

Stakes and Challenges of Textualizing Oral Texts: Translating the “Dugha” and the Samoryan War Hymn

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Abstract

This study dealing with the “Hymn of the Wasulu Empire” and the “Dugha” (the Song of the Vulture), two praise-songs revealing the hunting and warfare culture of the Mande, attempts to show the challenges and ideologies of the translation of such oral texts. In fact, translating a text from a non-scriptural culture to a written language-culture carries with it a set of challenges that ranges from translating indigenous polysemic words to operating choices as to what meaning must be retained in this case not only to make these oral texts understandable, but also in order to have them play a political role in this age of cultural hegemony and neo-imperialism. Translation being a matter of negotiating meaning, it is a site of deployment of ideologies and politics meant to uncover the hidden agency of the indigenous cultures lying behind the spoken (non-written) languages involved.

Keywords: Mande, griot, praise-song, oral text, written language, translation, challenge, ideology.

Résumé

Cette étude sur « l’Hymne du Wassoulou » et le « Dugha » (l’Air du Vautour), deux chansons traditionnelles déclinant la culture de chasse et de guerre chez les Mandingues montre que la traduction de tels « textes oraux » comprend une série de défis et d’idéologies. En effet, les défis s’étendent du choix de sens à opérer parmi les nombreux et différents sens d’un mot polysémique à la motivation politique du traducteur. La traduction étant donc une négociation de sens impliquant politique et idéologie, elle permet aussi de dénicher l’« agence » des langues-cultures orales et non-occidentales en cette époque d’hégémonie culturelle et de néo-impérialisme.

Mots-clefs : Mandingue, griot, chanson traditionnelle, texte oral, langue écrite, traduction, défi, idéologie.

Translation is one of the surest means to break the wall of silence, misunderstanding, distrust and conflicts which was erected among human beings after they were allegedly dispersed and punished with different languages following their attempt to build a tower whereby they could reach the Heavens or God. The Babelian allegory so central in Western translation theory is used to depict the diversity of human linguistic experience, testifies to linguistic diversity and the attending lack of understanding among people. In *After Babel*, a groundbreaking book on translation theory, George Steiner writes, “Translation exists because men speak different languages” (Steiner 49). Whether Babel is a myth or holds some origin in history or not, the thing remains that linguistic diversity is a reality for the entire humankind. Diversity as a source of problem seems to be more acutely posed than elsewhere on the African continent where a given geographical area may count more than fifty languages. Breaking down the wall of distrust in order to facilitate understanding among people becomes necessary because in Africa issues of miscommunication and lack of cultural porosity have, some way or another, been addressed by individuals who learn each other’s languages, thereby become plurilingual.¹ Notwithstanding the plausibility of multilingualism (i.e. plurilingualism at a larger scale or as applied to society), the need for translation is never evacuated; it still exists in cases where, by refusing to learn the other’s language or because of the inability thereof, translation imposes itself. Such is the case with African nation-states formed after the ascension of former African colonies to independence. Some countries regroup more than sixty nationalities (communities that share the same languages and cultures on a given geographical space).

Furthermore, due to exigencies of modernity these countries adopted foreign written languages, which fact imposed translation activities to Africans who seek to make cultural claims and to make their cultures known to the outside world. It was the case on the early days of Independence when African cultures were used to show the cultural

¹ Scholar and translator Carrol Coates, who is familiar with West African texts, is among those who noticed the plurilingualism of Francophone African writers and locators and how such a linguistic disposition affects the written texts originating from this part of the world. In an interview with Daniel Higuereado Coates states that “Some West African writers deliberately sprinkle their French narrative with expressions in one or another of the many indigenous languages without explaining them. [...] This practice is closer to the African reality, where few if any people always understand everything that is said or written, primarily because too many languages are in play in addition to whatever European languages might be used” (Higuereado 49).

