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Translating the African Postcolony:The Conflict of Selves, Intercultural Dialogue and the Location of the Translator in the German Translation of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

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Abstract
The translation of African postcolonial literatures into Western languages bespeaks the cultural encounter and intercultural relations of asymmetry that subsists at the dialogic and discursive spheres in the African postcolony between "ex-colonized" African cultures and societies and "ex-colonizer" Western cultures and societies. It also mirrors the location-in-conflict of the translator, especially the Western translator, of African postcolonial literatures, who deliberately or not, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or subconsciously mediates the conflict of cultural identities. This paper illustrates this in-between location-in-conflict of the Western translator of postcolonial African literatures in the German translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*and points to the critical position of the translator of African postcolonial texts in the dialogue between cultures in asymmetrical relations and, consequently, the ethical demand on the him/her to provide adequate and true representation of the identity of African source cultures in order to promote a progressive dialogue between cultures.

Introduction

The African postcolonial society is characterized by relations of asymmetry with the West and the presence of imperial structures of colonization still highly functional and corrosive long after the period of bounded colonial subjectivities. These relations of asymmetry subsist in various spaces and dimensions of conflict: symbolic, dialogic and discursive, as well as practical. In each of these spaces, critical issues of the relations revolve around questions of knowledge, cultural identity, hegemony and subjectivity, truth, and power.

African cultures, as constituents of the African cultural self, though pluralistic and diverse, expressed themselves, and considerably still do express themselves, in a spiritual communal ethos by which the individual realises him/herself in the collective. This communal ethos characterised itself as one that is rooted in a spiritual sense of kinship with all that is dead, alive and unborn and with nature and applies to morals and manners, habits, social organisations and institutions.

Colonialism, underpinned by the false claims that Africans have no culture and history, ruptured this African cultural self and diffused it with new attitudes

> that were contradictory and richly complex models in terms of culture, spiritual values and their transmissions; as it also broke the culturally unified and religiously integrated schema of most African societies ... trivializing the whole traditional mode of life and its spiritual framework (Mudimbe1988, 4-5).

This rupture displaces African cultures to the margin, subordinating and subjecting their societies to exploitation and underdevelopment. Furthermore, it leaves Africa with a double consciousness

of self and in a condition of having to (re)discover, represent and assert itself in conflict with the erroneous claims of the West.

Chinua Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart*[1](*TFA*), which his other historico-cultural novel *Arrow of God* (*AOG*) mirrors and expands, initiated the active dialogic and discursive engagement of the West through narratives to correct the negative and dehumanizing portrayals of the African cultural self, and to raise the voice and presence of Africa on the world cultural relations stage. The merits of these Achebean novels are widely acknowledged internationally. However, the conflict of determining cultural knowledge and relations continues in the intercultural textual media including the translation of narratives. The translator, especially the Western translator of African postcolonial narratives, is caught in the twists and turns of opposing narratives, contestations of meanings and identities and in the asymmetry of cultural relations. He/she becomes involved, deliberately or not, in creating modes of writing or rewriting the Self and the Other. This phenomenon of the translator's location-in-conflict in intercultural textual relations is explored and illustrated in this paper with specific reference to the translation of Achebe's two novels – *TFA* and *AOG* – into German. This paper begins by conceptualising the conflicting contexts of African and Western cultural selves: first, in the African Postcolony and then, with regard to the writing and the translator of African postcolonial literature. It further conceptualises the significance of cultural identity in the translation of African postcolonial literature and the potential of translation and translators to privilege cultures in postcolonial translation contexts. It identifies and illustrates the problematic location of the Western translator of African postcolonial literary texts using *TFA* and *AOG*, which were translated into German – respectively by Dagmar Heusler and Evelin Petzhold; and by M. von Schweinitz revised by Gudrun Honke. The paper concludes on the critical positioning or location of translations/translators in mediating the dialogue between African and Western cultures in relations of asymmetry, and the need, therefore, for an adequate and true representation of cultures in postcolonial translation contexts that will promote a fruitful and progressive dialogue between cultures.

[1] There was an 'East German' translation of TFA by Richards Moering with the same title as that of the 'West German' version: Okonkwo oder Das Alte stürzt published 1959 in Stuttgart by Goverts Verlag. This 'East German' version supported the communist ideology in practice in East Germany at that time. It is, however, no longer in print and its publisher no longer exists. Besides with the reunification of the two Germany's in 1990, the dominant translation of TFA is the 'West German' version, which supported the capitalist ideology of the West. A new translation of TFA in German by Uda Strätling appeared April this year which is useful for comparative studies. The former 'West German' version most presumably is the most circulated version through which the cultural knowledge of the Igbo African and Africa, in general, presented by Chinua Achebe in TFA has been received by the German readership.

The African Postcolony and the Conflict of Selves

The term postcolony literally refers to the former colonised world; but also, beyond that to the geographically unmarked symbolic, dialogic and discursive spaces of inequalities and conflicts between former colonised states, societies and cultures and former colonizer/imperial states, societies and cultures. Appadurai identifies the postcolony as a field or space of discourse and emphasises the need for the widening of the discursive field:

> There is a disturbing tendency in the Western academy today to divorce the study of discursive forms from the study of other institutional forms, and from the mundane discourses of bureaucracies, armies, private corporations, and nonstate social organisations. ... If the postcolony is in part a discursive formation, it is also true that discursivity has become too exclusively the sign and space of the colony and the postcolony in contemporary cultural studies. To widen the sense of what counts as discourse demands a corresponding widening of the sphere of the postcolony, to extend it beyond the geographical spaces of the former colonial world (Appadurai1996,159).

