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“NARRATIVES WITH NO NEED FOR TRANSLATION?” – *BEHIND THE BEAUTIFUL FOREVERS* BY KATHERINE BOO (2012) AND DAVID HARE (2014)*

Abstract

Katherine Boo’s award-winning non-fiction book (2012) and David Hare’s play *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2014) are set in a Mumbai slum called Annawadi. They tell a story of one family’s struggle with the Indian judiciary system, describing the life in a Mumbai slum in the process. The article purports to analyse the translation element of Boo’s narrative, as well as the book’s translation (Polish translation by Adrianna Sokołowska-Ostapko) and adaptation (Hare’s play). The first part of the article is focused on various shifts occurring in those secondary texts. Special attention is paid to ideological consequences and motivations of various decisions, which, consequently, leads to the question about the oppressive potential of translation (inspired by theories of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak). The second part of the article deals with the fact that although translation remains an essential and obvious component of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* for all three authors (Boo, Hare, and Sokołowska-Ostapko), this issue has been largely neglected (or misrepresented) by readers and critics. This, in turn, leads to the question (based on Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory) to what extent the case of *Behind Beautiful Forevers* can be interpreted as a product of various forces conditioning the scope and future of postcolonial translation.

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Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity is a non-fiction book by Pulitzer-winning American journalist Katherine Boo. Praised by readers and critics alike, it won the prestigious National Book Award in 2012. Shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award and The Guardian First Book Award, it has been translated into multiple languages; the Polish translation *Zawsze piękne: Życie, śmierć i nadzieja w slumsach Bombaju* by Adriana Sokołowska-Ostapko was shortlisted for the Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage. Boo's book is a portrait of life in Annawadi: a Mumbai slum situated next to the city's most affluent and prestigious quarter, near an international airport and several five-star hotels. The inhabitants of Annawadi are separated from all this wealth by a tall wall with an advertising banner for expensive Italian tiles, promising "Beautiful Forever" to whoever purchases them. The community, consisting of about three thousand people, lives off collecting and recycling garbage produced by the rich people living behind that wall.

In the present article, I am focusing on the aspect of translation in Boo's reportage as well as on its translation into Polish and adaptation for theatre. The first part focuses on the shifts concerning the representation of reality in Boo's book, its adaptation into a playtext (Hare) and its Polish translation (Sokołowska-Ostapko). The focus is on the ideological implications of these shifts, provoking the question about the potential of cultural violence inherent in translation (in reference to the theories of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak). The next part of the article includes a comment that while the translation component in Boo's text and Hare's play is obvious for both authors, it is almost entirely repressed by their readers, viewers and critics. This leads to a conclusion (based on Itamar Even-Zohar's polisystem theory) that the case of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* can offer an insight into processes conditioning the future of postcolonial translation.

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In her book Boo describes around 30 slum inhabitants, focusing on two families: the Husains, a Muslim family who make their living buying and sorting refuse, and that of a local politician, Asha Waghekar, whose daughter

Manju is the first girl in Annawadi to attend college. The main plot starts off with a tragic event: when the Husains manage to put aside some money and decide to renovate their hut (that is, to add a floor and a shelf for storing their food), their jealous neighbour One Leg plans revenge. In an extreme fit of anger, she pours oil on herself and sets fire to it, accusing Abdul, Kehkashan and Karam Husain of committing the act. Unfortunately, the situation gets out of hand and the woman dies as a result of her burns. But before she breathes her last, she gives testimony, accusing her neighbours of attacking her. Her accusations are readily accepted by the police and social services, who hope to receive bribes from the Husains for refraining from prosecution. The matter finds its resolution in court (which eventually acquits the Husains) but before this happens, Boo lays bare a great spiral of deception and corruption fuelling the Indian health services, administration and justice system.

