**Event Outline**

**Title of the Session:   
Centering Margins: Literary Translation as Social Activism**

**Organizer:**   
Somrita Ganguly, Professor, Poet, Literary Translator, & Fulbright Doctoral Fellow at Brown University (2018-2019)

**Speakers:**   
1. Somrita Ganguly  
2. Elina Alter   
3. Lawrence Schimel  
4. Larissa Kyzer **(Moderator)**

**Description of the Panel:**

In times of growing intolerance, translating world literature is a way forward. This panel will critically examine how literary translation is and can be a form of social activism by echoing voices from the margins. By choosing to translate feminist, Dalit, disability and/ or queer writings from around the world one can create a common ground to share diverse experiences and demonstrate how people’s struggles are not isolated or insular. The choice of translating literatures from “banned” communities, and marginalized languages can not only help to fight against linguistic hegemony but also bring us out of our insular existence. Translation is the way to establish relationships not only between languages, but also between cultures. The panelists are practising literary translators, translating from Bangla, Hindi, Icelandic, Russian, and Spanish into English.

**Flow of Events:**

**Larissa Kyzer** shall read out the AWP 2020 accessibility statement and introduce the speakers.

**Somrita Ganguly** shall introduce the idea of literary translation as a form of social activism, and discuss, specifically in the Indian context, how translation has helped counter cultural chauvinism, and also, by loudly echoing Dalit and disabled voices, created a common platform to share stories from the margins.

**Elina Alter**’s paper seeks to examine how translating women writers can be a feminist act, paying particular attention to how contemporary literary translations of writers working in Russian, including Svetlana Alexievich, Maria Stepanova, Alla Gorbunova, and Linor Goralik, can themselves usefully complicate this reading, due to the diversity of creative, cultural, and historical frameworks at play within the original texts. Just as the translator, working to enrich and develop literature as a whole, brings new texts into a specific linguistic, historical, and cultural context, one with its own specific history of feminism, the writers she translates are working in specific contexts of their own, where feminist activism has had a history and significance distinct from the one that may be more familiar to readers of the translated text. This paper explores the work of the translator in comprehending these distinctions and their importance to the text, and the choices she then makes in making the implications of these divergent traditions visible to readers—often in the “extra-literary” work of framing the translation. It argues that the afterwords, introductions, notes, and conversations about a new book or poem are often as critical, and as requiring of precision and imagination, as the work of translation itself.

**Lawrence Schimel** is going to talk about translating queer literature, as well as being a small press publisher with an imprint that focuses on women poets in translation. He shall also try to explore the dynamics of translating blackness as a white translator, and how he uses his privilege to make sure that he translates at least one woman and/ or queer writer of color each year.

**Larissa Kyzer** will discuss how translators are activists within their professional communities. Discussions about translation activism often center around questions of representation within translation—who is being translated, for instance, or from which languages—and how decisions that are made during the process of translation reflect a set of conscious political positions. These are important discussions that we must continue to have, but equally important are discussions of how we as translators—professionals within the literary community—can be activists within our own community. Let’s take it as a given that all translators are engaging in a kind of social/cultural/linguistic activism by virtue of promoting the voices and perspectives of authors from outside of their target language and culture. How then do we address imbalances within our professional community, wherein some translators have far more access to financial resources, networks, and professional opportunities than others? This talk will use personal case studies as a way of understanding power balances and resource allocation within the translation community and encourage discussion about how translators in positions of privilege can work to be better allies to marginalized members of their community, be they translators of color, LGBTQ translators, translators living in rural areas, low-income translators, emerging translators/ students, or others.

**Larissa Kyzer** will finally invite questions/ discussion from the audience.

**Bionotes:**

**Somrita Ganguly** is a professor, poet, and award-winning literary translator, soon to complete her PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was affiliated with Brown University, Rhode Island, as a Fulbright Doctoral Research Fellow. She is the editor of *Quesadilla and Other Adventures: Food Poems* (Hawakal Publishers, 2019) and has translated Dinesh Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Firesongs* (BEE Books, 2019), Ashutosh Nadkar’s *Shakuni: Master of the Game* (Juggernaut Books, 2019), and Shankarlal Sengupta’s *The Midnight Sun: Love Lyrics and Farewell Songs* (2018). Somrita translates from Bengali and Hindi to English and was selected by the National Centre for Writing, UK, as an emerging translator in 2016. She was invited as translator-in-residence at Cove Park, Scotland, in October 2017, and in December 2017 she was invited as poet-in-residence at Arcs of a Circle, Mumbai, an artistes’ residency organized by the US Consulate in Bombay. Somrita’s work has been showcased at the 2017 London Book Fair and has been published in *Asymptote*, *Words Without Borders*, *In Other Words*, and Trinity College Dublin’s *Journal of Literary Translation*, among others. Somrita has taught British literature to undergraduate and graduate students in Delhi and Calcutta, and has presented research papers at various national and international conferences in India, Singapore, UK, and USA. She has fifteen academic publications to her credit and is a recipient of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund Award (2013) and the Sarojini Dutta Memorial Prize (2011).

**Elina Alter** is a writer and translator living in New York. She received her BA from the Gallatin School at New York University, and her MFA in Fiction and Translation from Columbia University. She was a Writing Fellow at NYU Abu Dhabi and Columbia, and a Travel Fellow of the American Literary Translators Association in 2018. Her work appears in *BOMB*, *The Paris Review Daily*, *Guernica*, *The New England Review* and *Modern Poetry in Translation*. She is the editor of *Circumference*.

**Lawrence Schimel** is a bilingual (Spanish/ English) writer who has published over 120 books in many different genres. He is also a prolific literary translator. He has won the Lambda Literary Award (twice), a PEN Translates Award, the Clifford Beck Prize, and a Crystal Kite Award, among other honors.

**Larissa Kyzer** is an Icelandic to English literary translator, writer, and editorial professional. Born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, she then moved to New York City, where she lived for ten years while completing a BA in Comparative Literature and Creative Writing at New York University and an MSLIS in Library Science. In 2012, she was awarded a Fulbright grant, which allowed her to move to Iceland and pursue her study of Icelandic language, contemporary Icelandic literature, and translation. She lived in Reykjavík for five years, during which time she completed an MA in Þýðingafræði, Translation Studies, at the University of Iceland. Larissa’s translations have appeared in *CV2, EuropeNow, Exchanges, Gutter, Iceland Review, Lunch Ticket, Quiddity*, *The Reykjavík Grapevine, Words and Worlds*, and are forthcoming in *Words Without Borders*.Her translation of Kristín Eiríksdóttir's award-winning novel *A Fist or a Heart* is forthcoming from AmazonCrossing in September 2019. She is presently co-chair of the PEN America Translation Committee.