

Bandia, Paul F. (Ed.). (2014). *Writing and translating francophone discourse: Africa, the Caribbean, diaspora*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. ISBN 978-90-420-3894-3. EUR 52.

Writing and Translating Francophone Discourse: Africa, the Caribbean, diaspora is a collection of essays edited by Paul F. Bandia that explores the common ground of Translation Studies and French/Francophone Studies, with the aim, the editor says in his introduction, of encouraging interdisciplinary work and enhancing scholarship and intercultural exchange in the French-speaking world. By presenting the essays in English translation, we may add, this transcultural exchange is implicitly taking one step further.

Some of the essays draw on a common theoretical framework, i.e. Édouard Glissant's "poetics of relation" and, to a lesser degree, his concept of *tout-monde*. Glissant, the influential Martinican writer, poet and cultural/literary critic, employs the metaphor of relation to envision a non-hierarchical geographical and cultural network of relations in the Caribbean that harks back to the concept of the "rhizome" as conceived by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: in Glissant's words, "an enmeshed root system, a network spreading ... with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently" (p. 67). As far as *la francophonie* and translation practices are concerned, the unequal – un-rhizomic, we may say – power relationships that still exist between the center and the periphery support the traditional binary view of the inside vs. the outside, of "us" vs. "them". The essays in this book, and in particular those drawing on Glissant's and Deleuze/Guattari's theories, seek to reconceptualize *la francophonie* and the role of translation, and transcend, as the editor points out, such binarisms, paving the way to a multidimensional approach to *la francophonie* and translation phenomena.

The editor's 17-page introduction is an introduction in the best sense of the word as it provides some necessary background, not only on Glissant's and Deleuze/Guattari's theories that may be less than familiar in the English-speaking world, but also on the francophone postcolony, its research, and the situation of francophone authors writing from the periphery, all with comparisons to the anglophone sphere that will be of particular interest to English/international readers. For French literature to survive as a global literature, Bandia argues, literature written in French but outside France needs to be integrated into the body of French literature, a development that he sees with optimism given the fact that, for instance, the influence of institutional gatekeepers like the Académie française is diminishing. He even calls for giving up dividing labels like "French" vs. "francophone" literature and maybe even the label *la francophonie*, as such. In more general terms, he sees the rhizome also as an apt metaphor for describing today's transcultural encounters and a new cosmopolitanism, with the inside/outside divide further blurred by the existence of multicultural cosmopolitan identities. This brings to mind the concept of the "Afropolitan" first popularized in 2005 by Taiye Selasi, a writer of Nigerian and Ghanaian origin born in London, in an essay entitled "Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)".

With a view to translation, Bandia points out the parallels between (post-)colonial writing and translating as writing in this context necessarily involves various strategies of translation. The concept of translation as used in this book comprises both its pragmatic meaning as interlingual translation as well as its metaphorical meaning as representation of the Other,

and is conceived, as the editor says, as a paradigm for comprehending discourses of representation of otherness as well as a paradigm for literary and cultural criticism, whether these discourses are mediated through literature, film or other art forms.

Not counting the editor's introduction, the book comprises ten essays (the following discussion of the essays will deviate slightly from their sequence in the book). In the first essay, Lieven d'Hulst looks at some of the issues raised by Bandia in his introduction, i.e. the co-existence of three translation practices in the francophone Caribbean: interlingual translation that highlights the borders separating languages and literatures; cultural translation that aims at erasing these borders and at the same time merges the roles of writers and translators; and translation as a tool to enhance the recognition of Creole languages and literatures. D'Hulst discusses the translation flows in the region that move from the periphery to the center more often than the other way around, and further points out that Caribbean writers increasingly make use of translation in their works not just on the level of language but also by introducing translation as a motif, characters who translate or interpret, or narrators who recount translations.