As the author declares in the afterword, "The events recounted in the preceding pages are real, as are all the names" (Boo 2012: 249).¹ Despite this clear indication, most American readers and critics unanimously praised the 'novelistic' dimension of the work. "She makes it very easy to forget that this book is the work of a reporter (...) Comparison to Dickens is not unwarranted", writes Janet Maslin in *The New York Times* (2012). "The book plays out like a swift, richly plotted novel", according to *Entertainment Weekly* (Giles 2012). Praise for Boo's "brilliant novelistic narration" can be found in *The Wall Street Journal* (Mahajan 2012).

It can be argued that this reception is linked with Boo's authorial tactics – she consistently removes herself from the narrative and expertly covers her tracks. In consequence, all events are related as if by a third-person, omniscient and objective narrator. This effect is strengthened by her frequent use of free indirect discourse, as well as her relating of the characters' private thoughts ("He felt small and sad and useless"; BBF 168) and motivations ("One Leg also wanted to transcend the affliction by which others had named her. She wanted to be respected and reckoned attractive"; BBF xvii), accompanying them in their most private moments, such as a secret rendezvous with a lover. The impression of "novelistic discourse" is heightened also by the fact that the book follows the classic narrative structure: with an exposition (the introduction of Annawadi and its dwellers), rising action (One Leg

¹ Henceforth all quotes from this edition will be referenced with the abbreviation BBF and a page number.

setting fire to herself), climax (the courtroom scene) and denouement (the slum being liquidated by Mumbai authorities). Yet, though seemingly absent, the author's presence pervades the text, as the narrative is full of subjective judgements (for example, "for the poor of a country where corruption thieved a great deal of opportunity, corruption was one of the genuine opportunities that remained"; BBF 28).

Behind the Beautiful Forevers perfectly illustrates Hayden White's claims that every attempt to relate events is subject to emplotment, which is naturally influenced by the teller's moral values (White 1984). Boo's narrative strategies correspond to her general thesis (there is nothing noble in poverty and massive corruption makes it virtually impossible to fight poverty in India) but they are also obviously conditioned by her reading choices. The critics are certainly right in pointing to similarities between Boo's book and the prose of Charles Dickens: the descriptions of the morbid, grotesque machinery of justice in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* bear a striking resemblance to the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House*, and the disturbed refuse collector talking to the Hyatt hotel (BFF 9, 193) is a distant literary relative of Miss Flyte (*Bleak House*) and Miss Havisham (*Great Expectations*). Yet the most prominent Dickensian echo, in Boo's emplotment strategies, is the way she uses similar techniques to achieve a moralising effect. According to Robert Garis, Dickens creates a plethora of characters in order to expose the flawed, damaging "System" (Garis 1965: 109). In Garis's view, this strategy turns Dickensian worlds into "a theatrical performance rendered by a theatrical artist who is proving a case" (Garis 1965: 113).

The theatrical parallel is important here, as Boo's book quickly found its afterlife as a theatre play. Adapted into a playtext by David Hare, it was staged by Rufus Norris and premiered at the National Theatre in London on 10 November 2014. Hare's rendition follows Boo's narrative rather closely; still, certain alterations can be observed.

Obviously, some of these changes are a consequence of the transfer into a new medium (for instance, the time frame forces a fair number of omissions; information provided by the narrator in the book needs to be incorporated into characters' speeches etc.).² Nevertheless, there are other

² It would be interesting to explore the influence of the conventions that go with specific media on which elements of the story are highlighted. In Boo's text the focus is on the young Abdul Husain and it seems that his unjust accusation, his painful experiences with the justice system and subsequent change in his values resemble the tradition of *Bildungsroman*, whereas in Hare's play Abdul is not the protagonist at all; in turn, the Husains' decision to display

shifts as well, motivated by different factors. If the task accomplished by Hare is to be interpreted as an intersemiotic translation (according to Roman Jakobson's taxonomy; Jakobson 2000: 139) of a literary work into a piece of theatre, an analogy can be observed with translators' tendency towards specification – in his version of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* Hare fills in the gaps in Boo's material, adding his own interpretations, oftentimes ideologically charged. One example is Act I Scene 3, where Manju Waghekar, an eighteen-year-old student from the slum, makes her first appearance. One short sentence from Boo's reportage is expanded into a whole scene:

Katherine Boo

The plot of this novel *Mrs. Dalloway* made no sense whatsoever to Manju. Doing her college reading, Asha's daughter felt so sluggish that she feared she'd caught dengue fever or malaria again – hazards of living thirty feet from a buzzing sewage lake. (BFF 50)

David Hare

Manju: *Mrs Dalloway*. I don't understand it. It's a book by the English writer Virginia Woolf. Do you understand it? Who are these people? What do they do? I know nothing of these people. Clarissa goes out to get flowers. Later she gives a party. I'm trying to learn it, that's my only chance, I'm going to learn it by heart (...) It's not easy. When I read, my mind slips down the page. The First World War, I know about that, I've heard of that. But the rest. And like why she wrote the book, why should we care? (Hare 2014: 6)

While Boo merely states a fact (Manju did not like Virginia Woolf's novel; she could not understand the text), Hare supplants this episode with a whole layer of ideologically charged interpretation. Boo does not give any reasons for this state of affairs; in contrast, Hare does not leave anything open for speculation: Manju does not like *Mrs Dalloway* and she does not understand the novel, because of cultural differences ("I know nothing of these people", she declares). The girl is presented as a victim of an oppressive colonial educational system, which imposes a foreign, incomprehensible reading list. This introduces an interesting moral paradox. While presumably

their relative affluence by doing some work on their hut reminds one of classical hubris that brings on all subsequent disasters just as it does in ancient Greek drama. Nevertheless, this is beyond the scope of the present article.

it was Hare's intention to expose and condemn orientalism, defined as Western cultural practices aimed at subjugating the East (Said 2001: 1993), it can be argued that he inflicts similar cultural violence himself, succumbing to the stereotype of the East as the Other: the antithesis of Western culture (Said 2001: 1992). If the East and the West are viewed as two binary opposites, a girl from a Mumbai slum can never appreciate any book penned by "the English writer Virginia Woolf".

Following the interpretation of drama adaptation as intersemiotic translation, it can be suggested that Hare falls into the trap of specification. Introducing shifts and reinterpreting facts, he cannot do otherwise than infuse the play and all the events it represents with his own ideological agenda. Let us examine another example from Act II, Scene 17:

Katherine Boo

In normal courts, five or eight or eleven years sometimes passed between the declaration of charges and the beginning of a trial. (...) But by fiat of the central government, the massive case backlogs were now being addressed by fourteen hundred high-speed courts across the country. (...) The impatience was structural. Like most fast-track judges, Chauhan conducted more than thirty-five trials simultaneously. (...) By April, the case against the Husains was poking along in bitty hearings, and Judge P.M. Chauhan was annoyed. (...) At the end of a particularly tedious hearing, the judge rose for lunch and sighed to the prosecutor and defender, "Ah, fighting over petty, stupid, personal things – these *women*. All that and it reached such a level they made it a case". (Boo 2012: 200–206)

David Hare

Chauhan: Have you heard of fast track courts? Cases were taking eight, ten years to be heard, so Delhi decided there should be fourteen hundred new courts all over India. I run one. I have – let me think – thirty-five cases, maybe thirty-six, and each day I hear evidence from eight or nine of them. You need a good memory. You listen to poor people all day, fighting among themselves. She said this, he said that. They don't seem to realise. Perfect. Couldn't be better. Let them fight among each other. That way they're not fighting us. (Hare 2014: 104 – 105)

Similarly to the scene with Manju, Hare infuses facts taken from Boo's text with his own interpretation. Boo does not give any reason to think that the judge on the Husains' case perceives the whole affair in terms of class struggle. Rather, she seems bored and annoyed; and, while she certainly

looks down on the defendants, reducing their family tragedy to “petty, stupid, personal things”, the comment made in the play about it being convenient (“Perfect. Couldn’t be better. Let them fight among each other. That way they’re not fighting us”), is a surplus interpretation introduced by Hare, clearly motivated by the British playwright’s political views.

