THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATION IN BRIDGING DIVISIONS AMONG CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the role of translation as a mediating process between texts that are couched in *the languages of different cultures in contact. The etymology of the word "contact" goes back to the Latin verb "tango", which inflects "tangere, tetigi, tactum", and means "touch". The prefix "co(n)-.." is attached to "tactum", and we get a word that means "touching each other", "contact". In our* lived reality we come into contact with others who speak languages other than our own in order to conduct the business of living. For it to flourish, we need to understand each other through a third medium, a language which a translator has a command of, in addition to having fluency in the *languages of those seeking to conduct business together. Such a person"s role is quintessential to* the success of the business enterprise and must therefore not be assumed lightly. When executed successfully, translation serves to project both commonalities and dissimilarities among cultures, with the similarities serving to emphasize our common humanity, while the dissimilarities expand and deepen our understanding of what it means to be human. Using texts originally in a Bantu language and now translated into English, I argue here that access to the cultural terrains of peoples other than our own enables us to develop empathy for them, an empathy which facilitates peaceful and productive co-existence. If this were not so, why did my West African colleague object to me handing him a salt shaker, instead of merely pushing it towards him across the dining table? As we do in these parts, West Africans have a belief that handing the salt shaker to a fellow diner portends evil intentions.

KEY WORDS: translation, culture, common humanity, song, folktale.

1.0 Introduction

[255]Claudius (To Gertrude):

There's matter in these sighs,
These profound heaves.
You must translate them.
_Tis fit we understand them.

When a text, either in the spoken or written mode, is in a language other than the one which we have a command of, we need its translated version in order to understand it. Until we do, its meaning is as distant from us as that of Gertrude's sighs and heaves are from Claudius. The English word ‒translate‖ comes from two Latin roots. The first is ‒trans‖, for ‒across‖. This is a preposition which takes an object. The second root is the irregular verb ‒fero‖, meaning ‒bear, carry, lead‖. Its inflections lead to the form ‒latum‖. The latter is combined with ‒trans‖ to yield ‒translatum‖, which gives us the English word ‒translate‖. From this, we can deduce that to translate is to carry something across, across language, mental, social and cultural boundaries.

This way of looking at the process persuaded [256]Gray (1989) to write that translation is ‒a major life-

[255] Hamlet. 4. i. 1 – 4.

sustaining activity within the system‖ which serves the function of –unblocking the channels of communication to insist on the reciprocity of human feelings‖. This is because, when it is successfully done, he continues, it –emphasizes linguistic proximities rather than divisions‖ among different cultures in order to foreground continuities that unite humanity. This is the ultimate goal of translation towards which I have striven over the years. This, in the belief which I had arrived at after being introduced to the English-speaking world's literary canon, and after comparing it to what I had brought to that English Honors program, namely my immersion into the Shona people's worldview which is encapsulated in their oral traditions, the belief that each culture, each people, has a unique worldview which it encodes or is encoded in its language and stories, but which worldview displays significant overlaps with those of other cultures. For why else would that English-speaking world's literary canon be deemed to be incomplete if it focused only on the works of writers of Anglo-Saxon extraction without paying attention to Greek, Latin, German, Scandinavian, and Russian literary classics, among others, to which access was facilitated by translation? The reason is that these overlaps are the terrain on which humanity can negotiate non-antagonistic modes of co-existence in order to cultivate and project, in the conduct of citizens, life-sustaining attitudes towards the other. The word –other‖ is, in this scheme of things, a loaded expression, because it posits a relation of equivalence between and among comparable entities. These may be people, their languages, music or the culinary preferences which serve to partly define communities and nations. Herein lie the –reciprocity of human feelings‖ and the –linguistic proximities‖ which it is the role of translation to –emphasize‖ and thus foreground, and which it is, or should be, the abiding concern of those of us in the academy to impart to our charges. This way of viewing the role of translation was eloquently articulated by Steiner (1975: ix) when he wrote,

> The sheer volume of literary, historical, philosophic translation on which Western civilization has depended for its lineage and dissemination constitutes material for systematic analysis and reflection.

What Steiner was referring to is in part the body of successfully translated works that has had a defining impact on a considerable proportion of what we today regard as the English literary canon and which we give pride of place in our English Literature syllabuses. Many of our students come to our classes blissfully unaware of the rich oral literature bequeathed to us by our forebears, to which they should have access through translation.[257] But both historically and currently, it is an attested fact that when translation fails, cultural and national barriers uncompromisingly rear their ugly heads, sometimes with tragic, and at others with comical outcomes. This places a heavy burden on those who assume the mantle of translator. For apart from employing literal language, all cultures have

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[256] Quoted in Duncan Brown (1998: 8). Voicing the Text: South African oral poetry and performance.

