

**Book Review: *Translation and Race*, by Corine Tachtiris, London,
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Translation and Race, by Corine Tachtiris in 2024, is an innovative work that explores the intersection between the field of translation and critical race theory. The book aligns with Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003) and Kadish and Massardier-Kenney's *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823* (1994). However, it fills a significant gap by addressing the underexplored role of race in translation studies in contrast with the extensive focus on gender, feminist, linguistic, and postcolonial approaches. Through five chapters, Tachtiris bridges translation and critical race theory to argue that the only way to achieve equity in the field is through a radical transformation of norms, institutions, and power dynamics. To support her argument, she examines how Whiteness shapes translation norms and critiques the deep structural barriers that Black translators face. Therefore, by exploring a variety of case studies, she works to develop a unique anti-racist approach to literary translation.

In the first chapter, "From Slavish Translation to Bridge Translation", Tachtiris discusses how the metaphor of what is termed as "slavish" translation has been associated with literalism and a lack of creativity since its development during the transatlantic slave trade. During this period, she explains: "Europeans expected ... black translators and interpreters to produce 'faithful' literal translations, because racist ideas about imagination and intelligence supposed that was all they were capable of" (p.46). As a result, Black translators were limited to producing literal, faithful translations. However, they were distrusted for fidelity. When their

translations were deficient, they were “slavish”, and when they were good, they were suspect (p.51). Although it may seem that these practices have been abolished, they still exist today in the form of what Tachtiris terms “bridge translation” (p.35). ‘Bridge translation’ refers to what Tachtiris describes as the process of Black translators producing literal drafts for White writers who possess the skills and imagination necessary to refine them and transform them into literary, creative, artistic texts. (p.53-54). By detailing what she labels “slavish translation” and “bridge translation,” the author critiques Western White supremacist norms that reject literalism in translation since this rejection originates from a racialized framework that conflates fluency and creativity with Whiteness (ibid).

The second chapter, “Translation and Racial Capitalism”, opens with the author confirming how “authors of color” (p.62) have known more inclusion among international prize winners in recent years. Even though this increasing inclusion creates a belief of racial diversity and equality in the literary translation field, racial diversity in this context remains no more than an illusion since the White winners are overrepresented. Black translators face barriers that are more complicated and dynamic, including underrepresentation in publishing, hostile work environments, unequal pay, and limited opportunities. Thus, Black translators experience discrimination and inequality not only on the level of selection and participation in the prizes but also in getting access to the necessary resources to produce and publish their works in the first place. This is because racial capitalism permeates the field of literary translation. In addition, the chapter critiques the superficial diversity assumed in the English language translation market, where the works of “authors of color” (p.61-62) are often translated by White translators. According to Tachtiris, this cross-cultural practice raises critical questions about the transfer of these works: how can their authenticity, cultural identity, and cultural experiences be preserved during translation by a translator who does not share the same cultural background as the author? And how do power dynamics and racial biases influence the same process, knowing that it masks more profound systemic inequities? Tachtiris argues that these systemic inequities are reflected in structural barriers that include economic privilege and racialized perceptions of creativity that limit access to the profession for marginalized groups. To challenge them and achieve true racial justice in the field, Tachtiris advocates for deconstructing capitalist notions of intellectual property and reimagining translation as a collective anti-racist practice that stands on care and equity.

In the third chapter, “Beyond Racial Diversity: Identity Politics in Translation”, the author critiques how what she describes as “colorblind” approaches in translation perpetuate

Whiteness (p.109). She cites the example of the controversy over a White translator being hired to translate Amanda Gorman's poem "The Hill We Climb" from English to Dutch. Nevertheless, because of the uproar, all the White translators hired for the job quit as Black translators could reflect the lived experiences represented in the source text more accurately. Such incidents, according to the author, expose the systemic barriers that "translators of color" face (p.96, p. 101), which, as she notes by referencing Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (p.119), are shaped by overlapping systems of oppression rather than by race alone. Drawing on the Combahee River Collective—a group of Black American radical feminists—from where the concept of identity originated, the writer argues that "identity politics in the context of translation ... can lead to coalitional solidarity in support of racial justice as opposed to a liberal humanist vision of social justice in the form of 'diversity' that reproduces the norms of white supremacy" (p.93). However, misinterpretations reduce it to divisive stands and opinions, while the purpose behind it is to challenge the systems of oppression. In this chapter, Tachtiris presents her central argument. She believes that superficial inclusion is insufficient. Instead, the field of literary translation requires "a fundamental shift in the institutions and practices of literary translation, not merely assimilation into existing structures and norms" (p.96). She also emphasizes redistributing social resources and power and being guided by and in solidarity with the marginalized. What calls for attention here is Tachtiris's advocacy not only for Black translators to gain power and agency in the field of translation but also their right to refuse to translate when translation represents cultural appropriation and commodification for them (p.111).