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These are but a few examples from many; they all suggest that both Boo’s book and Hare’s play are ideologically charged. Drama is different from prose, however, and while Boo “smuggles” her interpretation into the text through the use of a third-person narrator and indirect discourse, Hare literally puts his words into dramatic personae’s mouths. This, in turn, leads to a striking situation in which a character who is supposed to represent the real Manju Waghekar, bearing the name of an authentic person, stands on a British stage and voices the British playwright’s opinions on Manju Waghekar. In her famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak labels such practices as “epistemic violence” (Spivak 1993: 76). This setup treats the real protagonists of (re)presented events as mere “native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other” (Spivak 1993: 79).

Even though Hare’s *Behind Beautiful Forevers* is openly presented as an adaptation (both on the cover of the playtext, and on theatre posters, it is described as “A play by David Hare based on the book by Katherine Boo”), it nonetheless meets the criteria of documentary theatre as formulated by Janelle Reinelt, who defines it as a performance where the audience believe that the stage production represents actual events; as long as such an impression is sustained, it does not matter that the content is mediated by the artists (Reinelt 2011: 11; see also Lachman 2013 and Luckhurst 2011). In documentary theatre, the viewers believe that the words uttered on stage “point to external reality” (Lachman 2013: 129) – and it is precisely in such a way that the London performance of *Behind Beautiful Forevers* was presented. And this, as Will Hammond and Dan Steward argue in their book on documentary theatre, “changes everything”:

This claim to veracity on the part of the theatre maker, however hazy or implicit, changes everything. Immediately, we approach the play not just as play but also as an accurate source of information. We trust and expect that we are not being lied to. (Hammond and Steward 2008)

As a result, inserting ideologically charged passages in the characters' speeches can be viewed as an act of epistemic violence, reducing the actual people behind the dramatis personae to the role of voiceless "subalterns".

What is more, with any theatrical adaptation there are other factors at play, connected with staging the text. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* premiered on the largest stage of the National Theatre in London and from the very first seconds it leaves the viewer gobsmacked with its exuberance. Over thirty actors in the cast, a revolving stage permitting dizzying changes of setting, half a ton of recyclable plastic dumped onto the stage in the grand finale – all these contribute to a striking effect. One does not need much imagination to realise that the budget of the whole enterprise reached sums unimaginable for the people whose lives it represents.

A promotional event accompanying the premiere – a meeting with director Rufus Norris and actress Meera Syal, the uncontested star of the performance, portraying Zehrunisa Husain – merits some reflection. First of all, the creators of the show proudly announced that it was the first production in the history of the National Theatre with an exclusively Asian British cast. Still, clips from the performance show clearly how Syal's native British accent (Syal was born in Staffordshire), a testimony to her university education (she studied English and Drama at Manchester University), changes into a characteristic Indian lilt when she begins to impersonate Zehrunisa. This makes one think of the famous scene in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the British-born protagonist learns to do the Indian accent for a performance in which he was cast solely based on his ethnicity.