vitality of the continent, thereby disproving claims that considered Africans to be without culture and civilization. In disproving racist, supremacist and arrogant claims included in (neo-) imperialist discourses on Africa, translation played a great role. Writing African stories in European languages in early African literature is much akin to translation because writers tended to couch into their adopted languages the moon-light stories that their elders would tell them.² These stories, when analyzed like narratives, show the worldview of the people involved. Beyond the worldviews unearthed by the stories looms the civilization of the group. As well, through songs that were passed down from one generation to the other by the service of the griot,³ some great African leaders were kept alive in the collective memory of their descendants. Better still, such songs redeemed the actors of the stories – whether these leaders be legendary, mythical or historical – from silence and oblivion. The contact of cultures – colonialism in the African case – allowed for the telling of African stories by those Africans schooled in Western ways. Western educated Africans were instrumental in showing their inner world to the West. Beside the usual translators of African cultures, i.e. the writers, there is a category of translators are descendants of griots who have received Western education and who endeavor to maintain their culture through the modernization of the art of their fathers. The modern griots they are sing African leaders and their heroic deeds through hymns and praise songs.

This study seeks not only to analyze two praise songs that reveal to the non-Mande deeds of glory by hunters in a warrior culture as expressed in songs, but also it

² According to Manthia Diawara, “The point of departure for the African writer is the oral tradition which he/she purportedly inherits, including the traditional forms of African discourse [...]” See Diawara in “Canonizing Sundiata,” p. 154.

³ Ramses Boa-Thiemele thus summarizes the role of the griot in West African traditional Mande society: “Attaché à une famille, [le griot] remplit le rôle d’historiographe, d’historien, et de conseiller. En tant que tel il vantera [...] les hauts faits des héros célèbres. Il aura pour souci de dresser l’arbre généalogique des peuples et des principaux acteurs des princes. [...] Il est messenger du peuple et le défenseur des nobles. Il a donc le devoir de connaître les origines des familles et leurs histoires respectives. [...] Le rôle du griot est non négligeable dans l’épanouissement des membres de la société traditionnelle.”[In the service of a family, the griot plays the role of a historiographer, a historian, and an advisor. As such he sings [...] the prowess of famous heroes. It is his task to provide with the genealogy of communities and the main collaborators of the regents. [...] He is messenger for the people and a defender of the nobility. [...] The griot’s role is central in bettering the life of members of the traditional society] (Boa-Thiemele 113-4).

attempts to show the challenges and ideologies of the translation of such oral texts. The first text is the “Hymn of the Wasulu Empire”; it was composed by griots for Samory Toure, a Muslim leader who fiercely opposed the French colonial penetration in West Africa. Also called the Samoryan “Hymn to War,” the praise-song is sung by Demba Camara, a Guinean griot who was also the composer and Chef d’Orchestre of the all-time musical group called Bembeya Jazz National of Guinea-Conakry. The second text is the “Dugha”(the Song of the Vulture); griots report that it was composed by Balla Fasseke Kouyate for Sundiata Keita, the emperor of Old Mali. This song was made popular through a recording by Kouyate Sory Kandia of Guinea in the 1970’s.

I

Translating oral texts – traditional hymns and praise-songs – from a culture of Africa’s multifarious cultures into a European language-culture comes with its share of challenges and dangers. The challenges include the impossibility to render a faithful translation of the oral text into a print or script-bound culture. Another challenge is the undertranslation and overtranslation binary. Antoine Vitez aptly describes this binary in translation writing that:

Quand il s’agit de traduire d’une langue dans une autre, le danger d’aplatissement est accru: le traducteur n’ose pas prendre avec sa propre langue les libertés que l’auteur prend avec la sienne; il a peur d’avoir l’air bête, ou qu’on lui dise qu’il écrit mal. Alors, plus ou moins consciemment, il traduit en retrait du texte original; le sens apparent est le même, mais le style est affaibli ; je dirai qu’il sous-traduit. Ou bien, généreusement, il voit dans le texte original mille merveilles auxquelles on n’a pas pensé en écrivant, et les traduit [...] Je dirai qu’il sur-traduit. (Vitez, 45-6)

[During the translating from one language to another, the danger of flattening out meaning is heightened: the translator dares not take the kind of liberties that the author takes with his language; he is afraid of appearing stupid, or being perceived as a mediocre writer. Therefore, more or less consciously, he translates with detachment; the apparent meaning is the same, however, the style is weakened: I should say that he undertranslates. Or, generously, in the original text he perceives and translates a thousand wonders that the author did not see [...]. I should say that he overtranslates.]

