Circulation, Translation, and Adaption of African Literary Works and Their Possible Positions in World Literature Anthologies

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ABSTRACT

World Literature is not all literature of the entire world but only literature which travels outside its country of origin.The circulation and reception of texts in a given cultural system can be complicated due to languages. However global awork may be in intention, it can be seen as just a would-be work of world literature unlessand until it actually finds readers abroad. By making anEnglish version of the novel accessible, many African writers couldmaintain their bargaining power, especially towards the circulation system of World Literature. African literature has also inspired several adaptations, since adaptation itself has a significant place in World Literature.Moreover, when African literary works are included in some anthologies, they could perform particular types of discourse. It could be inferred that the anthologies of African literary works by women writers are different from their male counterparts.

Keywords: *adaptation, anthology, circulation, translation, world literature*

INTRODUCTION

World Literature is most of the times defined as the circulation of works out into languages and cultures beyond their original homeland. In this model, usually the works of World Literature are not born but made, at a subsequent stage of their life or 'afterlife'.[1] However global work may be in intention, it can be seen as just a would-be work of world literature unless and until it actually finds readers abroad. In other words, World Literature is not all literature of the entire world but only those which crosses a border. In relation tothis, we could see how some African literary works are received outside their source culture.

Since language constitutes a crucial component of culture, it is not surprising that the question of language in modern African literature has been a source of intense, even perennial controversy.[2] Two literary giants, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria and Ngugi waThiong'o of Kenya, well encapsulate the two principal viewpoints. While the latter hasresolutely turned his back on English as his creative medium, the former and severalother African

[1] Damrosch, D. (2011). World literature as alternative discourse. *Neohelicon*, 38(2), 307-317. Retrieved on 23 October 2016.

[2] Okoh, N. (2015). Translationas validation of culture: The example of Chinua Achebe. *Hemispheres*, 30(3), 5-20. Retrieved on 24 October 2016.

writers have not succumbed to the wind of nationalism sweeping throughthe African literary landscape.[3]

In fact, it is also believed that the circulation and reception of texts in a given cultural system can be complicated due to the language itself. In this case, language can be an issue related to power, ideology, institution, and manipulation.[4]Moreover, as Damrosch argues, the market space for World Literature authors, especially from postcolonial or minor literatures is rather small and usually only accommodates one author from each nation or region. In this respect, Tachtiris argues that the author's provocation then becomes inseparable from the author as a figure and from his or her work, thus functioning as a kind of brand that the author, along with publishers, editors, and translators, can market (10). Thus, Tachtiris discusses how an author can function as a kind of brand, as shown by Ngugiwa Thiong'o.

Ngugiwa Thiong'o chose to release even his Gikuyu-language texts with Heinemann, who brought out both the English and Gikuyu editions of his work *Devil on the Cross*.[5] He is very much aware of the problematic nature of his decision but defends it on a couple of fronts.[6]Moreover, it is clear that the importance Thiong'o placed on producing, publishing, and distributing a quality novel in Gikuyu did not prevent him from concerns about global and local English-speaking audiences of the same book, since after completing *CaitaaniMutharaba-ini*, Thiong'o was busy with its English translation, *Devil on the Cross*.[7] By making an English version of the novel accessible, Ngugiwa Thiong'o and other writers could maintain their bargaining power, especially towards the circulation system of World Literature itself.

Conversely, Chinua Achebe demonstrates some 'creative' translations. Of course, the bare term 'translation' naturally suggests a straightforward transposition of thoughts from a source to a target language. Moreover, World Literature also denotes literary works with "transnational" or "translational" significance, common aesthetic qualities, and far-reaching social and cultural influence, so that world literature is thus by no means a fixed phenomenon but a traveling concept.[8] However, the investigation of Achebe's attemptsto render the Igbo macrocosm in a major world language makes the translationseen from a creative viewpoint.[9]In this case, Achebe's Africanization or nativization of English is seen in his injection of Igboexpressions into the narrative mainstream of his novelistic creations, meaning that Achebe proceeds to leave a term or concept untranslated, weaving in neatdescriptions that leave the non-Igbo reader in no doubt regarding the exact meaning or context of the word.[10] It is interesting thatAchebe successfully and creatively rises to the challenges of cross-cultural communication.[11]

[3] Ibid p. 5. Rather, they have maintained the status quo, preferring to produce their works in non-African languages.

[4] Tachtiris, C. E. (2012). Branding world literature: The global circulation of authors in translation [Dissertation]. Michigan University. Retrieved on 23 October 2016. Some languages possess more power than others and hold privileged positions within academic and market institutions.

[5] Ibid p. 174.

[6] Ibid p. 176. While international publishers are less concerned with the local political situation, and so have less of a stake in engaging in it in any militant way, they are also less vulnerable to the potentially dangerous elements in the political situation. Making the compromise of publishing with an English editor, then, is not necessarily self-serving nor merely practical. It also draws the English editor into a global contract that is not only financial but also political and cultural.