[257] Two instances of failure to translate meaningfully used to do the rounds on Zimbabwe's urban legends terrain. One had it that a Shona man was on trial before an English-speaking magistrate charged with inflicting life-threatening injuries on another in a fist fight. The accused explained that the causus belli was that his victim had insulted him in an argument by saying to him –Your mother!‖ –What's wrong with your mother?‖ the magistrate asked. –He made it worse by adding, „Your mother's mother‖, the accused responded. –But that's a reference to your grandmother‖. In the second instance, the translator sought to hide his failure to render an accused person's alibi. It entailed the latter claiming that when the crime which he was being charged with was committed, he was in another village dining with relatives. And to put the issue beyond doubt, he claimed that the meal of **sadza** was accompanied by **derere** as relish. But the translator did not know the English word for that relish, namely –okra‖. So, as the legend goes, in order to save his job, he moved close to the accused and sternly warned him, –Change the relish to something else or you will be sentenced to life imprisonment!"

metaphor. One important view expressed by [258]Danesi (1993: 122) is that of the culture-specificity of metaphor, namely that speakers of all languages are endowed with what he calls ‒the metaphorical language programming capacity‖, and that the metaphors each language group lives by are employed to fill in gaps of meaning left by its literal language. This has crucial implications for the understanding of both ordinary and, particularly, poetic discourse in a foreign or second language.
For poetic language thrives on metaphor. Those who would understand poetry in a language other than their own have to contend with metaphor. The poet-critic [259]Eliot (1959:19), writing on the European experience, states the well-known fact that, until a few centuries ago, Latin was the language of learning in Europe, and that the use of national languages began in poetic composition. However, he observes that this resort to national languages

> … appears perfectly natural when we realize that poetry has primarily to do with the expression of feeling and emotion; and that feeling and emotion are particular; whereas thought is general. (emphasis added).

Further, he writes that whereas a thought can be expressed in various languages, a feeling or emotion cannot.

In the same passage from which the above quotation comes, Eliot‘s reference to a people having ‒its language taken away from it, suppressed and another language compelled upon the schools‖ and then their language ‒reappear[ing] in poetry, which is the vehicle of feeling‖, foreshadows historical events such as the Soweto uprisings. That historically defining moment, more than any other, gave rise to and popularized the Toy-toy war dance, which is anchored on protest song lyrics in the language of the people expressing their feelings and emotions. This national character of poetry was also highlighted in Zimbabwe by the spontaneous revival of traditional songs in the struggle for independence. And the lyrics of some of that music were marked by the widespread use of metaphor, what the Shona call [260]dimikira, for precisely the reasons given by Eliot, namely to avoid detection of, and thus hide, the people's subversive emotions and feelings from those who had power to punish them for harboring those emotions and feelings. On these linguistic features of that music [261]Pongweni (1982: 23) once wrote:

> Whereas the music of our home artists was characterized by innuendo, deliberate ambiguity and other linguistic camouflages, liberation war choir music (sung from the safety of Mozambique and Zambia) called a spade a spade - a reflection of the different political contexts in which the two groups operated.

Because dimikira carries the conceptual models that a people use to organize reality, it is the form of language that they resort to when they define themselves and their values: in settling disputes at a dare, ‒chief‘s court‖, or in counseling the young at marriage or on attaining adulthood, and so on. Such usage does not serve to merely convey emotion and feeling. It serves to define them, which Eliot recognized when he wrote that ‒Emotion and feeling … are best expressed in the common

[258] M. Danesi. 1993. Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language.
[259] T. S. Eliot. 1957. ‒The social function of poetry‖, in On Poetry and Poets.
[260] dima n5 > darkness. -dimika > speak figuratively (in metaphor).
dimikira n5 > figure of speech (parable, allegory, metaphor).
[261] A. Pongweni. 1982. Songs that Won the Liberation War.

language of the people …‖ because it serves to –express the personality of [those who] speaks it.‖

But Eliot admits that through translation, the literatures of the world benefit from each other. His intention in emphasizing the local character of poetry is not the same as saying that –... the function of poetry is to divide people from people...‖, since cultures cannot flourish in isolation. His aim is to highlight the difficulties which are attendant upon the task of translation when he says that –Poetry is a constant reminder of all the things that can be said in one language, and are untranslatable‖ (1959: 23). A particular difficulty in the attempt to translate is caused by figures of speech in poetry where, as [262]Nowottny (1962: viii) observes, language is used –... at full stretch‖.