Conflicts in the postcolony are continuations of the conflicts from the era of bounded colonial subjectivities and have arisen as a result of the neocolonisation of the former colonised world by former Western colonisers and imperial states and cultures. The "neocolonialised" postcolony is characterized on the one hand by the continuing, but disguised power and influence of the imperial metropole (the West or 'former' colonizer powers) over 'former' colonized peoples, refracted through various forms of 'globalised' control of the institutions and structures, processes, frames of knowledge, references and discourses, values and ways of life of former colonized peoples (Eke 2006, 85). The disguised control uses various formal and non-formal, overtly forceful, underhand and ostensibly peaceful means to mentally condition the former-colonized to find repulsive, and to repudiate his/her own cultural self, preferring instead the Western self with all the institutions and structures, processes, frames of knowledge and references, and ways of life that constitute it. Such control aims to leave the former-colonized perpetually marginalized and excluded, subordinated and exploited. This disguised control is supervised in the postcolony by the postcolonial state, academies and institutions left behind by the colonizers or constructed after their models: these are being run mostly by surrogates and adherents of Western and imperial hegemonic structures and doctrines, who have also invested their personal and collective greed, their ostentatious indulgences and their ignorance in the exploitation, suppression and oppression of fellow Africans and African societies. Neocolonisation thus created a postcolonial condition of being by which the 'former-colonized' lives with and against the experience of 'still' being colonized, of being the "subordinated, non-white, non-Western subject of colonial rule" (Klages 2006, 153) after the period of territorial colonial subjectivity.

On the other side of the conflict, there have emerged in the African postcolony various manifestations of resistance – symbolic, dialogic, discursive and 'factual'/'practical' – to neocolonization. The 'former-colonized' intellectually responds to the awareness of this disguised

control by attempting to interrogate the self on both the African and Western sides hoping to recover and reassert his own self. This response is accommodated in the academy as postcolonial studies, 'Postcolonialism' being its theoretical frame. Its main directions of scholarship include examining by what means the colonizing powers "persuaded the colonized people to accept a foreign culture as 'better' than their own indigenous methods of government and social organization" (Klages2006, 153) as well as their cultural values and norms and examining by what channels and mechanisms this colonial mindset is being sustained. A major goal of these directions of scholarship reflected in the aim of Achebe's creative practice is, in his words:

> [...] to help my [African] society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. [...] I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my [African] readers that their past [...] with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (1975, 44-5).

Another dimension to the conflict in the African postcolony and of the resistance to and subversion of the 'neocolonised' postcolony is seen in the failure of the postcolonial African states and the subsequent pervasive disillusionment with the postcolonial order. The vacuum of authority and the disillusionment created by this failure have unleashed a seemingly 'chaotic' and violent engagement with the postcolonial order in order to bring about new legitimate bases of authority. This seeming chaotic scenario, in the African context, may construe Africa as a continent seriously turned against itself (Mbembe 2001, 68) with banditry, ethnic and tribal, regional and religious 'militancies' and war-lords up in arms against autocrats and arbitrary state power and against various segments of the satiated and complicit citizenry. Mbembe addresses this scenario thus:

> The upshot is an increase in resources and labor devoted to war, a rise in the number of disputes settled by violence, a growth of banditry, and numerous forms of privatization of lawful violence. Contrary to the assertions of a rather sloppy literature, however, such phenomena are not automatically indicators of chaos. It is important to see in them, also, struggles aimed at establishing new forms of legitimate domination and gradually restructuring formulas of authority built on other foundations (2001, 76).

These struggles are thus internal processes that negotiate or rather subvert and seek to overthrow, in the short or long run, the self-perpetuation of the colonial state in the postcolony and, in their place, to establish new forms of legitimate authority and representations that are not invented by Western gaze and reason. These struggles in the practical and symbolic spaces can be seen as complementary to the production and translation of 'African postcolonial literature'[2] in the dialogic and discursive spaces of the conflicts within the postcolony. The African postcolony is thus

[2] The expression "African postcolonial literature" is used here to refer specifically to African literary works deliberately written to rewrite and counter the false and Western-imposed negations on Africa and to recuperate the reality and integrity of the African cultural self. They also reflect these conflicts of inequalities going on in the African continent.

the space of unbounded imperialism inhabited by both the former colonizer and the former colonized selves, locked in asymmetrical relationship and in the conflict and contestation of knowledge, meaning and identities (cf. Eke 2006, 87). In this postcolony, the political, economic, cultural and conceptual, as well as institutional structures on which colonial and neocolonial occupation and imperial control were and are based assert dominance in the face of their being interrogated and resisted in order to be surpassed by the disciplinary project of postcolonialism (cf. Young 2001, 60, Ghandi 1998, 4).All these conflicts and seeming chaos in the African postcolony revolve around questions of knowledge, identity and representation – self-identification, self-definition and assertion; self-perpetuation; inequality, hegemony and subjectivity; truth and power.

Does Cultural Identity Matter?

Cultural identity is a vexed and problematic concept especially in the face of the critical propositions of postmodernism that sees identity as non-homogeneous or hybrid, unstable, always changing and changeable at will. (cf. Bauman 1996, 18-19). In this problematic conception of cultural identity, Hall has distinguished two strands of 'thinking' in his discussion of the Carribean diasporic self. First is the view of cultural identity in terms of "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common."

> Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (1996, 111).

The second thinking accounts for the discontinuities and transformations of 'being' brought about by "the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (112). In this sense, cultural identity is conceived as a hybrid identity formed by the continuous multicultural accommodation and interpenetration of different cultures, each of which is partially detached from the 'monolithic' and shared codes of culture it originates, to which it cannot literally and absolutely return but which it (re)constructs and steadily connects with through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth, and representations (113). This hybrid identity is ‘being’ which is always in the process of 'becoming'; it belongs to the past as well as to the future. It has no fixed essence but unstable points of suture or identification (113). Hall illustrates the Caribbean diasporic self by showing its three constitutive presence or 'Selfs': Presence Africaine, Presence, Européenne, and Presence Americaine. Hall states:

> Presence Africaine is the site of the repressed. Apparently silenced beyond memory by the power of the experience of slavery, Africa was, in fact present everywhere: in the everyday life and customs of the slave quarters, in the languages and patois of the plantations, in names and words, often disconnected from their taxonomies, in the secret syntactical structures through which other languages were spoken, in the stories and

> tales told to children, in religious practices and beliefs, in the spiritual life, the arts, crafts, musics and rhythms of slave and post-emancipation society. Africa, the signified which could not be represented directly in slavery, remained and remains the unspoken, unspeakable 'presence' in Caribbean culture. It is 'hiding' behind every verbal inflection, every narrative twist of Caribbean cultural life. It is the secret code with which every Western text was 're-read'. It is the ground-bass of every rhythm and bodily movement. This was - is - the 'Africa' that 'is alive and well in the diaspora' (Baumann 1996, 116).

