DE-COLONISING EMPATHY: THINKING AFFECT TRANSNATIONALLY

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Abstract: Opening up modes of political thinking and feeling take us beyond Euro-American calls to 'put oneself in the other's shoes', this article explores how empathy is generated within, circulated through, and productive of transnational power relations. It starts by mapping some political genealogies of empathy, while considering what it might mean to 'decolonise' emotion. I then begin to flesh out my own critical approach by examining the ambivalent relationship between empathy and transnational capitalism, considering how feminist and antiracist discourses of care, empathy and social justice are susceptible to various forms of neoliberal appropriation. I move on to focus on the related workings of empathy in the affective aftermaths of European slavery and colonialism, asking how empathy expressed at the margins of normative postcolonial imaginaries might disrupt or refigure universalist emotional politics. Extending these critical concerns, the final section examines what I call 'affective translation', exploring what might be gained in moving away from dominant ideas of empathy premised on knowledge, accuracy and prediction towards a mode of affective translation involving attunement, negotiation and invention – across cultural and geopolitical borders and boundaries. Throughout, I am interested in how empathy might be translated differently– how liberal, neoliberal and neo-colonial visions and practices of empathy can be reinterpreted in the context of transnationality to activate alternative affective meanings, practices and potentialities.

Keywords: empathy, transnational capitalism, neoliberalism, alternative empathies, translation, affective translation, relations of power

Within Euro-American public culture, warnings increasingly abound regarding the destructive social and political implications of 'empathy erosion'. In *The Audacity of Hope*, for example, Barack Obama announces that the U.S. is suffering the effects of an 'empathy deficit' (Obama 67).While in *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, neuro-psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen claims that the 'erosion of empathy is an important global issue related to the health

of our communities, be they small (like families) or big (like nations)' (2011, 124). Both authors call on us to develop more empathetic attitudes and capacities as a means to create a global society built on greater respect, cooperation and equality. Relatedly, in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, political philosopher Martha Nussbaum contends that, as universities become increasingly corporatised, we are witnessing a serious erosion of the very qualities essential to democracy itself, namely empathy: 'the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicaments of another person' (Nussbaum 7). In order to address these troubling deficiencies, she insists, we must ask what we can 'do to help compassion and empathy win in the clash over fear and hate' (43) and neutralise the pernicious effects of 'disgust and shame' (38).

As these and many other examples attest, creating more or better empathy is now framed as an affective 'solution' to a wide range of social ills and as a central component of building cross-cultural and transnational social justice. Yet empathy - understood in shorthand as the affective ability 'put oneself in the other's shoes' - can easily become a kind of endpoint. Precisely because it is so widely and unquestioningly viewed as 'good,' its naming can represent a conceptual stoppage in conversation or analysis. Thus, the most pressing questions tend less to be "what is empathy?", "what does it do?", "what are its risks?," and "what happens after empathy", but rather the more automatic refrain of "how can we cultivate it?" It is also evident that, although a number of commentators in the global North insist that empathy can play an important role in mediating relations between different social and cultural groups and across national and geo-political boundaries, relatively scant attention has been paid specifically to the transnational politics of empathy. As such, we have little insight into how empathy emerges and flows through global circuits of power, and the complex ways in which it transforms and translates as it travels between diverse contexts.

In the face of these dynamics, my work has grappled with two central questions: firstly, how can we think more critically about the contemporary political workings of empathy? and secondly, how might we understand the complex links between empathy and *transnational relations of power*? I understand 'transnationality' as constituted by inter-related and shifting processes of colonialism, slavery, diaspora, migration, development, globalisation, neoliberalism and global media, among other phenomena (Grewal, 2005; Ong, 2006). I am interested in how empathy – which I conceptualise as a social and political relation involving the imbrication of cognitive, perceptual and affective processes – is generated within, circulated through, and productive of transnational politics. Through analysis of political communication, international development literatures, popular

business and science books, postcolonial literary works, and feminist, anti-racist and queer theory, my wider project has sought to unpack the potentialities, risks and contradictions of figuring empathy as an affective tool for transnational social justice. Methodologically, my approach is one premised on both staging and tracing trans-disciplinary juxtapositions, encounters and entanglements. As feminist, queer and postcolonial scholars have incisively illustrated, it is so often at the intersections, borderlands and in-between spaces of both geo-political domains and disciplinary bodies of knowledge that we not only encounter the productive force of affective technologies of power but also critically imagine how they could be otherwise.