2.0 The Translator's Goal

> [263]The translator invades, extracts,
> and brings home.

It is generally agreed that, in seeking to convey these deliberate ambiguities and other linguistic camouflages into another language, the translator must strive to maintain a delicate balance between translation and interpretation. To interpret, according to Onions (1933), is to –expand, to render and make clear, to elucidate and explain‖ the meaning of a text. It is precisely in that process that the translator's role has to be clearly defined. Such a person is ideally a mediator, an honest broker concerned with conveying only the essence of things carried by the source text into the target text. On this matter, Hatim and Mason (1990: 223 – 4) write that

> … the translator has not only a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural one. Translators mediate between cultures … seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning.

In their reference to signs that are culture-specific and which the translator has to struggle with, and to yet others which have significance only in the source text and not in the target one, Hatim and Mason here point to the translator's perennial quandary. For example, it is grossly inadequate to translate the Shona words –mvongamupopoto‖ and –mhirizhonga‖ as –pandemonium‖ for the reason that the meanings of the former combine both their lexical and onomatopoeic signification, which the English word lacks. Another example is the Zimbabwean National Liberation Army Choir's translation of –colonialism‖ as –hutongi hwemarudzi ekunze‖, a phrase in a liberation war song, which itself translates into English as –the government of foreign races‖. In translating the song, I opted for the latter because it conveyed the revulsion with which the government of the day had come to be held and which the word –colonialism‖ did not capture and, in the process, I yielded to my own ideological bias. For in that song, the choir was desperately appealing to the governments of free Africa to live up to their declamations of pan-Africanism by coming to the assistance of Zimbabwe's oppressed. The choice to use one translation rather than the other accords with Juslin's (2013) view that –the listener can perceive any emotion in music‖, and that there –can be no right or wrong about it.‖ Given that, Juslin writes that –The subjective impression of an individual listener cannot be disputed on objective grounds.‖

[262] W. Nowottny. 1962. The Language Poets Use.
[263] George Steiner (1975: 298). After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation.

Zimbabwe‘s liberation war music had a utilitarian purpose, namely to educate the toiling, oppressed masses about their lot in the context of colonialism and about what they needed to do in order to regain their freedom. It was not merely a channel of expression of emotions but rather one of communicating them. On this distinction, Juslin (2013) explains that

> The notion of expression does not require correspondence between what the listener perceives and what the composer/performer intends to express. But the concept of communication requires that there is both intention to express a specific emotion and recognition of this by listeners.

In that war, Zimbabweans recognized two types of hero, the soldier-hero and the composer-singer hero. Cognizance of this dynamic constitutes an essential aspect of the ideal translator‘s qualifications a la Hatim and Mason (ibid).

2.1 The Translator’s Challenges

When Zimbabwe finally gained independence, the new Prime Minister worsened the translators‘ lot by appointing some people to posts called ―Minister without Portfolio‖. This came out in Shona news broadcasts variously as ―Minister with no job‖, ―Minister who stands for nothing‖ and, worst of all, ―Minister who is useless‖. They were continuing a tradition which stretched back to the pre-independence era when they translated the news that two American men had gone to the moon in Shona words which suggested that those astronauts had begun menstruating. That was because Shona has one word, ―mwedzi‖, for ―month‖ and ―moon‖, so women go to the moon every month.

On the ideal translator‘s conduct, Hatim and Mason (1990: 24) point to precisely the trap which those Zimbabwean translators fell into when they write that ―Ideological nuances, cultural predispositions and so on, in the source text, have to be relayed untainted by the translator‘s own vision of reality.‖ Yet they (1990: 11) also advise that such translators ―… are those who are most in tune with the original author‖, and that ―the translator must possess the spirit of the original, make his own the intent of the source language writer.‖ By those authors‘ standards, this translator failed to negotiate the slippery terrain between a Shona text that was suffused with a freedom-fighter lyricist‘s nationalistic emotions on the one hand, which the former shared, and his remit to not taint the target text with a jingoism that was only peripheral to and thus diversionary from the main thrust of the liberation war‘s original ideological dream of replacing a racist colonial dispensation with an all-inclusive one, on the other. This suggests that there is a certain degree of inevitability in George Steiner‘s invader of and extractor from the source text bringing home extraneous matter that is inextricably woven in the source language.