Important, however, is that each of the disparate cultures in a hybrid identity has its essence, meaning and stability linked (though not in absolute terms) to its origin outside the hybrid self; and despite hybridity, it is still possible to recognise 'differences' – to recognise what is African, European and American in the Caribbean hybrid self. Furthermore, the past of a culture can, therefore, still be relevant to understanding it and relating with it in the present.

Hall's conceptions thus still suggest the possibility of talking about identificatory features and codes of culture that weave a cultural identity. These features and codes comprise that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor 1992, 4); types of economy and technology, art and architecture, modes of entertainment, legal systems, religion, systems of education and upbringing, and much else besides; "everything, in other words, by virtue of which members of a group endow their activities with meaning and significance" (O'Hear1998,747); in short, "those mentifactual, sociofactual and artifactual aggregates which in turn define and constitute the way we are born, live, die and [are]buried – our culture and civilization" (Afigbo2000, para. 1). These features and codes constitute the body of organic and shared meanings by which a people or a society is identified and differentiated, and by which it orders relations within itself and with others outside itself. It is thus possible, even by Hall's conception, to conceive of an African cultural identity in the singular with reference to those shared traits, attributes and features of African cultures, which "when considered together make all the rest a logical complement, i.e. non-African" (Udeani 2001, 74).

However, cultural identity is formed not just by the numerical assemblage of these identificatory features but also through the discursive perception, interpretation and ascription of these features and codes in intersocial and intercultural relations. Cultural identity thus has equal reference to the socio-culturally constructed and contested perception of the self. It is "who we are – that is, who we perceive ourselves to be or are perceived by others to be ... Our conceptions of who we are as social beings" (Moya 2000, para. 10). This perception and conception of the 'Self' or the 'other' is 'voiced' in speech acts whether semiotically embedded or verbally expressed such that "Who we are to each other, then, is accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 4). Who we are will in no doubt be in relation to qualities and features which we appropriate or ascribe to ourselves, or which others ascribe to us.

The relevance of this conception to this paper is first in the implicit fact that identity concerns the contested perceptions of who we are and who we are not; and to that extent, it further implies an active process of representation either by oneself or by the other(s). Secondly, it acknowledges that identity "refers outward, with varying degrees of accuracy, to our shared world" (Moya 2000, para 10-11); our shared world being the socio-cultural context in which an identity defines itself. Thirdly, it points out the fact that identity can be constructed by the "other" or by others.

Cultural identity thus refers to the individual or collective self rooted in a common or shared culture from which it derives considerably its meaning, worth and differentiation. The destruction of a people or group's culture is the destruction of the meanings by which their lives and relationships are regulated, on which their existence is based; it is making them a "non-people" and leaving them without focus, vulnerable to exploitation and oppression and without an overall sense of collective well-being, safety and security, and the basis for collective action. Schoepflin (2001, para. 13) states in this regard:

> Collective [Cultural] identity provides a sense of security for its members by making the world meaningful, permitting intra-collectivity communication and constructing forms of knowledge that allow the individual to lead a life without having constantly to make (new) sense of whatever phenomenon he/she encounters. The world is made rational by becoming meaningful.

As a result, cultural identities develop ways and means for self preservation, one of which is to protect and preserve the meanings on which each orders its life and differentiates itself. Schoepfling (2001, para. 14) affirms this when he states:

> Collective identities protect their meanings. They do so by establishing boundary mechanisms and boundary filters, which ensure that ideas external to the community are never received in full, for if they were, they could devastate the sense of collective self by introducing a tidal wave of innovation which the receiving community had no cognitive means of ordering.

Further to the above, the strategic importance of cultural identity is also found in the fact that in the structural inequality that characterizes most societies and the international system, cultural belonging or identity is the most critical criterion in the assignment of worth and significance and in the distribution of national and international economic, political and socio-cultural goods and privileges. As Moya (2000, para. 10) puts it:

> The significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories. Who we are [...] will significantly affect our life chances: where we can live, whom we will marry (or whether we can marry), and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us.

The competitive struggle for international socio-cultural, political and economic goods and resources and privileges, the struggle for who gets what, where, when and how much (based considerably on collective cultural identities), and the struggle by some people to assert their

human dignity by affirming their cultural identities predicate the deliberate effort by people to construct or deconstruct cultural identities, to sustain or subvert cultural hegemonies and dominations through several means. Carson (cf. 2002, para. 4-5) shows the relation between culture and human dignity. Drawing on the African-American experience, he observes that:

> Anthropologists say that producing and transmitting culture is what makes us human and distinguishes us from our primate cousins. [...] People of African descent, particularly in the Americans, are alleged, according to much of the social-scientific literature, to have the distinction of having race, but it is difficult to find a serious analysis of our culture. So, we are denied having a "real culture" (2002, para. 12).

And further:

> For people of African heritage in America, race was not only associated with culture, it became culture. Our various social practices have not been taken seriously as expressions of culture, but they are – especially in the conventional literature, though less so now – seen more as pathological adaptations to American slavery and subsequent social inequality. In this way, our social practices are seen as acultural, not really cultural, and expressions of social dysfunction (Carson 2002, para. 11).

Carson's view leads to the inference that in ascribing to Africans a 'culture' that is equivalent to race, they are denied not only the possession of a real culture, but also their humanity and any dignity that goes with being human; and since they are "sub-human," the declaration of Human Rights, for instance, may not apply to them or, at least, not in equal measure. Furthermore, they are regarded to be inconsequential and, therefore, not given priority in the global allocation of goods, resources and privileges.