As a means to open up modes of political thinking and feeling take us beyond Euro-American calls to "put oneself in the other's shoes", this article examines empathy's dynamic relationships to transnational processes of location, translation, imagination and attunement. The first section maps some political genealogies of empathy, while considering what it might mean to "decolonize" emotion. The second section begins to flesh out my own critical approach by examining the ambivalent relationship between empathy and transnational capitalism. I do so through considering the links and distinctions among feminist and antiracist ethics of care, Obama's political affect, and the neoliberal rhetoric of the 'empathy economy' within popular business literatures. The third section focuses on the related workings of empathy in the affective aftermaths of slavery and colonialism. Considering the potentialities and limitations of what I call "alternative empathies", I draw on Antiguan American author Jamaica Kincaid's postcolonial invective, *A Small Place* (1988), to ask how empathy expressed at the margin of normative postcolonial imaginaries might disrupt or refigure universalist emotional politics. Extending these critical concerns, the fourth section examines what I call 'affective translation'. Drawing on British-Sierra Leonean author Aminatta Forna's novel, *The Memory of Love* (2011), I explore what might be gained in moving away from mainstream ideas of empathy premised on knowledge, accuracy and prediction towards a mode of affective translation involving attunement, negotiation, and invention. Throughout, I am interested in how empathy might be *translated differently* – how liberal, neoliberal and neocolonial visions and practices of empathy can be reinterpreted in the context of transnationality to activate *alternative* affective meanings, practices and potentialities.

Thinking and Feeling Empathy

In the context of contemporary social and political relations, empathy is perhaps most commonly defined as the affective act of seeing from another's perspective and imaginatively experiencing her thoughts, emotions and predicaments. Although empathy has a long genealogy[1], many scholars locate its modern political roots in the work of Scottish philosophers Adam Smith and David Hume. By the mid eighteenth century, Smith and Hume had identified empathy as important both 'in relation to our capacity to gain a grasp of the content of other people's minds' and 'in relation to our capacity to respond to others ethically' (Coplan and Goldie, 2011: ix). Smith argued in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that, although we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, the process of imaginatively assuming the other's 'situation' and circumstances allows us to 'enter into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them' ([1759] 2006, 4). Although Smith used the terms 'sympathy', 'pity' and 'compassion' rather than empathy, he generally understood sympathy in a way that was quite close to contemporary uses of empathy premised on imaginative perspective taking. German phenomenological theorists writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein and, later, Max Scheler, similarly associated empathy and sympathy with the affective capacity to enter the minds of others. However, following in the footsteps of Hume ([1777] 2004) rather than Smith, they described empathy less through models of imagination and identification than via accounts of embodied perception and attunement (Pedwell, 2014).

Resonating with these earlier (as well as later) debates [2] regarding whether empathy should be defined primarily as a process of imaginative reconstruction of the another's experiences or rather as a more intuitive experience of embodied sensing, feminist and anti-racist theorists have long asked challenging questions regarding how specifically we can understand the workings of empathy and its political and ethical implications. Sandra Bartky, for example, queries:

What does it mean, exactly, to become more 'sensitive' to the Other – in addition, that is, to my learning more about her circumstances? Does it require that I feel what she feels? Is this possible? Is it desirable? . . . Does a heightened sensitivity require an imaginative entry into the affective life of the Other? . . . Is such an entry possible . . . Does greater sensitivity require perhaps a merging of self and Other? (Barting: 181).

Critical scholars have tended to respond to these discussions by insisting on the need to maintain an ontological distinction between the one empathising and the one being

empathised with. When empathy is understood as the experience of 'co-feeling', it is suggested, this not only invites problematic appropriations or projections on the part of 'privileged' subjects, it also risks obscuring their complicity in the wider relations of power in which marginalisation, oppression and suffering occur. Indeed, the acknowledgement of complicity in and responsibility for transnational relations of power is key for scholars such as Elizabeth Spelman (1997), Megan Boler (1999) and Kimberly Chabot Davis (2004). Boler, for example, envisions an approach to empathetic engagement which 'radically shifts [one's] self-reflexive understandings of power relations' (Boler 157) and enables one to 'recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront' (166). In this way, feminist and ant-racist theorists have provided a potent critique of universalist discourses of empathy.

Importantly, however, these Euro-American genealogies of empathy are not the only, or the most salient, frameworks for understanding these kinds of affective processes and their implications within many transnational cultures. As the international 'Decolonising Theories of Emotions' seminar so richly showcased, there exist many varied and overlapping cultural paradigms of emotion - from the ancient Sanskrit topologies of '*Rasa and Bhava*' to Indigenous Canadian theories of ecological affects. In this vein, in her discussion of 'subaltern empathy', Sneja Gunew considers various paradigms for understanding emotion that move beyond 'European categories of affect theory' (Gunew 11) - including cultural anthropologist Anand Pandian's (2009) analysis of 'the figurative topographies of sentiment and sympathy sketched in a genre of funeral elegy (*oppu*) in South India' (Gunew 18) and postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) discussion of the Bengali concept of the 'exemplary' or 'compassionate heart' (*hriday*) (Gunew 19). Relatedly, exploring how contemporary theories of affect might be 'creolised' from a feminist perspective, Joan Anim-Addo turns to literary accounts of the gendered 'history of the Caribbean slave plantation' to 'delineate a trajectory and development of a specific Creole history in relation to affects' (Addo 5). Against 'consolidated, universalising and Eurocentric conceptualisations of affect' she develops 'a differentiated cartography and literary archaeology of affect' that pays critical attention to how affective creolisation occurred in and through intimate sexual relations in the context of slavery (5). From a critical transnational perspective – as indicated by Anim-Addo's use of the term 'creolisation' - the point is not to see the world as composed of discrete, culturally particular traditions of feeling, but rather to explore the ways in which such discourses, practices and experiences have been produced relationally and are, as such, genealogically implicated in one another.

