Volume: 08 / N° 01(2021) pp 275 - 287

Literary Translation as a Means of Reconciling Conflictual Identities: The Case of Algerian and French Identities

الترجمة الأدبية بوصفها وسيلة للتوفيق بين الهويّات المتصارعة: الهويتان الجزائرية والفرنسية أنموذجا

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Received: 23/09/2021 **Accepted**: 14/10/2021 **Published**: 28/12/2021

Abstract

This research attempts to consider literary translation as a means of reconciling conflictual identities, namely Algerian and French identities. In order for that, a discussion of the identity of texts and translations is provided. Conflict of identities is identified through a quick review of power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Thoughts and views about translation as reconciliation are presented. Then, reconciliation is sought through a discussion of literary translation stressing Arabic/French translation and the phenomena of writing in French as a form of translating Algerian experience, thus, setting the ground for reconciliation in the broadest sense.

Keywords: Literary Translation; Reconciliation; Conflictual Identities; Algeria; French.

ملخص:

يحاول هذا البحث أن يتخذ من الترجمة الأدبية وسيلة للتوفيق بين الهويات المتصارعة وبالتحديد الهويتين الجزائرية والفرنسية. ومن أجل ذلك استهل بنقاش حول هوية النصوص والترجمات، ثم حدد نزاع الهويات من خلال عرض سريع لعلاقات القوّة بين المستعمر والمستعمر، وبعدها قدم آراءً وأفكارا حول اعتبار الترجمة مصالحة، ثم بحث سبيل المصالحة من خلال نقاش حول الترجمة الأدبية مع التركيز على الترجمة من العربية إلى الفرنسية وظاهرة الكتابة بالفرنسية كنوع من ترجمة التحربة الجزائرية ومن ثم تحيئة الوضع من أجل تصالح بمعناه الواسع.

كلمات مفتاحية: الترجمة الأدبية، المصالحة، الهويات المتصارعة، الجزائر، فرنسا.

1. Introduction

The struggle for power and dominance seems to be perennial. Since ages, the world has seen many wars and conflicts. World War I and II played a significant role in power relations between different parts of the world. While some parts of the world known as "people of the North," or Western colonizers, gained extreme power, thus, represented the stronger pole, the other parts, known as "people of the South," or the colonized people, represented the weaker pole. Since then, no other categorization has ever suggested except that of the title 'third world' that was given to 'the colonized people' and which often means the uncivilized world. This was perhaps due to political reasons, which are not the issue of this research. Rather, the issue is that How can those who have been colonized get into peace with those who have colonized them via translation in a world that is characterized by another way of colonizing, that is, globalization and hybridization or the fusion of differences in some sense. However, the colonized 'third world' has proven to be stubborn and resistant to all kinds of hybridity that come from the so called 'North World'.

Resistance or decolonization used to be the motto of many colonized nations. It appeared in many forms, starting with military resistance (with weapons) to language resistance (teaching and promoting the use of national language), then cultural resistance in its broad sense, including (reviving religious beliefs and practices, customs and traditional practices, life styling, fashion and others).

Speaking of language resistance, which is of special importance in this research, the language of the colonizers has been used as a weapon (though metaphorically) against them. It has been used by writers of the colonized nations to write about their pains and their issues in a language of their own (E.g. new French by people of the French colonies or new English by people of the English colonies, and so on), or a language "in-between" in Bhabha's words.

As the model of one's thoughts, language can also serve as a means of shaping the world view of a person or a certain group. Algerian Francophone writers; for example, tend to use French language in a way that is different from that of original French writers, simply because both groups have different origins, backgrounds, memories, and so on. Thus, they tend to view the world differently. Actually, many Algerian writers, such as Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar ...etc. used French in a resistant way. It was manifested in their writings (further discussed in Section: 03). Similarly, there are Algerian writers, who chose to write in Arabic, following the stream of resisting the use of French in Algeria. Yet, some of those writers, like Tahir Wattar, Waciny Ala'araj, and Ahlem Mosteghanemi, got translated into French, as for some French writers have their works translated into Arabic, too.