It is this relative weight of cultural identity in the national and, especially, global contexts that makes the channels for the construction, deconstruction, affirmation and disaffirmation of cultural identities like the media, discourse and narratives and their accompanying translation of texts key sites for intercultural communication, intercultural politics and relations, and for the shaping of perceptions and representations. In the process of cultural identity construction, affirmation and disaffirmation, especially in the translation of texts, cultural knowledge and its transfer across texts become very important. Cultural knowledge refers here to the body of knowledge of a people that comes from an awareness of, or familiarity with, their entire way of life including their values and beliefs, habits, customs and traditions, institutions and environment, their lives in the ordinary process of social living – indeed their mentifactual, sociofactual and artifactual lives – which has the potential of identifying and differentiating them as a distinct cultural group and of shaping or influencing perceptions of, and attitudes and behaviours towards them. This knowledge, thus, embodies all the cultural elements or features unique to a people and constituting, as it were, their cultural personality or identity (cf. Opie 2001, para. 28, Adams 1995, para. 1).

The Nature of Translation and the Location of the Postcolonial Translator

Translation is a textual activity that takes place at the crossroads of and within the difference, tensions and conflicts of cultures. It offers the great advantage of sharing knowledge across the boundaries and differences of languages and cultures. This sharing can bring about improvement in the collective understanding not just of a subject matter but more importantly in the knowledge and understanding of cultures; consequently, of peoples and of one another. This understanding can potentially contribute to mutually beneficial personal, intergroup and intercultural relations. However, translation can also account for the difference, tensions and conflicts that can exist between the purposes and motives set out for source texts by their authors and those set out for target texts by their translators and commissioners, clients, and receivers. The purpose for translating the same source text can vary with various commissioners and translators. These variant purposes may not always agree with the purpose and function which a source text is meant to achieve by its author. Various purposes for the translation of a source text call for their own set of strategies in the treatment and ordering of the message and meanings of a source text into the target text in order that each purpose is realized in the target text (Reiss and Vermeer 1984, 95-6, 100, 134; Hönig 1997, 9; Schäffner 1998, 235-236).

The above facts show the power of translation, of translators, clients, receivers, commissionners over texts; their power to influence, manipulate, and reorder knowledge in the translated text and determine how a source text and culture may be read, understood, viewed and related to by the target/receiver readership and culture. They thus can determine how the knowledge of the source culture in the translated text may potentially affect or not affect the attitude, behaviour and, even, relations of an individual or group to a cultural other.

Translation can, therefore, encourage intercultural understanding or exacerbate misunderstanding, prejudice and strife; for written cultural narrative (source or target) texts can create stereotypes of people and cultures that are usable in real life contacts and relations, and translations can be very well used to privilege the source or target culture to the detriment of the other. Bassnett and Trivedi declare that translation is a highly manipulative activity, while Chesterman (1999, para. 11) puts it even more elaborately when he says "translations change things, and so translators themselves are also agents of change, not just of preservation. Translations affect readers in multiple ways, they affect target and also source cultures and they affect intercultural relations and perceptions."

Furthermore, Postcolonial considerations or theorizing in translation studies lead to the view that the manipulations or changes that occur in translations can be the consequence of unequal power relations between 'ex-colonized' cultures and 'ex-colonizer,' imperial cultures. In these relations, translations/translators can knowingly or unknowingly privilege the dominant position of the 'ex-colonizer' culture by upholding the views or ideas about the former colonized peoples on which their dominance is based (Niranjana 1992, 3) or the translations/translators can deliberately or inadvertently erode these views or ideas (Döring 1995).

Further on the location of the translator, Carol Maier speaks of the translator as an "inter-venient being" located in conflict between his/her professional disposition to and his/her inner/personal involvement in the experience and reality he/she translates; "between a translator's simultaneous involvement in and separation from the text" (2007, 3, 8). This conflictual location can generate affective responses in the translator. He/she may become shattered and traumatized by the experience and reality he/she translates; or he/she may become 'aroused', for instance angry at and revolt against the experience and reality; and, therefore, he/she significantly alters the text such that the text now reads as a rewriting of experience and by extension the alteration of emotions, and, even, cognition.

This location-in-conflict of the translator is also poignant in postcolonial translation situations in which a 'former' colonized culture, from a marginalized and subordinated standpoint, asserts its 'cultureness,' its identity and argues for its equal recognition and voice through its narratives, producing new meanings and new representations of its self that refute the ones held about and against it in the dominant and privileged culture and society. The position of power of the dominant culture is important to it for its own sense of self worth, for the preservation of its privileges in its relations with the marginalized and subordinated culture and for ordering its attitudes towards it. Therefore, these new meanings and self representations by the marginalized culture, which are capable of upsetting the claims on which the position of the dominant culture is based, are seen as threats by the dominant culture.

The Western translator of the African postcolonial text, intervening in this asymmetrical relation of cultures is, in the context of this relations of inequality between African cultures and the West, located in conflict between adhering to a professional ethics of neutrality that may require him/her to translate the source text "adequately" and "faithfully" to the purpose of the source text; and, on the other side, to protect as much as may be reasonable the claims of superiority and dominance of the Western culture to which he/she belongs. To be faithful to the source text, the translator of a postcolonial text must transpose cultural and linguistic elements that are particularly problematic to the sensibilities or cognitive framework of the translator and/or the receiving audience. The translator ceases to be faithful if and when he/she obscures or mutes or distorts these cultural disjunctions (cf: Tymoczko 1999, 21).

