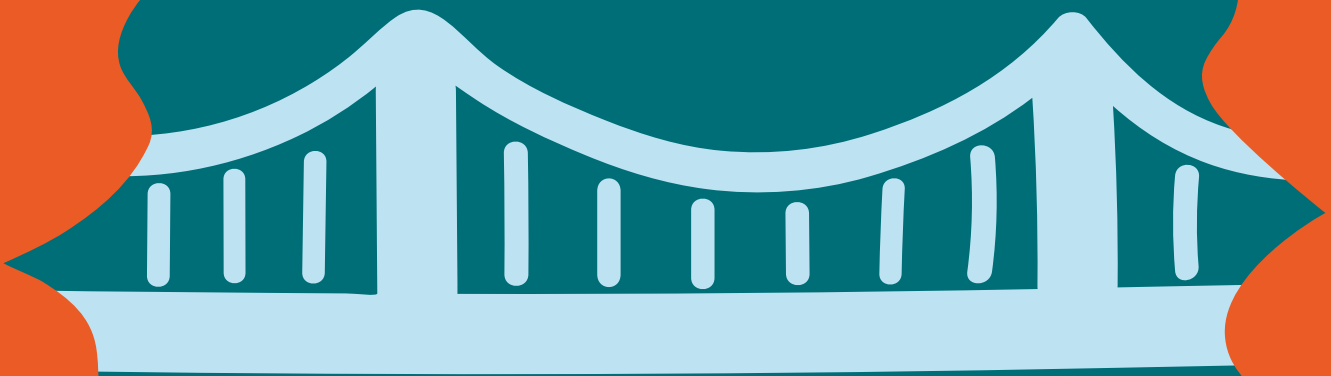


THE UNESCO Courier

April-June 2022

TRANSLATION: From one world to another

- In Mexico, drawings to translate words
- Don Quixote: From Castilian Spanish to Mandarin and back again
- Putting African science in the dictionary
- Do translators need to resemble the authors they translate?



OUR GUEST

Joanne McNeil, American writer:
“The web still offers a lot of potential,
besides what corporations have made of it.”



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Editorial

To translate is “to say almost the same thing”, in the words of the Italian writer Umberto Eco. A whole world is contained in this “almost”. To translate is to confront the other, the different, the unknown. It is often the essential prerequisite for those who want to access a universal, multiple, diverse culture. It is therefore no coincidence that the League of Nations took up the issue in the 1930s, envisaging the creation of an *Index Translationum*.

Taken over by UNESCO in 1948, this Index allowed the first census of translated works in the world. Two years later, the Representative Works programme was launched to translate masterpieces of world literature. UNESCO’s support for the publication last year of a lexicon of words from indigenous languages of Mexico that are untranslatable into Spanish is a continuation of these efforts.

Although their disappearance was predicted as early as the 1950s, translators – who are most often women – have never been as numerous as they are today. The machines developed in the aftermath of the war have not been able to outdo this behind-the-scenes profession. Nor have digital translation tools, which have become the standard feature of our globalized conversations, even if they have contributed to transforming the job.

This is because language is more than just a means of communication. It is that, and much more. It is what written or oral works make of it, contributing to forge what is sometimes called the ‘genius of the language’, which the most powerful applications cannot restore.

For to translate is to question the unconsidered in language, to confront its equivocations, to bring to light the richness, the gaps and the levels of meaning that are revealed in the passage from one language to another. It also means, through this confrontation with the other, questioning one’s own language, one’s culture, one’s self. It is therefore essential to preserve the vitality of multilingualism so that everyone can speak and think in their own language. This is what is at stake in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), which draws attention to the critical situation of many languages threatened with extinction.

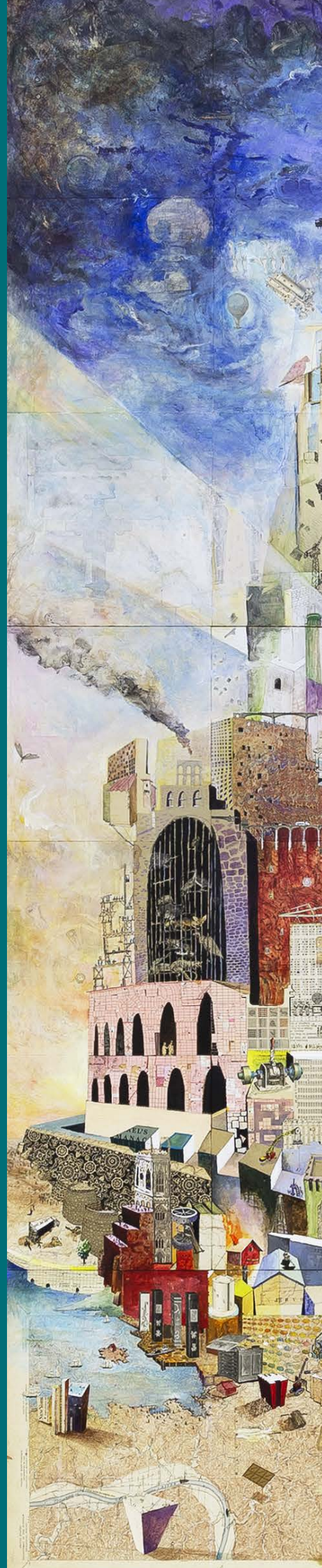
In an era marked by the quest for identity, translation remains an irreplaceable remedy against withdrawal from others. For without it, as the Franco-American author George Steiner wrote, “we would live in provinces surrounded by silence.”

Agnès Bardón

Translation: From one world to another

It is a little-known world, hardly limited to its literary dimension: translation is a tool for promoting languages, a discreet part in the economy, and a vehicle for ideas. But it is also a domain in transformation, shaken up by the advances of artificial intelligence. Perhaps above all, it is the means for each civilization to access 'the other'.

▼ The Tower of Babel by American artist Josh Dorman, 2008.





© Josh Dorman / Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York

Nicolas Froeliger

A former professional translator, Nicolas Froeliger is now a professor at the University of Paris, specializing in pragmatic translation.

It is omnipresent and everywhere discreet. We all have an idea of what it is, but never the same one. It represents a universal human faculty (to understand is to translate, wrote the Franco-American writer, linguist and critic George Steiner), and it mobilizes very specific skills – translation seems to be nothing but paradoxes. It is not surprising, then, that over the centuries, people have preferred to use metaphors, often disparaging ones, to try to define it: translation as ‘an unfaithful beauty’, ‘a servant’, ‘the reverse side of embroidery’, etc. Translators as ‘go-betweens’, ‘craftsmen’, ‘copyists’, and occasionally as ‘traitors’ or ‘investigators’, and so on.

It is also commonly a place for pre-conceived ideas: ‘translation is impossible’; ‘with a dictionary, anyone can translate’; ‘translation is a matter of language’; ‘it is impossible to make a living from it’; ‘a translated text is necessarily inferior to the original’; ‘automatic translation will soon replace professionals’, and so forth. All this is untrue – or at least dubious – but revealing.

Therefore, it deserves some clarification. First, let us remember that translation is both an operation and the result of this operation, without these two aspects perfectly overlapping. Many translations are done by non-translators, and professional translators often do much more than *simply translate*. Moreover, translators are most often female – in fact, three quarters of them are.



“
**Translation is first
of all a necessity
for culture**

'Saying almost the same thing'

Translation also calls for multiple definitions. From “*dire quasi la stessa cosa*”, saying almost the same thing, (the title of the Italian semiotician and novelist Umberto Eco’s book on translation) to “saying something else in another way” (as expressed by the French linguist and anthropologist Jean Gagnepain). From an activity that presupposes knowledge of languages to an instrument for teaching those same languages. We translate an aesthetic emotion, a message, meaning, an intention, etc. The world of research is not left out. Some within it take translation as an object – they are then called ‘translatologists’. Others use

it as a tool in the service of literature – comparative or otherwise – language sciences, philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminist or postcolonial studies, for example. In any case, the key word is ‘interdisciplinarity’.

It would be easy to get lost in the infinite particularities of this vast universe. Therefore, it would be better to outline some of the issues at stake, at a time when this activity, this profession, this operation is, like many others, being shaken up by the advances of artificial intelligence.

Translation is first of all a necessity for culture. It is through translation that each civilization becomes aware of itself and gains access to ‘the other’. This is the oldest branch of translation, and therefore still the most celebrated. With a historical

arc that starts from the first known legal translation in 1271 BCE (a peace treaty between the Hittites and the Egyptians), that passes through the successive translations of the Bible and other great religious texts – from the Septuagint (the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, in Alexandria in the third century BCE) to the present day – before being passed on to the literary domain. It allows everyone to access masterpieces, as well as other written and now audiovisual productions of humanity, in their own language, beyond the differences that make some people suspect there may be untranslatable texts or concepts. These are, in fact, eternally to be retranslated, as the French philosopher and translator Barbara Cassin has observed.

What is UNESCO’s *Index Translationum*?

What do Danish fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen, English novelist Agatha Christie and the father of Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi, have in common? They are some of the most translated authors in the world, according to UNESCO’s *Index Translationum*, a unique bibliographical database listing translated books in the world.

The *Index* was created in 1932 by the League of Nations’ International Institution of Intellectual Cooperation and adopted by UNESCO in 1948 – predating the creation of the Organization itself, making it one of UNESCO’s oldest programmes. It was born out of the strong belief in “translation as a valuable force for understanding among different peoples”, providing an overview of the flow of ideas. Thanks to the *Index*, we know that the most translated languages

in the world are, in order: English, French, German and Russian followed by Italian and Spanish.

Until the *Index*’s discontinuation in 2013 due to financial reasons, bibliography centres or national libraries in participating countries would send UNESCO biographical data on translated books in all fields of knowledge. By 2013, it consisted of more than 4 million entries – 2.2 million of which had been digitized – concerning translations to or from 1,139 different languages. It contains works from over 500,000 writers, translated by approximately 600,000 translators, making it one of the Organization’s biggest databases. Although it has been put to rest, the *Index* is still considered a key source of information on translated books.

“

Translation is an essential component of what underlies our common humanity


Enabling the travelling of ideas


In terms of citizenship and public policy, translation is an essential tool for mediation and for promoting languages, national or otherwise. It provides a welcome counterweight to ignorance, hatred and violence, even when it is used in the service of armies. It is through translation that ideas travel. With the development of migration, more and more countries see it as a fundamental right to be able to access public services (health, justice, legislation, and so forth) in a language that one masters.


Translation is also an essential, albeit discreet, part of the economy. It is a profession in full transformation, regrouping more and more specialized professions: translation and interpretation in the traditional sense of the term, of course, but also localization,


Top translated authors*

 **Agatha Christie** (1890-1976) English novelist ● **7,236 translations**

 **Jules Verne** (1828-1905) French writer ● **4,751 translations**

 **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616) English playwright ● **4,296 translations**

 **Enid Blyton** (1897-1968) English writer ● **3,924 translations**

 **Barbara Cartland** (1901-2000) English writer ● **3,652 translations**

 **Danielle Steel** (born in 1947) American writer ● **3,628 translations**

 **Vladimir Lenin** (1870-1924) Russian politician ● **3,593 translations**

 **Hans Christian Andersen** (1805-1875) Danish fairy tale author ● **3,520 translations**

 **Stephen King** (born in 1947) American writer ● **3,357 translations**

*Number of translated works (including republications) in different languages over an approximate 30 year period (1980s–2009/2010).
Source: UNESCO's *Index Translationum*

terminology, revision, post-editing, project management, technical writing, linguistic engineering, for instance. These are all gathered under the general term 'pragmatic translation', in the sense of having above all an aim of communication (technical, scientific, legal, press, economic, financial texts, for example). On a global scale, this involves several hundred thousand people, with a turnover of over 50 billion dollars.

Superficial reflection could lead one to oppose these different aspects, or to favour one or the other. A methodological error: the social does not contradict the cultural, automation does not doom the professionals. In fact, translation cannot prosper without them. On the other hand, current developments force us to update our ideas about translation, about those who practice it and its place in

society. The availability of free automatic translation tools for almost everyone tends to make it a *common good*, albeit with some imperfections, but without condemning the professionals, since machine translation does not integrate the dimension of communication and the capacity of human language to create novelty from the already existing. In the same way, the translation professions and that which is called 'pragmatic translation' provide a foundation for the digitally and economically more limited field of literary translation.

Beyond these diversities, we must understand that translation is an essential component of what underlies our common humanity. That all these elements can and must be thought of as part of the same whole. That it is an investment before it is a cost.

Yes, translation deserves to be better known and practiced. Firstly, for each individual, because, through the mastery of language, it is a formidable tool for elucidation. Secondly, at the level of societies, because it allows for exchanges that respect linguistic and cultural diversity – which a single or dominant language is powerless to do. In fact, we can affirm, with Claire Joubert, professor of English literature at the University of Vincennes (France), that with translation, it becomes possible to "think the entire chain, from language to geopolitics". Admittedly, translation is discreet, but it is an extraordinary lever. It is up to each of us to seize it in our own way – translation knows no exclusions. ■

Professor of literary studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Lori Saint-Martin is an essayist, novelist, conference interpreter and literary translator. She recently published *Un bien nécessaire, éloge de la traduction littéraire* (A Necessary Good, in Praise of Literary Translation) (2022).

Do translators need to resemble the authors they translate?