Such transnational imbrications are made clear, for example, though incisive analysis of the colonial legacies of empathy. Extending genealogical work on empathy and sympathy by scholars such as Saidiya Hartman (1997) and Amit Rai (2002), Susan Leigh Foster argues for the importance of situating the development of empathy as a concept 'within the context of Britain's discovery of the new world and subsequent colonial expansion' (Foster 11). Smith and Hume's founding analyses of sympathy and empathy, she suggests, depended on pernicious distinctions of nation and race, as well as those of gender and class. Smith, for instance, argued that 'sympathy accrued to those [largely men] in a civilised society who lived in relative comfort and those of better means possessed greater sympathy. Savages, in contrast, necessarily spent their time tending to their own needs with no available time to devote attention to another' (142). This example and others point not only to the ways in which empathy has long been employed as an affective tool in the pernicious construction of racialised, classed and gendered social 'difference', but also to how such empathetic discourses are not simply 'European' in invention, but rather, to borrow Ranjana Khanna's words, they 'could emerge only when Europe's nations were entering modernity through their relationships with the colonies' (Khanna 10). While it is not my project to undertake an in depth analysis of the kinds of 'non-Western' frameworks for understanding emotion that Gunew, Anim-Addo, Khanna and others consider, my analysis takes inspiration from these scholars in its efforts to engage in a project of 'worlding' empathy, of 'provincialising' emotional discourses and practices that have presented themselves as universal as a means to open up other ways of thinking and feeling affective politics (Khanna, 2003: 3). Keeping these various affective interventions in mind, the following sections flesh out key aspects of my approach to theorising the transnational politics of empathy, focusing on three main themes: 'neoliberal empathy', 'alternative empathies' and 'affective translation'.

Neoliberal Empathy?

One important starting point for my project is to consider how current manifestations of empathy are tied to the shifting assemblage of policies, techniques, discourses and atmospheres commonly referred to as 'neoliberalism'. Although neoliberalism is diverse and takes shape differently in different geo-political domains, I understand it broadly as involving 'the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics' (Ong 4; see also Rose, 2006). I am interested specifically in how feminist and anti-racist ethics of empathy are susceptible to appropriation by market-oriented rhetorics and practices that are arguably concerned with 'empathy', 'care', 'equality' and 'social justice' primarily to the extent that they can be incorporated within, *or indeed leveraged to*

advance, goals of transnational economic competitiveness. As an exemplary case, I want to consider some of the affective interconnections among feminist and anti-racist praxis, American presidential communication and popular business narratives.

Rhetorics of care, compassion, and empathy have been pivotal to recent American presidential politics. As Kathleen Woodward argues, 'the political fortunes of George Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush' all turned on a 'national discourse of empathy' (Woodward 60). For Bill Clinton, the empathetic catchphrase 'I feel your pain' was a consistently successful mode of political rhetoric (Garber, 2004). Via the slogan of 'compassionate conservatism', the Republican party skilfully 'appropriated the rhetoric of feeling that had been so powerfully associated with the Democrats' (Woodward 59). Yet, as critical theorists have argued, Republican discourses of compassion served merely as a code for the privatisation of the state and for the federal government's divestiture of responsibility for ameliorating social suffering through impelling families, local institutions, and faith-based organisations to take up this obligation themselves (Berlant, 2004).

While keen to distinguish his politics from Republican narratives, President Obama has not shied away from mobilising such affective rhetorics. Indeed, a discourse of empathy was central to his 2008 presidential campaign. As he wrote in his second memoir, *The Audacity of Hope*, 'a sense of empathy' defines '[my personal] moral code' (Obama 66) and serves as 'a guidepost to my politics' (67). While Republican discourses ask 'us' to 'cultivate compassion for those lacking in the foundations for belonging where we live' (Berlant, 2004: 3), Obama calls for empathy that appears to transcend the borders of community and nation. As he proclaimed in his 2009 inaugural address, 'we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect'. And, in a widely cited commencement address to Northwestern University in 2006, Obama argues that 'In a culture where those in power too often encourage selfish impulses', we are told that 'the innocent people being expelled from their homes half a world away are somebody else's problem to take care of'. Yet, now is the time for Americans to 'broaden, and not contract, [their] ambit of concern' and recognise their 'obligation to those who are less fortunate' and their 'debt to all those who helped [them] get to where [they] are' (2006b).

In urging Americans to develop more empathetic attitudes to those who are less privileged than themselves, whether 'the laid-off steel worker, [or] the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room' (2006b), Obama employs a language of 'mutuality', 'debt' and

'obligation' which seems to echo feminist and anti-racist concerns regarding privilege, complicity and social justice. Yet, the nature of Obama's empathy and its potential affinities with these critical perspectives need to be assessed in the context of his administration's wider neoliberal stance. It is important to note, for instance, that his vision of empathy, which transcends national borders is articulated in the context of a speech that simultaneously, and predictably, stresses the need to increase the nation's economic competitiveness in response to threats that 'better educated' Chinese and Indian 'kids' will take 'American' jobs (2006b). Indeed, upon closer inspection, I want to argue, Obama's image of the 'empathetic American' is a risk-taking and enterprising individual who not only cultivates appropriate emotional capacities and skills but also engages in 'healthy' economic competition - in other words, an ideal neoliberal citizen.