My training in translation began, and ended, with my career as a student of Latin, which stretched from secondary school to the first year of University studies. My first Latin teacher insisted on his students not translating Latin texts into some language which he dismissively called ―Translationese‖, a hybrid animal between English and Latin, but which no one used in communication. Rather, he would have them negotiate with, and retrieve meaning from the source language and then dress it in the garb of the target language. He called it ―rendition‖. Rather than create their own story, he urged them instead to present the essence of the Latin text in English.

Many years later, I brought that advice to bear on my translation of [264] Zimbabwean liberation war songs, producing some English versions which a reviewer of my book, one of Zimbabwe's leading poets, described as –scandalous‖. Yet throughout my translating career, I have produced no other book that has been as widely quoted as the one in which I scandalized that reviewer's sensibilities. The translations which are discussed in this paper are informed by the now age-old wisdom of the Very Reverend Canon Robin Ewbank, MA (Oxon), then of Cyrene Mission School, just a short distance to the south of Bulawayo.

3.0 Communicating the history of social dislocation through song

What scandalized the reviewer of that book were my attempts to replace –gaps‖ of meaning which were occupied by non-verbal vocalizations in the composers' song lyrics. In traditional music, these may come right at the beginning of the performance but are usually placed between verbal parts of the song, when the theme has been articulated or has unfolded to the extent that the audience feels accommodated in the scheme of things. At that point, the listener who has ideological empathy with the issues being addressed is not satisfied merely by humming along with the performer. Such vocalizations are so suspenseful that they impel the listener to anticipate what the lyrics are leading to, and to do so by relying on the life experiences which both lyricist and listener share. Consider the following lines from Thomas Mapfumo's song –Chirizevha Chapera‖: –Traditional rural life has ended‖, which he composed in order to expose the human rights violations committed by the Rhodesian military on African people in the rural areas, which they called –Operational Zones‖:

Ho yihere mambo
……..
Ho here baba
……..
(Chirizevha chapera: Rural life has ended)
……..
(Hinga zvinonzwisa tsitsi mambo!: It is a pitiful sight, Lord)

and those from his other song –Gwindingwi‖: –A big forest, home to life-threatening knowns and unknowns‖:

Hiyaa ha
Ho yere ndende ndinde
Hiyaa ha

In the first two lines of the first excerpt above, there are only two words that can be translated, –mambo‖: –King‖, the Almighty, and –baba‖: –father‖, the Creator. But the others cannot. So the listener is left asking what the lyricist is saying to the Almighty. Within the context of a song lamenting, in the most heart-rending words, the depredations of a racial Armageddon unleashed on the lives of a people living a hitherto idyllic, rural life, the listener and the translator can hardly restrain themselves from retrieving meaning that gives verbal face to such vocalizations as –Ho yihere …‖ and –Ho here …‖.

The second set of vocalizations comes from a song composed to express disillusionment when it first became apparent that the new government was facing serious challenges in meeting its promises to the people of a liberated, independent Zimbabwe. In Mapfumo's song, the government's bureaucratic

[264] A. Pongweni (1982). Songs that Won the Liberation War.

and no-nonsense reaction to criticism had turned the Promised Land into a –Gwindingwi‖. The non-verbal vocalizations here come after verbal ones appealing to the ancestors to come and see for themselves what a hell-on-earth their land has become. In live performances, these vocalizations prompted and were accompanied by dust-raising earth-pounding dance moves by audiences, each member of which was propelled by their own and their community‘s disappointment with a government for which they and their departed loved ones had made sacrifices but which was now apparently ignoring their cries for the better life which it had promised them during the war. That is why this translator rendered parts of the song using words from Yeats‘ poem, among other –inventions‖ inspired by the spirit of the historical moment.

[265]3.1 Chirizevha Chapera: Traditional Rural Life is Finished

1	Chirizevha chapera.	The fabric of rural culture is finished.
	Ho ihere mambo;	Oh Yes, Lord
	Chirizevha chapera	(—Things have fallen apart‖).
	…….	……
	Chirizevha chapera.	(—Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world!‖)
2	Hinga zvinonzwisa tsitsi mambo!	This is a sad spectacle,
	Ona zvinonzwisa tsitsi mambo!	There's utter misery, my Lord!
	……..	……
3	Hoihere baba,	Our dear father,
	Chirizevha chapera, [X2]	Our communal culture has been dislocated.
	……...	……
4	Chembere dzaikanga mudyakari, parizevha;	The old women used to cook their favorite dishes, in the reserves
	Harahwa dzaiveza mupinyi, paruzevha	The old men used to carve hoe handles, in the reserves
	Mapfumo aichema,	Beating iron into spears,
	Mheterwa dzaitsviriridzwa	The young whistling in the
	mumakura parizevha.	echoing bush.
	Tuzukuru twaienda kumombe	The grandchildren used to
	Honde parizevha	herd cattle.
5	Hoihere mambo,	Yes, our people used to dance
	Vaitamba chigendeya	the joy dance.
6	Hondo inonzwisa tsitsi mambo!	War unleashes suffering, my Lord!
7	Vamwe vakadimuka makumbo nayo!	Some of our people lost their limbs in it,