To render an author's voice with justice. That is the role of the translator. But does this representative task demand a certain resemblance with the author? If so, to what extent? While the issue is not a new one, it recently became subject to heated debate. Other than fueling discussions between propagators of universalism and defenders of diversity, it raised the complex question of legitimacy in translation.

As the conjunction of at least two languages and two cultures, translation and diversity are inseparable. Translation remains a profound experience of otherness, even when the person translated is culturally similar to us. Many translators, after having fallen in love with a book written by someone 'racially' and culturally very different from themselves, have looked for a publisher willing to take on that author's text in the new language. This is one reason why many of them were upset by the 2021 controversy over the translation of a poem by Amanda Gorman.

Let us briefly recall the facts: when the Dutch publishing house Meulenhoff announced the choice of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld – a young non-binary person who had just won the International Booker Prize with their first novel – to translate *The Hill We Climb*, the poem read by Amanda Gorman at US President Joe Biden's inauguration ceremony, a journalist, Janice Deul, asked why the publisher had not rather chosen a young black woman instead. Rijneveld quickly announced they were withdrawing from the project, while many outraged literary figures demanded the right to translate, without restriction, people very different from themselves.

These protests – which were predictable and, in a sense, understandable (albeit not very nuanced) – quickly nipped the debate in the bud. However, I personally believe that the question is highly complex. Neither the rhetoric of rights ('I have the right to translate whoever I want'), nor the language of identity diktats ('only a young black female poet should translate another young black female poet') is able to provide a definitive answer.

For some people, to ask the question, 'who can translate whom?' is to play politics at the expense of literature. But they make it sound as if the world of translation is perfectly fair and harmonious, or rather was, until the wolf of diversity entered the fold. But this is not true – the publishing world,

which includes the world of translation, is riddled with power struggles that the Amanda Gorman affair at least had the distinction of bringing out of the shadows: gender relations, 'race' and class relations, geopolitical relations.

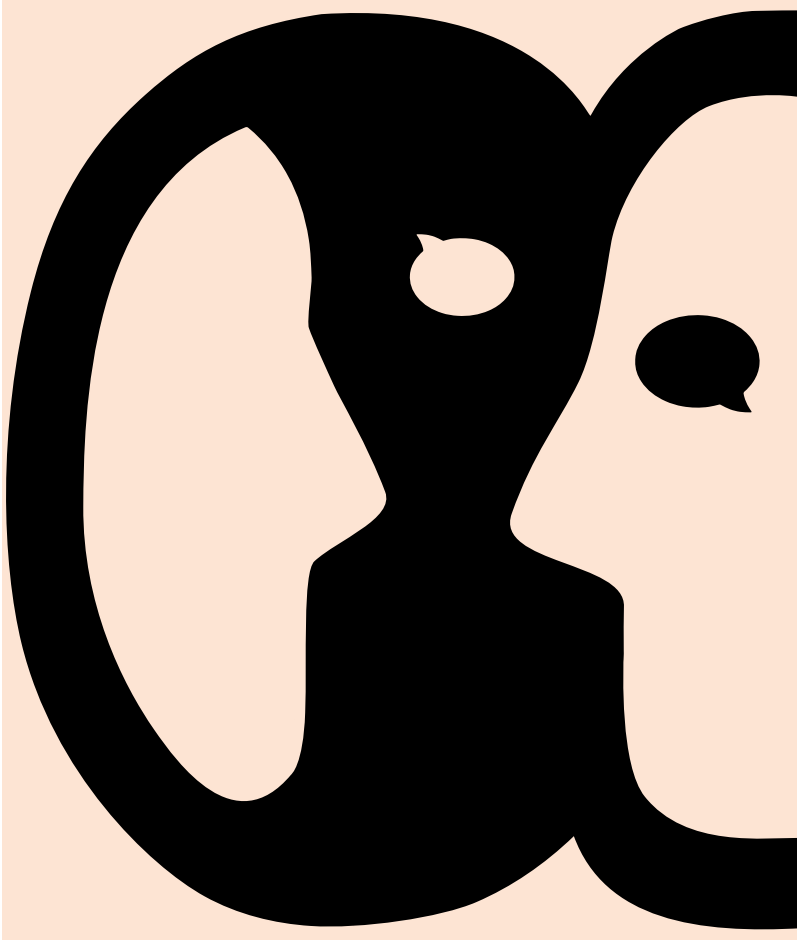
An illusion of diversity

The abundance of translations among the 'new titles' on display in bookshops gives us the false impression of having access to works from all over the world, when, on closer inspection, the 'diversity' of this world is really rather uniform – a few languages, a few countries, an international elite, some dominant individuals. Until very recently, the history of translation has been one of white privileged males translating one another or being translated by women.

As in the past, translation today is entangled with relations of domination between North and South, between 'races', languages and cultures, whether hegemonic or not. Racialized women authors from across the border who reach us in translation generally belong to a globalized elite writing in the language of the former colonizer (English, Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, etc.), published in New York, in London,



Translation shakes us up, it shifts the centre and disturbs the dominant ideology



in Paris. For every Indian woman author translated from Hindi, Marathi, or Malayalam, for example, there are dozens, if not hundreds, translated from English. Even within a minority, oppressed or marginalized, complex hierarchies emerge. While a black American woman writer may experience racism at home, abroad she benefits from the global hegemony of her country. She is far more likely to be translated and disseminated internationally than a black woman who lives on the African continent and writes in, say, Wolof. To be lent cultural capital, you must already possess it.

Although it is difficult to obtain aggregate statistics, it appears that men are translated more than women. At the height of the Latin American boom, almost no women writers were being translated, and a generation of important women authors (Cristina Peri Rossi, Luisa Valenzuela, Elena Garro, Silvina Ocampo) remained in obscurity. Between 2011 and 2019, around 26 per cent of the fiction or poetry translated in the United States was written by women.

I can already hear the apostles of the 'great universal literature' (a notion manufactured and maintained by those who dominate) declaring that it is the best writing that should be distributed in the world. But who makes the editorial choices, if not those who are already dominant? What the apostles of absolute freedom for translators often forget to mention is precisely just how white the translation community is. In the United States, a study conducted by the Authors Guild in 2017 found that 83 per cent of working translators were white and 1.5 per cent were black or African-American.

Breaking out of self-segregation

The profession therefore needs to open itself to new and more diverse translators, instead of remaining the preserve of white people. Much has been said about the importance of role models for discriminated groups – if people 'like you' have never written, you will find it hard to imagine yourself as a

writer. Similarly, if the vast majority of translators are white and middle class, how can a person of diversity imagine getting into the field?

That said, affinities are not always based on identity – they can be based on style, voice, or subject. Other deep points of connection can create the energy needed for translation. One of my works of fiction was translated into English by a person from Québec much younger than me, and into Spanish by an Argentinian man who was slightly older. I never thought they were disqualified by being men or different to me in other ways.

The Franco-Congolese novelist, Alain Mabanckou, has an amusing saying about choosing a translator – "For me, it doesn't matter what colour the cat is, so long as it catches the mouse." Others might find the cat's pedigree fundamental. Some people from dominated or marginalized groups prefer to be translated by someone like them, while others will be happy to accept someone 'non-diverse'.

In the next few years – and it is still in its infancy – we will witness the emergence of translators from minority or marginalized groups and backgrounds. But as competence is not *only* based on identity variables, we should avoid confining people to 'their' group, unless they prefer to devote themselves to it exclusively.

Finally, let us return to the 'case' of Amanda Gorman. Without saying that no white person would ever have been able to translate her well, I do believe that – in this emblematic and highly mediatized case – the choice of a young female black translator would not only have been a magnificent symbolic and political gesture, but also a gesture of support for diversity.

More generally, partly out of concern for social equity, it is important to translate less privileged and more diverse writers. To allow other voices, stifled by the barely revised colonialism of the past, masquerading as globalization, to be heard.

We translate (and we read translations) so as not to find ourselves in an artificial, violent 'self-segregation' created by erasure and exclusion. Translation shakes us up, shows us that we are not the centre of the world. It shifts the centre and disturbs the dominant ideology. At its best, it is diversity itself, the world, *worlds*, at our fingertips. ■

In Mexico, drawings to translate words

Published in 2021, the book *Intraducibles* (Untranslatables) illustrates a series of words from indigenous languages without equivalents in Spanish.

In January 2022, employees of a hotel in Tulum, a tourist resort on the Yucatan Peninsula, demonstrated in the streets of the town. Their demands? To obtain the recognition of their social rights and to protest the rule forbidding them to speak their language, Maya.

The event is not insignificant. With its sixty-eight indigenous languages, Mexico is one of the world's most linguistically diverse nations. But this rich diversity is eroding. It is partly because indigenous languages exist in many variants, meaning that speakers of the same language do not necessarily understand each other. The main reason for the decline, however, is the predominance of Spanish, which is used for all official, literary and educational purposes.

The work carried out through the book *Intraducibles* (Untranslatables) by Irma Pineda – a Didxazá-speaking Zapotec

poet and representative of indigenous peoples to the United Nations – is situated in this context. Published in 2021, the book collects and illustrates sixty-eight words from thirty-three languages of Mexico's indigenous peoples that do not have a Spanish translation. Each word has a corresponding illustration that sheds light on its untranslatable nature.

Digging into the collective memory

"Intraducibles was born of a conversation I had with Gabriela Lavalle, director of the Mexican Cultural and Tourism Institute of Houston in the United States, about the book *Lost in translation* by Ella France Sanders, which lists untranslatable words in many languages", says Pineda. "In indigenous languages, there are also words that have to do with emotions, sensations and traditions, which are very

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With its sixty-eight indigenous languages, Mexico is one of the world's most linguistically diverse nations

difficult to capture in a single word in Spanish.”

For example, the term *ndúyuu*, which in the Zapotec language refers to a body position one adopts to rest. In the book, it is illustrated by people in the fetal position. Other examples are *chuchumi*, which means “to stare into the void” in Akateko; *ke ndse'*, a ritual dedicated to the Earth that consists of placing stones in the river to ensure the health of a newborn child in Chatino; or *watsapu*, which refers to a special sheet used to wrap black bean tamales in Tutunakú.

The book, which was produced with the support of the National Institute of Indigenous Languages of Mexico, the Santillana publishing house and the UNESCO National Office in Mexico, was an opportunity to dig into the collective memory of the speakers. They were invited to investigate their own language to find words that had no equivalent in Spanish. →



© Mark Quijano

▼ Illustration of the word *chuchumi*, which means “to stare into the void” in Akateko.



Tu nombre es el remedio

si te encuentras esta planta.

Dilo fuerte, que no te detenga el miedo

Y dile que chakis se llama.

▼ Illustration of the word *chakis*, a plant which, according to speakers of Nahuatl, triggers a rash on the person looking at it, unless one says one's name followed by that of the plant. The illustration is accompanied by a poem by Irma Pineda.

The idea is for these words, exhumed by elders, to find a place in everyday life. “The fact that people see their language, their words, reflected in a book, in written and illustrated form, gives meaning to and embellishes them. People reconnect with a word and regain the affection they have for their language,” says Pineda.

Words from the heart

Young people have a key role to play in the revaluation and use of these languages. Some have already grasped this. For Érika Hernández, a young Nahua

painter from the state of Morelos in central Mexico, Nahuatl is a language that carries a non-exclusive vision of the world, and does not differentiate between the sexes. “The feeling is different when I use certain words to describe nature or an emotion”, she explains. “It’s something very personal that comes from the heart and risks losing its meaning if you translate it.”

Intraducibles succeeds in making tangible and reflecting the depth and meaning of several words, thus offering a more profound understanding of indigenous culture, from cuisine to ritual

practices. By reading these words, we learn more about the ideas behind our food, our celebrations and our beliefs.

Many schools, especially in indigenous villages, have already ordered the book. Despite this success, Pineda regrets not having been able to find words in all sixty-eight of the existing languages. “Some languages have suffered a lot”, explains the poet, who deplores the contempt in which indigenous languages are still held and the lack of knowledge that surrounds them. “But we cannot appreciate what we do not know”, she concludes. ■

© Cynthia D. Hernández Palomino



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Young people have a key role to play in the revaluation of indigenous languages

▼ The term *ndúyuu* which in the Zapotec language refers to a body position one adopts to rest.

An International Decade for Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)

While indigenous peoples make up only 5 per cent of the world’s population, they speak the majority of its 7,000 languages – an estimated 6,000 languages.

According to the United Nations, more than 30 per cent of the world’s languages are expected to disappear by the end of this century due to a lack of speakers, teaching, literature, transmission or political commitment. Not only does the loss of an indigenous language impoverish linguistic diversity, it also leads to an irremediable loss of traditional knowledge.

It is in attempting to halt this trend and safeguard this heritage that the United Nations

has proclaimed 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. This Decade, led by UNESCO in cooperation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other relevant UN Agencies, is designated to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the need to preserve, revitalize and promote them, including as vehicles of education.

The Los Pinos Declaration, endorsed in February 2020 in Mexico City upon the impetus of Mexico, and a Global Action Plan, presented in 2021, foster the implementation of concrete global action to preserve indigenous languages.

Philologist, Hellenist and philosopher, member of the French Academy and a founding member of the International Network of Women Philosophers sponsored by UNESCO, Barbara Cassin has published numerous books, including *Éloge de la traduction* (In praise of translation), published in 2016. She edited the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, first published in French in 2004.