Reminding his audience that the 'power' of the market to 'generate wealth and expand freedom' is both 'unquestioned' and 'unmatched' (2009), Obama impels the American citizen to 'cultivate' empathy as an emotional capacity alongside the imperatives to 'challenge yourself' and take 'greater risks in the face of greater odds' as a means to 'realize your full potential' (2006b). He maintains that while developing an empathetic outlook is a necessary means of recognising one's obligations to those less fortunate than oneself, cultivating empathy is crucial, above all, 'because you have an obligation to yourself' (2006b). That is, I want to suggest, an obligation not only to be a caring and empathetic individual because it's 'the right thing to do', but also because empathy, as an emotional competency, has become part and parcel of being a self-managing and self-enterprising individual within a neoliberal order (Boler, 1999; Swan, 2008; Pedwell 2012a, b).

In these ways, Obama's political language resonates closely with the neoliberal rhetoric of the 'empathy economy' in popular business literatures, which figures empathy as an affective tool for increasing multinational corporations' competitiveness and profit accumulation in the context of globalisation (see, for example, Nussbaum, 2005). Dev Patnaik and Peter Mortensen's bestselling book, *Wired to Care: How Companies Prosper When They Create Widespread Empathy* (2009) is emblematic of this growing business trend. While Obama envisions the 'empathetic nation', Patnaik and Mortensen imagine the 'empathetic company': To 'continue to grow and prosper', they argue, corporations have to 'step outside of themselves' and 'walk in someone else's shoes' (Patnaik & Mortens x). Through producing 'widespread empathy' amongst employees, companies like IMB and Nike have not only become more in tune with the specific interests and needs of their customers, Patnaik and Mortensen suggest, they have also been able to discover and seize on new markets and 'opportunities for growth' (xi). It is clear, however, that what is valued

above all here is not care, ethics or morality per se, but rather how empathy, as an affective technology for 'knowing the other', can be mobilised to extract increased profits via a return to 'capitalism in its oldest form' (64) – that is, capitalism unfettered by cumbersome regulations. Indeed, Patnaik and Mortensen go as far as to suggest that, within the capitalist marketplace, empathy could in fact replace regulation (62).

Thus, in common with feminist and anti-racist literatures, both Obama's liberal political discourse of emotion and Patnaik and Mortensen's neoliberal business rhetoric of empathy figure empathic engagement as that which connects individuals to wider communities. Yet unlike more critical scholars and activists, the emphasis in these interventions is not on empathy's potential role in building transnational social justice. Rather, empathy is understood primarily as an affective technology for 'creating the many', a means to maximize economic competitiveness and growth within transnational circuits of capital. It is vital to note, moreover, the gendered, raced, classed and geo-political distinctions on which these mobilisations of affect depend – that is, who is able to capitalise on the affective injunction to hone empathy as an a mode of neoliberal capital and who is confined to performing unrecognised emotional labour (Pedwell, 2012a, 2012b). The key point to underscore at this stage, therefore, is that a critical, transnational politics of empathy needs to pay attention to empathy's uneven effects, to the particular social and geo-political distinctions and exclusions the generation of it can produce in a global frame.

Nonetheless, my intention is not to (re)produce what Clare Hemmings (2011) calls 'a good/bad empathy' divide by mapping it onto neoliberalism – where 'bad empathy' functions in the interests of capitalist technologies and 'good empathy' lies outside these calculative logics. Rather, given complex the entanglement of both intellectual and professional discourses and practices (including feminist and anti-racist praxis) with neoliberal modes of governmentality, my argument is that no such divide is possible. This is not to suggest, of course, that the only response possible is resignation to the inevitability of neoliberalism, but instead to argue that it is in the ambivalences, tensions and contradictions of both emotion and global capitalism that spaces for thinking and feeling transnational encounters differently might emerge. In this vein, the next section considers how we might exploit such ambivalences by engaging the possibilities of 'alternative empathies'.

Alternative Empathies

Although mainstream liberal narratives pose empathy as universal (as something everyone has the potential to develop), these discourses routinely take for granted a socially privileged subject as potential "empathiser". That is, in the vast majority of Euro-American calls for empathy as affective solution, it is an imagined subject with class, race and geo-political privileges who encounters "difference" and then chooses whether or not to extend empathy and compassion. Yet, as critical theorists have argued, the act of "choosing" to extend empathy can itself be a way to assert power. Moreover, the repeated mapping of categories of "empathiser" and "sufferer" onto traditional social and geo-political hierarchies can function to fix such hierarchies and the privileges they uphold. That is, while the affective capacities and skills of privileged (middle class, white, and/or Western) subjects can be cultivated, honed and tested through empathy, the less privileged (poor, non-white and/or "third world") "other" remains simply the object of empathy and thus once again fixed in place (Hemmings, 2011; Pedwell, 2012b, 2013).