Secondly, Rufus Norris freely admits that his one-week-long trip to India, while working on the performance, was his only visit to that country. His comments reveal a stereotypically orientalist attitude. He describes his experience as "overwhelming (...) fantastic, really fantastic", and apparently the greatest challenge posed by his only week-long research "is to get over the 'wow isn't this, you know, wonderful and exotic'" (Rufus Norris and Meera Syal on *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*). Listening to such comments one can hardly escape associations with Danny Boyle, for whom the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) was his first-ever experience of India. The postcolonial implications of Boyle's attitude were condemned by Salman Rushdie:

I imagined an Indian film director making a movie about New York low-life and saying that he had done so because he knew nothing about New York and had indeed never been there. He would have been torn limb from limb by critical opinion. But for a first world director to say that about the third world is

considered praiseworthy, an indication of his artistic daring. The double standards of post-colonial attitudes have not yet wholly faded away. (qtd. in Hanrahan 2015: 108–109)

Clearly, then, with every subsequent mimetic transposition (Boo's reportage, Hare's play, Norris's production) the reality becomes increasingly distorted.

A similar tendency can be observed when analysing interlingual translations. Translation shifts and surplus meanings are not as significant as in adaptations, but they also influence the reading of the text. Such mechanisms, though less prominent, can be identified in the Polish translation by Adriana Sokołowska-Ostapko. Though they can hardly be compared with Hare's dramatisation in terms of ideological motivation – due to differences between interlingual translation and transposition or adaptation – it is worth investigating them more closely, mostly because of several interesting phenomena linked with cultural elements. In Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, there are many words and expressions borrowed from Indian languages, signalling the setting of the story in that specific linguistic context. Some of them were retained in the Polish text:

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| Hired a <i>baba</i> (BFF 54) | wynajęty w tym celu <i>baba</i> (ZP 93) ³ |
| He was <i>chaukanna</i> , alert. (BFF xx) | Był <i>chaukanna</i> , czujny. (ZP 22) |
| He looked <i>naya-tak-a-tak</i> , brand new. (BFF 78) | wyglądał <i>naja-tak-a-tak</i> , jak nowy. (ZP 122) |

Still, in many cases the translator decided to supplant these interjections with explanations:

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| Manju untied her dupatta (BFF 65) when they performed the <i>jhaad-phoonk</i> (BFF 113) | Dziewczyna zdjęła długi szal zwany [a long scarf called] <i>dupatta</i> (ZP 106) |
| Put your mangalsutra on a long chain (BFF 143) | podczas odmawiania modlitwy [the prayer] <i>džhaad-funk</i> (ZP 166) |
| | Zawieś swój ślubny naszyjnik [your wedding necklace] <i>mangalsutra</i> na długim łańcuszku (ZP 205) |

³ Henceforth all quotes from this edition will be referenced with the abbreviation ZP and a page number.

In others, she opted for deleting the foreign words altogether, replacing them with Polish equivalents or periphrases:

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| just wanted to hear if the signboard listing incoming flights went <i>chucka-chuck-a-whirrr</i> (BBF 38) | utrzymywali, że chcieli jedynie posłuchać charakterystycznego dźwięku, jaki wydawała maszyna [a characteristic sound made by the machine] (ZP 73) |
| wealthy neighborhoods with their <i>pucca</i> buildings (BBF 181) | barwne i błyszczące jak zamożne osiedla [wealthy estates] (ZP 253) |
| raising her fist in high <i>filmi</i> style (BBF 212) | wymachując pięścią teatralnym gestem [theatrically] (ZP 292) |
| threatened to arrest Abdul for sorting his garbage on the <i>maidan</i> (BBF 213) | zagrozili, że aresztują Abdula za segregowanie śmieci na placu [on the public square] (ZP 293) |

Occasionally, she replaces an unfamiliar word with another foreign word but one that has already been adopted in Polish (even if this involves a change of the referent).