The fourth chapter of this book is titled "Translation in Critical Race Studies". It explores how translation shapes racial meaning and hegemonic norms through the dominance of Western languages, knowledge systems, and frameworks since "the 'periphery' can supposedly only consume, not produce" (p.120). Tachtiris highlights that translation imposed Western frameworks on indigenous languages and epistemologies. Even the term "race" itself is a challenge for translators between English and Mexican Spanish due to the difference in connotational meaning, not to mention racial categories and terminology. Despite this difference, the US English meaning was imposed, which is, according to the author, one example of the hegemony of English knowledge production and how local meanings can become obscured in/via translation by Western-centric ideas. The chapter ends with a subsection titled "Translating Blackness" that emphasizes the existence of a "décalage" in meaning across languages, illustrating how meanings are often reshaped during translation depending on

White-centric norms and instructions (p.129). Nevertheless, this chapter features the role that translators can play in proposing alternative frameworks that challenge fixed racial categories, expose gaps in meanings, and negotiate the tensions arising from them.

In the final chapter, “Translating Racism,” the author examines how the Western translation theory and practice have historically been rooted in White supremacist norms. These norms affect who translates, who profits, who produces knowledge about translation, how translation functions, and which texts and practices are valued, preserving racial inequities under the lie of race-neutral universalism. The second point Tachtiris addresses in the chapter is the hard decision translators should make between conveying the intent of the author and preserving the impact of the text. She argues that while translators often focus on the author’s purpose, which may obscure the racial impact of the text, translators should prioritize the cultural impact of racist language over the author’s intent, taking into consideration the cultural and historical contexts of racial terminology and determining the specific readers their translations address. In this context, Tachtiris embraces Khaironi Barokka’s noteworthy suggestion that the discussions between the translators and authors of the texts about the problematic terms and language be made public so that neither the translator nor the author is protected at the expense of the other. Translators, according to Tachtiris, have two options when translating a work: either to soften the language and remove all the traces of racist language, but this strategy risks what she calls a “whitewashing” of the text (p.151), or to retain and heighten racism, and this can highlight and critique systemic racism. She also recommends including paratextual notes that can help the readers engage with the historical and contextual significance of the cultural value of texts.

The book has several notable strengths. First, although it is a purely theoretical work, it is enriched with examples and case studies that make the reading experience more engaging and accessible. All the case studies mentioned in the book, including Amanda Gorman’s and Fanon’s translations, are contemporary and reflect the author’s extensive knowledge and scholarship in the field. Second, to support her argument, the author provides a deep analysis of the structural barriers that translators of color face. Tachtiris does not keep her analysis within the bounds of surface-level issues like underrepresentation in prizes and unequal pay. Instead, she delves into the root causes derived from capitalism and White centrism that restrict their access to equal resources, education, and even life experience. Finally, as a result of the deep analysis, the writer advocates for a radical transformation of translation practices and institutions, which presents a strong call to action and which does not necessarily have to start

big but with “small acts—like decisions about texts to translate or how to translate racist language” (p.156). This blend of theoretical depth and urgent call for systemic changes positions the work as a valuable contribution to the field.

Despite the book being groundbreaking in its critical scope and premise, it has some limitations. One key limitation is its oversimplification of racial dynamics by focusing only on Western-centric/Global North/USA contexts and on the Black-White dynamics manifest within such contexts, which has the effect of (unintentionally) marginalizing the experiences of other groups and regions. The inclusion of perspectives from different areas of the world, as well as the experiences of other marginalized racialized groups, would have enriched the analysis. In addition, while the title of the book implies that the focus is on translation in general, it focuses on the field of literary translation only. Other types of translation, such as technical, legal, and audiovisual translation, which are also influenced by racial/ized hierarchies, could have broadened and thus strengthened the book’s lines of argument. Lastly, although the book has a rich theoretical background, convincing critique, and an urgent call to action, the author does not put forward practical steps and guidelines for action. Similarly, there are no concrete strategies for translating racial terms, new translation practices, or transforming institutions, which reduces the book’s applicability for practicing translators.

Translation and Race is a thought-provoking work that serves as both a critique and a call for action in the field of literary translation. Tachtiris critiques the White-centric norms that configure the work of Black translators as less creative, the unfair concentration of capital in White hands, and the lack of opportunities offered to Black translators. She emphasizes that her call is not for mere inclusion and diversity, but for a radical reimagining of translation practices, institutions, and power grounded in solidarity, equity, and anti-racist anti-capitalist transformation. Despite the book’s potential limitations of geographical scope and practical applicability, its contribution to the field renders it a must-read for those seeking to improve the situation of literary translation and its race dynamics.