With these power dynamics in mind, this section explores the potentialities of what might be referred to as alternative empathies. Specifically, I am interested in how empathy expressed from the marginsof dominant postcolonial social imaginaries might differ from mainstream liberal and neoliberal mobilisations, as well as how it might disrupt or refigure their affective logics.[3] To engage this question, I want to turn to Antiguan American author Jamaica Kincaid's, postcolonial literary work, *A Small Place* (1988), which provides a powerful commentary on the political, cultural, economic and affective links between colonialism, slavery and more contemporary practices of tourism in the Caribbean. Given empathy's historical links to debates about the imaginative possibilities of literature (Boler, 1999; Nussbaum, 2003), drawing on critical literary works to consider how empathetic engagement has the potential to 'become otherwise' seems fitting (Deleuze and Guattari 1994).

A Small Place opens by directly addressing an imagined Western tourist: 'If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see' (Kincaid 3). Seeing through the eyes of this 'white North American or European', Kincaid's narrator describes the seemingly unreal beauty of the island that will have revealed itself as their airplane descended into V. C. Bird International Airport: 'What a beautiful island Antigua is – more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen' (3). But 'since you are on holiday', the narrator points out, 'the thought of what it might be like for someone who had to live day in, day out in a place that suffers constantly from drought, and so has to watch carefully every drop of fresh water . . . must never cross your mind' (4). With these lines, Kincaid's intention becomes clear - this will not be a pleasurable literary tour of this 'exotic' island for the reader, who

may themselves be the kind of tourist these opening pages conjure. Rather, it is likely to be a distinctly uncomfortable experience, one that brings to life for the reader with visceral clarity 'the palpable impact of European colonialism and tourism and their own complicity in perpetuating it' (back cover).

In assuming this imagined tourist's view of Antigua as she negotiates her stay on the island, Kincaid's narrator, I suggest, engages in the empathetic practice of 'imaginatively experiencing the feelings, thoughts and situations of another' (Chabot Davis, 2004: 403). However, different to liberal (as well as many more critical) narratives, Kincaid's 'confrontational empathy' is not premised on care, concern and sympathy towards this other. Rather, it is sharp, incisive and uncompromising. Furthermore, this empathy works not to enable "privileged" subjects to put themselves in "the other's shoes"; instead, it is a mode of affective perspective-taking adopted by those usually viewed as the postcolonial " objects" of empathy, which calls various transnational subjects to account for their role in perpetuating damaging neo-colonial and neoliberal relations. Throughout *A Small Place*, Kincaid's careful yet staggering juxtapositions make connections between colonial "pasts"and neoliberal "presents" palpable: 'You must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it', she tells the tourist, 'Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in . . . it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed up' (13-14). Thus, rather than positioning "the tourist" as a potential empathiser who, if they could only be forcefully affected, might be transformed into a more critically aware and ethical person, Kincaid's confrontational empathy figures this subject as devoid of empathy, as perhaps incapable of it. Indeed, the tourist's very existence - her relaxation, pleasure and freedom – depends precisely on repressing any discomfort or critical questioning that might lead to an empathy premised on acknowledgement of her own complicity in others' suffering.

Although Kincaid is no doubt aware of the differences between tourists (of social location, privilege and perspective), she gives the reader no choice but to fill the role she has assigned her imagined tourist – a move that, for some readers, produces frustration and anger. If this move is read as strategic, however, we might say that Kincaid's hope is that readers' anger at being stereotyped might give them an (empathetic) sense - if very limited and fleeting - of what it feels like to be the object of dehumanisation and stereotyping as well as to always be spoken for – a feeling that black Antiguans (and other so-called "racial others") have long been subject to at hands of colonial (and postcolonial) commentators. The possibility therefore exists that, for some readers, reactions of anger or rage might, once interrogated, give way to shame.

While shame is widely viewed a 'negative' emotion, feminist, postcolonial and queer theorists have explored its ambivalence and transformative potential. For example, drawing on the psychologist Silvan Tomkins' notion that 'interest and shame are intimately connected' (Probyn ix), Elspeth Probyn argues that 'shame reminds us with urgency what we are interested in' and 'goes to the heart of who we think we are' (Probyn x). 'We must use shame', Probyn suggests, 'to re-evalute how we are positioned in relation to the past and to rethink how we wish to live in proximity to others' (xiv; see also Spelman, 1997). Acknowledging shame, however, is not an easy or straightforward task, not least because it is widely 'considered shaming to admit shame' (xiii; see also Ahmed, 2004). In this respect, it seems important to point out that Kincaid's narrator also expresses her own shame, shame that self-governed Antigua may be, in her words, 'a worse place that is was when it was dominated by the bad-minded English and all the bad-minded things they brought with them' (Kincaid 41). As such, we might see the narrator's own admission of shame as indicative of the critical generosity that underscores her confrontational empathy. That is, in expressing her shame, Kincaid's narrator may make it more acceptable for the reader herself to show shame, indeed, she may take away some of the shame in showing shame - while also suggesting that there might be something powerful in sharing in shame's *varying* postcolonial contexts, causes and affects.[4]