The Translator in the Translation of *TFA* and *AOG* into German

TFA and *AOG* are interlinked by their setting in the African traditional past (Achebe 1975, 45); they both narrate traditional African culture and present the African cultural self seen through an Igbo worldview. *AOG* is both a "flashback and a consolidation" of *TFA* (Emenyonu1978, xix). Both have attained worldwide repute in their projection of African traditional cultural values and in the formation of the African literary canon. These novels, beginning with TFA, are written in response to the denial of the existence of African culture and history and the negative imaging of

Africa (n) in Western narratives. They represent pioneering classics in the boldest engagement of the West in the dialogue to present an 'authentic' African cultural self – i.e. an African cultural Self that is not contaminated by Western negations. They also prompted a vigorous interest into the investigation of relations between Europe and Third World countries that were formerly colonised. OUP (Oxford University Press)[3] acknowledge "Things Fall Apart is the novel that inaugurated the long and continuing tradition of postcolonial inquiry into the problematic relations between the West and the countries of the third world that were once European colonies." These postcolonial narratives of African culture and identity continue to be translated into other cultures and languages globally. These translations are critical to how these cultures perceive and understand the African cultural self.

In order to achieve one of the main goals that informed his writing of these narratives, which is to present an authentic African identity to show that Africa was not a cultural desert without values, thoughts and customs, literature and laws before the coming of the White Man, Achebe has to transform the English language into a "new English" or 'english' (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 8), which though "still in communion with its ancestral home" has been "altered to suit its new African surrounding" and to carry the weight of the African cultural experience (Achebe 1975, 28- 30). Achebe's 'english' in *TFA* and *AOG* reflects the Igbo African cultural environment through the transliteration of native idioms and proverbs; the transposition of native oral speech structures, tones and rhythms; richly drawn cultural characters and images; consistent contextual articulation of and allusive reference to the Igbo culture, among other devices, such that the English language is not only 'acculturated' and 'nativized' in the Igbo African culture (cf: Bandia 1993;Bamgbose1995, 20-22;Igboanusi 2002, 13, 38), meaning also becomes contextualised in the Igbo African culture.

This correlate of Igbo and English and now German (with regard to the translation of this ‘english’ into German) presents to the German translator a unique translation situation in which meaning could become triply contextualised where English, Igbo and German culturally diverge. He/she not only has to locate appropriate and accurate cultural references in the Igbo African culture passing through the English language (cf. Bandia 1993a, 61-62) and then bring them into the German language, he/she also has to deal with the conflictual relations of asymmetry between 'ex-colonizer' European cultures and societies and 'ex-colonized' African cultures and societies as well as deal with his/her own cultural location in this conflict.

I shall illustrate this conflictual location of selves and the translator with examples on gender and family relations and the treatment of women from the translations of Chinua Achebe's *TFA* and *AOG* into German. The first example comes from page 64-66, chapter 10 of *TFA*. In the narrative context, Uzowulu has brought a marital dispute between him and his in-laws before the

[3] See OUP (Oxford University Press) online Review, (2005) Reviewed Work: Isidore Okpewo, ed. Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Casebook. [online], USA: OUP. Retrieved from www.us.oup.com/us/catalog/general/sublect/LiteratureEnglish/WorldLiterature/Africa/

ancestral and highest judicial panel of the entire clan – the Egwugwu. His in-laws have forcefully taken back their daughter (his wife) on account of several cases of wife battering by Uzowulu. At the end of the proceedings, the Egwugwu rules that Uzowulu should go to his in-laws with the traditional pot of wine and plead for his wife's return, reminding him of the wisdom of the clan according to which "it is not bravery when a man fights a woman"(66). The translators rendered this wisdom of the clan in the German translation as:

> Es zeugt wahrlich nicht von Tapferkeit, wenn sich ein Mann mit seiner eigenen Frau schlägt. (It does not show bravery at all, when a man fights with his own wife. trans. p. 106)

preferring to translate what the textual speaker should or could be saying in the context or situation and not what he has said.

The replacement of '[...] a man fights a woman' with '[...] a man fights with his own wife.' amplifies the narrative situation or context in the proverb. Although this translation appears to capture the precise social situation of the narrative context, it, however, perhaps unknown to the translators, contests the truth of a gender relation established and acceptable within the culture. This is because it modifies the perspective and meaning of the proverbial wisdom in the socio-culture of the Igbo African, thus misrepresenting them and suppressing this knowledge of the Igbo African culture to the target readers.

"A woman" in the proverb and in the culture includes 'wife' and 'non-wife'. The proverb aptly fits the precise situation in the narrative context without the substitution made in the translation. It also presents the relations between man and woman acceptable within the culture. In the Igbo African culture, it is not bravery for a man to fight 'any' woman. The substitution made in the translation not only permits the erroneous view that in the Igbo African culture a man may justifiably fight (or, inferably from the narrative context, beat) a woman that is not his own wife, It also, through the backdoor, permits a misunderstanding of the source culture as justifying wife-beating in another sense: if the source culture justifies 'woman-battering', then it justifies wife-battering, for it implicitly connotes that a man, by the translation, can justifiably fight (or beat) a woman, who though married, is not his own wife; and a wife in the culture is, in all practical sense, necessarily a woman. A combined reading of both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* clearly shows that the Igbo African culture regards wife-battering to be the evidence of a dysfunctional or soured marital relation that needed to be healed or restored; and the culture also provides the institutions and mechanisms for such healing and restoration. A pertinent question would, therefore, be why the statement in the source text has been distorted to the detriment of an adequate understanding of the source culture.

Earlier on pages 50-51, chapter 8 of *TFA*, Obierika, Okonkwo's bossom friend, is giving his daughter, Akueke, in marriage. Obierika has called his kinsmen and his friend, Okonkwo, to join him in the performance of the bride-price settlement rite with his prospective in-laws. The bride-price settlement ritual is a symbolic process of bargaining by which a bundle of short broom-sticks of a certain number is presented by the father or family of the bride to the prospective in-

law family, each broomstick representing a bundle of cowries. Each family makes concessions by adding or subtracting from the number of the broomsticks; consulting among its members present each time the bundle is passed to it. This process continues until a certain number is agreed. During the process, Machi, Ukaegbu's eldest brother uses a proverb to emphasize the cultural meaning of the ritual process and the wisdom of the clan. Ukaegbu is the father of Ibe, the suitor.