[7] Ibid, p. 178.

[8] Ning, W. (2010). World literature and the dynamic function of translation. *Modern language quarterly: A journal of literary history*, 71(1), 1-14. Retrieved on 23 October 2016. Translation plays a vital role on the process of circulation, for with it some of literary works might become accessible to other cultures and traditions.

[9] Okoh, N., "Translation as validation of culture: The example of Chinua Achebe", p. 8.

[10] Ibid p. 8. It is by means of such ingenuity that he validates such Igbo concepts as *osu*, *obi*, *ikenga*, *agbala*, *ogbanje* and *efulefu*.

[11] Ibid p. 18.

African literature hasalso inspired severaladaptations, since adaptation itself has a significant place in World Literature. Adaptation is intra/intercultural representation of a work in the same or another medium, through a double process: receptive and creative.[12] Achebe's first novel, published in 1958, is theonly Nigerian novel to have, over the years, inspired several cinematic and stageadaptations. The first adaptation was a dramatic radio program, *Okonkwo*, made by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in April 1961, with Wole Soyinka in a supporting role.[13] The first film adaptation was then produced in the U.S. in 1971, blending *Things Fall Apart* with Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960).[14]

The film, while respecting the spirit of Achebe's narrative,took a fresh look at some of the events and read them in a unique way, for instance, one couldeven say that it is closer to Igbo tradition than the novel.[15]The film's treatment of the relationship between the colonial authorities and missionaries and its impact on the storyline is interesting as well. The film presents a clearer picture of colonial violence, its total misunderstanding of local customs, and disregard of the culture.[16] Yet the film version of *ThingsFall Apart* did make the novel more popular and consolidated Nigerians' views ontheir colonial history, while the 1986 Nigerian Television Authority's (NTA) production or TV adaptation of Achebe's novel did not immediately lead to more film adaptations from either Achebe or otherNigerian novelists.[17]

Other African authors have also seen their texts adapted to the screen, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which was made into a movie in September 2013.[18] Another screen adaptation is Ingrid Sinclair's film, *Riches* (2011). This movie is said to not only draw on, but creatively reimagine Bessie Head's autobiographical novel *A Question of Power*, and thus significant parrallels can be observed between the film and the novel.[19]

Anthologies of World Literature put into evidence the intersection of academia and the market in that they disseminate a variety of short texts becoming a commodity for sale not only at home but also abroad.[20]*The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (1956) that featured only Western European and North American works expanded and changed in 1995 to *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* that includes many non-Western writers.[21] In other words, this supports the idea that World Literature has opened up to literatures of non-Western societies, while it was mainly limited only to the Western classics. In this respect, *Things Fall Apart* is not just taught in World Literature classes but also published in *Norton's Anthology of World Literature*

[12] Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*. New York: Routledge.
[13] Ugochukwu, F. (2007). Things Fall Apart: Achebe's legacy, from book to screen. *Research in African literatures*, 38(4), 168-183. Retrieved on 24 October 2016.
[14] Ibid p. 169. Web. 24 October 2016. This joint Nigerian, German, and American production, first titled *Bullfrog in the Sun* and later renamed *Things Fall Apart*, was directed by Jürgen Pohland, with Edward and Fern Mosk as executive producers, and Francis Oladele as coproducer.
[15] Ibid p. 176.
[16] Ibid p. 178.
[17] Ibid p. 179. It does, however, reveal some of the traits that would become part of Nollywood films: a deep-seated interest in history, theme songs reinforcing the message of the film, and Igbo-English code-mixing and code-switching.
[18] Ibid p. 180.
[19] Mboti, N. (1973). Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication of Bessie Head's A Question of Power. *Current Writing*, 26(2), 181-192. Retrieved on 24 October 2016. The film is about a fiercely independent coloured woman, Molly McBride. She is a single-mother who is exiled from South Africa on an exit permit, with her young son Peter, at the height of apartheid in the mid-1980s.
[20] Tachtiris, C. E. (2012). Branding world literature: The global circulation of authors in translation [Dissertation]. Michigan University. Retrieved on 23 October 2016.
[21] Ojaide, T. (2015). *Indigeneity, globalization, and African literature*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. Retrieved on 25 October 2016.

and also in Norton Series of World Literature texts.[22]

African literary texts included in the anthologies could perform particular types of discourse, such as post-colonialism. For instance, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, British colonization slowly creeped into Nigeria, through the process of mutual 'consent'.[23]*Arrow of God* is also Achebe's novel where he depicts the causes of British colonialism, but here not only as a process of mutual adaptation but as one caused by inefficacy, disunity, and disorientation within his own people, the Igbo race.[24]In another novel, *No Longer at Ease*, a character named Obi Okonkwo is caught between two cultures, his native African and his western educated training, making this is a novel of hybridity where the character finds himself.[25]Chinua Achebe's novels prove through the instance of his own race, the Igbo race, that Nigeria adopted many conditions that the British had imposed upon them, somewhat willingly, condoning Gramci's notion of 'consent'[26], and adapted many practices of the colonial masters including religious conversion and allowed the British to gradually establish their political stronghold upon Africa.[27]