Barbara Cassin: “We must resist the globalization of languages”

Each language carries a singular vision of the world, explains French philosopher Barbara Cassin, who defines translation as a know-how for dealing with differences.

Interview by Agnès Bardou

UNESCO

A question of definition to begin with – what is translation?

To translate means to lead through, to provide passage from one language to another. The exhibition I did in 2016 at the Mucem (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations) in Marseille, titled ‘Après Babel, traduire’ (After Babel, translate), opened with the different ways of saying ‘translate’. To translate comes from the Latin, *traducere*, not from ancient Greek, which had no equivalent and used another word: *hermèneuein*, which means ‘to interpret’. In Arabic, the word ‘translate’ also means to interpret. In Chinese, ancient texts refer to translation as the act of turning over an embroidered piece of silk – the back side is not the same as the front side, and yet it is the same thing. This is a beautiful metaphor. To translate is to turn one thing into another, the two being so close that, as the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges says, it is the original that tries to resemble the translation.

Each language has its own strength and consistency, what we sometimes call its ‘genius’. We have to imagine that something more than a simple change of clothes takes place in this process, contrary to what Plato describes in *Cratylus*. It is a change of personality that occurs. So to translate is to put the foreign into what is ours and to change both. It is, to use a beautiful expression of the twelfth-century Occitan troubadour Jaufré Rudel, “that inn afar”.

Can one think in several languages?

When we think in one language, we necessarily think in several languages, that is, in comparison with other languages. In ancient Greece, translation was not a question because it was considered that there was only one language; the *logos* was at the same time reason, ability to speak (*ratio et oratio*, translated in Latin) and language – the Greek language. For the Greeks, the *logos* is universal, it defines humanity. But then those who do not speak Greek are ‘barbarians’, an onomatopoeia like *blah blah blah*, to designate the one who is not understood, who does not speak like me, and who is perhaps not a person like me.

To think in my language, I need to think in other languages as well. When I say ‘*bonjour*’ in French, I don’t say ‘*salaam*’ or ‘*shalom*’. Unlike in Arabic and Hebrew, I don’t wish you peace but just a good day. Nor do I wish you, like the ancient Greeks, *khaire*, to rejoice, to enjoy. I do not wish you, like in Latin, *salve*, to be well. I am simply opening the day. Each language thus involves a vision of the world.

But we must add immediately that each language is by definition mixed

– there is no racial purity of language. Words, like thoughts, are in evolution, they are imported, exported, digested. Each language is a process, an energy, not a closed work. Languages never stop interacting.

In 2004 you edited the Dictionary of Untranslatables. What exactly do you mean by ‘untranslatable’?

My interest in the untranslatable came from the practice of translating pre-Socratic thinkers. Since the syntax and semantics of Greek are not those of French, there are always several possible translations. The *Dictionary of Untranslatables* testifies to the fact that, even in philosophy, we speak and think in words – that is, in languages – and there is no overarching universal. When I say ‘mind’ in English, I do not quite say *Geist* in German and I don’t quite say *esprit*. Depending on whether one translates Hegel’s work entitled *Phénoménologie de l’esprit* in French as *Phenomenology of the Mind* or *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in English, the result is two completely different books.

The untranslatable is not the ambiguous. Certainly, in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, many terms are ambiguous in one language compared to another. For example, the word *pravda* in Russian does not mean only ‘truth’. Above all it means ‘justice’. There is another word for truth in the sense of accuracy: *istina*. So, in Russian, our French word ‘*vérité*’ (‘truth’) is ambiguous. If you start from French, it is the word *pravda* that



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Each language
is a process,
an energy,
not a closed work

is ambiguous. It is always in relation to a point of view. Homonymy is one of the difficulties most full of meaning when we are translating.

What interests me is the discordance between languages, their non-equivalence, semantic but also syntactic and grammatical. The untranslatable is



With ‘globish’, the languages of culture, including English, find themselves in the position of dialects

not what we cannot translate – we can translate anything – but what we never stop (not) translating. Translation is a movement. The philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt said that he had never encountered language, only languages – a ‘pantheon’, not a church.

Translating also means choosing. One translates some texts rather than others and into some languages rather than others. Is translation therefore also a reflection of relationships of domination?

Language is a political issue par excellence. This has always been the case. The way the Greeks defined *logos* was obviously also political, and as for the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, it is conceived as a war machine against two dangers threatening Europe. The first is a linguistic ‘nationalism’ that establishes a

hierarchy between languages, with Greek and German at the top as ‘authentic’ languages. The second danger is that of ‘globish’, global English, which is supposed to be everyone’s language. But speaking is not just communicating. Globish is the poorest of languages, the language of expert reports and dossiers. The languages of culture, including English, which are created by authors and works, written or oral, find themselves in the position of dialects, to be spoken at home.

We must resist this leveling globalization of languages. When I was at the The French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), I refused to allow the researchers under my responsibility to write directly in English. I asked them to write in French and to have their work translated into good English.

The diversity of languages is undoubtedly an asset, but how can we manage to establish common ground from this diversity?

To achieve this, we must reflect on the differences. We must give ourselves the means to understand what we do not understand. This is one of the reasons why we founded an association called *Maisons de la sagesse – Traduire* (Houses of Wisdom – Translate). One of its main purposes is to establish glossaries of French administration terminology in order to help those who arrive on French soil and those who welcome them. Nothing can be less simple than giving one’s name, first name and date of birth. When, for example, a Malian has the name of a hunter or warrior, his wife cannot bear his name, which poses a whole series of problems with the administration. And how do you give a date of birth when you come from a country that does not have the same calendar? The issues that newcomers face are loaded with centuries of French bureaucracy. We try to explain this in these glossaries, in which we give each other injections of culture. If translation is so important, it is because it is a know-how for dealing with differences. ■

Illustration: © Sylvie Serprix for The UNESCO Courier



Don Quixote: From Castilian Spanish to Mandarin and back again

A century ago, a first edition in Mandarin of *Don Quixote* appeared, translated by the self-taught Chinese scholar Lin Shu. This very creative version of Cervantes' work, reinterpreted for Chinese readers, is now translated into Spanish – a great example of literary hybridization.

In its four centuries of existence, Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has become one of the most read, translated and analyzed books in the world. With its experimental form and literary playfulness, it has been hailed as foundational in modern literature. It invites readers to follow Spanish gentleman Don Quixote who, fed by his own delusional fantasies, turns knight errant. In the company of his faithful squire, Sancho Panza, he embarks on picaresque adventures in seventeenth-century Spain, leaving behind them a legacy of humor, romance and sadness.

Originally published in two volumes in 1605 and in 1615, the first version of this Spanish classic was not translated into Chinese until three centuries later. In 1922, Fujianese translator and writer Lin Shu's (1852-1924) translation was published under the title *Moxia Zhuan* (*History of the Enchanted Knight*). What makes this translation particularly remarkable, however, is that Lin did not speak or read Spanish. As a matter of fact, Lin did not know any western languages at all.

A Confucian Don Quixote

It was with the help of his assistant, Chen Jialin, that Lin was introduced to the hidalgo's adventures as they appeared in three different versions in English. According to research done by experts on Cervantes, Lin's translation was probably based on English author and translator Pierre Motteux's version published in 1885. However, Lin interspersed his version of the tale with invented dialogue and shortened it by many chapters, including the book's famed prologue, making it a 'transcreation' – a reimagined version resonating better with another culture – rather than a translation.

Not only did Lin reinvent scenes and adopt popular Spanish expressions into *chengyu*, a type of traditional Chinese idiomatic expression, he also changed the characters. In his version, Don Quixote becomes more learned than crazy; his squire, Sancho Panza, is turned into his disciple; his fair maiden, Dulcinea,

becomes 'Jade Lady'; his old, half-starved horse, Rocinante, is promoted to a 'fast horse', and all references to God are removed. With Lin's magical spell of writing the story is thus recast as "less crazy, more romantic", as sinologist and translator, Alicia Relinque, Professor of classical Chinese literature in the University



© Shanghai Library



▼ The cover of the first edition of the reinterpretation of *Don Quixote* in Chinese by Lin Shu (1922), kept in the stockroom for ancient books at the Shanghai Library.

of Granada, has put it, as Don Quixote is turned into a romantic hero more familiar to readers of Chinese literature.

The differences between the original and Lin's version go beyond shape and form, however. By interweaving grace and sagacity along with Confucian values and local sayings into Cervantes' wit, Lin tinged Don Quixote with even more Chinese nuances. For example, the chivalrous hero turned Confucian scholar endorses traditional values, such as filial piety and respect for the past, and by turning his squire into a disciple, he transformed their master-servant relationship into one of teacher and disciple, following the Confucian tradition of veneration for masters.

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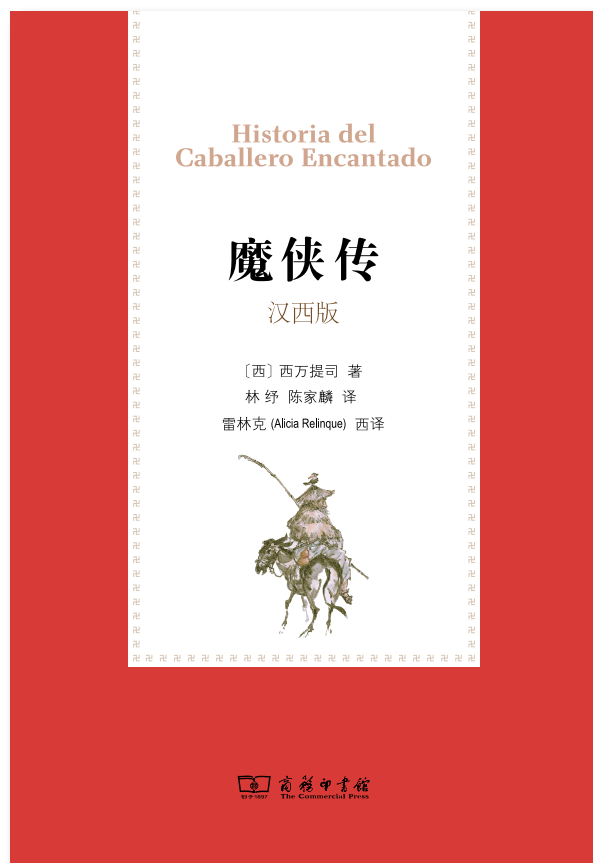
Moxia Zhuan is a 'transcreation' rather than a translation

'The Enchanted Knight' back to La Mancha

In Lin's time, China had been forcibly opened to the outside world. In this context, Lin wished for his translations of literary works to serve as eye-openers to the general public. Despite its additions, deletions, distortions and even misrepresentations, his *History of the Enchanted Knight*, with extensive commentary and interpretive observations, became appreciated among Chinese intellectuals. It earned the praise of leading writers, such as Mao Dun and Zheng Zhenduo, and the renowned twentieth-century literary scholar and writer Qian Zhongshu once stated that it was the more conspicuous elements in the willful misrepresentations that more or less prevented Lin's translations from being totally relegated.

What is the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works?

Between 1948 and 2005, this UNESCO programme focused on translating masterpieces of world literature, mainly from lesser known languages into more widely spoken ones, but also vice versa. In 2005, the catalogue consisted of 1,060 different works, ranging from *Je suis un chat* by Japanese novelist Natsume Sôseki (from Japanese into French), and *Aus dem Diwan* by Persian poet and prose writer Saadi (from Persian into German) to *Hamlet* by English playwright Shakespeare (from English into Indonesian).



▼ Cover of the bilingual edition (Spanish and Chinese) of *History of the Enchanted Knight*, translated into Spanish by sinologist and translator Alicia Relinque.

From the standpoint of rhetoric and writing, Lin's reinterpretation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* did indeed have an eye-opening effect. However, although it did earn praise, it was also widely criticized and accused of being a mistranslation omitting key aspects of the original version. When more faithful versions later appeared, Lin's peculiar version seemed to be long forgotten in the field of Chinese literary translation.

In 2013, when Inma González Puy, Director of the Cervantes Institute in Shanghai, discovered Lin's version of *Don Quixote*, she initiated the idea of rescuing the forgotten text and translating it back into Spanish. With the help of Relinque, she wanted to catch a glimpse of how Don Quixote's image was accepted in China a century ago. On the eve of the 405th anniversary of Cervantes' death, Relinque's translation, *Historia del Caballero Encantado*, was finally published – including more than 650 footnotes carrying information on curious aspects that may bring the readers a better understanding of China and Chinese culture.

Relinque's dual edition of *History of the Enchanted Knight* has been heralded as a fulfillment of Don Quixote's century-long homecoming journey and a hybridized literary landscape in the history of literature. For Relinque, it serves as a "perfect example of how literature has traveled from one country to another". In fact, Lin's version of Don Quixote is far from being the sole example of transcreation in the history of translation. Other examples include widely accepted misrepresentations in Chinese poet Hanshan's work, as well as the classical script *Tao Te Ching*, to name a few. While never impeded, such transcreations – such movement into a new environment – enriches cultural and intellectual life across the world. ■

Spanish translator specialized in creative translations and video game localization.

She is the chief executive officer of Terra Translations and co-host of *En Pantuflas*, a podcast about translation.

Humour: A real puzzle for translators

Cultural by essence, humour is not easily translated from one language to another. To maintain the spirit of the original joke, the translator needs to show a great deal of inventiveness.