> As the dog said, "If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play" (*TFA* 51)

This proverb is translated into German by substitution and paraphrase as:

> Aber wie der eine zum anderen sagte, "senkst du den Preis, dann will auch ich mich nicht lumpen lassen, denn dann ist es ein Spiel" (But as one said to the other, "lower the price, then I will also spend generously, for then it is a play") (trans. p 83)

The proverb comes from the observation of animal behaviour, more precisely of dogs playing. During play, dogs fall to the ground and roll over for each other. The proverb drives home the point that the ritual process of deciding the bride-price is symbolic: it is play, not quarrelling and not fighting; it is a pointer to the cultural expectation of what relationship should subsist between the in-law families.

The situation in the narrative context does not exist in the target culture. The translators, therefore, decided to insert the German colloquial expression "mich nicht lumpen lassen" into the proverb and to remove the animal reference, most presumably to adapt the proverb to the cultural sensibility of the target readers and to make the situation in the source text clear and accessible to them. The phrasing of the proverb in the translation is, consequently, adjusted to fit into a German world view.

The translation very well preserves the ideas of concession, compromise and sportsmanship that are visible in the Igbo African culture as seen in the narrative situation. However, the substitution of the animal imagery from which the proverb is logically processed and to which it owes a proper and correct interpretation of the bride-price settlement ritual of the source culture is apparently unnecessary in the translation. This is because the play life of dogs is the same in both cultures. The proverb, translated with the animal imagery, is still capable of giving the target reader unambiguous access to the meaning and belief of the source culture on the bride-price in the narrative context. There is, therefore, no evidence of cultural distance between source and target cultures associated with the animal imagery. The removal and substitution of the literal content can be seen as an implicit, perhaps inadvertent, adaptation of the context to a new market-dominated Western 'modern' culture. By replacing the animal imagery with the market-place bargaining imagery, the translation subtly introduced a shift in perspective into the context that refutes the presentation of the source culture that agrees with the purpose of the source text author. This new translator-infused perspective promotes a Western view of the bride-price in African marriages that differs from how the African views the bride-price. It decides how the Western target readership could or should read and interpret the source culture in this regard.

In the dialogue among the men soon after the bride-price settlement ritual has been concluded, the narrative clarifies that the ritual varies in its detail across Igbo clans, but insists that 'it is play' and not the selling of the bride as if she were an item for sale in the market. It condemns practices in the ritual that deface its true symbolic nature. Here is the dialogue:

> 'It was only this morning,' said Obierika, 'that Okonkwo and I were talking about Abame and Aninta [...] All their customs are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market.' 'That is very bad,' said Obierika's eldest brother. 'But what is good in one place is bad in another place. In Umunso they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks, the suitor just goes on bringing bags and bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always leads to a quarrel' (*TFA* 51).

The animal imagery in the proverb most strongly supports the context, meaning and identity of culture being presented by the author. The bride-price, is the ritual, indeed spiritual, representation of the blood-tie that henceforth binds the two families in marriage; additionally, its settlement ritual is a symbolic and public demonstration and declaration that, henceforth, the tie of kinship that binds the two families forbids them to injure or hurt each other. Disagreements between the families have to be settled through mutual consideration for and deferment to each other and not through fights. Dogs in play, in the context, symbolically demonstrate and fulfill the basic needs for 'society', family and friendship without any obvious, hidden or ulterior motive linked to monetary or material profit, or to exploiting or taking advantage of the other, as the market place imagery directly implies. It is in the bid to be precise and "politically correct" and to avoid such misrepresentation of culture as the translators have consciously (or subconsciously) done that the wisdom of the proverb and the cultural significance of the bride price is phrased in animal imagery. The animal imagery in the proverb is thus used to forestall a possible misunderstanding of the 'bargaining' in the cultural context in the narrative situation as 'selling'. The translation is inadequate in the representation of this knowledge and in identifying the source culture.

Such a mistranslation has the potential of enforcing or reinforcing an erroneous Western-mediated views of the bride-price in Africa as the market value of the wife and the bride-price settlement ritual as the selling of the woman – a devaluation of women, consequently. Such an erroneous view (and others like it), through implicit comparison, present targeted African cultural practices as inferior and objectionable, and encourage their jettisoning in preference for Western alternatives.

A further example comes from *AOG* pp. 73-4, chapter 7 in a scene that comes after the celebration of one of the major feasts of the clan (66-73). The ritual runnings in the feast of the pumpkin leaves have ended and the crowd breaks up into small groups of friends and relatives. Ezeulu's (the chief priest's) daughter, Akueke, seeks out her elder sister, Adeze. While they exchange pleasantries, Ugoye, Ezeulu's third and last wife, joins them. She embraces Adeze whom she calls "mother of my husband" (*AOG* 73). Further into the discussion between the three

women, Adeze light-heartedly accused Matefi (Ezeulu's elder wife) and Ugoye of half-hearted commitment to Ezeulu's welfare, for which offence she (Adeze) would exact 'a fine or two' from the women. To this accusation, Ugoye cries out to Adeze in mock fear, "*please husband, I implore you*" (*AOG* 74) (Emphasis mine).

In the discussion among the women above, Adeze asserts the right to judge what happens in her father's house, though now married in another village, a right that Ugoye acknowledges with the expression "please." The basis of this assertion is to be found in Adeze's status as First daughter. Ugoye calls Adeze "husband" creating an ambiguity with that term for the target reader: how could Adeze, a woman and first daughter to Ezeulu, husband to Ugoye, be described as husband to her father's wife? The expression used by Ugoye here has been erroneously processed and rendered by modulation as: "Bitte, Herrin, ich flehe dich an!" (trans. 93), i.e. Please Mistress, I beseech you.

The translator may be said to be observing double 'caution' here: firstly, to find a functional replacement for "*please, husband*" that removes the possibility of ascribing lesbian practices to the Igbo African culture by the target reader and, secondly, to maintain the nature of authority between husband and wife in the source culture. Although the idea of 'a superior' is maintained in the replacement of the masculine term 'husband' with the feminine term 'mistress', mistress does not assume the conviviality that is possible in a husband-wife relationship. Above all, the replacement of 'husband' with 'mistress' ignores the deep gendered cultural meaning associated with 'husband' as used in the context. This meaning can only be found in the source culture, not in the narrative text alone.