The danger of this binary in the translating of an oral text is easily detected by a person who is competent in both the source language (orality-bound) and the target

language (European and script-bound). In fact, when an oral text is translated into French or English, it has a high potential of losing its original meaning(s). Conversely, the text in question can gain in meaning inasmuch as its translated version may yield some clarifications without which the source text would have remained inaccessible and incomprehensible for the people in the target language or culture.

Also, when an oral text of this kind is translated there are stakes that transcend the mere translational. As a matter of fact, the translation of African oral texts into European languages – mostly by artists and writers who are translators of their cultures as their works are actually palimpsests of African orality – usually serve some political and ideological goals. The translation of the two texts is inscribed in the postcolonial game. In the postcolony,⁴ cultural gestures (using the former master’s language by way of writing or speaking, translation, etc.) are calculated and everything hides some information, and thus requires some explanation. Such is all the more true that in rendering an African oral material, the translator not only seeks to make sure that the message is clearly and well relayed to the receiving culture, but also the translator of African (oral) materials is never oblivious of the power game involved in translation. The African translator of the oral material – writer or actual translator – intends to engage in a discourse of counter-hegemony, and the negation of the (mis-)perceptions that the outside world holds generally about non-scriptural cultures, and very particularly those of the African continent. Thus, the translation of African materials has a *de-structuring* and *remapping* potential that characterizes most African postcolonial works. The de-structuring consists in literally destroying and disproving vilifying claims that colonial literature and mentality are about with regards Africans in particular and subjugated peoples in general. Remapping is the new discourse that the African translator tries to effect in the broader interactions between the (ex-)colonizers and the (ex-)colonized.

⁴ I appropriate Mbembe’s notion of postcolony, which he defines as identifying “specifically a given historical trajectory - that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and violence which the colonial relationship involves. [...] It is a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or re-forming stereotypes. It is not the economy of signs in which the power is mirrored and imagined self-reflectively. The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied transformed and put into circulation” (Mbembe 102).

II

Translation, as per Jean-René Ladmiraal's definition, consists in "passer un message d'une langue de départ (LD) ou langue source dans une langue d'arrivée (LA)" [carrying a message from a source language into a target language] (Ladmiraal 11). This passage is not an easy task insofar as it raises questions of reliability and faithfulness. These questions become more relevant when it comes to languages that have less in common in terms of their communicational, expressional and operational modes. The one language is written whereas the other is not. A look at the "Wasulu Hymn to War" provides more insights into the danger(s) that a native speaker runs while he or she attempts to translate an indigenous material into a foreign language: English and French for this matter. Before dealing with translation issues proper, it is compulsory to give form, that is, to transliterate the song in its original language. Here is how the Hymn runs in the original Mande language:

Den-den-ya te kuma-la.
Den-den-ya te kuma-la,
Den-den-ya te jaama-da kuma-la,
Fama ye kêle faadeng-ye.
Ni ite na se kuma la,
Ni ite na se kuma la,
Ni ite na se jaama-da kuma-la,
Jaama-da kuma dee jeliliw-ma,
Oluyew-ke feng yeeni nang di.
Ni ite na se kee mina la,
Ni ite na se kee mina la,
Ni ite na se mogo-jugu kee mina la,
Kee mina-julu di muso-lu ma,
Olu ye oke feng sili feng di.