Thinking translation as communication, some translation scholars perceive translation as a cross-cultural communication or communication across borders. Communication is vital for two nations, which are/were in conflict, say England-Nigeria or France-Algeria, in order to come to certain tolerant solutions. Not only verbal communication was necessary, but also writing in all its forms. It is in the

literary forms that life style, social issues and interests are best depicted. For this reason, the present paper chooses to review the course of literary translation in Algeria, i.e., the literature and translation that has been produced before and after the Algerian independence.

In order to acutely study literary translation in Algeria, this research tries to consider Algerian francophone literature as a way of translating the Algerian experience before and after independence. So, based on some data accompanied with commentaries, this research attempts to validate the hypothesis that literary translation is an act of reconciling conflictual identities.

2. Identities, Texts and Translation:

Any text, be it literary or non-literary, is expressive of a set of belongings. It might be the topic, the genre, the people, and the linguistic and cultural aspects that are particular to a nation. Given that, the translation of that text is supposed to recreate these belongings in the target language. It is in no way predicted that they could all be fully reproduced. Because there are no two identical languages, how can a text and its translation be the same? Actually, the changes that a translation came with pose serious problems, but the very question here is: could these changes alter the identity of that text? And will texts really lose their identities when they got translated?

First of all, what is meant by 'the identity of the text,' here, is the national belonging of that text, as well as the specific features (linguistic, stylistic and cultural) it contains. The identity of a text can be recognized through its writer, topic and language. Stressing the idea of 'language' and 'national language', it is worth mentioning that there do exist texts that do not belong to the nation, though they are written in its language. According to some theorists, these texts are called 'post-colonial texts' (Bill Ashcroft, 2002, p. 77) and described as 'hybrid' or 'métissées', for they enjoy a mixture of language levels and cultural specifications (Mehrez qtd in Venuti, 1992, p. 121). Marjolijn De Jager, one of the translators of such texts, precisely Francophone texts into English, in her article "Translation as Revelation" (2009) is speaking from a personal experience. She noticed that these texts are marked by the use of many adverbs and cultural specific items, which, she admitted, pose serious problems and sometimes are even untranslatable.

When translators face such problem of untranslatability, they either look for substitutions or just eliminate it. This, in turn, would result in a distorted identity of the text. Alicja Zuchelkowska, in her article, « Pour une approche Identitaire en traduction : Implications socio-culturelles » (2012), confirms:

Les traducteurs ont parfois tendance à « effacer » le caractère identitaire du texte, en gommant les marques identitaires qui leur poseraient d'éventuels problèmes, telles que : utilisation par l'auteur des parlers locaux, changement de codes linguistiques (*code-switching*), traces phonétiques d'une identité multiple, mots ou phrases hybrides, repères culturels absents dans la culture d'arrivée, etc.

Translators, sometimes, tend to « erase » the aspect of identity in the text. They erase the identity markers that pose potential problems for them, like: using local dialects by the author, code-switching, phonetic features of a multiple identity, words or hybrid sentences, cultural references missed in the target culture, etc. (my translation)

According to the above ideas, translation causes remarkable loss in the text. It defaces its identity markers. But a pertinent question could be asked here: what about texts that gained fame and literary reputation in the world via translation, and thus become world literature?

Venuti believed that translation plays significant role in the conceptualization of world literature. He confirms that: "Translation ... enables the international reception of literary texts" (2013, p.193). This sounds true, but viewed from another perspective, it seems that translation also causes some harm to the original. Works do lose some of their features in translation, be it literary, linguistic or cultural, as mentioned before. However, again, the price of 'literary fame' might be losing the identity that is casted in the text in the form of untranslatable units, sometimes called "dialectical passages" (House, 2016, p. 56), which once they got translated, they lose their connotations and their identity signification.