What makes you laugh? What you perceive as funny can vary depending on unique characteristics such as age and personality traits, but culture and language are also key determining factors. Humour is an integral part of the culture in which it was created and as such, it can be one of the hardest things to translate.

Because humor is often related to language itself – for example puns, regionalisms, wordplay, and cultural references – the literal translation of a joke would most times fall flat or be incomprehensible. To maintain the spirit of a joke, the translator is faced with the dilemma of preserving the original meaning (such as keeping the literal word-for-word translation) or adapting

it completely into another language. The idea is that the translator will create something new, but by keeping the emotion and intention of the original content.

Transcreation is often necessary for the translation of humor. However, since wordplay is verbal wit based on the meanings and ambiguities of words, and the way words sound and are written vary from language to language, it becomes challenging for the translator. For example, let's take a look at the following joke which contains a wordplay in English: *Last night, I dreamed I was swimming in an ocean of orange soda. But it was just a Fanta sea.*

In order to translate this into another language, the translator might have to think about a new joke entirely. They could strive to preserve some element of

“**Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process**”

E.B. White, American writer

the original text, for example another joke about a drink, since creating a new pun or a new wordplay might be the only way to make sense of a joke like this.

What do you meme?

Have you ever had someone explain a joke to you, why it's (supposedly) funny? American writer E.B. White once wrote that “Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind.”

This quote illustrates what might happen if the translator opts for explaining the joke in a different language. It could be linguistically interesting, but it ultimately kills the joke. A footnote or an explanation might not even be possible depending on the type of content, such as, for example, subtitles of a movie or the voiceover of a video game.

To add to the translator's challenge: what happens when the joke is bad? Should the translator transcreate it into another bad joke or create something funnier? This is a common dilemma, and the answer usually lies in the author's



Illustration: © Selçuk Demirel for The UNESCO Courier



“At the United Nations, language should not be a barrier”

For Lama Azab, a French and Arabic interpreter at the United Nations headquarters in New York since 2016, impartiality and the ability to adapt are essential qualities for this demanding job.

What are the main qualities required to become an interpreter?

Apart from certain obvious qualities, such as having a command of the working languages, timing and general knowledge, it is essential for an interpreter to understand the issues at stake in a situation. You must always be aware of what is going on in the discussion.

It is also important to remain impartial. To ensure that all participants are treated equally, we have to set aside our personal opinions and feelings, regardless of what is being discussed. It is a constant challenge to remain neutral, to control one's emotions, and guarantee equality, while respecting the diversity of views of all the participants.

What daily difficulties do you face?

Being an interpreter means knowing how to adapt. It is second nature in this profession. You have to be able to pass from one topic to another, from one language to another, without being thrown off by the speed at which a speaker is talking, and so on.

It is a profession that teaches one modesty, because we will never be as knowledgeable as the experts. But in order to be up to the task, we have to keep learning all the time. This is essential when dealing with subjects as diverse as disarmament, human rights, or the budget. Recently, like most professionals around the world, we have had to learn to work remotely. This has meant a lot of adaptation technically.

Is there anything special about doing this job at the United Nations?

A UN specificity is the permanent concern for multilingualism. We are committed to guaranteeing that each participant understands what is being said and that they, themselves, are understood. This is essential, as it is the condition for ensuring that all participants can be equal during an exchange. Language must not be a barrier, but a tool for understanding.

Terminology is also important within the United Nations. It ensures that when we talk about something, we all use the same words to convey the values of the UN to everyone. The concept of *sustainable development*, for example, was hardly used in Arabic a few decades ago. Today, this expression has entered into common language. It is thanks to colleagues from the United Nations language services (translators, terminologists, proof-readers, and editors) that we are able to be properly prepared before going into the booth. The interpreter is one link in a vast chain that makes it possible to hold a conference. ■

The Courier, a multilingual magazine since 1948

One of the very first international newspapers to be published, *The UNESCO Courier* has been multilingual from the start. Since its creation in 1948, it has appeared in English, French, and Spanish. This desire to translate the articles into as many languages as possible reflects the intention of its founders – to promote the widespread dissemination of the Organization's humanist ideals in the aftermath of the Second World War. It is thanks to its many language editions that the *Courier* has been able to reach a vast international readership over the years, including in countries where the press was muzzled by the state.

The language coverage of the magazine has fluctuated over the years. In 1957, it was published in Russian. Later, Arabic, German, Italian, and Japanese editions followed. In 1967, Hindi and Tamil editions were launched, and from 1968 to 1973, the *Courier* also appeared in Dutch, Hebrew, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish. In 1988, a record thirty-five language editions were published.

Today the *Courier* is published in nine languages – the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish), as well as Catalan, Korean and Esperanto.



▼ Cover of the 1969 UNESCO Courier issue 'The Arts and Man'. Edition in Tamil.

Journalist based in Cape Town, South Africa. He has co-authored two books on South African history: *Rogues' Gallery* and *Spoilt Ballots*.

Putting African science in the dictionary

Many technical terms do not have an equivalent in African languages, depriving parts of the population of scientific knowledge and its impact in society. Researchers and experts from the entire continent have decided to do something about this by enriching the vocabulary of several languages.

For South African science journalist Sibusiso Biyela, writing about a new dinosaur discovery in his home language Zulu should have been an easy task. But when he sat down to write the piece, as he told the British journal *Nature's* podcast, he found that he “didn't have the words for relatively simple scientific terms like ‘fossil’ or even ‘dinosaur.’” Biyela remembers being extremely discouraged.

Another journalist might have taken the easy way out and ‘Zulufied’ the English words by adding an ‘i’ to the beginning, but Biyela felt uncomfortable with this approach. He ended up translating ‘dinosaur’ as *Isilwane sasemandulo* or ‘ancient animal’. When it came to ‘fossils’, he took things even more literally, translating them as *Amathambo amadala atholakala emhlabathini* meaning “old bones found in the ground”.



Not having the words to discuss certain topics is a problem faced by people across Africa

This was by no means the only time Biyela had encountered such problems. Not having the words to discuss even mildly technical topics is a problem people across Africa face every day. Linguistically, the continent, which has an estimated 2,000 indigenous languages, has been bypassed by science and many other spheres.

Constructing together

In 2019, a group of researchers from across the continent formed Masakhane (‘we build together’ in Zulu). This grassroots non-profit organization is “focused on developing language technology for African languages”, explains co-founder Jade Abbott, an expert in natural language processing (NLP). Initially the group was made up primarily of machine learning experts, but it has since grown to include linguists, engineers, political scientists and communicators like Biyela. Being scattered across more than forty countries, these experts have developed the habit of working online. So when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, they were prepared.

At the start, Masakhane focused on developing machine translation tools for as many African languages as possible. Today many of us take tools like Google Translate for granted and we assume that any web page we access can automatically be translated into our

home language. But to this day, speakers of only a handful of Africa’s over 2,000 languages have access to such a luxury.

It is relatively easy to build machine translation tools, provided they have access to data – something which is sorely lacking for the vast majority of African languages. For this reason the Masakhane team focused on showing that “working in a participatory manner, with humans who understand the tools and the languages, enables you to get better data”, says Jade Abbott.

A paper published in 2020, co-authored by fifty members of Masakhane in dozens of countries, won the Wikimedia Foundation Research Award. Examining the status quo for forty-eight of Africa’s most spoken languages, it provided a roadmap for establishing “machine translation benchmarks for over thirty languages” while also enabling people “without formal training to make a unique scientific contribution.”

Igbo, Swahili or Yoruba

Once this initial research phase was complete, Masakhane set about putting the theory into action. Their translation tool currently has working prototypes for six African languages (Igbo, Lingala, Shona, Swahili, Tshiluba and Yoruba). Abbott expects it to be a work in progress for several years. The team will also be exploring how to best make this tool

accessible, as everyone involved is very keen “to make sure that the tools are used to improve communities in Africa rather than boosting profits for digital platforms”.

Masakhane’s members have produced over 200 academic papers and the organization has sanctioned seven other major projects. One of these, *Decolonise Science*, a collaboration with AfricaArxiv, an African digital archive working towards building an open scholarly repository, and ScienceLink, an open access scientific platform based in the Netherlands, in which Biyela, the Zulu journalist, is heavily involved.

When the project kicked off in 2021, the initial goal was to translate around 200 scientific papers into six African languages. But the team soon realised that this was a nearly impossible task which would require the creation of hundreds of new terms (‘dinosaur’, ‘fossil’, etc) for each

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The lack of data in African languages is hampering the development of machine translation tools

paper. A more realistic, revised goal will see the group translate the abstracts of 180 papers (which have already been selected via an intensive process that considers the field, impact, and geographic and gender diversity of the research) into the six languages while also generating five new terms for each paper.

If ‘decolonisation’ sounds like a destructive process of tearing down existing edifices, for Masakhane it is more about building new ones. “What happens for a lot of speakers of indigenous languages,” explains Biyela, “is that we can talk about sports and politics and other topics in our home language, but when it comes to talking about science or technology [we] have to code switch. [...] This can be problematic because it paints science as this foreign visitor that’s invading the conversation”, he adds. This situation is not without consequences, notably in the health domain. When facing people who are hesitant about getting vaccinated, for example, “you can’t really explain what mRNA or immunology is in your home language.” If Masakhane has their way this will all be changing very soon. ■

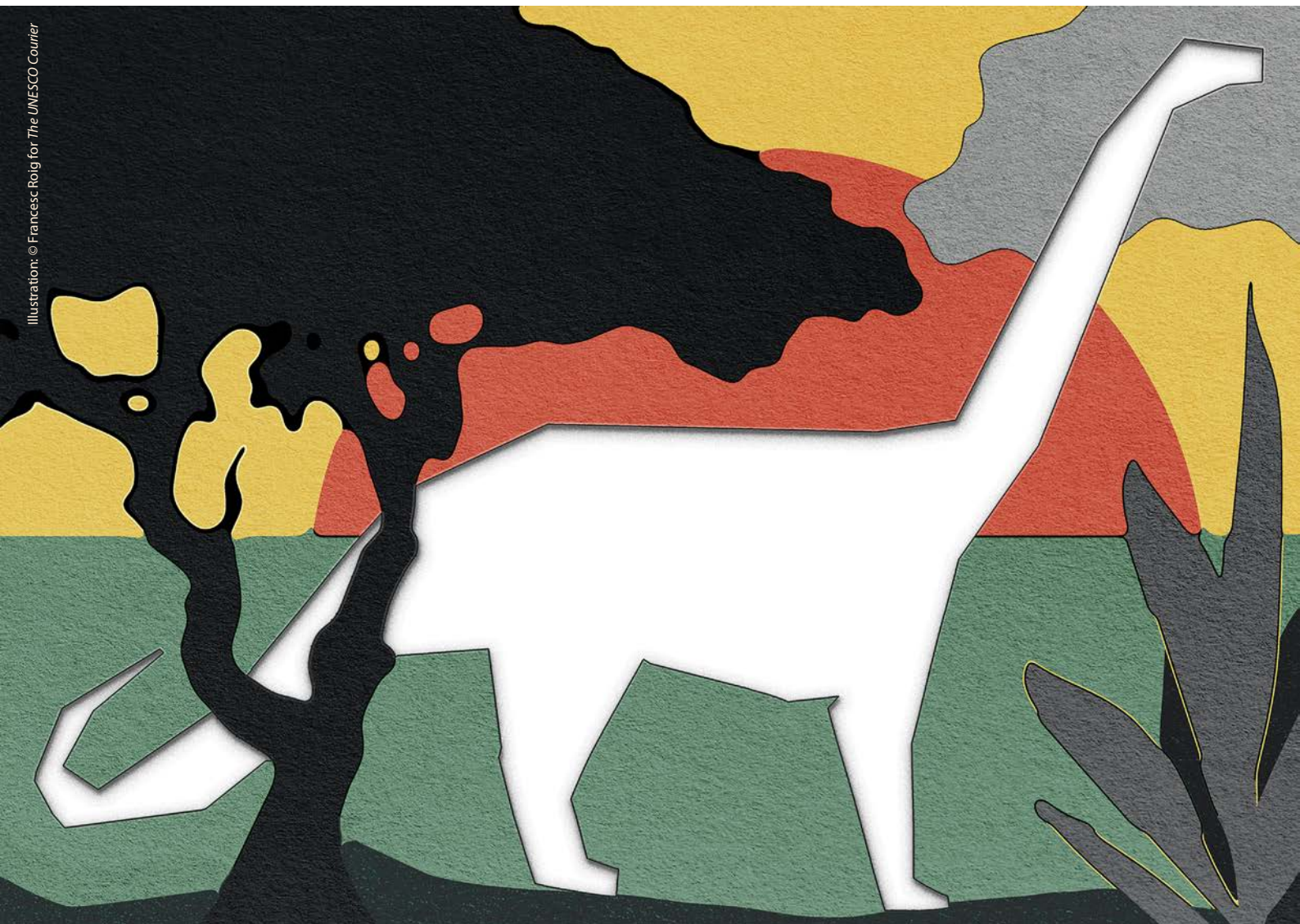


Illustration: © Francesc Roig for The UNESCO Courier

Subtitling: Behind the scenes

If digital platforms have revolutionized the distribution of films and series in foreign languages, translators have hardly benefited from the public's enthusiasm for international content as the pressure on deadlines and wages increases.