Among the most important socio-cultural female-focused familial and kinship groupings that are institutionalized in the Igbo African culture are the "Umuada" and the "Umu-Iyom" or "Iyemdi" (cf. Onyeozil 2002). "Umuada" refers narrowly to the "first daughters" of the family or kindred. However, as a socio-cultural institution, it refers broadly to all the patrilineal daughters of the family, kindred, village or community as the case may be. A 'Nwada' (patrilineal daughter) may be married, unmarried, divorced or widowed but she belongs to the family or kindred by birth. The Umuada usually come back to their father's family or community whenever the need arises. The "Umu-Iyom" or "Iyemdi" are women who belong to the family or kindred by marriage.

Traditional roles give more influence and power to the Umuada. An area in which the Umuada has a strong mediatory and adjudicatory role is that of marital relationships within the family and the enforcement of traditional rites of widowhood on the Iyemdi. The Umuada can call to order an Iyemdi who conducts herself improperly to her husband. An Iyemdi whose conduct has been judged to be severely detrimental or threatening to the well-being and, sometimes, even to the life of her husband, and, therefore, to the patrilineage, and who has ignored or resisted previous admonitions to change, may be sent packing from her matrimonial home by the Umuada. The Umuada can also call to order a husband who maltreats his wife. This

means, therefore, that in an intractable marital crisis the Umuada can play mediatory roles in their family of birth. Either the man or his wife may bring the matter to the family Umuada and invite them to intervene in the strained relationship or the Umuada may take the initiative to mend a strained marital relationship in the paternal family or kindred. The Umuada also have a strong voice and participation in non-marital matters affecting the peace, progress and development of the patrilineage.

When Adeze says that she would exact a fine from Ugoye and Matefi for half-hearted devotion to the welfare of her father, their husband, she asserts her culturally legitimized role and authority as a 'Nwada,' who ensures that a stable and culturally sanctioned marital relationship and peace subsists in the homestead. When Ugoye calls Adeze "husband," in Igbo '*Di*,' it is an acknowledgement and recognition of "maleness" or "male essence" inherent in the power of the Umuada or of a Nwada over the Iyemdi as an implicit extension of the power and principle, broadly speaking, of the patriarchal society and more closely of the husband. Onyeozili (2002) helps us to understand the meaning extensions of the concept of "*Di*" (husband) beyond marital relations in the Igbo culture. According to her:

> In Igbo linguistic framework, the concept of "*di*" (husband) is not limited within the marital sphere. *Di* (husband) is widely used in Igbo language to describe a range of relationships, which goes beyond marital relations [...] *Di* in Igbo language represents power, strength, maturity and other positive attributes associated with maleness in Igbo culture. [...] *Di* is also a neutral gender shared by both male and female in Igbo power relationships. For instance, a daughter is "husband" to women married into her extended family and all "Umuadas" are husbands to "Iyemdis" married into their kindred. Accordingly, it is mandatory in traditional Igbo culture for "Iyemdis" to fear and respect the "Umuadas" as their extended husbands.

The mock fear of Ugoye is culturally real. The modulation of "husband" with "mistress" in the translation may have been inserted either to conform the text unit to the point of view of the target culture and to the cultural sensitivity of the target readership or to correct a presumed mistake by the author or even to 'rescue' the source culture, as it were, from negative portrayal associated with lesbian practices. In any case, it amounts to a mistranslation and a misrepresentation of source cultural perspective and knowledge – and a distortion of source cultural identity. The translators, in the least, did not demonstrate adequate and true knowledge of the source culture. It is also curious that the translators were quick to correct the source culture and perhaps to rescue it from itself instead of researching it and sensitizing the target reader to this aspect of its peculiarity. This bespeaks an attitude of self valorization that represents the source culture as being both inferior and reprehensible.

The last example I will discuss is taken from *AOG* and is one in which the communal ethos of the Igbo African culture is subtly confused with, and imposed upon by, the liberal individualism and materialistic world view of the West. In the process, difference that is critical to the definition of a cultural identity is erased.

"*The assembly of elders and men of title*" comprises the leaders of the clan, Umuaro (*AOG* 15, chap. 2), which makes weighty decisions affecting the collective interest of the clan. In the novel, the first meeting of this assembly was to decide to send an emissary of war and peace to the neighbouring clan of Okperi with whom Umuaro has a land dispute (*AOG* 15-18). The assembly then meets again after the ill-fated emissary was killed in Okperi and his corpse brought home to Umuaro with no accompanying 'diplomatic' explanation. The assembly has to decide on the fate of the land dispute between Okperi and Umuaro and on what to do about the death of Akukalia, the slain emissary (*AOG* 26-28, chap. 2). In the third instance, Ezeulu summons the body to inform it of the visit he received from the white man's messenger and of the summons served on him to see the white man the next morning (*AOG* 140-145, chap. 13). In *AOG* (140), "elders and men of title" is used interchangeably with "*elders and ndichie*" (the living elders who are close to and represent the deified ancestors bound to the clan in communal kinship.). This means that the assembly comprises only of elders, each of whom is a title holder.

The communicative translation of "*assembly of elders and men of title*" by modulation as "*Gruppe der Ältesten und Reichen*" (trans. 26), i.e. "group of elders and the wealthy" is at the very least misleading and a grossly inadequate and unfair rendition of this institution of the source culture. The replacement of "men of title" with "the wealthy" is faulty for it potentially leads to the erroneous conclusion that the elders are necessarily the wealthy in the clan and, therefore, that once one is wealthy and rich, one is necessarily admitted into this highest decision making body of the clan; or simply put, that being wealthy automatically qualifies one to be an elder in the clan. It is a translation that touches on, indeed undermines, the value system of the culture.