[265] The texts of the two songs and the two folktales discussed in this paper first appeared in Pongweni (1982: 96 – 98, 122 - 123) and Pongweni (2012: 246 – 248), respectively.

Vamwe ndokufira ipapo, mambo!	Others their lives there, on the spot,
Vamwe ndokutsvira mudzimba iwe!	Some were roasted alive in their huts.
Vamwe vakatiza hondo kumusha!	While yet others ran away from the war at home.

3.1.1 Textual analysis of song

This first word in the title of this song has an ironic etymology. It is a Shonalized version of English ―reserve‖. On occupying the country, the British settlers carved expansive pieces of land with rich soils for their people to turn into commercial farms. The indigenous people were moved to poor land set aside for them, what the setters called ―Native Reserves‖. With time, our people came to call their home areas ―marizevha‖, in which each family was allocated about six acres of land for tilling and lived under the watchful eye of a government official called the Native Commissioner, but whom the Shona called ―M**u**dzviti‖. This is the singular form of a non-complimentary term which the Shona had used to refer to King Lobengula‘s Ndebele impis, ―M**a**dzviti‖, when the latter invaded Shona territory before Cecil Rhodes‘ Pioneer Column did the same in 1890. The Shona eventually came to call their way of life ―chirizevha‖. Despite this colonial history, our people still call their rural home areas ―marizevha‖.

In this song above, Thomas Mapfumo laments the demise of pastoral, communal life as a result of the 1970‘s war. We deliberately render some of his lines using the words from ―The Second Coming‖, because the intensity of emotions that suffuses this song bears comparison with that in the iconoclastic English poem. Mapfumo is here describing the same dramatic confrontation between two diametrically opposed modes of existence that persuaded Chinua Achebe to borrow a line from the same poem for the title of his widely read novel, Things Fall Apart.

Things were falling apart in traditional society because the age-old routine of the peasant had been rudely and mercilessly interrupted by the killing, maiming, torture and incarceration of otherwise peace-loving, industrious and creative people. To paraphrase Yeats‘ words, that ceremony of innocence had been drowned. Before all this, as the song says, old women were to be seen in the villages cooking their favorite dishes to feed their men-folk and grandchildren, while old men carved beauty from pieces of wood, and spears from iron painstakingly dug from the treasure trove that the Zimbabwean soil had once been. The young boys would be going out to look after the cattle, goats and sheep, the jealously guarded wealth of their families. All this done for the day, the evenings would be spent dancing the joy dance, celebrating and offering thanks for Providence's beneficence to humankind. There is a poignant nostalgia for this way of life in Mapfumo's use of the past tense. Why this fabric of traditional culture was in tatters begins to emerge in verse 6: ―War unleashes suffering. It opens the floodgates of hell, To swallow the innocent‖.

Verse 7 catalogues the series of what were now the routine occurrences in the life of the ordinary inhabitant of the ―operational zones‖ of the country. Armageddon came to the rural population when the Rhodesian security forces discovered that the ―ungrateful savages‖ were consorting with ―murderous terrorists‖ from across the borders. Their huts were burnt down, their cattle confiscated,

and their own food rationed or destroyed, all this in order to sabotage the ‒terrorists'‖ supply lines. Those who survived the official terrorism found cold comfort in the urban centers, the theme of Jordan Chitaika's song below.

Mapfumo is here, like Yeats in ‒The Second Coming‖, attempting to clarify his own vision by expressing the disorder which he saw around him, and by finding and defining those things in the older tradition which he held as valuable and necessary, but which were now in great danger of obliteration.