“Once you overcome the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films”, stated South Korean director Bong Joon-Ho at the Golden Globe awards in 2020. His film *Parasite* became the first non-English

language film to win an Oscar for Best Picture, shining a spotlight on the critical role subtitles play in exposing global audiences to the vast world of film.

The international success of the film negated the widespread perception that English speakers are reluctant

to read while watching televised content. Indeed, *Parasite*, which is now streaming on subscription-based platforms worldwide, grossed more than \$50 million throughout the United States and Canada upon its cinema debut.

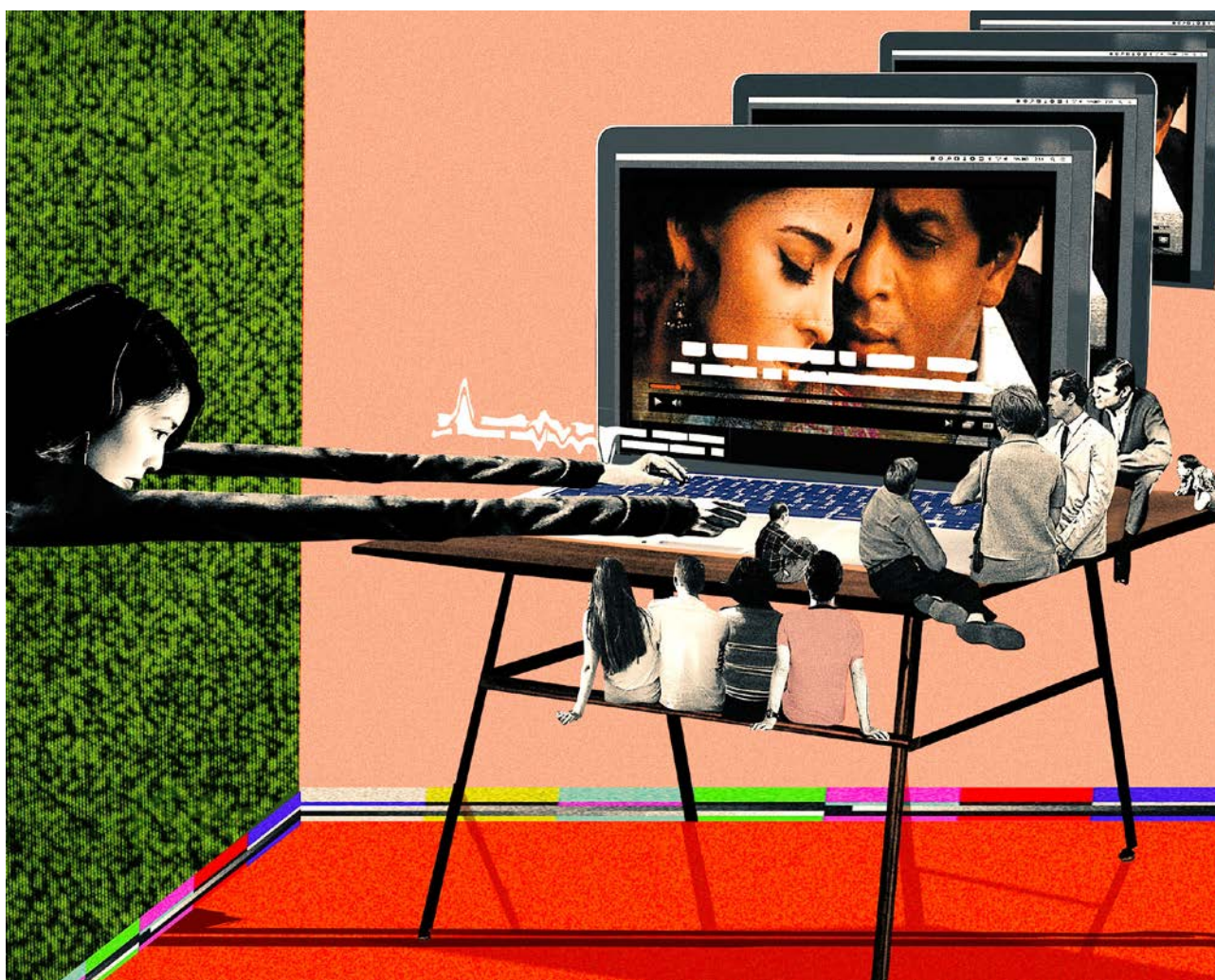


Illustration: © Nadia Diz Grana for The UNESCO Courier

The phenomenal success of subtitled films like *Parasite* or the South Korean series *Squid Game* has also brought to light the precarious situation of subtitlers. Do their poor working conditions explain the stark contrast in subtitle quality across shows and films for streaming platforms? This question has prompted debate among the public-at-large.

Unprecedented popularity

In a few years, subscription-based streaming platforms have revolutionized cross-border viewership of foreign-language films and television shows, with localized international content gaining unprecedented popularity among English-language audiences.

Roughly 36 per cent of Netflix subscribers are from the United States and Canada, with viewership of non-English content up 71 per cent since 2019, stated Bela Bajaria, Head of Netflix Global TV, at the Television Critics Association's summer press tour in 2021.

The American giant, which streams content in more than 190 countries, subtitled seven million run-time minutes in 2021, with plans to promote translations and make them even more compelling for subscribers, revealed Greg Peters, Chief Operations and Chief Product Officer at Netflix. The platform is largely considered by Language Service Providers (LSPs) to be a "pioneer" in setting subtitling and dubbing standards.

A vicious circle

Subtitlers, however, do not really profit from this growing popularity of foreign content. "We have this 'subtitling as an afterthought' type of model. Money for translation, subtitling, dubbing and access currently comes at the very end of the filmmaking process, when the film or television budget has largely been spent", says Pablo Romero-Fresco, Honorary Professor of Translation and Filmmaking at University of Roehampton in London.

While 50 per cent or more of most films' revenue is earned from their foreign translated versions, only 0.01 per cent to 0.1 per cent of budget is spent on them. "Is the color correction of a film that is going to be speaking to millions of viewers more important than its translation? It's a shocking disparity", Romero-Fresco says.

Subtitlers are generally paid per minute of content rather than per subtitle. According to subtitle translators, who prefer to remain anonymous, this per minute rate has been gradually falling over the past thirty years. Another issue is that there is no standardized process for assignments, contracts or payment, with rates and methods for contracting subtitling services varying vastly by country or region.

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In the United States and Canada, viewership of non-English content has increased by 71 per cent since 2019

"Streaming platforms and content creators themselves are prepared to pay for quality subtitling", says Stavroula Sokoli, Vice President of the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation. However, these revenues need to reach the translators, which is not always the case. Sometimes streaming platforms give subtitling projects to Language Service Providers (LSPs) who in turn pass them on to smaller vendors. Even if the initial rate paid is high, it decreases as the number of intermediaries increases.

"If you're only working for vendors or clients who pay very badly, then you have to work all the time because you can't make ends meet", says a veteran French subtitler. "And if you work all the time, you can't have time to meet other [better-paying] clients. It can become a vicious circle."

The increasing pressure on deadlines and wages, is prompting some longtime subtitle translators to leave the industry. "In the past few years, streamers are expecting a lot more of the linguists:

they expect higher quality, they give us a little bit less time, they pay us less than before or the same, even though the cost of living in the world has changed", says the head of a LSP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Pragmatic deadlines

Many in the subtitling industry state that subtitling should be integrated in the budget at the start of the filmmaking process, so that a respectable payment rate is included and an appropriate LSP is selected from the start. That vendor would in turn, have the appropriate funding and time to select a subtitler who is the right fit. Indeed, Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite* was so phenomenally successful because he chose to work with a subtitle translator with particular experience, Darcy Paquet, to ensure the translation's appropriate context and nuance.

In the near-term, a solution could be for streaming platforms to collaborate with vendors to ensure consistency in subtitler payment and more pragmatic deadlines. This process has started in France, where subtitlers are paid per subtitle rather than per minute for certain films. Streaming platforms are also able to communicate more forcefully with vendors to pay better rates for translation.

"French film producers know that they have to export to countries that speak other languages, so most of the time, they will take that into account from the start", says Sabine de Andria, a Paris-based translator who has been subtitling for more than twenty years. "If globalization has one positive aspect, it is that it has really made obvious that subtitling and dubbing are essential and they need to be done well". ■

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Expenditure on translation and access typically accounts for 0.01 per cent to 0.1 per cent of a film's budget

The translator, an endangered species?

Since the first public machine translation experiments in the 1950s, we have not stopped predicting the triumph of machine over human. Yet, more people work in the translation industry now than ever before. Having become very efficient and accessible to most people, online translation systems have not killed the profession – they have transformed it.

The first public machine translation experiment took place in 1954. Led by researchers from IBM and Georgetown University in Washington, DC, it was destined to make possible high-quality automatic translation from Russian into English in a few years. Since this first attempt, claims that machines could soon be replacing translators became usual. In 2018, Microsoft announced that their Chinese to English news translations were of comparable quality to human translation. The paradox however, is that although translation systems are accessible to most people, the number of people working in the translation industry is higher than ever before – an approximate 600,000 people in the world. In this context, do professionals really have a reason to worry?

In fact, the situation is more complex than it seems. Firstly because translators themselves use digital translation tools. Translators who work on repetitive or

iterative texts are likely to use translation memory, a labour-saving tool for recycling translations of sentences identical or similar to those translated previously. Many translators use machine translation and edit the text generated by the machine. Some however, prefer not to use it as they find the job uninteresting and poorly remunerated.

There are, of course, texts that are machine translated without any human input. Since there is now more digital content produced than ever before, there are simply too few human translators to translate it all. In general, a common rule of thumb guiding the level of human input is that the automation should be appropriate for the shelf-life of a text, as well as the level of risk in terms of subsequent consequences resulting from errors. This means that the translation of an online travel review or a tweet can be automated, whereas printed materials, marketing or medical texts, for example, require more human oversight.

The earliest systems were based on a hand coded set of rules and bilingual dictionaries. Since the 1990s, however, they have used previous human translations to compute the most statistically likely translation of a source text sentence. By the 2000s, free machine translation had become ubiquitous and around 2016 there was a leap forward in quality, brought about by neural machine translation (NMT). With the intention to replicate neural networks in the brain, these systems try to produce the most statistically likely translation for a sentence based on ‘training data’ – source sentences and their human translations.

Thanks to the increased accessibility and quality, online translation systems have become more useful and popular than ever. In 2016, for example, Google announced that their Google Translate system produced over 143 billion words per day, even though their accuracy sometimes leaves room for improvement.



Gender bias in machine translation can be very difficult to spot

Dashed hopes

Since the early days of automation, there has been a tendency to overestimate output quality. The hopes placed on machine translation in 1954 were let down, and the 2018 claim of news translations being of human parity was based on very limited evaluation criteria. Over the last years, of course, these technologies have progressed a lot.

Mistranslation and bias

While NMT’s complex mechanical operations can produce fluent-sounding output, it can also generate something entirely unexpected, what researchers call ‘hallucinations’. Common issues are mistranslations of nouns or verbs in a sentence that reads well but has a different meaning from the source sentence. Another pitfall: encoded

bias in systems, which can generate assumptions about certain adjectives, like 'beautiful', 'sassy' or 'sexy' to be female, and adjectives like 'decent', 'hard-nosed' or 'likeable' to be male.

These kinds of issues can be very difficult to spot and to resolve. Furthermore, ambiguous words that flummoxed early systems are still a problem, with occasional hallucinations having caused media flurries. A report from 2018 revealed examples of Google Translate translating random combinations of letters into religious prophecies.

In the end, the intention of the author and the purpose of a text cannot be encoded into a machine translation system. Its output will remove lexical richness, defaulting to the most common words from their training data. For creative texts in particular, any trace of the author's voice will be lost, unless automation one day develops to the point of posing a threat to this more creative part of the job.

Reducing costs

Despite its limitations, machine translation is frequently used and post-editing has become an expected part of many translators' work: human-level quality and cost savings mean that machine translation is sometimes used or added to translators' workflows. As most translators work on a freelance basis, they may not be in a strong position to refuse. Many subtitling jobs, for example, involve post-editing of machine translation to save on cost and

turnaround time – often with related viewer complaints about translation quality. Dr. Ana Guerberof Arenas, Senior Lecturer in Translation and Multimodal Technologies at the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom, recently reported that, although readers may find the output comprehensible, they are less engaged with the narrative and enjoy reading it less than a human translation.