The key words in the Mande version are "den-den-ya", "kuma", "ni te na se", "jaama-da", "fama", "kele", "faading" "jelilew", "feng-yeeni nang", "kee", "mina", "mogo" "jugu", "julu", "dee", "muso", and "sili". They can respectively be rendered in English as "to beat around the bush, to seek for a detour", "speech", "if you cannot or are unable to do something", "jaama" deriving from the Arabic "jama'a" meaning "public gathering", "jaama-da" in public, "chief or leader, the son of his father," "the griots," "means to achieve something," "valorous man", "to seize", "someone", "enemy", "rope",

“to give”, “woman”, and “to tether or to tie up.” However, before showing the difference between the original version in Mande and how it can be translated in French in a literal manner on the one hand, and how it is rendered by the singer on the other, I shall give a literal French translation of my own, which will still be followed by an English translation of mine.

When Aboubacar Demba Camara sings the Wasulu hymn, he gives a very poignant title, *Regard sur le Passé*, which can be translated as “A retrospective Look at the Past.” In other words, the modern singer seeks to appropriate parts of the attributes that come with “jeliya,” i.e. the function of traditional singer. The griot is first and foremost a historian, a historiographer, and political advisor to kings and princes; however, he is also a praise-singer as he also plays the *kora*, a twenty-one-stringed harp, to accompany his singing. Demba Camara shows that he is a Mande griot through the way he masters the imaged language of his people. Also, the historical narrative he provides as well as the translation of the songs reveals that he also has some refined Western education. Demba Camara translates the Wasulu Hymn into French as follows:

Si tu ne peux organiser, diriger et défendre le pays de tes pères,
Fais appels aux hommes plus valeureux!
Si tu ne peux dire la vérité en tout lieu et en tout temps,
Fais appel aux hommes plus courageux!
Si tu ne peux être impartial,
Cède le trône aux hommes justes!
Si tu ne peux protéger le peuple et braver l’ennemi,
Donne ton sabre de guerre aux femmes qui t’indiqueront le chemin de l’honneur!
Ô Fama!
Le peuple te fais confiance!
Il te fait confiance parce que tu incarnes ses vertus.

A literal translation of Abouacac Camara’s French version into English would approximately be what follows:

If you are unable to organize, lead and defend your Fatherland,
Call for men who are more valorous!
If you are unable to speak the truth wherever and whenever you are,
Call for men who are more courageous!
If you are unable to be impartial,
Surrender your throne to the men who are righteous!
If you are unable to protect your people and defeat the enemy,
Give your sword to the women who will show you the path to honor!

Oh Fama!
The people believe in you!
They believe in you because you are the embodiment of their values.

Clearly, there is a sizable gap between the original version of the “Wasulu Hymn to War” in Mande language and the French rendering as provided by Aboubacar Demba Camara. By the same token, big is the gap between my French translation of the Mande text, and the translation of the same from French to English. The point of the matter is that each translation imposes on the translator the necessity to twist the original version in order for it to be expressible in the target language. This is so because the source language and the target language culture are different. They are different in terms of sentence structures, phonemes, and semantics, among others. In order to express the idea of the source language in the target language, the translator cannot not operate some changes and make a choice among the wide gamut of possible meanings available to him or her. He has to make a choice such as Daniel Kunene, the retranslator of Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*, aptly describes as a difficulty for any translator: “One of the most difficult things about translation is that you have to determine your loyalties before you embark on it. You have constantly to ask yourself whether your translation does justice to the original, whether in fact it says what the author intended to convey” (Mofolo xix). To do justice to the original or to convey the original meaning intended, chiefly when the original text is oral, altering influence on the receiving language is as inevitable as it gets when the translator chooses to domesticate a material to be translated. When the alteration of the original version is the choice, the translator has to find equivalents and possible meanings of the words from the indigenous language for the target or foreign language. The treacherousness of the translator becomes more apparent. The translator betrays the original idea in order to be able to express it in another context and another language. Camara’s rendering is very telling in this regard. His translation is highly political insofar as it espouses the political colors of his time, i.e. when the no less political song of Samory is appropriated. Camara certainly wants to be in keeping with the political trend of the post-independence era where the late president of Guinea, Sekou Toure, believed art and culture could play a vital role in the struggle for total independence in Africa.

