

THINKING *NEGOFEMINISM* IN TRANSLATION - INTERVIEW WITH TOMI ADEAGA

Dennys Silva-Reis [D.S-R.] *Do you have any experience with feminist translation practices? If you do, could you report?*

Tomi Adeaga [T. A.] Over the years, I have found out and have been quite critical of the way African feminine literature is being translated into German for example. African women are often portrayed in Western media including the German media as underdeveloped, helpless women suffering under patriarchal yoke. This perception along with the xenophobic approach to the African continent has also affected the way African and African diaspora feminist authors' books are translated into German.

[D.S-R.] *Do you believe that the profession of translator and interpreter is sexualized? If you do, what could be in your opinion the causes and consequences of that?*

[T. A.] In a way I believe it is and this is irrespective of the translator and interpreter's race. This is because most authors already feel that they are much more important than the translator/interpreter. They even become more aggressive when they see that they are dealing with feminist translators/interpreters. But the point they are missing is that the translator is the one that unlocks the doors of foreign languages and cultures to them. Also, they have a symbiotic relationship, which means that one cannot exist without the other. They therefore have to respect each other's work.

A third party in this is also the publisher. The publisher is often the one who looks for and engages the services of the translator. However, if there is lack of collaboration between them, which happens if the author is unable to work with the female translator and the book is nevertheless translated and published, it may have to be taken off the market.

Tomi Adeaga

Professor Tomi Adeaga teaches African literature at the Department of African Studies, Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies of the University of Vienna, Austria. She is the author of *Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s): Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany* (2006). She has published an article called "Problems of Translating two Nigerian Novels into German" In: *Acta Scientiarum Journal of Language and Culture*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (2008). She translated Olympe Bhêly – Quénoum's *C'était à Tigony* into *As She Was Discovering Tigony* (2017). Her areas of interest include African literature studies, African Diaspora and transnational studies, translation studies as well as Afro-European studies. She has gathered experiences as the founding secretary of the Translation Caucus of the African Literature Association (TRACALA), the *African Literature Association Executive Council*, and a host of others.

Dennys Silva-Reis

PhD in Literature from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). E-mail: reisdennys@gmail.com

[D.S-R.] *Do you believe there is a connection between translation (cultural and discursive) and gender?*

[T. A.] Yes, there is a connection between them, especially if the author is a feminine author who is trying to enunciate the dynamics of feminism in her culture and the foreign translator tries to diminish it because it does not conform with his and his society's notion of the author's society.

[D.S-R.] *In your opinion, to which extent (if any) the notion of gender of one given culture could be translated into another given culture?*

[T. A.] I have always strongly believed that translators do not just translate an author's book, but they also translate her culture. If the translator does not take the time to inform himself on the culture from which the author's work has been written, it may lead to false translations. This is the reason why some dedicated publishers send their translators not just to talk to the author but also to visit society that produced the author. It helps to reduce or minimize the possibilities of intercultural misunderstandings.

[D.S-R.] *Is there, in your opinion, a difference between feminine translation and feminist translation?*

[T. A.] There is a difference between feminine translation and feminist translation. If I were to use the African example, I would say feminine translators, irrespective of their gender, are those who pay close attention to the source text during the translation process. Feminist translators, which have been, based on my own experience, mainly Western translators. They are those who believe that they know what the author is thinking and feel the need to change the contents of the source text.

[D.S-R.] *Which would be the importance of translating feminist theories in the contemporary world?*

[T. A.] There is a great importance of translating diverse feminist theories in the contemporary world because it allows the readers to see that there is no such thing as one size fits it all for feminist theories. What may be the norm in one feminist society may be a taboo in another society.

[D.S-R.] *What is your opinion about translation and activism (intellectual or other)?*

[T. A.] Translation and activism go hand in hand for several reasons. One of the key reasons is that translation has not been taken as seriously as it should be over the last few decades. Despite the fact that translation theories have been developed over the last few centuries, translated books are still not perceived in the same light as original

books. This is where activism comes in. A translator must play an active role in the promotion of the work he or she has translated so as to ensure that they do not collect dust on the bookstore shelves.

[D.S-R.] *Does the circulation of feminist ideas through translation impel the emancipation of other groups of women?*

[T. A.] I would not say so because it all depends on the kind of activities that these other women's groups are engaged in.