To summarize, machine translation can be efficient and useful – with or without human intervention. Despite this, there is a risk that heavily automated work processes may render the translating profession less attractive. That is a worry for the sustainability of both machine and human translation. However, we must not forget that, as Prof. Dorothy Kenny from the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies at Dublin City University in Ireland, has noted: for machine translation to replace human translators, the former depends on the latter for its training data and for its legitimacy. ■

“
**An author's
intention cannot
be encoded
into a machine
translation system**”

Illustration: © Adria Fruitós for The UNESCO Courier



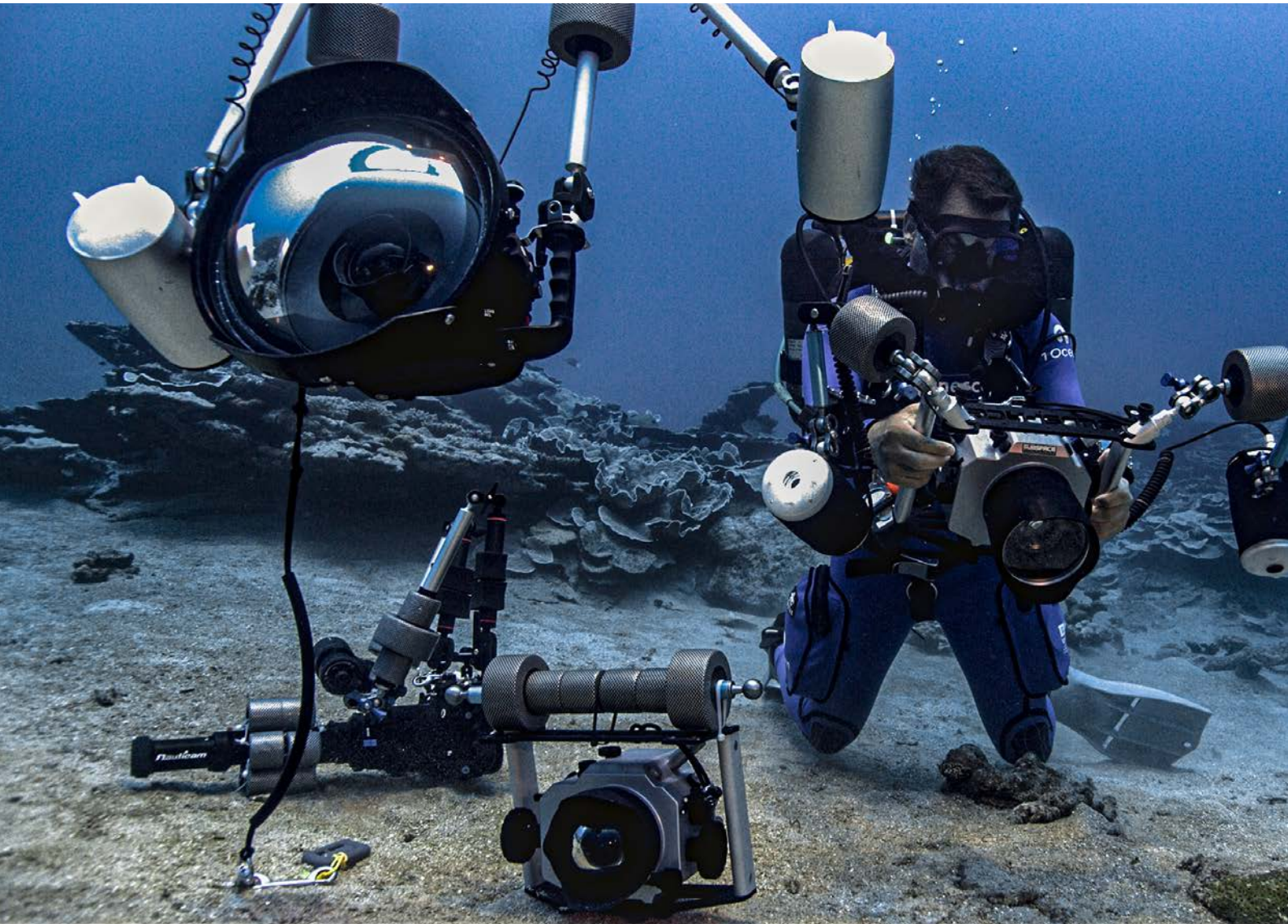
ZOOM

Coral reefs: A chronicle of a fragile world





*A research mission under
the aegis of UNESCO
exploring one of the biggest
coral reefs in the world,
off the coast of Tahiti.*





It's one of the biggest coral reefs in the world, unfolding its flowers and lace over a nearly three-kilometre long stretch, and one of the deepest too. This underwater treasure has for long been known to local fishermen, but its extent was unsuspected. Following a diving expedition conducted with support from UNESCO in 2021, the French explorer and photographer Alexis Rosenfeld provides us with exceptional images of this landscape.

In contrast to many other coral reefs, this particular one has escaped bleaching, the scourge that is devouring the majority of reefs. Almost half of coral ecosystems have disappeared since the 1870s because of climate change, overfishing and pollution. Of those that have survived, a third are threatened with extinction.

It's only an estimate, since just 20 per cent of the seabed has been mapped to date. This is why UNESCO has pledged to map at least 80 per cent of the ocean floor by 2030. The deepening of our knowledge of the seabed may one day reveal the existence of other ecosystems, capable of adapting to rising ocean temperatures. ■

Above: The French explorer and photographer Alexis Rosenfeld, founder of the 1 Ocean campaign carried out in partnership with UNESCO to raise public awareness on the need to preserve the ocean.

Left: In order to capture light, rare at over 30 metres depth, the corals of this reef open like rose petals.

*Below: The Maldives archipelago. Two carnivorous starfish *Acanthaster planci* devour a coral colony. This species is today the main natural cause of the disappearance of corals.*



Below: Natural Park of the Coral Sea in New Caledonia, France. While clinging onto gorgonians, crinoids capture plankton with the help of their long flexible arms. This species has inhabited the ocean for about 500 million years.





Above: These coral trees are deployed by scientists from the French laboratory CNRS-CRIOBE off the coast of Moorea (French Polynesia) to study the effects of global warming on corals.

*Right: The sea anemone *Entacmaea quadricolor* is often inhabited by clownfish. Here, in the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in the Philippines.*





*The Gambier Islands
in French Polynesia.
The lagoon of Rikitea is home
to an impressive colony
of mushroom corals (*Fungia
scruposa*) capable of moving.*





Left: A salp colony in the Mediterranean. The life cycle of this species has two phases: the first one is solitary and characterised by an asexual reproduction. The second one is collective, with reproduction becoming sexual.

Below: A plastic bag stuck to the pectoral fin of this long-snouted dolphin (Stenella longirostris). Nondegradable waste makes up a real threat to marine fauna.





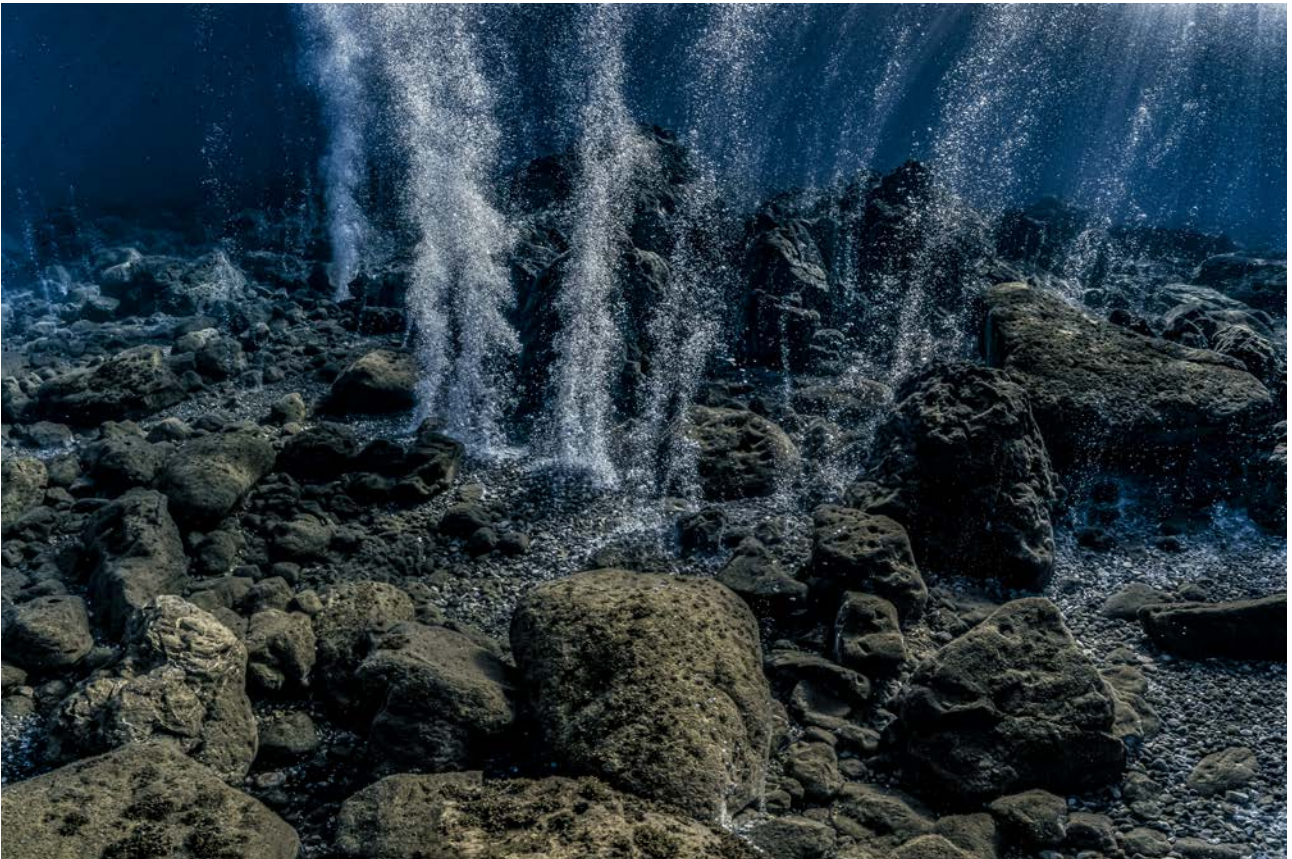
Above: The Aeolian Islands (Italy) in the Mediterranean. The Smoking Land is an underwater zone discovered in 2018 between the islands of Panarea and Basiluzzo. It consists of more than two hundred volcanic conduits that emit gas-rich acidic fluids.



*Tahiti in French Polynesia. The grey reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) lives in groups during the day. These groups only separate to chase during the night.*



*A hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in the waters of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in the Philippines.*



Eruption of hydrogen sulfide in the heart of the Panarea caldera, off Sicily. This zone in the Mediterranean has significant volcanic activity.



The Mayotte Marine Natural Park (France) in the Indian Ocean. A real link between land and the ocean, the mangrove dampens waves and serves as a natural filter.



Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are

Our interest in food shows no signs of waning. This is obvious from the proliferation of books, programmes, films, and series on the subject, and chefs being treated as celebrities. This phenomenon of *gastrolatry* reflects the profound changes that are shaping a new world food order.

The act of eating is governed by a principle of absorption. The food we ingest has concrete biochemical effects in the body. This is why we literally are what we eat. But this aphorism also works the other way round – we eat what we are. Because, when we eat, we absorb not only nutrients, but also symbols and meanings. All cultures assign specific meanings to their foods – there are everyday dishes and festive dishes, main meals and snacks, things that are eaten and things that are not. Food not only weaves a web of meanings, it is also a central feature of collective and individual identities.

For the past thirty years these identities have been evolving, creating paradoxical eating behaviours. This 'new food order' is in fact traversed by two opposing movements. On the one hand, we are witnessing the globalization of a standardized diet – often called 'Western' – based on an abundance of meat products and processed foods, refined sugars, saturated fats and carbohydrates. On the other hand, more singularized diets are emerging, creating a mosaic

of fragmented trends with increasingly personalized, 'à la carte' ways of eating.

This singularization has the effect of distancing us from traditions, so that we can play an active part in deciding our own eating habits. Today's sophisticated consumer is able to consciously manipulate symbolic meanings with the specific aim of constructing their own identity. For consumption largely shapes our lifestyle today.

The ritual of the family meal

Few activities are as everyday as the act of eating. Yet this reiterated action is increasingly leading to a theatricalization of intimacy.

The ritual of eating together as a family around the table in front of the television is now largely a thing of the past. As the number of screens increases, eating habits are becoming more fragmented. It is not unusual to see members of the same household having dinner, each in front of their own screen and with their own individual meal – a plate of vegetables for the vegan, gluten-free

“

**When we eat,
we absorb not
only nutrients,
but also
symbols
and meanings**

food for the coeliac, vitamin supplements for the sporty one, a barely reheated ready meal for the one who lacks the time or the desire to cook.

This diversity of ways of eating betrays a distancing from culinary traditions that once conferred collective identities on the various regions and nations of the world. Many people today eat differently to their grandparents, even their parents. However, this does not mean that collective identities are dissolving, they are simply changing. By adhering to a particular diet, individuals deploy identities that transcend family, region, →



▼ For his project *Daily bread*, American photographer Gregg Segal travels the world in search of communities whose traditional diets have resisted the impact of globalization. He asks children to keep a diary of everything they eat in a week and then takes photos of them surrounded by the food items making up their weekly menu. Photos © Gregg Segal

or country, to become part of networks of transnational communities.

Networked eating

At the same time, commensality – the way in which a meal is shared – is being enriched by new practices. A few years ago, a phenomenon called *mukbang*, a Korean term that melds together ‘eating’ and ‘broadcasting’, was born in certain Asian societies. This practice consists of eating a sometimes-impressive quantity of different foods in front of a video camera while interacting with a connected audience. As many people eat their meals alone, this phenomenon may be a response to the need to invent a new, virtual commensality. Nowadays, we also eat in networks.