III

Griots sing the “Dugha” in exhortation of warriors who must stand strong on the battlefield, fight the enemy as manly as can be, and brave the throes of death. The song holds its title from vultures that hover over battlefield and feed on human and blood once war is over. On the wake of the crucial Krina battle where Sundiata is believed to have defeated the Susu King (Sumaoro Kante), Balla Fasseke, his griot thus exhorted the Mande warriors: “Men of Mande, tomorrow let me sing you the song of vultures, for I want to see your enemies’ blood run like a river” (Diawara 2000: 91). Those who flee from war are cowards and therefore not allowed to dance to the tune of the “Dugha.” That’s why Manthia Diawara believes that the composition is a “military song which valorizes brutal power, fearlessness, and cunning battle strategies” (Ibid.). Sory Camara translates the Dugha from the original version, which runs as follows:

Dùwá te fola cebajito ñe

Wolu ye borila le
Wolu te ikofonena
Dùwá te fola cebajito ñe
Wolu ye borila le ka gbe rosa !

Muuka ba bo wula do
Made dùwá di sewa, dùwá di i jala
Jada ba wurudu wamene do
Warofedu di sila, mina di yereyere
Made gbine yeleda dafegbe ka
Jitolu borida, ja yato ma bo
A ! Kirina Dùwá, tuña, Dùwá mañi !
Jala be kosado
Jala be kodula
Jala ka bo jala di
Jala ma kuna jala di

Dùwá te fola cebajito ñe
Wolu ye borila le ka gbe rosa
Duwa ye fola ce fadi medu ñe
Wolu ye sala bari wolu te silana fe ñe !
Woi, ce be te Dùwá dona de ! (Camara, 1992: 353)

In his bilingual appendix, Sory Camara translates the “Dugha” in a rather formal French. The translation reads as follows:

On ne joue pas l’air du Vautour pour l’homme couard:
Ceux-là prennent la fuite ;
Ceux-là ne regardent point derrière eux.
On ne joue pas l’air du Vautour pour l’homme couard:
Ceux-là prennent la fuite et traversent l’espace.

Quand la déflagration de la poudre au loin retentit,
Le Vautour du Made se réjouit, le Vautour plane.
Quand le lion rugit en pleine brousse,
La peur s’empare des fauves, l’antilope tremble.
Le Fouet du Mande a enfourché sa cavale blanche.
Les couards ont pris la fuite : vrai, la place est intenable !
Ah le Vautour de Kirina: vrai, le Vautour est méchant !

Le caïlcédrat est en amont,
Le caïlcédrat est en aval,
Le caïlcédrat est plus gros que le caïlcédrat.
Le caïlcédrat n’est pas plus amer que le caïlcédrat.
On ne joue pas l’air du Vautour pour l’homme couard
Ceux-là prennent la fuite et traversent l’espace !
Les hommes braves pour qui l’on joue l’air du vautour

Ceux-là meurent, mais ceux-la ne connaissent point la peur !
Woi ! Tous les hommes ne dansent pas sur l'air du Vautour ! (Ibid. 282).

Here, Sory Camara adopts a Western literary or poetic pattern because his translation is guided by a concern of clarity and understanding on behalf of the foreign readership, mainly the French speaking people. Since the main audience consists of Francophones, and more specifically the French – who were back then trying to interfere with Sekou Toure's rule after his historical “no” to France –, who are not “mandephone” in general, and since they have to hear what he has to say anyway, his message had to be shaped in such a way that the hurdles of comprehension be leveled down. Thus, he has to use refined and academic French.

Also, unlike Mande language, French is written, and between these two languages there is a lack of systematic correspondence. In fact, languages belonging to the same group have some linguistic and cultural correspondences, which are visible in the way words are almost the same. Germanic languages share the same words with slight modifications, as do romance languages. African languages, which used to be denied the status of language, do not have anything in common with the aforementioned languages and their attending cultures. Translation between different linguistic registers is a painstaking task. Thus, the dilemma that any translator faces does not spare Sory Camara: he faces the traditional question as to whether use domestication or foreignization to carry his Mande oral text across the French language. In other words, Sory Camara juggles with being truthful to the Mande language thereby attempting to translate ideas in a *stricto sensu* manner and with providing an acceptable text to the reader in the target-language.