The emergence of a new generation of African women writers, e.g.Calixthe Beyala of French Cameroon, Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe, Monica Arac DeNyeko of Uganda and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie of Nigeria also points to new beginnings/directions.These writers refuse to let theircharacters' lives be dictated by themen in their lives.[28] Their work encourages andsupports their characters in definingtheir own space, be it choosing toremain unmarried or exploring their sexuality in different forms.[29]

The anthologies of African literary works by women writers could also bring out post-colonial and feminist discourses. In male-dominated Africanliterature, women constantly fall under two categories: good wife and bad girl/female. Contemporary African women writersare preoccupied with deconstructing thenotion of what it means to be an Africanwoman, since their characters are always tornbetween two cultures: an African oneand a Western one (be it educated in theWestern world, or moving to a big citywhere one is entangled in the "high life")and what that entails.[30] For example, in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the story revolves around Tambu, the poor, country cousin who comes to live with the family of her revered, educated, and wealthy uncle.[31] Tambu istorn between accepting a modern way of life and that of her culture, yet she gradually leaves behind those parts of herfamily: parts of herself and her culturethat she cannot accept – an analogy of theindependence process in

[22] Ibid p. 75.
[23] Basu, A. (2015). Postcolonial adaptation and appropriation in Chinua Achebe. *International journal of English and literature*, 6(33), 51-57. Retrieved on 25 October 2016. If one looks at Colonel Lugard's indirect system of governance one may notice that such a system of government involved mutual adaptation. The British adopted the rule of tribal leaders for their own benefit while the tribals adopted the governance of British in the tempation of becoming powerful king and receiving benefits from the British government.
[24] Ibid p. 55.
[25] Ibid p. 55-56.
[26] Ibid p. 56. This 'consent' is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. Thus, 'consent' is an integral part of domination.
[27] Ibid p. 56.
[28] Tambajang, K. A. (2013). The defiance of the New African woman writer. *New African Woman*, 12(23), 83-85. Retrieved on 23 October 2016. The protagonist women characters in their writings always manage to take control of their previously paternalistic-centred lives. Contemporary African women's literature is filled with thematic tones of refusing to be seen as docile, selfeffacing and passive observers in a maledriven world.
[29] Ibid p. 83.
[30] Ibid p. 84.
[31] Shaw, C. M. You had a daughter, but I am becoming a woman: Sexuality, feminism and postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps. *Research in African literatures*, 38(4), 7-27. Retrieved on 25 October 2016. In her uncle's house, she learns of the problems of his auto-cratic control and comes to admire his rebellious daughter Nyasha.

Zimbabwe.[32] Similar with the male counterparts, Tsitsi Dangarembga also projects the postcolonial consciousness, yet she also portrays the women, different from the male perspectives. When directly addressing postcolonial Zimbabwe, feminism is vital to Dangarembga.[33]

Another contemporary African woman writer who has seized the opportunities of living in the Western world is Calix the Beyala, who has penned more than sixnovels, based on women's liberation,prostitution, lesbianism, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation and thediscovering of one's body.[34]In her most recentwork, *Femme nue Femme Noire* (*Naked Woman Black Woman*), which is one of thefirst erotic novels written by an African woman, Beyala deconstructs the African malewriter's notion of female sexuality and owns it.[35]

It could be infered that postcolonial writing by male writers are somehow still male-centred. However, postcolonial writing by the female writers is different, especially the contemporary ones. Today's African women authors create a space of independence for their characters.The issue of male domination is still there and is still being battled, butthe new African woman is one who isbent on blazing her own path with all thechallenges she constantly faces, be it class,sex or colour.[36]Therefore, African women writers have eminence in anthologies through the discourse of postcolonialism, feminism, or even queer, while the male writings are still male-centred. To summarize, contemporary women writers are liberating their protagonists against patriarchal disrimination.

[32] Tambajang, K. A. (2013). The defiance of the New African woman writer. *New African Woman*, 12(23), 83-85. Retrieved on 23 October 2016.

[33] Shaw, C. M. You had a daughter, but I am becoming a woman: Sexuality, feminism and postcoloniality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and She No Longer Weeps. *Research in African literatures*, 38(4), 7-27. Retrieved on 25 October 2016. On p. 7. Dangarembga's feminism, expressed through the power of speaking up and the erotic as power, has traces of the workof AudreLorde, which Dangarembga uses and critiques.

[34] Ibid p. 84.

[35] Ibid p. 85. She redefines sexuality not to mean heterosexuality, but sexuality in all its complexity. She easily introduces Irene to the reader, with Irene being intimate with Ousmane (a married man) and later Fatou (Ousmane's wife).

[36] Ibid p. 85.

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