginity tests, virginity reconstruction surgeries, the use of red belts in weddings to symbolize the bride’s virginal status, and the problematic notion of (male) honor. Also included in the translator’s preface is a “joke” about the centrality of virginity in a male-centered Turkish society, a genre employed by Blank as well. My use of folk genres aims both to make the text more appealing to a wide range of readers in Turkey, where riddles and jokes are popular cultural forms of expression, and to discursively parallel the style of the rest of the book.

While localizing Virgin’s critical discourse (emphasizing the historical and cultural heritages of Turkey), I paid special attention to highlighting the voices of feminist scholars whose knowledges my preface and translation drew on. I also included the voices of feminist activists whose collective political actions to stop virginity tests and honor-based violence in Turkey inspired my translation efforts. In Lotbinière-Harwood’s words, I tried to make visible the feminist “intertext” — “a communicating and resonating collective text scripted in the feminine by feminists rereading and rewriting what other feminists have written and spoken” — of my translation work (126). In addition, my preface offers a feminist critique of not only virginity politics but also hetero/sexist language. Emphasizing “the power of language to make exist” (Ergun 15), I address some of the problematic elements of the Turkish lexicon, including kızıl zar, and invite readers to engage in similar feminist interrogations of language. Reflecting feminist scholars’ critiques of dictionaries as “man-made,” I also problematize the official definitions of terms related to virginity. I ground my decision to use himen on these critiques of hetero/sexist language. Accordingly, I explicitly identify Bekâret as a project of “feminist translation” and inform the reader in the preface that the text they are reading has been mediated by a politically-situated subject, whose voice has been

15 “A man, two days after getting married, kills his wife and is taken to the court. The judge asks him, ‘Why did you kill your wife, son?’ The man answers, ‘She wasn’t a virgin, your honor.’ When the judge asks him, ‘Then, why didn’t you kill her on the first day?’ he replies, ‘Your honor, she was a virgin on the first day’” (Ergun 12).
integrated into the text whether they hear it or not. Marking the text as a feminist translation is key because “signature, in turn, creates context. A feminist’s signature on a translation positions the reader expectations” (Lotbinière-Harwood 154). Then, my “confession” statement in the preface is both an ethical disclosure and a political act that aims to reassure readers, especially feminist ones, that the text they are reading has not been filtered through heteropatriarchal interpretive models or assimilated into hegemonic discourses in the translation process.

**Conclusion**

In this essay, I have argued that despite its largely ignored role in the construction, circulation, and revision of critical scholarships, political agendas, and sociocultural movements, translation, especially when it is ideologically marked and politico-consciously transperformed, is in fact a crucial mode of intellectual activism. By enabling cross-border movements of texts, translation not only enriches the discursive repositories of the destination of the traveling text, but also expands the epistemological and geohistorical scope of the traveling theory itself. Translators, reconfigured here as intellectual political agents (as opposed to copiers or reproducers of “second-hand” texts), are situated enablers of such discursive travels. Feminist translators, specifically, disseminate feminist concepts, discourses, and practices, making them circulate, interact, transform, and generate on their own multidirectional routes across geopolitical, cultural, and historical borders. (In fact, the theoretical body of literature that we call “Transnational Feminism” is a direct product of feminisms in travel, contact, and conversation with each other.) Yet, despite countless contributions to theory and praxis, the geo- and socio-historical specificities of translational travels have not received the scholarly attention they deserve. Translation has not even been firmly recognized in academia as intellectual or political production, while in fact, it is both.

While recognizing the centrality of translation in the trans/formation of local and global scholarships and trajectories of specific border-crossing discourses, it is also important to call attention to asymmetries in the global flows of discourses and knowledges. Without such studies, we run the risk of romanticizing the notion of the global circulation of knowledges floating freely in unideological terrains and routes of a “global village” untainted by power hierarchies. In other words, geopolitical directionality is a key factor in shaping the course and “fate” of translational flows of theories and knowledges. Therefore, we usually do not see a reciprocal egalitarian importation of discourses between the global South and global North. In fact, the translation project analyzed in this paper follows this very hegemonic route of “from the West to the rest” and seems to replicate the global power disparities that facilitate unidirectional discursive flows. Therefore, this paper cannot illustrate the difficult
journeys and encounters that discourses traveling from the global South to the global North go through. Yet, by presenting a theoretical and analytical model on global flows of feminist discourses it can hopefully spark the production of more studies on translations and discursive travels across multiple directionals.

The analysis of my feminist translation of *Virgin* has allowed me to demonstrate how and why translation is not marginal to the epistemological production and political project of feminisms but rather at the very center of it. I have aimed to address these major gaps in the feminist scholarship, increase the academic visibility of translation as a catalyst for social movements and critical thinking, and initiate dialogues and research studies on the politics of translation across disciplines. Such epistemological and theoretical undertakings on reconfiguring translation as intellectual activism – whereby theory and practice coexist as praxis – has important implications for our re/conceptualization of scholarship (What counts as scholarship?), activism (What counts as activism?), and scholarship as activism (the political role of scholarship in dis/enabling, generating, and transforming political activists).

Translations of feminist texts (particularly groundbreaking ones that blaze a trail by forging new epistemological, theoretical, and political paths) bring us into contact with feminist discourses and agendas produced in different localities in response to different historical realities. They help us recognize and face the fact that we lack the critical language and discursive repertoires necessary to similarly express our gendered experiences and worldviews, and in doing so, they accelerate the political discovery process, underlined by Smith as a key component of feminist politics:

In the women’s movement, we began to discover that we lived in a world put together in ways in which we had had very little say. We found that we had participated unknowingly in a culture and an intellectual life in the making of which we had had little part. We discovered that we had been in various ways silenced, deprived of the authority to speak, and that our experience therefore did not have a voice, lacked indeed a language, for we had taken from the cultural and intellectual world created largely by men the terms, themes, conceptions of the subject and subjectivity, of feeling, emotion, goals, relations, and an object world assembled in textually mediated discourses and from the standpoint of men occupying the apparatuses of ruling. We came to understand this organization of power as ‘patriarchy’, a term that identified both the personal and the public relations of male power (*Texts* 1-2).

Translation not only helps us come to grips with the voids and/or flaws in our conceptual, theoretical, epistemological, political, and experiential repertoires, it also pushes us to create an alternative, subversive language. It encourages us to fill the
gaps in local discursive fields – what Smith calls “the cultural and intellectual world created largely by men”, or “the terms, themes, [and] conceptions of the subject” which are offered “from the standpoint of men occupying the apparatuses of ruling” – with our own oppositional makes and remakes. Thereby, every act of feminist translation is an intervention into local gender and sexual politics as well as their corresponding feminist movements. In fact, translation can activate critical conversations on issues that receive little or no attention from political and epistemic agents. Politically conscious translators can help break silences on taboo issues, such as virginity, by importing transformative “foreign” discourses and encouraging local agents to question their own realities through a critical engagement with the knowledges and experiences of the Other. Translation, indeed, offers a potential “contact zone” where the self can encounter the other, an encounter that has the capacity to help us face ourselves (and the other) in ways that we never have before (Pratt). Such critical translational encounters are both intellectual and activist in their forms and effects and should be recognized as such.
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