[D.S-R.] *Do you agree that only white women can translate white women and only black women can translate black women?*

[T. A.] Definitely wrong. Everything depends on how good the translator is, irrespective of her race and even gender.

[D.S-R.] *Do you believe that men (feminist or not) have the sensibility and aptitude to translate feminine and feminist texts? What would be the challenges and the potentialities involved in this case?*

[T. A.] Yes, I do believe that men, irrespective of their race and feminist believes have the sensibility and aptitude to successfully translate feminine and feminist texts. The challenges involved in this are such that they have to be willing and ready to work with the texts and the author, if she is available. The potentialities of such collaborations are such that the finished production will be a reflection of both the author's and the translator's joint endeavor.

[D.S-R.] *Are there, in your opinion, feminist agendas compatible with editorial policies and structures? How to seek for some gender equity in this field?*

[T. A.] In my opinion, I believe they are because there are more feminist writers of African descent who are actively engaged in the field of translation and transnational studies these days that cannot be overlooked. Gender equity within this framework is thus easier to achieve today than it was in the 1960s as the field of African literature was dominated by male authors.

[D.S-R.] *In the history of translation few women translators and interpreters are known, let alone black women. Do you know any names? Could you talk about them?*

[T. A.] There are indeed fewer women translators and interpreters because women needed to catch up with their male counterparts. In terms of African women, which as you must know is not just about sub-Saharan African women, we also have female

translators and interpreters from the Maghreb countries: Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. There are also others from Egypt. One black translator stands out and her name is Wangui wa Goro, a veteran Kenyan translator who translated the Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* from Kikuyu into English almost thirty years ago. She has been at the forefront of promoting African language translations both on the African continent and in the African diaspora.

[D.S-R.] *In your opinion, whose is the “guilt” (if any) for the existence of more translations of white feminist theory divulged around the world?*

[T. A.] I put the blame on colonialism in most parts of the African continent. The adoption of the former colonial languages in most parts of the former colonized African countries stunted the growth of translation in most parts of the African continent. Apart from East Africa where the first post-independent president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere installed Kiswahili as the national language in Tanzania, which is also the mother tongue in Kenya, the lingua franca in Burundi, Uganda, the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda; other parts of postcolonial Africa have not been that lucky. A large number of the local languages do not have written traditions and therefore, this has retarded the growth of translations done by African women.

[D.S-R.] *Can translation contribute to the revival of canonical feminist literature in the fields of humanities?*

[T. A.] Yes, it can. If there are more African women and women of color translating books written by our foremothers in particular and the rest of the world in general, then it will contribute to the revival of feminist literature as a whole.

[D.S-R.] *Do you have knowledge about any projects of non-hegemonic feminist translation? If you do, could you please tell us which they are and how they function?*

[T. A.] No, I am not aware of any. This is due to the fact that given the very small pool of African women and women of color translators and interpreters, they mainly work with translators and interpreters from all over the world.

[D.S-R.] *In your opinion, could translation projects contribute to synergies involving nationalism and feminism simultaneously?*

[T. A.] Yes, it is possible, at least with female African translators and interpreters. This is in part because African feminists work with grassroots women and when it is time to come together for a female cause, it makes easier to work together and collaborate on various issues.

[D.S-R.] *What would you suggest to achieve a less sexist language in translation?*

[T. A.] Female translators tend to be quite sensitive to the usage of sexist language in the source language. It always helps to work with the author (if available) to minimize the use of sexist language in the target language.

[D.S-R.] *Do you believe it is possible to identify some textual typologies related to gender? If you do, in what way? If you don't, why not?*

[T. A.] From my experience in reading narratives on the African people written by Western, or more specifically former colonists, there is a pattern in the way black gender is portrayed that is different from the way blacks portray themselves.

[D.S-R.] *What could be a good metaphor for (black) feminist translation?*

[T. A.] A good metaphor should be the one used by the African feminist theorist, Obioma Nnaemeka called: NEGOFEMINISM. That is No- Ego feminist translation.

[D.S-R.] *Is it possible to learn how to translate feminism or how to do a feminist translation?*

[T. A.] Apart from the fact that the source text dictates the way the translation is carried out, one can also translate feminism by being sensitive to the implications of the words chosen during the translation process.