To speak of gains and losses in translation means to speak about the power that generated them. Andre Lefevere was at pains to explain in his book, *Translation*, *Reviewing and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 1999, how power, that is shaped in many forms (patronage, poetics, and ideology), controls the literary fame through translation. By doing so, one might interpret that these forms of power run the risk of altering the identity of texts. Lefevere himself, in discussing the '*Quasidah*' (he sometimes referred to as *mu allaka*, one of the remarkable forms of Arabic Literature), says:

The apparent failure to "naturalize" the *qasidah* in the Euro-American system to the degree that the *haiku*, for instance, or even the *ruba'i* have been naturalized has absolutely nothing to do with the competence of the rewriters: their knowledge of Arabic is not questioned. Simply, no rewriter has, as yet, found a "slot" in Euro-American poetics to fit the *qasidah*. Nor is the incompatibility of the two poetics the only reason for the failure to naturalize the *qasidah*. That compatibility is compounded with the low prestige of of Islamic culture in Europe and the Americas (p. 75).

It is implied that some literary forms, like *haiku* and *ruba'I*, become 'universalized' through translation. It does not mean that they lose their identity in its entirety. For the term *Haiku* is an original Japanese form of literature, and *ruba'i* refers to the Persian Robayat of Omar khayyam. They just become homogenized forms, not like the *qasidah* that fortunately lacks 'compatibility' and parallel status with the western culture and, thus, was prevented from losing its original identity as a unique form of Arabic Literature.

To this end, translation, as it is likely to transform texts, also serves as a means of preserving some identity specifications. The next discussion is going to be focused not on preserving 'identity markers' in translation, but on how translation was perceived as a means of reconciling conflictual identities? So, a review of assumptions, thoughts and views that are central to the notion of reconciliation is provided.

3. Translation, Conflicts and Reconciliation: (Thoughts and Views)

After the works of postmodernist translation theorists (Even Zohar 1970, Andree Lefevere 1992, Tejaswini Niranjana 1992, Susan Bassnet and Andree Lefevere 1998, Lawrence Venuti 1995, Mona Baker 2006, Michael Cronin 2006, ...etc.), it becomes evident that translation is no more interested in the conflict of translators with texts. but in the conflict of interests (political, ideological, poetical, identitarian, ...etc.). Actually, Conflicts are inevitable in human lives, for the nature of conflict is rewarding. Humans seek that reward no matter how harsh the conflict is or was. It may, sometimes, lead to shame and even 'scandals'. Translation as a form of communication seems to play a role in sustaining that shame. Translations, for example, and translators, more precisely as language and cultural mediators, are the first to be blamed when a translation does not serve its specified goals. So, they may be 'the victim' as approved historically (Tyndale, Dolet ...). Or they may victimize the text and transform both its tone and its tenor (as what happened to Haiku and the Qasidah). They can even victimize others; that is, translating in wars (the case of using translation in Iraqi-American war to misrepresent Iraqis and Iraqi resistance force explained in (Baker, 2006)).

Since translation played a role in waging wars and creating conflicts, it can also be taken as a means of making peace and reconciliation. Reconciliation, which is the core concept of this research, is going to be inferred through the views of some scholars and translation theorists.

It is essential here to remind that postcolonial translation theorists affirm that translation has been used in many ways to maintain the superiority of the colonizer over the colonized. They also believe that translation is just a mere copy and that it represents the colony, while the original refers to the European colonization (Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice, 1999). However, there are views that challenge the notion of "original". In his most inspiring essay, "The Task of the Translator, John Benjamin speaks about the value added by translation to the 'original'. He believes that translation is not a copy of the original, but something that guaranteed a 'continued life' of that original. He also sees that "languages are...interrelated in what they want to express." He explains this interrelatedness (or equality in some sense) in what he termed 'pure language'. This pure language is, in turn, the task of the translator. Thus, every translator is said to create this language to allow the other to communicate with the self in a new mode (he calls it translation) (1923-1992). Benjamin also insists on the insertion of some newness to the original and stresses that translation is not a referential process. Rather, it is a process of

'supplementing' the original. But what if this 'original' belongs to the dominant languages of the *ex*-colonizers, like "English or French"? Clearly then translation maintains that dominance of these languages, and then the colonized remains dependent.

It is due to this perception that scholars from x colonies, like Tejaswini Niranjana, an Indian translation scholar, who, in her book, *Siting Translation History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (1992), approaches translation from a deconstructionist perspective, mainly Benjamin, Derrida and De Man's thoughts. She urges post-colonial translators to adopt a deconstructive strategy in which they intervene and dismantle the hegemonic rules of translation that has long been imposed by the colonizer over the colonized: British Empire vs. India. (pp. 2, 4 and 173).