From this perspective, in contrast to liberal narratives (such as Nussbaum's cited at the beginning of this article) in which "positive" empathy and compassion must be cultivated to win over "negative" shame and anger – *A Small Place* helps us think about how these emotions are not oppositional, but rather, may be complementary: in particular circumstances, it could be their mutual presence and interaction that creates conditions for affective transformation to occur. But Kincaid's text also suggests that efforts to *generate* empathy might be less important or productive in some contexts than examining the potential causes and implications of empathetic "failures" (Hemmings, 2011) – those circumstances in which empathy reaches its limit point, is ignored or rejected by its intended recipient(s), has antithetical consequences to those anticipated, or simply makes no sense (or difference) in the midst of given social conditions and political hierarchies. Extending this section's interest in the possibilities of alternative empathies, the next section considers what might be gained through thinking empathy and/ as "affective translation".

Affective Translation

Within liberal and neoliberal political imaginaries of social justice, empathy has frequently been understood as an affective technique through which "we" can come to know the cultural "other". As noted earlier, since the writing of Smith and Hume, many philosophical and psychological accounts have conceptualised empathy 'in relation to our capacity to grasp of the content of other people's minds and to *predict and explain* what they will think, feel and do' (italics mine, Coplan and Goldie ix). As such, I want to argue, political mobilisations of empathy that draw on these frameworks often employ a positivist lens that associates empathy reductively with knowledge, accuracy and prediction. For example, the philosopher Amy Coplan argues that genuine empathy necessitates that 'an observer's affective states are qualitatively identical to a target's, though they may vary in degree' (Coplan 6). By contrast, 'congruent and reactive emotions' (i.e. becoming angry in the face of another's mistreatment or suffering) 'do not qualify as empathetic . . . because they are not *sufficiently accurate* representations of a target's situated psychological states' (italics mine, 7). Questions immediately arise regarding whether any two (differently culturally, socially and psychically located) transnational subjects can ever feel 'the same' feelings, and indeed whether emotions or affects, in their often ephemeral and fleeting quality, lend themselves at all to the positivist registers of "accuracy" and "equivalence". Furthermore, and crucially, it is clear that, in a geo-political context in which neoliberal and neocolonial affective technologies and psychologies designed to produce increasingly "accurate" knowledge of "cultural others" are employed by global hegemons, empathetic *targeting* can function insidiously the interests of regulation, discipline and even annihilation (Chow, 2006; Povinelli, 2011).

Moving away from visions of empathy concerned with accuracy, equivalence and prediction, I want to think through the possibilities of empathy and/as *translation*. What might it mean to understand empathy *not* as emotional equivalence (either by spontaneous fellow feeling or imaginatively conjuring an "accurate" sense of the emotional or psychic state of another), but instead as a complex and ongoing set of translational processes involving conflict, negotiation and attunement? What could emerge from a *giving up* of the empathic desire for cultural mastery or psychic transparency and a *giving in* to being affected by that which is experienced as "foreign" in the midst of transnational flows, relations and power structures?

In addressing these questions, there are productive resources to be found in the field of critical translation studies. In the midst of "the cultural turn", scholars of linguistic translation moved away from the 'once key concept of equivalence' (Lefevre and Bassnett, 1998: 1) to pay increasing attention to rhetorics, norms and cultural and geopolitical

context. Translation could be understood from this perspective as practices of intercultural transfer within structural relations of power, which operated through forms of cultural 'negotiation' rather than strict linguistic faithfulness' (1-2; see also Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009). If translation is understood as premised on negotiation, I want to suggest, then it must not only involve power, bartering and compromise, but also relationality, resistance, imagination and change. From this perspective, rather than posing *conflict* as what needs to be neutralised or eliminated through empathy (as per the liberal ethics of empathy), a conceptualisation of empathy as translation figures conflict, contradiction and even antagonism as vital to affective politics and political transformation.

Alongside mapping the colonial legacies of translation practices, postcolonial translation scholars also explore the political implications of "foreignising" translation. As Lawrence Venuti has discussed, when a translation strategy based on 'domestication' is followed, the text is 'adapted to suit the norms of the target' audience, and 'signs of its original foreignness are erased'. By contrast, in the practice of 'foreignisation', 'the foreign' is 'deliberately not erased, so as to compel the target readers to acknowledge the otherness of the source' (Venuti, 1992 cited in Lefevre and Bassnett, 1998, 9; see also Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999). Referring to this technique as 'dissident' translation, Venuti points to how foreignisation can function as a practice of political resistance, compelling readers 'to rethink their own domestic norms and conventions, and recognize that in erasing the unfamiliar, what is happening is actually a form of ethnocentric textual violence' (10). In this vein, we can say that an empathy premised on translation works less to achieve an accurate or faithful affective equivalence, than it does to revise, re-direct, or open up affective relations in ways that can be politically transformative.