The comparison with Yeats is not made lightly. The point at issue here is that the Rhodesian white public had missed the bus: the message of an artifact eloquently adumbrating an earth-shaking emotional and psychological experience of the indigenous people, much like that of Yeats' poem, a product of their own culture, was hidden from them by prejudice and deliberate ignorance of its vehicle, the vernacular language. Their dismissive attitude towards things African, including the latter's music, was noted by Berliner (1977: 5), who was told by his White informants that African music was ‒charming‖ because, in fact, ‒All they really have is rhythm‖. The issue here is that, if the early White rulers of Rhodesia had had access to the meaning of African song lyrics through either translation or through learning the language in which they were couched, they would not have arrived at the conclusions which they did, describing their hosts, according to Berliner (ibid), as ‒genetically inferior, condemned by their constitution to remain in a primitive state forever, passive, docile and basically apolitical.‖

While Mapfumo's song focuses on the deracination of rural life and, in fact says some of the rural folk found refuge in urban squatter camps, Chataika's song below focuses on the squalor in those camps.

3.2 Ndopatigere pano: This is where we live

Chorus: Ndopatigere pano,	This is where we live,
Ndopatigere pano.	Yes, this is now our home.
Lead Singer: Uyai muone	Please Lord, come and see
pamakatiisa baba	where you have dumped us.
C.: Isu ndopatinge pano	Yes, we now live here,
Pasi pemiti baba	Under the trees,
LS.: Netuhupfu twedu turi	We and our mealie meal
mumasaga baba	packed in little sacks.
C.: ……	……..
LS.: Tumapoto twedu turi	Our little pots are under those
pamiti iyo baba	trees over there.
C.: ……..	……
LS.: Madzimai edu	With our wives shaking their
achidzungudzika baba	heads in utter distress.
C.: ……	……
LS.: Tinevana vedu	We have children here, destitute

vachitambudzika	
C.: ……..	……
LS.: Uyai muone zvamakatiita baba.	Lord come and see what you have chosen for us.
C.: ……...	…….
LS.: Uyai muone zvamakatiita baba.	Lord come and see what you have done to us.
LS.: Chokwadi makatotikanganwa baba	We have no doubt that you have forgotten us.
C.: ……..	…….
LS: Zuva rikauya rinongotipisa	The scorching sun comes and fries us.
C.: …….	……..
LS.: Mvura ikauya inongotinaya	Come the torrential rains, and they drench us.
C: ……..	……..
LS: Mhepo ikauya inongotivhuvhuta	When the wind comes, it tosses us about like dry leaves.
C: ……	……..
LS: Chando chikauya chinongoti tonhora baba.	The chilling cold leaves us completelynumb.
C.: ……	……..
LS.: Takanga takavakawo misha	Yet, Lord we were living in homes, built with our own hands.
C.: …….	……
LS.: Takanga takarima minda yedu baba	We had ploughed our fields, dear Lord.
C.: ……	…….
LS.: Takanga takarima chibage chedu baba	We had planted our maize crop as usual.
C.: ……	……
LS.: Takanga tichifudzawo mombe dzedu baba	We used to graze our cattle in the open plains.
ALL: Isu ndopatigere pano	But oh! How fickle fate is!

3.2.1 Textual analysis of song

The forced migration of an intrinsically rural population into an urban environment usually has certain easily definable problems of orientation as concomitants. Basically, such problems have to do with a communal group suddenly having to come to grips with the cash-nexus ethos of the urban environment. The saving grace in these circumstances is that such migration is voluntary. But Jordan Chitaika's song is about forced migration. It is the story of a people violently uprooted from their natural, rural element to find themselves in an entirely novel and decidedly hostile milieu. The pathos of their lot is underscored not merely by the strangeness of the new environment, but it is further exacerbated by the destitution that the song so poignantly details: ‑We and our mealie meal packed in sacks, Our (cooking) pots under those trees there, we have to call this home.‖

This song became a group anthem for the refugees because it chronicled the salient features of their suffering, physical and psychological, so faithfully that it created in their minds and hearts a nostalgia for those pastoral values and pursuits which they may have taken for granted, through familiarity, but which had now been so rudely dislocated: ‒Yet Lord, we were living in houses built with our own hands, we had ploughed our fields dear Lord, We had planted our maize crop as usual.‖

Then suddenly, came the deluge, the storm which now had exposed them to the impersonal elements: ‒The scorching sun comes and fries us ...That's home for us ...Come the torrential rains, and they find us exposed...The wind tosses us about like dry leaves; …The chilling cold leaves us completely numb‖.