The word “cailcédrat” is an African name for a tree that goes by the botanical name *khaya senegalensis*. It has various orthographies: it is also written “kaicédrat” or “caicédra”. Sory Camara uses the word to translate “jala,” which is a tree of an extremely bitter bark. Some West African people use the decoction of this bark to cure fever and fever-related diseases. It seems that the Mande people have not tasted anything bitterer than this tree's bark. Therefore, anything distasteful in life so as to be unpalatable is referred to as “jala.” Likewise, when someone commands respect because of his valorous deeds on the battlefield Mande people call him “jala.” He outlives his enemies

because the latter cannot kill him. The question is: how should such a highly culturally charged word be translated in French? Or should the translator retain the native word for it in his translation or simply bring in a term of dubious origin and accuracy?

Besides, the translation of “muuka,” which is rendered in French as “la déflagration de la poudre” is somewhat evasive in the sense that the concept in Mande carries more meaning than what Camara confers to it. “Muu” means powder or flour. However, it is not any kind of powder or flour. The kind of powder or flour that the griot refers to is one that causes detonation. Better still, it is the gun, which has been introduced in warfare only through the first contact of Mande people with foreign gun-using cultures. An adequate rendition would be the sound of guns, even though most oral sources teach us that the main weapons used by great Mande warriors and hunters were swords and arrows. The question of dependability of the griot’s account arises therefore as no historical narrative to this date shows that guns and bayonets were in use in the Mande Empire during the rule of Sundiata.

As well, Camara’s translation raises another different problem. In fact, the singer does not fully render certain Mande words by way of taking into account all the possible meanings they are liable to indicate in French. The consequence of this inability is a challenge that any translator has to face up to in a polysemic context. Polysemy, according to George Steiner, is “the capacity of the same word to mean different things, such difference ranging from nuance to antithesis [...]”(Steiner 34). The translator in the above-mentioned situation has to make a choice of word, which raises the question of reasons for choosing such and such word. For instance in the third stanza, Camara translates “Jala be kosado/Jala be kodula” as “Le caïlcédtrat est en amont/Le caïlcédtrat est en aval. ” The word “kô” means more than one type of (flowing) water. It can mean all of the following in French: “marigot,” “rivière,” “étang,” and “fleuve,” which mean respectively “fish-pond,” “river,” “swamp” and “stream.” To circumvent the problem raised by the many meanings of this word, Camara simply does away with the problem by concentrating his efforts on the suffixes of “Ko,” which are “sãdo” (*amont*, or *en-haut* : French words for slope of a hill or upstream) and “tula” (*dans la brousse* – in the bush–, but translated as “aval,” which means downstream). It is clear that Camara over-translates the (group of) word(s). Perhaps translating the two verses respectively as “Les Jala sont

tout le long de “Ko”[The Jala tree border the ...]/ “Les *Jala* dans la brousse à côté du *Kô*.” [The jala trees are in the thick bush by the ...], appeared to be too painstaking for Camara. The easiest way out was the contraction of the idea in a phrase that betrays the griot’s words. Retaining native words like “*Ko*” and “*Jala*” because of their equivocal meanings would have contributed to establish the faithfulness of Camara’s translation to the original oral text.

Now, concerning Camara’s (mis-)/over-translation of Mande words, another example catches the attention of the alert mandephone, who also happens to be proficient in French. In fact, in the following two verses “Jitolu borida, *ja* yato ma bo/ A! Kirina Dùwá, *tuña*, Dùwá mañi !” are translated as “Les couards ont pris la fuite : *vrai*, la place est intenable !/Ah le Vautour de Kirina: *vrai*, le Vautour est méchant !” [Italics are mine]. The words “*ja*” and “*tuna*” have been rendered in French as “*vrai*,” which means “truly, certainly or verily.” However, “*ja*” is an exclamation that is better translated in French “or, donc” [therefore, so], thereby implying a conclusion one draws from observing a given situation. As for “*tuña*,” the word means “truth” or “in truth,” which is faithfully rendered in Camara’s translation.