Later translation studies draws attention to the way towards transcending such colonial discourse that perpetuate the conflict of identities. In his book, *Translation and Identity* (2006), Michael Cronin has dealt with questions of tensions and conflicts that originate out of the issue of identity. He perceives translation not as commonly perceived 'a threat to diversity', but as something that connects different people, who belong to different races. He urges to see the world through the eyes of the others. He says:

What is most objectionable in the existence of translation is the way in which it acts potentially not just as a viral agent destroying cherished pieties but as a bridge which connects different experiences, belief systems and cultural practices and opens the door to a whole new way of experiencing and interpreting the world. (2006, p. 120)

Cronin's Siting Translation History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context used two terms "door, bridge," which he thought are central to overcome tensions and conflicts of identities. Drawing on the ideas of the German sociologist, George Simmel, Cronin used "Bridge" to mean building bridges to connect the separated cultures, i.e., translating as bridging the gap of conflict, and by "door," he means translating as opening the door and accepting the differences between us. It is important to say that Cronin advocates the ethical view of translation. He considers that the work of translation, translation thinkers and translation theorists bring people of different origins together and let them have a 'dialogue' and avoid any potential 'evil' (p. 05).

Another way of perceiving reconciliation and diversity in translation happens to be Lawrence Venuti's influential formulations. His two notions 'Domestication' and 'Foreignization,' which he derived from his work on Shleiermacher and Antoine Berman. These two terms continue to appear in many of his works (his collection: Translation Changes Everything, 2013). Although he used these notions to condemn the dominant cultural and linguistic values of Anglo-American world, they seem to fit other considerations, like that of making peace between the conflictual identities.

Venuti reminds us that translation studies are there for the sake of preserving diversity through the adoption of a strategy that respects the differences uttered in the other's work, i.e., the source text. He says:

We should study these differences (*linguistic and cultural*), even when they occur unconsciously, but not in the hope of eradicating them. For they cannot be eradicated, and some in fact ought not to be because they are necessary for an understanding or awareness of the foreignness of the source text, that is to say, what makes that text different from texts originally written in the translating language and culture. The goal we should set for translation studies is rather the ultimately ethical one of developing methods of translation research and practice that describe, explain, and take responsibility for the differences that translation inevitably makes. (Venuti, 2013, p. 34 Italics added)

Like Cronin, Venuti sees translation as an ethical issue. His vision focuses more on texts; it has a humanistic dimension, which is to accept the differences of the other while translating and striving to 'describe/explain' what these differences are. He affirms:

The ethically and politically motivated translator cannot fail to see the lack of an equal footing in the translation process, stimulated by an interest in the foreign, but inescapably leaning towards the receptor. Such a translator knows that a translation can never simply communicate a foreign text because it makes possible only a domesticated understanding of that text, however much defamiliarized, however much subversive or supportive of the domestic.(2013, p. 12)

By advocating 'Foreignizing' in his works (*The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 1995 and 2008, *Translation Changes Everything*, 2013), Venuti believed that it is not only a strategy of translation but a 'humanistic translation' (p. 02) that works on saving the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text giving no attention to whether the language of that text is major or minor. That is to say, translating with respect to the other as another human no matter what his/ her origin or his language is. The idea traced back to the French translation theorist Antoine Berman 1985.

4. Reconciling Algerian and French Identities through Literary Translation:

The previous discussions shine up ways through which the conflictual identities may come to some kind of agreement and reconciliation via translation. They can be summarized in three points:

A. Translation is a process of supplementing the original. It grants it an additional value and opens up doors for fruitful interactions between the source text and the target text.

- B. Translation allows people to better know each other. It builds bridges and opens doors for connections in order to overpass any question of identity conflict.
- C. By adopting foreignizing method in translation, the self is urged to travel away and discover the environment of the other and, thus, grows a sense of intimacy with it and with its people.