Although it is true that obtaining a title (or rather some titles) involves huge expenses (cf. *TFA* 5, *AOG* 15), wealth is not the sole, and indeed not the most important criterion for the conferment of noble titles in the traditional Igbo African culture. A man's positive contribution and participation in the life and well being of the clan is a more important consideration. In *AOG* (69), Obiozo Ezikolo, the old man that drums the Ikolo for the clan, was conferred with the Ozo-title many years previously when he was a young man by the six villages of Umuaro because of "his great art which stirred the hearts of his kinsmen so powerfully in times of war". Besides, a noble title holder may still be 'stripped' of the dignity of the title after he has been conferred it.

Although the Igbo African society highly values personal achievement, this achievement is regulated by and realized within the communal spirituality that is the bedrock of the culture and society. This communality is rooted in a spiritual continuum or sense of kinship with all that is dead, alive and unborn, as well as with nature and applies to habits, morals and manners. In this communality, the ancestors, the gods and the spirits, and nature live together and endlessly interact with the living and the yet unborn. Personal achievement is not necessarily measured by the level of material wealth one has amassed for oneself but by how much concrete positive

impact one has made on the clan or community. A person can be very wealthy and still be useless to the clan or community.

Conclusion

The analyses of the cultural text units from *TFA* and *AOG* show that the translators knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or subconsciously have, on the critical cultural themes of family and gender relations and the material value system, woven into the target texts an ascription of identity to the source culture that sustains the Western assumptions of inferiority against it. The translations defeat the purpose for which Chinua Achebe wrote these novels with specific reference to those cultural themes.

Translations and translators are critical to how a culture may be understood and identified by the target reader in a postcolonial relations context in which inequality underlie the relations. The subtle and erroneous portrayal of the Igbo African culture and society as sanctioning "woman-battering" (violence against women), the representation of the bride-price as the market value of a woman and its symbolic settlement ritual as the market negotiation of an item for sale, the rush to correct and perhaps rescue the source culture from itself, and the representation of the Igbo African culture and society as ultra-materialistic, all demonstrate an attitude (perhaps subconscious and unintended) and strategy of demonizing the African cultural Other by an implicit negative comparison with the West's Culture and of support for the West's presentation of its own culture as the superior. This strategy creates antipathy against the African society, which is represented as backward in family and gender relations, for instance; thereby, establishing the purportedly superior values of the cultural background of the Western translator.

These errors are not just linguistic mistakes supposedly borne solely out of cultural ignorance. They are also intercultural encounter indicators in the conflict within the postcolony and they mirror the location-in-conflict of the Western translator. This is so considering, especially, cases where there are no pressure of cultural distance between the Igbo African and German European cultures to justify the changes introduced by the translators and also by the fact that ignorance is no justifiable excuse to wrongly identify and misrepresent a culture in the translation of a cultural text. Where a translator was not able to obtain the necessary cultural information, he/she needed, at least, to include a note on the ambiguity of and the possibility of error in his/her translation. Bandia rightly points out:

> Cultural value systems are difficult to grasp as they are intricately woven into the texture of the native language. A conscientious translator, therefore, must be willing to make the extra effort that is required to unearth the full cultural meaning hidden in the language. He must be alive to the two socio-cultural systems with which he is working in order to narrow the gap that separates them. His task becomes even more complicated when he is working between two languages of divergent socio-cultural backgrounds and the

> issue takes another twist when the translation is between the languages of the "colonizer" and the "colonized." (1993a, 56, emphasis mine).

The selective negations and distortions of African cultural values and practices in the translation of African postcolonial narratives into Euro-Western languages, as exemplified in the analyses above, amount to a falsification of 'African cultural identity' and a clear deficit in the optimal usefulness of the target texts to potentially promote intercultural understanding and relations. This is because the target texts are not representative of the source texts in the essentials of source cultural content. They rather subtly repatriate into the translated African text the Eurocentric views of the African Self contested in or through the dialogic and discursive narratives of the African postcolonial literature. By this repatriation, the 'ignorant and naive' Western target readers of the translated text are made to accept the distorted views as the true and authentic Africans' views of themselves; and African cultures are presented as the justifiable object of the West's reforming zeal. Forced reforms of African cultures based on ignorance and Eurocentric interpretations of African societies and cultural practices will only produce further prejudice, mistrust and crisis, and intensify the conflict in the African postcolony.

In postcolonial translation contexts, translation is more than merely a linguistic transposition from one language to the other. It is the location of a cultural encounter and an intercultural (textual) relation. The translator takes centre stage in his/her handling of questions of identity, representation, ethnocentrism and the subtle ideologies and presuppositions that underpin texts. He/she is caught in the twists and turns of these opposing narratives, contestations of meanings and identities and asymmetry of cultural relations and becomes involved, deliberately or not, in creating modes of writing or rewriting the Self and the Other. His/her task is exceptionally marked by the challenges of cultural difference that inhabit the African postcolonial text. The result of his/her translation has the potential of affecting how the source culture may be read, understood and viewed in the target culture and can, as a result, encourage intercultural understanding or exacerbate misunderstanding, prejudice and strife.

The invaluable significance of cultural identity and cultural knowledge in international cultural relations, and the relevance of, especially, narrative texts in the creation or perception of cultural identities make imperative the need for a more robust development and deployment of intercultural postcolonial translation theories and methodologies in the translation of African postcolonial literatures into Euro-Western languages. The deployment of such theories and methodologies will create the need for translators of African postcolonial literatures into Western languages and cultures to have a critical and dialectical attitude that is sensitive to the tensions and asymmetry between cultures, that is particularly aware of and seek to avoid cultural and textual practices, and ethnocentrism in translation, which block the development of a more democratic and equal relations between cultures and restrain the development of the collective consciousness necessary for a global progressive change.

Translators of African postcolonial literatures into Euro-Western languages will need to use translating approaches and techniques that give equal voice and self-expression to cultures in asymmetrical relations. They have to be courageous to sincerely acknowledge any limitations they have regarding their competence in the source and target languages and in the knowledge of both cultures and find adequate remedies for their limitations before embarking on the translation of the cultural texts of the postcolonial other.

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