What the two Camara’s translations bring into light is the question of untranslatability and fidelity. The two concepts go hand in hand in that although the first which conjures up the question of equivalence and correspondence, it boils down to the question of faithfulness in translation. While some denies the very existence of untranslatables, which is some fantasmagoric view of translation, translations that involve oral written cultures by way of putting in a relationship of parity have to address the issue of cultural specificities and the question of the irreducible lack of correspondence between oral and print languages.

Also, Geneviève Calame-Griaule claims that “La meilleure traduction et le meilleur commentaire ne pourront jamais rendre les qualités proprement ‘orales’ des textes, celles que leur confère le temps d’une récitation, la personnalité du conteur ou du poète,”[the best translation and the best commentary can never render the clearly ‘oral’ quality of texts, the quality yielded by the time of performance and the personality of the storyteller] (Calame-Griaule 74). Even though the analysis of oral literature supersedes the only plain message, what transpires in the translation of an oral text has much less to

do with the personality of the bard. Rather, the message of the song is first and foremost the focus of translation because the storyteller's histrionics as well as the time of the performance cannot be translated.

IV

What matters in oral texts is accuracy, which is a third element to naturalness, and communicativeness in an ideal translation from a target language perspective. In fact, ideal translation tends to lay more emphasis on more natural forms of the receiving language/culture, which although it takes into accounts the source language, tend to accord primacy to the readership in the target language culture. In the name of communicativeness, also, fidelity is sacrificed on the altar of all aspects that guarantee the understandability of the source text in the target culture. And yet, too much concern for the target language kills the originality of the source text. Such is so true for the oral text that when words without adequate equivalents are flatly translated the original copy becomes a copy of the target language culture.

Some critics have vehemently pilloried the perspective of those who advocate for the source text. For instance, Jean-René Ladmiral writes that “Une traduction sourcière, qui se veut littéraliste et qui prétend prendre en compte essentiellement la langue-culture où s’insérât le texte-source, tend à réduire ce texte original à n’être plus qu’un *document-cible*” [a source-oriented translation that is literalist and purports to essentially take into account language-culture to which source-text belongs, has the propensity to reduce this original text to nothing more than a target-document] (Ladmiral 26). So be it. It should be clear that an oral text cannot be translated the way its written counterpart is rendered from another print culture. Translation from an oral culture to a print culture should capture the strangeness of the source-text in such a way it is recognizable and recognized as such in the target culture. This renders the singularity of the source text, which is absolutely necessary for the text to partake in the exercise of paving the way for clear understanding among people outside the range of hegemonic gaze. To twist an oral text for it to fit in a scriptural frame is a violence that perpetuates imperialism. The

foreignization⁵ of the target language contributes to bulldozing the wall of indifference and ignorance such the attempt to monopolize the word as well monovocality has done so far. Dynamiting the assumed epicenter of the word by way of multiplying possibilities of voices and expression rather enriches the target language than it destroys its so-called beauty. That's why Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of "thick translation" appears to be important. It implies "a thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding meets the need to challenge ourselves [...] to go further, to undertake the harder project of genuinely informed respect for others" (Appiah 399). In other words, "annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich and cultural and linguistic context" are necessary in the postcolonial African translation. The need is obvious.

On top of seeking to preserve the original quality and the singularity *qua* strangeness of the African oral text, it is imperative that translators dive into the culture of the oral texts they deal with. The same applies to the translation of African written texts that are strongly indebted to oral sources. For, as Jan Vansina aptly puts, "the intended message is often quite obvious to members of the community that produced the tradition, but not so evident to any outsider" (Vansina 68). A translation that concerns with the reception of the original text in a target culture is not only done from an outsider's perspective, but also it is completed along the lines of what Lawrence Venuti dubbed the violence of translation. He states that "[t]he ethnocentric violence of translation is inevitable: in the translation process, foreign languages, texts, and cultures always undergo some degree and form of exclusion, reduction, and inscription that reflect the cultural situation in the translating language" (Venuti 267). A target-language oriented translation of a polysemic and multi-layered or "palimpsestic" text such as African ones undertakes the risk of losing important pieces of information, which because of the translator's reluctance to seriously approach the culture – with open-