This section discusses literatures and translations that have been produced before and after the Algerian Independence, in the hope of shedding light on aspects of reconciliation between French and Algerian identities and, thus, validating the hypothesis of reconciling the conflictual identities via translation.

It is important to claim, here, that Algerian Francophone literature, i.e., Algerian works produced in French language, are a kind of literary translation. Maria Tymoczko, a post-colonial translation scholar, in her article "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation in Susan Bassnet and Harish Trevidi," (1999), made a comparison between post-colonial texts and literary translation; she found that the two types of texts have many things in common, as both of them are involved in a process of transferring linguistic and cultural specificities from one linguistic and cultural setting to another. Similar attitude has been taken towards Algerian Francophone texts, like what the French editors wrote in their introduction to the Algerian novel *Nedjma*. They say:

Conçu et écrit en français, *Nedjma* reste une œuvre profondément arabe, et sur laquelle on ne peut porter un jugement valable si on la sépare de la tradition à laquelle, jusque dans ses reniements, elle ne cesse d'appartenir. (1956, p. 05)

Designed and written in French, *Nedjma* remains deeply an Arab work, which one can never provide a valid judgment if we are to separate its tradition, or even neglect it; it does not prevent its belonging. (My translation)

Algerian Francophone writers have a good commend of French language. Their writings happened to be competitive and challenging even to the great French writers and critics. Sami Al-Durubi, in his introduction to the trilogy of Mohammed Dib, speaks about the mastery of French language by Algerian writers. He writes:

They do have a good commend of this French language. It is very obedient for them in manipulation. They manipulate its use, in forms of expression poem, prose, stories and philosophy, better than great French writers. (My translation)

Algerian francophone texts, either before or after independence, have always been concerned with transmitting their messages through a language, which is not their own and expressing their political and ideological thoughts through an even homogenized form of literature, which is called "Francophone literature". As for Algerian

francophone texts, which had been produced before independence, they were characterized by a tendency towards decolonization and resistance; while –as previously hypothesized- post independence works are seeking a way towards maintaining good relations with the x colonizer.

The following discussion will show how reconciliation between 'Algeria and French' is sought through translating and disseminating Algerian literature in France.

4.1. Algerian Literature and Translation before Independence:

The French publishing houses play essential role in presenting Algerian literature to both French readers and readers worldwide. This is a form of reconciliation between France and Algeria if one is to consider the efforts of French publishing houses (Le Seuil, Julliard, le Plon, 10/18UGE in Paris and others), before and after the war of independence. These publishing houses allow Algerian francophone writers to tell the world through their writings that French colonization was such damage to Algeria and Algerian character, not as some thought of it as a merit. Before 1962, the main concern of many Algerian writers was to depict the Algerian scene and describe the pain and suffering of its people and, thus, urge for independence. The most notable writers which French publishing houses took care of were, Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Kateb Yacine, Malek Haddad and Assia Djebar. Their themes were freedom, equality, and the right of self-determination. Writing about some of those writers, the Algerian scholar, Abu Al-Kasem Sad Allah, confirmed that the Algerian writers were like Latin American writers, either in the way of their writing or in the subject matter about which they were writing, as war, conflicts and the need for independence. That is to say, both communities of writers were experiencing the same conditions. Saad Allah writes:

North Africa has been influenced by the American culture during the II World War....The American impact on North African literature appears in the great similarity between the circumstances and the environment, which produced the national literature in both America and North Africa. (My translation)

It is implied, here, that Algerian writers, among North African writers, were reading American literature, and so adopted some of its forms of expression. Actually, this is what Saad Allah asserted when he mentioned the French Claude Mani's phrase "The age of the American story," which characterized the era during and after WWII. Algerian Francophone writers of that time, according to Saad Allah, were calling for not only rebellion and resistance, but also for honouring and showing respect to humans as humans. The writer, Malek Haddad maintains that

We (Algerian francophone writers) have perceived Arab world as an ethical entity, a deep humanistic realization and a civilization that we presented to

those who do not worship humans but well-estimated them. It is a civilization that does not aim to be superior but great.... We are not aiming at parallel but at extending. We are in an age of respect" (qtd in Abdul Aziz Sharaf, 1991, pp. 69-70, My translation).