The singularization of diet is often a matter of choice. The individual decides whether to be vegetarian or omnivore, to eat organic, local, or seasonal produce,

whether to eat unhealthy but comforting food, to be a gourmet or a detoxer. The reasons for these choices may be moral or dictated by the need to adapt one’s diet according to pathologies, intolerances, or food refusals. They also reveal the medicalization of food. According to an economic logic that tends to commercialize every aspect

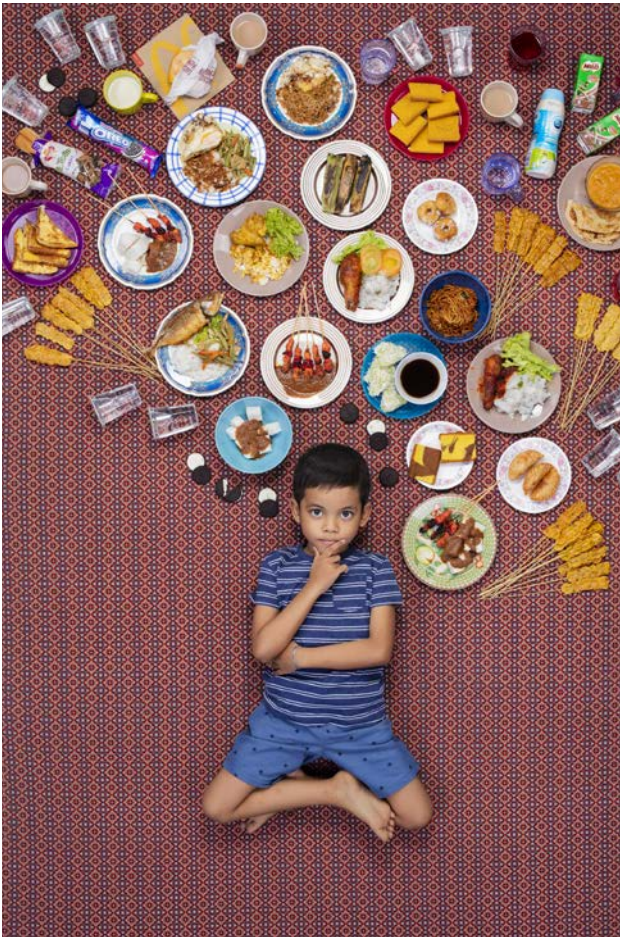
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**Eating
 behaviour,
 central to
 collective
 and individual
 identities,
 is changing**”

of life, market players have converted certain foods into ‘remedies’ that fight diseases, facilitate digestion, are antioxidant, or prolong life.

Enhancing the experience

Indeed, eating has become an experience. The satisfaction of this desire has increasingly become an adventure of the self, into which people invest their money, their cultural capital, and above all the search for their own identity.

Consumer culture encourages exoticism and novelty. Certain products thus acquire greater economic value if they pass into a sphere of consumption where they are invested with labels linked to the rhetoric of authenticity, as being ‘ethnic’, ‘artisanal’, ‘heritage’, or ‘natural’. Examples include quinoa from the Andes, Pu-erh tea from China’s Yunnan province, artisanal cheese from the Pyrenees, and beef from natural pastures in Uruguay.



❶ Majo Said, 7 years old, Hamburg, Germany, 2017. ❷ Kawakanih Yawalapiti, 9 years old, Upper Xingu region in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, 2018. ❸ Altaf Rabbal DLove Bin Roni, 6 years old, Gombak, Malaysia, 2017. ❹ Sira Cissokho, 11 years old, Dakar, Senegal, 2017.

In the same vein, tourism offers one of the most dynamic forms of *gourmetization* and the satisfaction of the need for exoticism. Travellers have the chance to enjoy a vast range of unique gastronomic experiences. In this respect, a growing number of countries are keen to develop so-called *gastrodiplomacy*, a strategy that uses local food as a lure to attract visitors. This strategy works in two ways to stimulate the economy and local development. It not only attracts tourists to the country, but also confers on its products and chefs a brand image that functions as a label of quality abroad.

However, *gourmetization* can also be obtained through more artisanal processes. Faced with the massification of consumer goods standardized by industry, people are now looking for products that stand out. In today's society, cooking has become an object of consumption – it is no longer a heavy domestic burden, but a glamorous and

recreational pastime. Growing vegetables for your own consumption, buying fair-trade coffee beans, preferring organic produce, or preparing homemade *kombucha* is more than just a gourmet attitude. Through these forms of creative consumption, foods also express aesthetic, political and above all, identity-related positions.

These new practices are not without certain adverse effects. When quinoa entered the gourmet market, for

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We are
witnessing
the globalization
of a standardized
diet

example, indigenous communities in the Andes, who base their diet on this seed, saw their access to a traditional food seriously compromised. Meanwhile, the medicalization of food is largely illusory, even misleading. Another pitfall is that the destruction of commensality is eroding the social bonds that sharing food reinforces.

Despite these limitations, cuisine is remarkably resilient, constantly capable of reinventing itself. It remains the centre of social life and continues to forge identities. It remains a shared code – materially and now virtually – and a very powerful system of communication. ■

Joanne McNeil :

“The web still offers a lot of potential, besides what corporations have made of it.”

In her recent book, *Lurking: How a Person Became a User*, American writer Joanne McNeil traces the history of the internet – for the first time from the perspective of the user. Pushing back against glorified narratives of the early days of the World Wide Web, she argues for a more inclusive, community-based internet that is not only shaped by corporations.

Your book on the history of the internet is written from the perspective of the user. Why did you choose this perspective?

The user is often talked about as the ‘non-expert’. If one is not inside the big tech companies, one allegedly does not know the inner workings of them. However, in the process of experiencing online products, we, the users, have unique life experience about them. This perspective is rarely talked about in technology reporting. In a world where it is not realistic anymore to say that we can just opt out of digital life, what does it mean that we are structuring our lives around

these platforms without necessarily having a say in their development?

How has the internet changed since the early ages? Is the idea of the internet as a utopia providing universal access to knowledge definitely dead?

In my book, I wanted to push back in terms of the nostalgia that comes up in conversations about the early days of the internet. The potential for people to meet across distances without corporate ownership was there, but there were still unknown problems. If we go back to any early online forum, we will see harassment; we will see bigotry; we will see discrimination. In the 1980s, if one wanted to get online, one had to purchase a very expensive computer. By the 1990s, when the World Wide Web launched, the digital divide and the cost of access was a problem.

At the same time, as we see through the decades, the entrepreneurs were the ones getting investments to create social media platforms. A lot of the companies, which were once very small, like Twitter and Facebook, grew enormous and

became next to impossible to scale back. This was happening incredibly rapidly at a time without much regulation.

As easy as it is to be frustrated with what the internet has become now, some of the initial promise is still available to the everyday user. These platforms remain a way for people to and communities to gather and organize. For example, Amazon workers organizing to defend their rights, or people with the same illness meeting on Facebook.

Do you see key moments in the history of the web? When did persons start to become users?

What we now refer to as ‘social networks’ accelerated the change between person and user. The period of the 2000s, referred to broadly as ‘Web 2.0’, is the moment of enormous adoption of the internet by not just individuals, but schools and workplaces. This was when we started developing the habits of following people and having friends and followers online.

This is very different to the 1990s, when much of the online community was based on a sense of cloaking one’s



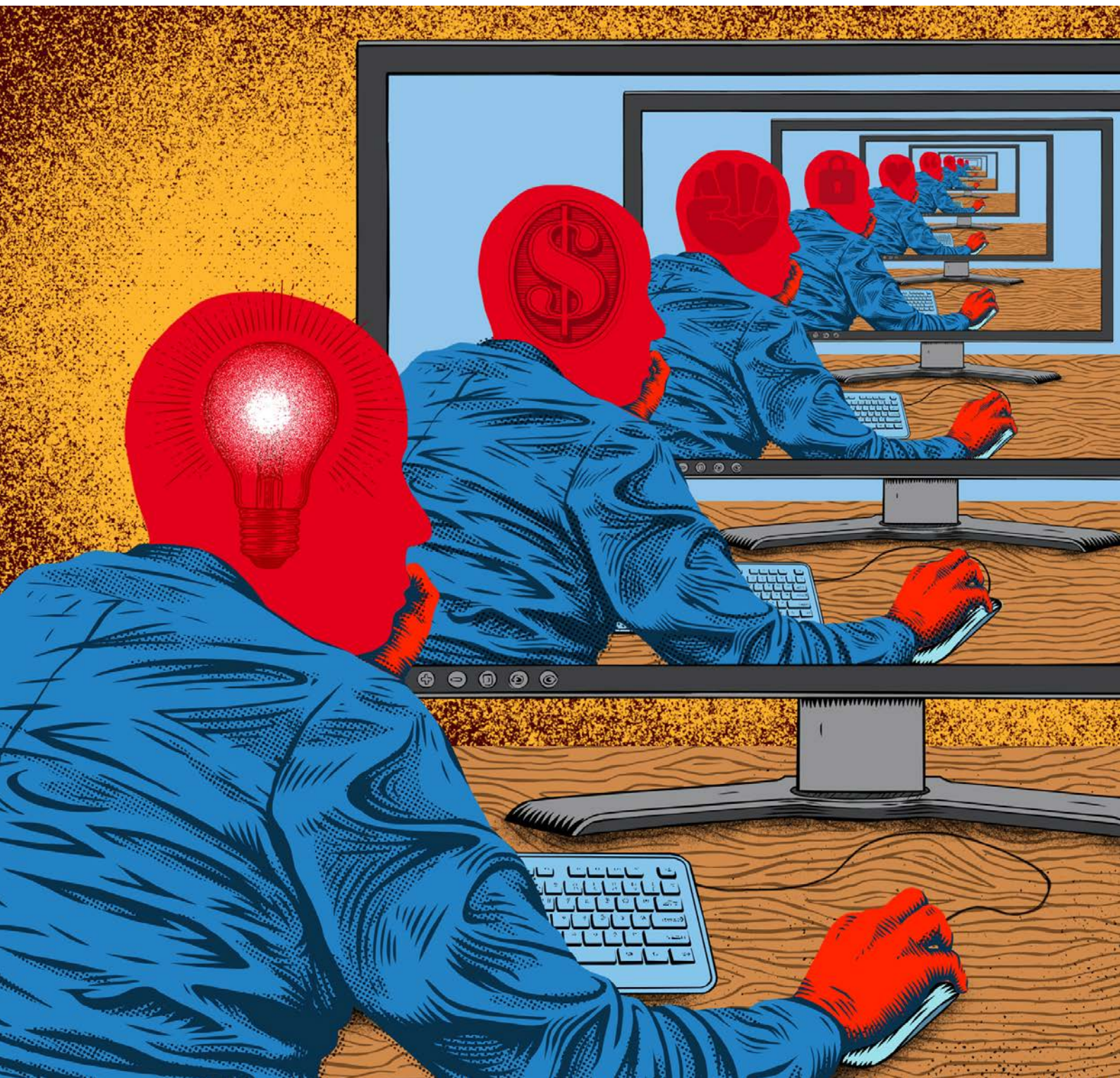
Some of the internet’s initial promise is still available to the everyday user



Joanne McNeil

The author of *Lurking: How a Person Became a User*, Joanne McNeil is a writer, editor, and art critic interested in the ways that technology shapes culture and society.





identity and finding groups on one's own. The interaction was based on getting to know people as part of a community, as people and not just as users in a very abstract way. The platforms were shaped by certain rules of participation, unique to a community, or values that everybody in that community would share.

Then came new platforms based on what would encompass all one's acquaintances online. There was a blend of meeting strangers, but also having a better idea of who they are because one has their photos, their location, their interests and one's connections to them made visible.

You make a distinction between two different classes of people, users and developers. What is the difference between the two?

In the earlier times of internet, online communities were founded by people who were members of that community.

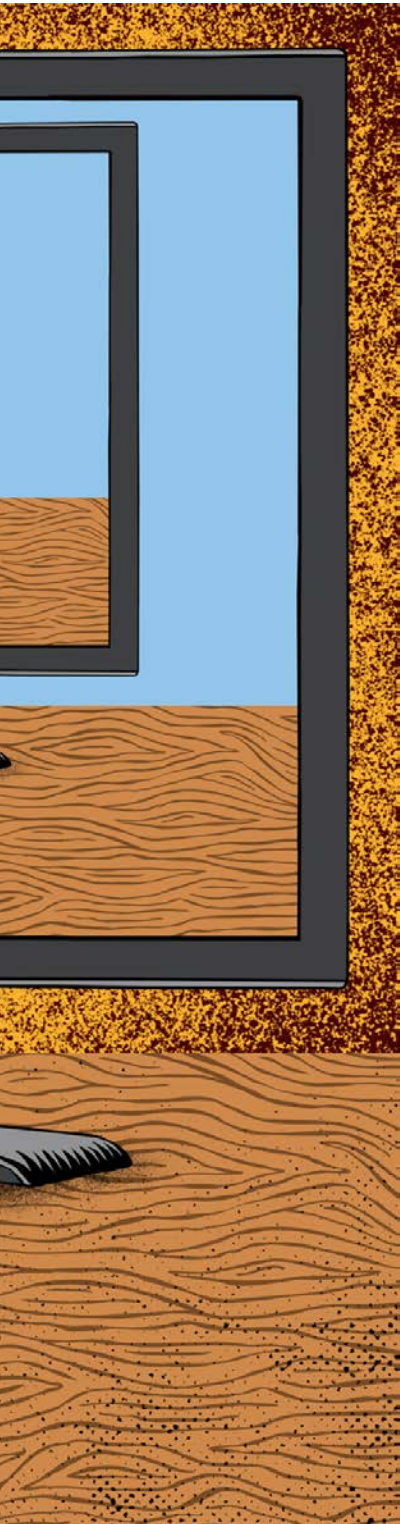


Illustration: © Boris Šermeňiako for The UNESCO Courier

they are using these platforms in a very alienated way and there is an alienated sense of who is actually going to be using these different tools. There is also very little opportunity for the user to be heard if the tools turn out to be harmful. This shift is emblematic of the 2000s – moving away from having a real community, where the founders and developers are all part of it, part of maintaining it and have something personally invested in maintaining it.