For the traditional Zimbabwean mother and her children, the father is the tower of strength, able to fend for the family and to keep the enemy, of whatever nature, at bay. Having had to abandon his home because he could not handle the situation created by the bitter fighting, and then having to make do with the tin shacks and meager rations from the philanthropic organizations, were humiliating experiences for the men-folk. These sour experiences fostered such red-hot racial bitterness in the country that, were it not for the statesmanship and magnanimity of Zimbabwe's new leaders who convinced the masses of the desirability of reconciliation, the landslide victory of ZANU PF in the 1980 elections would have ushered in a new, possibly more bitter phase of national self-destruction. While driving from the then Andrew Fleming Hospital on the night of Tuesday, 11th April 1980, I stopped on the side of the road when I heard, with disbelief and a deep sense of relief, the new Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, extending a hand of friendship to all citizens, and promulgating the policy of reconciliation, on national radio.

After this, the dispossessed refugees returned to the homes which they had once been forced to abandon and, characteristically, devoutly began to engage in the process of reconstruction and, for the first time in their lives, felt proud to be masters of their own destiny under a popular government.

4.0 Communicating rural life experiences through folktales

In a typical village setting, the cultural values of the Shona were conveyed to the young mainly through folktales. Many of these featured animals as characters, whereas others had anonymous *human ones, such as "a certain man", "a certain woman", "a certain Chief". Otherwise, if the latter were given names, these would be those which no one in the children"s universe was known by. This* anonymity of the characters served to convey the message that some people behave in the way the character in the folktale did. The *time scale was also indefinite, "Long, long ago", to suggest that it* was immaterial and that the events portrayed could still happen today. Otherwise, why bother to tell the story?

The themes of these folktales encompassed a wide range of contexts in which village life was lived, as well as the experiences which the typical denizen underwent. They were narrated most times by Grandmother and sometimes by Grandfather. These two exuded so much experience and wisdom, in addition to such eloquence as to enable them to speak to their charges about their community‘s

cultural values in a language accessible to them partly for being devoid of proverbs. Yet the themes which they addressed are comparable to those which the children of Israel found in The Book of [266]Proverbs: –common sense and good manners, … family relations, … matters of etiquette in social relationships, … self-control, … humility, patience, respect for the poor, loyalty to friends.‖

Just as the Shona songs do, their folktales serve as a treasure trove of knowledge of who they are, where they have come from, and where they are headed. Translations of them open a window through which the outsider can learn their ways. Since the values which folktales convey are intrinsically human and humane, they project similarities and differences with those of others. Their translations can serve to highlight practices and modes of thought that unite, rather that divide, humanity, in the same way that the contemporary world's literary canons do.

4.1 The role of the folktale in a people's culture

Apart from their music, as the foregoing has shown, another vehicle through which a people define themselves and by which they socialize the young is the folktale. It is a platform from which grandparents, the repositories of traditional wisdom, tell stories to children about the good, which is to be emulated, and the bad, which is to be avoided. The doyen of Shona folklore, the late Aaron Hodza (1983: iii), wrote that –There is no evil deed that has ever been committed on earth about which there is no folktale that warns us about the consequences attendant upon it.‖ It is for that reason that the translation of a people's folktales, such as the ones discussed in the following sections of this paper, serves as a window through which their cultural values can be observed and learned.

4.2 A Man and his Wife

There once lived a man and his wife. This man built his home in an isolated area, out of fear that others might dispossess him of his wife. It so happened that the wife was expecting a *child. She told her husband, "If you want me to deliver without any complications, you should go out and gather figs for me to eat." The man was happy to oblige.*

True to his word, **the man one day caught the rooster by the mouth** and made straight for a fig tree that he knew. He arrived at it when **the sun was beginning to sit on the tree tops**. This tree was painted so red with fruit that even the animals were salivating, ready to eat from it. They were also preparing to eat the fruit from that tree on that day.

The man filled his bag with the fruit before eating some of it. Then he decided, just as *little Squirrel arrived, rebuking him, "I see you are* eating our fruit! You wait and see who is *coming behind me."*

Next came Snake, and he too admonished the man.

Then came Lion, Kudu, Hyena and **Jikinya, the young woman who loved the beat of the drum to distraction**. They were all carrying a drum for making music to enliven their feast on the fruit.

*On seeing all this, the man, trapped in the tree, began to quiver with fear. Then Lion roared, "What the hell are you doing in the king's fruit tree?" But the man remai*ned tongue-tied. Hyena made things *worse, "Before we eat the fruit, let us have this god-sent meat for starters." "Before I am eaten", pleaded the man, "allow me to sing my little song!" Lion gave permission.*

[266] Good News Bible: *Children"s Illustrated Edi*tion. Introduction.

