

Translation activities in the Organization of Intellectual Cooperation

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Today, we have at our disposal several works that have been crucial to rescue the Organization of Intellectual Cooperation (OIC), and the different bodies that composed it, from the oblivion they had fallen into (Iriye 1997; Renoliet 1999; Grandjean 2018). Other contributions have also laid the groundwork for a geographically decentered historiography (Herrera León 2008; 2020; Pernet 2015; Dumont 2008; 2018; Pita González 2014; 2019; Saikawa 2014, to name just a few examples). From a thematic standpoint, the global scope and the complex structure of the institutions included in the OIC entail several methodological challenges that justify its constitutive bodies being generally approached from specific disciplines. Most research available emerges from the perspective of the history of international relations, with the discipline dictating the research questions and objects of study. However, given that the institutions specialized in intellectual cooperation engaged in a variety of fields, from museology to cinema, and from education to literature, different disciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches would in turn further contribute to generate "multiple 'decentered' histories" (Biltoft 2020) of the Organization of Intellectual Cooperation and to shed light on the latter's historical contributions in different fields of activity.

This paper seeks to address this gap by examining the activities the OIC deployed in the field of translation. While we have at our disposal partial accounts of some of the activities promoted in this domain (Banoun and Poulin 2019, 47-52 for the *Index Translationum*; Pita González 2019 for the Ibero-American Collection; Millet 2014 for the Japanese Collection), a systematic study that analyses them relationally is still lacking. Thus, I draw on material from the archive of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (hosted by UNESCO Archive, Paris) and from the archive of International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (UN Archive, Geneva), to discuss the translation activities these bodies promoted, while also reconstructing the processes, opinions and beliefs that shaped them. Indeed, the projects that were proposed but never implemented, from the foundation of an international office of translation to the creation of translation awards, will also be discussed in light of a variety of factors, including the economic framework, the type of agency the ICIC and the IICC pursued, their hierarchies, rivalries and procedures of decision-making.

This thematic approach will also bring to the forefront a number of actors from a diversity of countries and institutions that intervened in translation activities in different ways. I will use network analysis to reconstruct the networks woven by such actors and pay special attention to some figures whose involvement in translation activities confers them different forms of centrality. This includes members of the bodies mentioned above, such as Chilean diplomat and poet Gabriela Mistral, and Franco-Brazilian writer and journalist Dominique Braga, but also external collaborators like French translator Valery Larbaud.

Considering the different research areas of scholars sharing an interest in intellectual cooperation, this contribution will adopt an interdisciplinary perspective and will offer insights that may be relevant for different fields, including translation and global literary studies, international cultural relations and global history. The OIC's translation activities will be approached as the canary in the coal mine, that is, as an indicator of broader pervasive phenomena. Indeed, as stated by Phillips and Reus-Smith "international institutions do not neutralize culture, they organize it" (2020, 23). In the ways translation activities were undertaken (that is, in the decisions, views and beliefs that determined them, the actors involved, the funding, the directionality of translation flows, and so on), we found crystallized several aspects that have to do with broader linguistic and cultural policies, and with the political and social context of the interwar period.

For example, translation offers fertile ground to unpack the expression “mutual understanding”, often used to refer to the OIC’s aim. But what does it mean to mutually understand each other? What does it take? Indeed, translation *can* facilitate mutual understanding in a very literal, real and practical way. However, scholarship on representations, narratives and metaphors of translation (Hermans 2002; Baker 2006; St. André 2010) has warned us against simplistic, excessively optimistic or romanticized accounts of this activity. Instead, translation boasts a secular history of entanglements with politics, policy and power (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002; D’hulst, O’Sullivan, and Schreiber 2016). The OIC’s translation activities will show the ways disinterested cooperative projects overlap with self-interested goals and strategies, thus contributing to problematize the relationship between cooperation and diplomacy.

Some of the questions I will seek to answer include: How does the analysis of the OIC’s translation activities confirm or nuance our previous views on the institutions that compose it? How do the sometimes-conflicting interests present within the OIC interplay in the domain of translation? Was translation the object of specific reflection in the internationalist mindset? What is the role and potential of translation in international politics? What was the role of the OIC in the history of translation, that is, in the emergence of translation as a specialized activity, in the evolution of its social recognition and professionalization?

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