Christine Raguet draws on the concept of exoticism as elaborated by the French ethnographer, writer and literary critic Victor Segalen between 1904 and 1918, that envisions a non-hierarchical relation between the inside and outside/the Other, as well as Glissant's view of translation as creolization. Instead of translation strategies that aim at effacing intercultural distance, Raguet advocates what she calls "intercreation" or "tesseration" when it comes to translating Caribbean literature: the creation of a "mosaic-whole" that does not attempt to erase differences but brings elements from the outside inside to complement what is already there.

Sandra Bermann focuses on Glissant's poetics of relation in the context of world literature. Just as geographical regions and cultures may be seen as rhizomatic, she says, translations also entail "a movement outward, like the reaching tubers and roots of a rhizome" (p. 82). At the same time, every language in itself is multilingual and creolized, as it always contains also languages of the Other. Bermann convincingly shows how Glissant's concepts of relation and creolization and their close links with translation could open up new perspectives on world literature as a "mobile, polylingual and polycultural field, rather than one attached to a hegemonic center" (p. 68).

In her reading of Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Biblique des derniers gestes*, Samia Kassab-Charfi focuses on the author's ample use of hyphenated words. Hyphens are, of course, stylistic choices, but at the same time they act on the level of semantics, creating new images that signal a "centrifugal surge from the boundaries of the single word, pushing it to the limits" (p. 107); they add to the novel's multi-level ambiguity, and also force readers to engage more actively in meaning-construction. For Kassab-Charfi, the hyphens of Caribbean writers enable and encourage new forms of reading and, by extension, new forms of translating the region's literature.

A discussion of the hyphen also features in Tom Conley's contribution regarding Glissant's term *tout-monde* (*Tout-monde* being the title of one of his novels, and part of the title of a more philosophical sequel called *Traité du Tout-monde*) that invites, Conley says, "all kinds of reverie" (p. 111). The term may be taken as a visual signature of Glissant's poetics of relation, with the hyphen signifying a relation between the world and its imaginary entirety. Conley describes Glissant as a "writer of space", "investing, or, better, translating geography and

mapping in the register of his writing" (p. 112, fn). He discusses what he calls "the cartographic latency" of the term *tout-monde* and its link to "the writing of the world" (i.e. geography), referring to, among others, the 16th century Flemish cartographer and geographer, Abraham Ortelius, who is considered the creator of the first modern atlas of the world (fittingly named "Theatre of the World") and who described geography as "the eye of history" (p. 112). Glissant's *tout-monde*, Conley argues, thus hints at the perpetual translation between language and space.

A more explicit historical perspective is at the heart of Alain Ricard's essay on translation in South Africa. Ricard explores the pioneering translatorial and publishing work of a number of missionaries in Lesotho in the first half of the nineteenth century, tracing it up to the middle of the twentieth century. He shows how translation in this context, performed by religious men he calls "maverick dissenters" (p. 206), was a political gesture as much as a linguistic or cultural act of communication. At a time when translations from African into European languages were still quasi non-existent, these maverick dissenters already engaged in "dialogic translation" (p. 207), translating from and into Sesotho, thereby showing a European audience that literature in African languages did exist and was worth reading. In 1940, one of those missionaries, Victor Ellenberger, brought out his French translation of Thomas Mofolo's novel *Chaka*, a mystic account of the life of the renowned Zulu monarch who died in 1828. Interestingly, the 1953 German translation of *Chaka* by Peter Sulzer seems to have been the first ever German translation of a book written in an African language (see Kolb, 2010).

Marie-José Nzengou-Tayo and Elizabeth Wilson write not just as scholars but also from their own experience of translating Haitian and Guadeloupean texts. They are particularly interested in questions of translation ethics when it comes to translating the Other's voice in Caribbean texts into other languages of the Caribbean. Acknowledging the difficulty of the translator's task to find a balance between the reader's needs and the author's choices, they favor a strategy that refrains from introducing "authentic" language, such as Kreyòl spelling, that is not in the original text. What they call for is a cross-Caribbean debate on translation among Caribbean languages.