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|---|---|
| tie your <i>dupatta</i> to someone too weak to swim (BBF 148) | osobę zbyt słabą, by płynąć o własnych siłach, przywiąż do siebie końcówką <i>sari</i> (ZP 212) |
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Interestingly, it would seem that Sokołowska-Ostapko's decisions regarding whether to change or retain a particular phrase are arbitrary – it is hard to decipher any consistent strategy. At times, alternative strategies are used with reference to units belonging to the same category (for instance clothing), or even with the same items. One word can sometimes be removed and replaced with a Polish equivalent, only to be retained in another passage (without any added explanation):

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| All they do is create a useless <i>tamasha</i> (BBF 40) | Sami potrafią robić tylko niepotrzebne zamieszanie [commotion] (ZP 75) |
| The audience of neighbours re-formed for this lively <i>tamasha</i> (BBF 93) | Sąsiedzi znów się zebrali na placu, by pooglądać ożywioną <i>tamasza</i> (ZP 142) |

Another difference in the treatment of cultural elements between Boo's text and Sokołowska-Ostapko's translation emerges from the use of italics. Boo's text applies italics whenever a foreign word or phrase is used for the first time; subsequently, the word/phrase is not highlighted in any way and consequently it blends into the text. In the Polish edition, italics are used consistently throughout the text, which means that foreign words and expressions are always marked as alien; at the same time, their number (as can be seen from the examples listed above) is visibly smaller in comparison with the English edition.

It can be argued that the relatively frequent use of strategies aimed at circumnavigating otherness in the text – such as elimination, explanation and paraphrase – point to a domesticating tendency in the Polish translation. The simplest explanation is the direction of the cultural transfer: because of the colonial past and the resulting presence of large immigrant communities in countries such as in the UK or the USA, the English language has incorporated many more loan words from Urdu and Hindi than Polish. Still, this explanation is far from satisfying, as Boo could hardly expect her readers (native speakers of English) to easily comprehend vocabulary items such as *tamasha*, *dupatta* or *jhaad-phoonk*. It seems, then, that it was her conscious decision to expose the readers to foreignness, while the Polish translator/publisher chose to moderate this impact.

One explanation of such a state of affairs can be found in André Lefevere's theory of refractions which he defines as "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work" (Lefevere 2000: 235). As Lefevere explains, "[s]ince different languages reflect different cultures, translations will nearly always contain attempts to 'naturalize' the different culture, to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to" (Lefevere 2000: 236–237). The "degree of compromise in a refraction", that is the degree of domesticating shifts introduced in translation, depends on the author's position in the target culture (Lefevere 2000: 237); however, it is also linked to the target readers' knowledge of the source culture. The more familiar with it they are, the more likely they are to be open to elements that clearly point to that culture. And as it can be clearly seen in the examples listed above, Sokołowska-Ostapko makes certain sacrifices in the name of the "compromise in a refraction".

In the light of Lefevere's theory, some of the translator's decisions can be treated as indicators proving the low level of cultural transfer between

Polish literature and Indian literature, or, for that matter, literature on India. It should be noted, however, that introducing some culturally charged elements and expressions, Sokołowska-Ostapko's text clears the path for subsequent translations, apparently increasing the tolerance level for foreign elements among Polish readers. Potentially, therefore, it enables the use of foreignising strategies in similar translations conducted in the future. Ideally, this process would be administered by a conscious strategy on the part of the translator; nevertheless, certain inconsistencies and the possible arbitrariness of certain solutions suggest that some things might have been left to chance. It can be argued that the closest possible representation of cultural and linguistic reality – though by no means neglected – was not the primary concern in preparing the Polish edition of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*,⁴ which also has certain ideological consequences. It should be noted here that this issue was not addressed in the critical discussion about the book, following its nomination for the Ryszard Kapuściński Award.

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The above examples demonstrate that both Boo's original work and its derivative texts are by no means ideologically neutral. It should be noted, however, that both Boo and Hare are well aware of this fact.