This humanistic attitude is central to the reconciliation of conflictual identities. The editors as well as writers and philosophers both national and international, like Franz Fanoun, Jean Paule Sarter, Ghandi, Chegevara,...etc, who condemned colonization, they all contributed in the realization of liberation and the spread of freedom all over the world. This is not to forget the significant role that translation played in growing such consciousness and need for independence worldwide.

4.2. Algerian Literature and Translation after Independence:

After 1962, there was like an attempt to reform the Algerian character and assure its belonging to Arab culture, through writing and translation into Arabic. It was in 1964 that UNESCO urged for creating a High School of Interpreters and Translators in Algeria, which resembles what has been created in France. It was for the sake of translating and Arabicization of both Algerian education and administration (Aissani, 2000, p. 481). Such a resistance to the use and adoption of French in Algeria has been followed by a stream of writing in Arabic. So, we found Ahlem Mosteghanemi, Tahir Wattar and Waciny Laredj as notable writers who wrote in Arabic. Nassim Harrar argued that those writers have gained their fame due to various reasons, which are: a-the conflict of generations and the urge to write an Algerian Arabic literature, b- the role of media and literary events in introducing writers, c- the role of translation. (2018). The latter was really an influential step towards an international reception of Algerian works, originally, written in Arabic.

In the same vein, there were Algerian Francophone writers, who are still proving to be the best among their French competitors. From 1970s towards the 1990s up to the present decade, Algerian francophone writers, like Rashid Boudjedra, Tahar Djaout, Rashid Mimouni, Malika Mokeddem, Anouar Benmalek, Boualem Sansal, Yasmina Khadra and Kamel Daoud, have all asserted their belonging to Algeria through writing about its social, economic, political and cultural issues. However, some Algerian critics, who studied works of writers, namely Boualem Sansal's Le Serment des Barbares 1999, Yasmina Khadra's Ce Que le Jour doit à la Nuit 2008, and Kamel Daoud's Meursault: Contre enquète 2013, found that the impulse that drives those writers to write is still dubious. For, they criticized Algerian society and its regime, as well as trying to glorify the presence of French in Algeria (2017). One might say that they were attempting to reconcile Algerian and French identities and live in a world without conflict, but still their writings seem to be never away from personal and ideological interests. Mohammed Sari, one of the translators of the above mentioned writers, admits that those writers were driven by French media, which love to criticize Algerians for issues of identity, religion and language (2018). This, unfortunately, leads to not illuminate the conflict but perpetuate it.

Translation from Arabic into French after Algerian independence is a form of reconciliation, for it paves the way for French readers to know Algerian people more appropriately. According to a study conducted on the situation of translation in Algeria, there were around 187 Arabic books translated into French in the years from 1974 to 2013 and most of these translations happened to be literary. Around 72 titles were literary works, whereas the rest was in various fields (2016). This active movement of translating literary texts means that there was a need for French readers to know an Arabic literature other than *One Thousand and One nights* and grow a sense of familiarity with it.

It is through the adoption of foreignizing method in translation that French readers would be able to recognize the specificities of that literature. Thus, open doors and build bridges to overpass ethnocentrism and the fear from the other, who is, in this case, 'the Algerian Other'. Translating Algerian literature into French requires more efforts on the part of French authorities and establishments for rising awareness about the need for a political and cultural reconciliation between Algeria and France.

5. Conclusion

It is necessary for a world that is characterized by a variety of conflicts to seek a way toward reconciliation and tolerance between its peoples. Translation is way of reconciliation in that it creates a friendly atmosphere, which is often found in the translation of literary texts. Readers of translation or postcolonial texts are said to empathize and experience others' thoughts and feelings; thus, they construct a sense of intimacy with them.

The act of translating Algerian works, especially literary works written in Arabic, into French is still demanding. The more French readers receive Algerian works in their language (which is French), the more they get aware of both past and present of Algerian people, and the more they stand by Algerians and urge French authorities for acknowledging its damage in Algeria, thus, taking a step towards reconciling Algerian and French identities.

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