Furthermore, critical scholars examine how processes of linguistic and cultural translation often involve, and in turn produce, a range of emotions and affects. For Gayatri Spivak, for example, translation 'is the most intimate act of reading', and a translation practice that does not simply reproduce neo-colonial paradigms require that the translator be motivated by 'love' – not as a romantic ideal, but rather as a 'surrender to the text' (Spivak 180). If translation is now seen as a highly *affective process*, there are also, however, important questions to ask regarding how emotions and affects themselves are translated (Ahmed, 2004; Gunew, 2009). While empathy, frequently understood by liberals as a universal human quality, is framed as an affective bridge between subjects, cultures or societies, it cannot simply be assumed that it is understood, generated or felt the same way in different contexts or by differently positioned subjects.

Keeping these contributions in mind, I want to consider how the dynamics of affective translation take shape through a critical reading of Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010). Set in Sierra Leone before and after its civil war of the 1990s, Forna's novel engages with how trauma, loss, empathy and love are experienced, expressed and translated in the aftermath of violent conflict and interrogates the role of "European" psychological and affective techniques in these processes. Much of the story follows British clinical psychologist Adrian Lockhart, who, alongside a host of Western aid workers, has travelled to Freetown with the conviction that he can provide aid and support. Through examining the affective contours of Adrian's fraught intimate and professional relationships as the narrative unfolds, Forna highlights the limits and dangers of an empathy that involves amassing "accurate" contextual knowledge of "the other" and illuminates how translating affect is bound up with negotiating both conflict and uneven temporalities.

Although Adrian has come to Sierra Leone with the conviction that he can help its people heal, his efforts are frustrated by the seeming incommensurability of affective patterns and norms that alienate him from his patients and colleagues. Feeling isolated and shut out by Sierra Leoneans' 'unembarrassed' refusal to fill what he perceives as gaping silences in the course of his "talking therapy", Adrian ruminates on the difficulty of being 'surrounded by languages you don't understand' (Adrian 27). Interestingly, Adrian's experience of affective dissonance in the novel is intimately linked with his sense of temporal dissonance. While his life in London was organised by seasons and 'train timetables' (64), in Freetown, 'there is no dawn. No Spring or Autumn' (27). Time seems much slower and, in the intense heat, 'he feels like a sleepwalker' (45). He admits that, in his sessions with patients, his 'empathy' feels 'slight, unconvincing' (21). Linking back to critical translation studies, we might say that Adrian arrives in Freetown equipped with an empathy premised on expectations of 'domestication' (Venuti, 1992). He wants cultural and affective particularities to be translated for him in a way that can smooth over traces of radical 'otherness', so as to mesh with his existing assumptions and expectations.

Adrian's very motivations for coming to Sierra Leone are continually questioned by his colleague Kai Mansaray, a surgeon in the hospital. Calling Adrian 'a tourist', Kai goads him, framing his arrival in Freetown as part of a massive influx of Westerners who now see the war-torn nation as fertile ground, not only for 'giving something back' to those in need, but also, as Kai puts it, for 'living out their unfinished dreams' (220). Yet, as Kai makes clear, this sense of limitlessness reveals precisely the geo-political particularity of the hope and affective possibility that only those in positions of privilege see as universal. The two men's first encounters in the novel, though convivial, thus seem overdetermined

by the wider geo-political structures of power in which they are embedded. In one of the novel's early scenes, for instance, Adrian watches Kai while he sleeps during a break from work at the hospital: here we have Adrian as voyeur, his empathy premised on the power to look, indeed to maximise the visibility of his 'target', to 'see without being seen' (Chow, 2006).

Drawing on Spivak's analysis of translation as a political process requiring love, in the form of affective surrender to 'the rhetoricity of language' (Spivak 181), we might say that things begin to change for Adrian only when he lets go of an approach to translation premised on knowledge, accuracy and prediction, and instead *surrenders* to the 'foreign' rhetorics, affects and temporalities that confront him. Indeed, a different kind of intimacy between Adrian and Kai begins to take shape, in part, through a kind of temporal translation that frays hierarchical boundaries:

In the days and weeks that follow, the rhythms of their lives begin to intertwine . . . The patterns of Kai's breaks from the operating theatre become familiar to Adrian, and he will, on occasion, endeavor to stop working at the same time. He finds he looks forward to the other man's companionship in the evenings (51).

This process of affective synchronisation involves not a flattening or domestication of differences, but rather a temporary intertwinement of rhythms, a tuning of frequencies, and a sense of shared survival in the midst of staggering losses. The most substantial shift in Adrian's relationship with Kai comes when Adrian falls ill with malaria. Dizzy and weakened by his symptoms, he must let go of any semblance of sovereignty as he becomes dependent on Kai to nurse him back to health. Gradually, through becoming open to being affected by Freetown's affective temporalities and by sharing time and space with Kai and others, Adrian becomes more affectively attuned to 'the silences, the textures, the shades' of life in Sierra Leone (104). He begins to have 'less trouble understanding' the 'accents and patterns of the language' (161), and eventually feels that his patients have more 'trust' and 'confidence' in him.