Documentary theatre and drama are works of artistic imagination and every artist follows a certain set of principles in construing their message. As Aleks Sierz reminds us, similarly to any other type of theatre, documentary theatre is a product of careful editing (Sierz 2004: 60). David Hare knows

⁴ A similar conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of translation errors. Though in Sokołowska-Ostapko's acclaimed and overall very thorough translation slips are very rare, whenever an error occurs, it is usually linked with cultural elements. For instance, in a chapter dedicated to the garbage picker Sunil, the character jokingly impersonates a character from the film *Om Shanti Om*, played by actress Deepika Padukone. He worships her, because "nikt nie potrafi rozbierać się z tych staromodnych fatałaszek tak jak ona!" (ZP 81) [nobody takes off those old-style outfits like she does]. In Boo's text we read: "Only she can pull off those old-style outfits!" (BFF 45). Here "pull off" clearly does not refer to Padukone undressing herself; what Sunil means is that nobody looks as beautiful in those outfits as that particular actress. This is a minor slip; nevertheless, it is culturally significant, as there are no nude scenes in Bollywood films. The change of meaning in the Polish translation creates a false image of Indian cinema, representing it as close to the Western tradition (where nudity, especially female nudity, is frequently explored). This, in turn, compromises the epistemic function of reportage writing, which is supposed to transmit information about the world.

this only too well, and as an experienced documentary theatre artist he repeatedly spoke out to underline the creative role of playwrights in such artistic ventures. "Theatre (...) is not journalism. The mistake is to imagine that simply because it can incorporate real-life material, so it can be judged by similar criteria", he claims (qtd. in Luckhurst 2013: 210). That is why plays such as *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, despite being based on actual events, should be placed "somewhere between truth and fiction" (Hare, qtd. in Hammond, Steward 2008). Ideological implications are inextricably linked with the very nature of adaptation, as is explained by Linda Hutcheon (2006: 92): adapting a text, the author must take a position with reference to it.

Hare discussed potential pitfalls of colonial representation as early as the 1980s, in his play *A Map of the World* (1983), set during a UNESCO conference on poverty in Third-World countries, organised in Mumbai. One of the characters, a representative of an African country in dire need of international help, openly declares:

We take aid from the West because we are poor, and in everything we are made to feel our inferiority. The price you ask us to pay is not money but misrepresentation. The way the nations of the West make us pay is by representing us continually in their organs of publicity as bunglers and murderers and fools. (Hare 1983: 40)

Katherine Boo is equally conscious of these ideological implications. She admits that writing her book on the basis of various materials, including conversations with people with whom she could not communicate directly, she was aware of the risk of potential "overinterpretation" (BFF 250–251). Selecting the material and choosing the right perspective for telling her story required making constant choices, all of which had their consequences. In an interview with Kate Medina she explains:

[it] is not to say that the narrative without an "I" is a paragon of omniscience and objectivity. Does it still need saying that journalism is not a perfect mirror of reality, that narrative nonfiction is a selective art, and that I didn't write this book while balanced on an Archimedean ethical point? My choices are reflected on every page, and I look forward to discussing with readers whether those choices were justifiable ones. (Boo, Medina, *Q & A with Katherine Boo*)

It only remains to say that neither readers nor reviewers acted on that invitation. The vast majority of critical receptions (predominantly positive)

focused on the vividness of description and gripping narrative.⁵ Theatre critics praised Hare's "decisive, skilful" adaptation (Clapp 2014), commended the "humane, dignified sweep" of "David Hare's excellent stage version" (Taylor 2014) and even went so far as to declare that the British playwright's "triumph" of a show (Clapp 2014) is better than "Boo's sometimes restrictive-feeling prose" (Cavendish 2014). None of the reviewers spares a thought to reflect whether the success of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* has something to do with domesticating narrative/dramatic strategies – and if so, what the consequences are.