This is why I think that an ideal use of internet would be seeing more groups that are organized on a small-scale level, as a community. Then, at least, one would be able to create moderation policy that everybody is aware of, even if they do not necessarily agree with it.

In a small community, one can urge members to moderate their behaviour. Maybe the user takes it the wrong way and they do not want to be part of the community anymore. Or maybe they take it to heart and reflect on their behaviour. These are behaviours and experiences that we can deal with on a small scale – in a classroom; in a workplace; at a party – but cannot deal with as a whole world.

“
An ideal use of the internet would be seeing more groups that are organized on a small-scale level

**You are critical of big tech.
What are your main concerns?**

My main concerns are the exploitation of data, the lack of privacy and the role that big tech companies have taken in society because of the wealth that they have acquired. One of the worst consequences is that a lot of people think that is the internet and that there are no alternatives. In which case, I would recommend that they do read about the history of the web and the creation of services that are everyday internet experiences which were not made for money, such as email.

They can serve as examples of what the internet still can be.

You say that there needs to be rituals in place online to treat people – users – with dignity, both the living and the dead. What do you mean?

The question of what will be done of traces of ourselves on the internet is still a complicated topic and it is an issue that needs to be treated. Some argue that such traces make up important archives that are important to preserve. I am concerned about whether a lot of experiences online really are necessary for us to understand the twenty-first century – what information really is the most crucial to archive? We do not have every casual conversation saved from the nineteenth century, is this a problem?

An important ritual would be asking for consent from the users and coming to agreement about how to put data and information to rest in a way that feels authentic to their community. One platform that is doing a really great job is MetaFilter. It is one of the oldest online communities, organized by people who participate in it. There are a lot of users, personally invested in this community, thinking through what it means to have an archive of users' material and information over time on the internet.

How could we develop greater privacy protection and user consent?

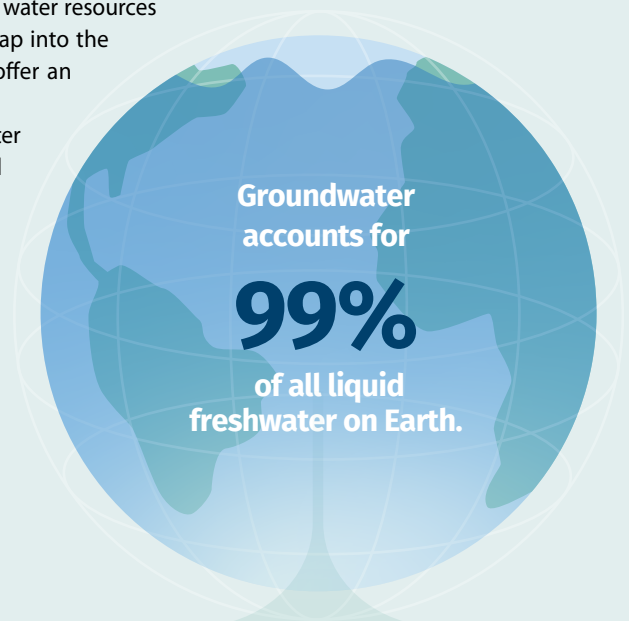
It would have to be in terms of regulation. Platforms would like us to believe that they can regulate themselves, but over the past twenty years, we have seen that this is not going to happen. I do feel optimistic that there is a large interest from the users, from so many of us who are online everyday, that our privacy is still important. Generations born with the internet know what they are giving the internet and what the internet is taking from them. That these exchanges are unfair. This is what makes me feel optimistic – most individuals want to see something happen and that should give us some hope. Just a little bit of an alternative to the general platforms is in my mind progress. It shows us what the internet can still do. The internet is not Facebook. The internet is not the web. The internet still offers a lot of potential, besides what corporations have made of it. ■

For example, even Facebook began as something for students but then started to include more people. There was a type of accountability because they were all part of the same social groups. Nowadays, on the general interest platforms, the founders, executives, and developers might not be users themselves. If they are,

Groundwater: A remedy for water crises?

Growing use along with the increased pressure on surface water resources is making global water crises unavoidable – unless we tap into the full potential of Earth’s groundwater resources, which offer an enormous supply of freshwater.

Groundwater, which accounts for 99 per cent of all liquid freshwater on Earth, currently covers a quarter of our needs. Yet, this natural resource is consequently undervalued, mismanaged and even abused. The latest edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report, *Groundwater: Making the invisible visible*, published on 21 March 2022 by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water, brings to light the potential of this abundant resource to meet our needs, if it is managed sustainably. ■



MAPPING GROUNDWATER



Globally, water use is expected to grow by roughly **1% per year over the next 30 years.**



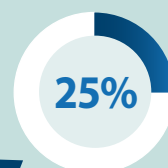
An estimated 4 billion people

live in areas that suffer from severe physical water scarcity for at least one month per year.



Humans extract about **1,000 km³** of groundwater per year, a number that appears to have **been increasing by about 2% every year over the past two decades.**

This corresponds to



of all human freshwater withdrawals.



GLOBAL GROUNDWATER DEMAND

Groundwater is recharged mainly from **rain and snow infiltrating the ground.**

Water is the most important raw material used by the brewing sector, making up about **92%** of beer on average.

Of all natural resources, **groundwater is the most extracted resource in the world.**

70% is used for **agricultural purposes.**

40% of all the water used for irrigation in cereal cultivation **comes from groundwater.**

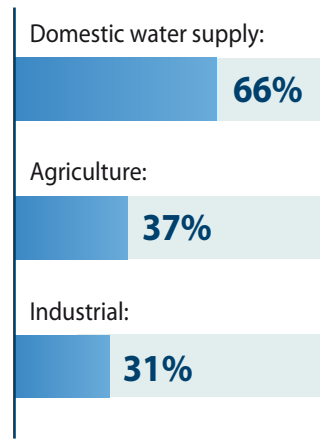
The fashion industry currently uses enough water to quench the thirst of **110 million people for an entire year.**

To produce just one cotton shirt requires approximately **2,500 litres of water.**

44% of the population in the United States depend on groundwater for their drinking water supply.

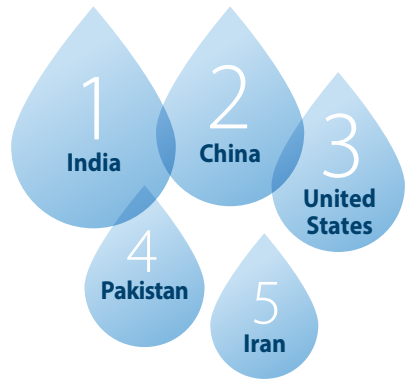
More than 90% of groundwater in India is used for irrigated agriculture.

Groundwater in France:



Top five countries

in terms of groundwater extraction by volume, as of 2010:



HOW AND WHERE DO WE USE GROUNDWATER?

Groundwater abstractions

69%



of all groundwater abstractions correspond to the **agricultural sector.**

22%



are for **domestic use.**



9% for industrial purposes.

Nearly **50%**

of the global urban population is **estimated to be supplied from groundwater sources.**

About **15% to 25%**

of groundwater withdrawal is from **non-renewable sources.**

Regions heavily reliant on groundwater for irrigation

North America
59%

areas equipped for irrigation that **use groundwater.**

South Asia
57%

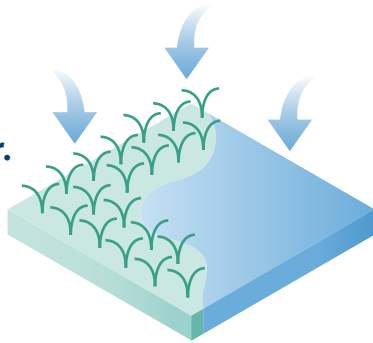
Sub-Saharan Africa
3%
of farmland is equipped for irrigation.

Only 5%

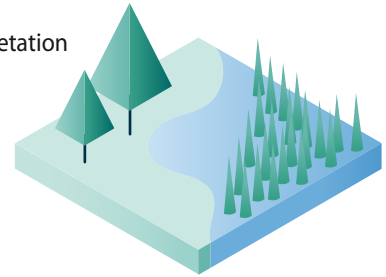
of that area uses groundwater, despite the vast shallow aquifers which remain largely underexploited.

GROUNDWATER CAN HELP FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE. BUT TO DO SO, WE MUST IMPROVE OUR USE OF IT

Wetlands soak up **CO2 from the air.**



Water-enhanced vegetation protects against **flooding and erosion.**



Rainwater can be stored

for dry periods for daily use and can thus reduce dependence on ground and surface water.



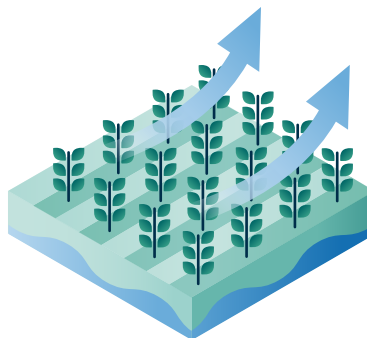
Wastewater can be reused

to reduce water wastage.



Climate-smart agriculture

can be carried out with improvement in water use in farmlands.



HOW DO WE UNTAP GROUNDWATER'S TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL?

We need to generate and share more data knowledge about the characteristics and properties of groundwater systems. The more we know, the better we can:

1 Determine how much groundwater we can extract, where and when, without overexploiting and depleting the resource.

2 Avoid groundwater pollution, especially by protecting the land and ecosystems in the aquifer recharge zones from which contamination would originate.

3 Ensure that access to (and profit from) groundwater is distributed equitably.

New publications



World Heritage No. 101 New Sites

ISSN 1020-4202
88 pp., 220 x 280 mm, paperback, €7.50
UNESCO Publishing/Publishing
for Development Ltd.

This issue is dedicated to the latest additions to the World Heritage List, spectacular properties ranging from Gabon's Ivindo National Park and Iran's Trans-Iranian Railway to Thailand's Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex and France's Cordouan Lighthouse.

During its 44th session, the World Heritage Committee examined not only World Heritage site nominations submitted in 2021, but also those from 2020: thirty-four new sites, twenty-nine cultural and five natural, were inscribed; three previously listed properties were extended. This brings the total number of sites now on UNESCO's World Heritage List to 1,154.



Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2

**Non-state actors in education:
Who chooses? Who loses?**

ISBN 978-92-3-100506-0
474 pp., 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55
UNESCO Publishing

Non-state actors' role extends beyond provision of schooling to interventions at various education levels and influence spheres. Alongside its review of progress towards SDG 4, including emerging evidence on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, the *2021/2 Global Education Monitoring Report* urges governments to see all institutions, students and teachers as part of a single system.

Standards, information, incentives and accountability should help governments protect, respect and fulfil the right to education of all, without turning their eyes away from privilege or exploitation.



Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity

**Addressing culture as
a global public good**

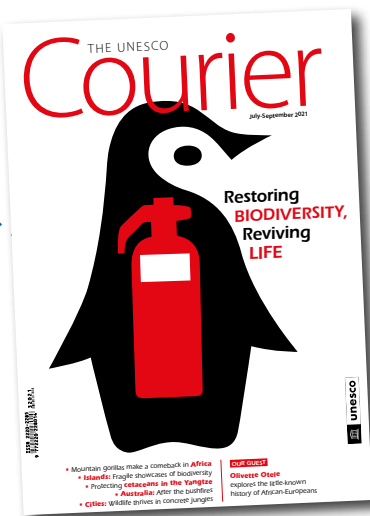
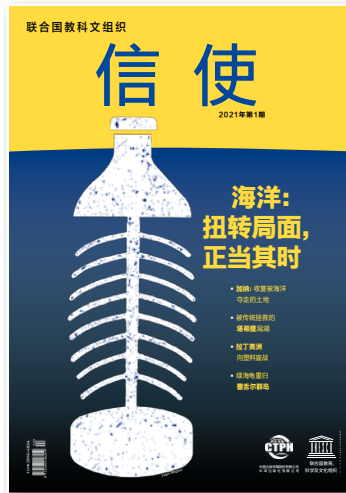
ISBN 978-92-3-100503-9
332 pp., 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55
UNESCO Publishing

The Global Report series monitors the implementation of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, as well as progress towards achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within and with the cultural and creative sectors.

Its 2022 edition revolves around two major questions: What is the state of the cultural and creative sectors? What policy changes to promote sustainable, human rights-based systems of governance for culture and equitable access to cultural opportunities and resources have resulted from stakeholders' implementation and ownership of the Convention?

Many voices

The UNESCO Courier is published in the six official languages of the Organization, and also in Catalan, Esperanto and Korean.



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The Next 50

In 2022, UNESCO is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention under the theme: "World heritage as a source of resilience, humanity and innovation".

Join us via whc.unesco.org



unesco
World Heritage Convention