Significantly then, unlike a project of establishing cultural authority through mastering complex cultural codes and amassing 'accurate' knowledge of 'the other', the empathetic attunement between Adrian and Kai men develops, in part, through a process of de-subjectification – a sensing of mutual vulnerability that creates an opening for different ways of affecting and being affected to emerge, and for a sense of affective solidarity to take shape. As such, affective translation here is not so much about the faithful

reproduction of meaning from one cultural context to another, but rather, about the potentially radical implications of becoming 'a foreigner' in one's own affective language; that is, of becoming minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975). This is not, by any means, to claim that wider structures of power are ever cast aside, a point crystallised by the fact that Adrian can always (and will indeed always) leave Freetown; but only to suggest that, in this context, there appears to be a link between openness to being affected by what is 'foreign' (internally and externally) and a relinquishing of both certainty and (a degree of) control.

Interestingly, empathy in *The Memory of Love* is not confined todescribing relations between individual subjects (i.e. through affectively entering the mind/psyche of another); indeed, it exceeds "the subject". The processes of affective synchronisation and attunement I have described are partly about a kind of empathising with time and space themselves. As such, in addition to engaging the intimate and political potentialities afforded by empathy's less intentional, willed or conscious aspects, affective translation offers an understanding of empathy that extends affective relations to the non- and more-than-human.[5] For further discussion of non or more-than human empathy, particularly in relation to neuroscience and ethology (see Pedwell, 2014). Importantly, however, such processes of attunement are not simply direct or passive ones of "emotional contagion": affective translation here involves conflict and negotiation. Indeed, Adrian is politically challenged by those around him throughout the novel; he is repeatedly compelled to translate and interrogate how power and geo-political positionality shape his affective expectations, his habitual ways of thinking and feeling. My reading of Forna's novel therefore offers an understanding of affective translation that figures empathy as both a relation of power in which conflict is always present, and as a potential openness to being affected and transformed by that which is encountered as 'foreign' in the midst of shifting transnational 'connectivities'   (Grewal,   2005).

Conclusions

This article has explored some of the varied ways in which empathy travels and translates; how affect is differentially interpreted, experienced and made to work transnationally. Rather than posing empathy as an emotional solution to complex structural, political and economic problems, I have asked what attention to empathy's diverse manifestations might tell us about the affective nature and workings of contemporary international geo-politics – whether this is the way in which neoliberal modes of governmentality extract and hone

our emotional capacities in the interest of global capital or how the affective aftermaths of empire continue to shape both politico-economic and psycho-social relations in the (uneven) present. As I have tried to show, empathy, or any other emotion, alone cannot be the *remedy* to complex transnational social inequalities and conflicts, because it is always already bound up with, and produced through, these very relations of power.

In any critical approach to theorising empathy transnationally, attention to the ways in which feelings travel, and the political implications of such mobility, needs to be combined with attention to the significance of contingent social and geo-political location and positionality. As my analyses of 'alternative empathies' in Kincaid's *A Small Place* and Forna's *The Memory of Love* have sought to show, embodied location and geo-political context matter to the production of affect, to the particular ways in which empathy might work and gain significance. Nonetheless, from a critical transnational perspective, we cannot simply delineate discrete cultural contexts with their "own" affective particularities that might be compared to others: attention to affective relations requires that we constantly negotiate between the imperative to contextualise and the need to account for emergent and shifting cultural, socio-political and economic connectivities which keep the co-ordinates and qualities of any imagined context, group or site in flux. As such, we need a critical approach to exploring the transnational politics of emotion that can oscillate between particularity and flux, location and circuit, context and relation, structure and ephemera.

While my analysis has been critical of various claims for the transnational political efficacy of empathetic identification, it has not dispensed with empathy or extinguished its transformative potential. Indeed, in my mapping of empathy's ambivalent grammar, and the 'dissident translation[s]' (Venuti, 1992) this has involved, there is, I hope, something of the promise and power of empathy that lives on – an affective afterlife generated precisely through empathy's ambivalence, complexity and contingent relationships with other emotions and affects. In embracing a mode of affective translation involving negotiation, resistance, restaging and, perhaps, the creation of newness, my approach has offered empathies that open up rather than resolve, that mutate rather than assimilate, and that invent rather than transcribe. Affective translation, as I understand it, involves ways of relating that take difference, conflict and lack of full commensurability as central to transnational affective politics, and approach empathetic "failures" and "mis-translations" as opportunities for discovery and transformation.

NOTES

1 See Foster, 2010; Coplan and Goldie, 2011; and Pedwell, 2014.

2 These differences between Smith and Hume resonate with much more recent scholarly debates concerning the overlaps and distinctions between "emotion" and "affect". For further detail, see Pedwell, 2014.

3 Concepts of margin/marginality - and related distinctions of "centre" and "periphery" – are, for course, complex, fluid and shifting. People may be marginalised in some respects and privileged in others and such distinctions of power may change over time or across cultural and geo-political contexts. Nonetheless, as a complex and contingent concept, marginality offers a productive heuristic for thinking through the ambivalent links among emotion, positionality and transnationality at a time when distinctions between "the West and the Rest", among other social and geo-political hierarchies, remain salient.

4 Importantly, differently positioned readers may have different (and shifting) affective reactions to this text. For a discussion of these complexities of reader location and reception, as well as the contradictions of Kincaid's own "marginal" location, see Pedwell, 2013.

5 For further discussion of non or more-than human empathy, particularly in relation to neuroscience and ethology, see Pedwell, 2014.

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