In his review, published in *The New York Times*, strikingly titled *Narratives with No Need for Translation*, Anand Giridharadas formulates a thesis which is worth examining more closely:

Ms. Boo has done something much more interesting and subversive than write a terrific book: though a product of the Western storytelling apparatus, she has pointed toward a new world in which writing about places is not an act of writing for somebody, but an act of writing from somebody. (Giridharadas 2012)

Giridharadas's article opens a number of interesting questions. First – is such an act as "writing from somebody" even possible? Wouldn't such practice necessarily involve an element of the "epistemic violence" condemned by Spivak? And finally, why should the "need for translation" be viewed as something negative? For a counterbalance, it may be worth looking at the issue from another perspective.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers is a text founded on translation; in consequence, it offers a great starting point for a discussion on translation. Reading all that praise showered on Boo's text, one cannot but be surprised that virtually no one would comment on the fact that the author does not speak the language of her characters. All the information she managed to collect from them was mediated by translators (Mrinmai Ranade, Kavita Mishra and Unnati Tripathi; BBF 251). As a result, the book is rooted in translation; then through subsequent translations it grows into many other languages, including Polish – and by this token it is packed with translation-related issues. By no means is this a text "with no need for translation" – on the contrary, it has much to do with celebrating and exposing translation practices.

⁵ With the notable exception of Martha Nussbaum (*The Times Literary Supplement*), but even in her sharp analysis the problem of representation is only briefly signaled; instead, Nussbaum focuses on her doubts as to whether the success of Boo's book can be translated into any tangible social action that could bring about real change (Nussbaum 2012).

Analysing the issue from the perspective of Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, it is worth asking how it came about that a book on poverty in India, authored by an American writer, appeared on the shortlist of a Polish literary contest, and why Rufus Norris's production was broadcast in Polish cinemas as part of the National Theatre Live project (2015). Even-Zohar (2000) analyses the mechanisms governing the selection of texts for translation by the representatives of the target culture and reminds us that cultural forces at play cannot be reduced to political imbalance between developed and developing countries: it depends also on the distribution of power in the literary polysystem. According to the data collected by researchers from the University of Rochester, in the year 2013 only three literary translations from Indian languages were published in America: one novel translated from Hindi and two volumes of poetry from Hindi and Tamil (Translation Database 2013). In Poland, a system unquestionably weaker than the American one, the overall percentage of translations in the annual number of book premieres is much higher. According to the data of the Polish Book Institute, in 2014 almost 65% of all translations into Polish were done from English, which reflects the main trend in the present cultural transfer (Polish Book Market 2015). As Even-Zohar explains, "[w]hen there is intense interference, it is the portion of translated literature deriving from a major source literature which is likely to assume a central position" (Even-Zohar 2000: 195). This would partially explain why, despite an apparent interest in contemporary India among the Polish readers – apart from the Nike Award-nominated *Lalki w ogniu* by Paulina Wilk (2011), other books on India published around the time of the Polish premiere of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (such as *India: A Million Mutinies Now* by V.S. Naipaul, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* by William Dalrymple and *Maximum City* by Suketu Mehta) are predominantly translations from English, presenting Western authors' views of the Indian subcontinent.

According to Jerzy Jarniewicz, translators of fiction create the literary canon (Jarniewicz 2012: 29) by introducing selected source culture texts to target culture readers, ultimately shaping the target readers' associations with the source culture. Analogically, translators of non-fiction texts transmit knowledge and by doing so influence the readers' ideas about the world. To make sure that these ideas are complete and consciously acquired, the translation component needs to be made visible. Only then can the readers of *Zawsze piękne* understand that what they receive is a (repeatedly!) mediated image – and this mediation brings certain ideological implications. As

a result, they may become tempted to reach to the cultural source and seek for literature translated directly from Indian languages. In the long run, this may bring about a strengthening of those systems and a redefinition of the entire polysystem.

But in order to make this happen, we need not only conscious writers, but also conscious publishers, critics and readers, ready to critically analyse the techniques employed by writers and the epistemological implications thereof, willing to embrace the translation component of texts and treat it not as a problem but rather as a chance for dialogue. Understanding what postcolonial translation is today – and what it may become in the future – is necessary for these changes to occur. The case of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* suggests, however, that we are not quite there yet.

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