In many ways comparable to the situation of Caribbean writers is that of Maghrebian and African writers discussed by Réda Bensmaïa in his essays entitled "The Language of the Stranger". He speaks of "the razor's edge of language" (p. 154) with which these writers have to deal, and the challenge of coming to terms with living in a plurilingual environment while writing in only one language, the language of the former colonizer. As the Moroccan novelist, playwright and literary critic, Abdelkébir Khatibi, says, the plurality of idioms always implies that there is a standard model of reference, in this case French language and literature, in whose shadow these idioms were to flourish "as in the metaphor of the tree" (p. 155, fn). Bensmaïa explores Khatibi's view of this linguistic asymmetry and Khatibi's concept of *bi-langue* juxtaposing it to Derrida's view of language and focusing on Derrida's assertion that we never speak only one language and, therefore, that language is always inherently translatable.

Two contributions deal with film rather than literature. Moradewun Adejunmobi examines the role of what she calls "vernacular monolingualism" and translation in West African popular film. Vernacular monolingualism here refers to films that are produced in multilingual communities of speakers (who often do not share identical language repertoires) and make use of just one indigenous language rather than several. Those films are frequently subtitled into the country's official language, i.e. English in the case of Nigeria, with the initiative for the

translation coming from within the source culture and not the target culture (as is the rule in the case of literature). This “externalizing translation practice”, as she calls it, thus serves domestic agendas, one of them being fluency and transparency through the use of a Nigerian variety of English rather than British or American English, but with the local audience still able to perceive the foreignness of the film. Therefore, the combination of vernacular monolingualism and externalizing translation practices works towards strengthening the status of the indigenous language/culture and highlighting its value.

Verena Andermatt Conley deals with issues of migration, displacement, and exclusion as represented in what has been labeled *banlieue* films and explores the multiple levels of translation that are present in those films: linguistic, cultural, and visual translation. As Conley points out with reference to Rabah Ameur-Zäïmeche, an Algerian filmmaker who grew up in France, life in the *banlieue* and individual and collective emotions are translated into words, images, and sounds. The characters speak different languages and react in different ways that spring from different cultures and traditions and thus highlight the necessity of ongoing linguistic as well as cultural translation – translation that is sometimes even explicitly performed by one of the characters. As Conley says, “he invents an alternative cinema that is truly one of translation” (p. 203).

One of the merits of this collection clearly is that the essays cover a wide range of topics and various art forms, ranging from more theoretical pieces to more practically oriented contributions, written from different perspectives depending on the contributors’ backgrounds. The contributors come from various fields such as French/Francophone Studies, African and American Studies, Comparative Literature, or Translation Studies, and the bio-bibliographical information about them is definitely a plus. Another plus, as pointed out above, is the fact that the collection came out in English as this will hopefully facilitate and promote the debate between francophone and anglophone scholarship. While the fact that a number of essays are linked by a common theoretical framework is certainly a merit, a more systematic integration of Translation Studies concepts would have been welcome from the translation scholar’s perspective. This critical note aside, international readers will find a wealth of material and stimulating thought in the book, and it is therefore warmly recommended to anyone interested in writing and translation in Africa, the Caribbean, and the diaspora.

References

- Chamoiseau, P. (2002). *Biblique des derniers gestes*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Glissant, É. (1990). *Poétique de la relation*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Glissant, É. (1993). *Tout-monde*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Glissant, É. (1997). *Traité du Tout-monde*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Kolb, W. (2010). Noch nicht unter zu vielen Geschichten begraben: Englischsprachige Literatur aus Afrika auf dem deutschen Buchmarkt. In M. Wolf & N. Bachleitner (Eds.), *Streifzüge im translatorischen Feld. Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum* (pp. 278-292). Vienna: LIT.
- Selasi, T. (2005). Bye-Bye Babar. *LIP Magazine* 5. Retrieved from <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>
-



Waltraud Kolb
Universität Wien
waltraud.kolb@univie.ac.at