⁵ The concept has been popularized by American translation theorist, Lawrence Venuti who seems to have been directed to this translational strategy by German translator and theorist Friedrich Schleiermacher in an essay entitled "On the Different Methods of Translating". See Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*, pp. 83-124. As well, according to the Shuttleworth and Cowie in the *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, to foreignize a translation is an exercise that "deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original" (Shuttleworth & Cowie 59).

mindedness –, are considered as unnecessary appendages to the text. Such is indeed a mistake to refrain from making.

Ultimately, although Sory Camara and Demba Camara make theirs Walter Benjamin's proposition – that is, “The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original” (Benjamin 77) – their translations are exercises into overtranslation insofar as they use far-fetched correspondences and equivalences in the written culture that receives their works. This is by and in itself a sin that the translator must shy away from. And yet, these translators have the benefit of the doubt in that they wanted to find correspondences that could legitimate their cultural and civilizational counterclaims in the face of imperialist and colonialist claims that degraded and denigrated their cultures. The enterprise of debunking untrue claims aims at exercising in self-revalorization by these artists and their cultures. Samory Toure's war strategies and fierce opposition to French troops certainly impressed French high ranking colonial officers sent to pacify the Wasulu Empire. Otherwise, it would appear very bizarre to see French General Baratier praise Emperor Toure as follows:

Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que Samory s'est montré supérieur à tous les chefs noirs qui ont été nos adversaires sur le continent africain. Il est le seul avoir fait preuve de qualités caractérisant un chef de peuple, un stratège et même un politique. Conducteur d'hommes, en tout cas il le fut, possédant l'audace, l'esprit de suite et de précision et, par dessus tout, une ténacité inaccessible au découragement. (Kesteloot & Dieng 193)

[It is not exaggerated to say that Samory proved to be superior to all the leaders who were our adversaries on the African continent. He appears to be the only possessing qualities that characterize a leader of a people, a tactician, and even a statesman. He was in actuality a leader who had audacity, the sense of predictability and precision, and above else, the tenaciousness that is not accessible to discouragement.]”

To sing Samory Toure the same way his forefathers of the Mande Empire were sung by griots seems necessary as Baratier's remarks show. A translation of such poems, praise-songs and the like begs a mastery not only of the cultural background of the materials, but it also requires of the translator a certain linguistic preparation that will disclose the unrevealed parts of the message. In other words, the translation of these oral texts by indigenous Africans show nuances that a non-Native would not perceive offhand.

It also contributes to exhibiting the pluriglossia,⁶ which characterizes writers and other artists in Africa in particular and African people in general. It ought to also be added that the translation of these oral texts show how common warfare culture is to epic tales whether from Europe or Africa, and more importantly how ideologies are better uncovered with the aid of translation.

In the final analysis, to translate an oral material – i.e. to textualize it – necessitates the mobilization of a good measure of strategies that reveal the allegiance of the translator on the one hand, and on the other, his or her ideologies. Both Sory Camara and Demba Camara, as various examples above show, have elected to endow their French translation with some clarity that required of them the domestication of the Mande language. Some Mande words could have been simply translated without any far-fetched and extremely refined French. The ensuing message could still be within easy reach for both the outsider and insider. This choice stems from an obligation of result which is incumbent upon both Camaras, who are ambassadors of Mande culture and socio-politics. In other words, these two translators had some stakes that strongly seethed through their translations of Mande important texts.

⁶ The concept refers to the plurality of languages involved in a diglossic context. According to Musanji “diglossie désigne une situation où deux langues ou deux variétés de langues co-existent et se distribuent de façon complémentaire les fonctions communicatives” [diglossia refers to a context where two languages or two varieties of languages co-exist and complement each other with regards communicative functions], while pluriglossia designates a variety of supplemental languages. See Mwatha Ngalasso in “États des langues et langues de l’État au Zaïre,” p. 13.

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