"Let the drum begin dherere! You have cleared the dancing area.
And it's so big, well done Squirrel!.
Dherere! You've cleared the area for dancing," went the man"s song.

As they all joined the man in song, Rabbit beat the drum so eloquently that all the animals became possessed. As Rabbit had quickly learned to lead the singer, he discretely advised the man to come down from the tree and escape. Rabbit then led the dancing revelers in song until the whole place was covered by a cloud of dust. But as the frightened man made his get-away, the figs dropped from his basket. Rabbit concluded that the fugitive had got far enough away from danger. He thus called *the revelers to order, "Enough, everyone! Stop singing. Let"s now eat our man."*

After waiting for the dust to settle, they looked, throwing their gazes up the tree, only to see nothing but the tree with its crop of fruit. Hyena gave out a loud cry as he went in hot pursuit. Lion asked *angrily, "Who has been pretending to be lead singer?" Rabbit sprang up and made for his hole in the* ground, with Lion hard on his heels.

The man continued to run until he reached home, and breathed a sigh of relief. But all he had to offer his wife was one fig, which she ate and immediately delivered a baby boy. She named him *"Mandinetsa", "You have nagged/been nagging me."*

That is the point at which the narrator died.

4.2.1 Textual Analysis of story

The fundamental unit of social organization among the Shona, the family, is the spring board of the vicissitudes of life. In the above folktale, devotion and loyalty are rewarded, but only after the life-threatening danger of a lone encounter with some carnivorous animals of the wild. The man, we are made to think, is basically good, his venial and only transgression being that of diffidence induced by an all-consuming jealousy: ‒This man built his home in an isolated area, out of fear that other men might dispossess him of his wife.‖ That is why he went into the forest alone to gather figs for his pregnant wife. He could have combined his mission with hunting for game with his neighbors, otherwise his response to his wife's request (or is it blackmail?) is commendable.

After all, she is pregnant, possibly with their first child, a significant stage in the life-cycle of a marriage, when the woman‘s craving for whatever unlikely ‒food‖ is sure to send the compliant man foraging in even more unlikely environs.

Even though his self-inflicted ostracism exposes him to mortal danger, the man is saved, however fabulously, because his mission in the wild has social sanction. He is saved by art and by the lion's personification of that ‒improbable improbability‖ that is the life-line of the folktale. Although the lion and other hungry animals arrive at a bounteous fruit tree, only to find a lone man eating their fruit, the lion, instead of administering instant punishment, grants the offender‘s request ‒… to sing my little song.‖ Among the animals are the hyena and the lion who feed on vegetation only when meat is not available. Yet the lion, famished and craving his favorite dish as he is, agrees to postpone eating the man until after the man has sung his song. The man's song is complemented by Rabbit eloquently beating the drum which he had brought to provide music at the animals‘ feast.

The man in this story comes from an exceptional family in the context of other folktales under, a family over which harmony reigns supreme. Such harmony is valued all the more because of its vulnerability to the destructive forces which the other families have been victims of. Parallel to this is the harmony among the animals, some of which normally feed on their companions' flesh: both the lion and the hyena feed on Kudu flesh, for example. But they are all gathered to feast together while dancing to the music of the drum. All their deep-seated propensities for anomy are suppressed in order for a sumum bonum to prevail through the instrumentality of music. Thus it is possible for Rabbit, while the predators are transported on –the wings of poesy‖ to realms tranquil, to nudge the man to escape to his loved one. Even though he loses all but one of the figs that he had gathered for her, she accepts it, knowing that it is not the quantity but the quality of the service, and the spirit in which it is provided, that matter. No sooner does she eat the fig than she delivers a son, ensuring the perpetuation of her husband's name and clan lineage. Even the guardian spirits of the clan, it would seem, put their stamp of approval on the man's conduct. The name given to the child is partly a sportive reminder of his father's near - misadventure at a critical point in the history of the family.

Although the woman in this folktale is given only one line, her mirthful –If you want me to deliver without any complications, you should go out and gather figs for me to eat‖, the line reveals that she in fact plays a centre stage role. By telling the story of a man who was rewarded with a son after showing devotion to his loving wife, society is emphasizing the importance of the marital partnership as a mutually supportive symmetry, a dynamo which is the heart-beat of society. So fundamental is this value that nothing is allowed to go right for those who, for whatever reason, find themselves unattached, as the ensuing folktale illustrates.

4.3 A Woman

There once lived a certain woman. This woman held a work-cum-beer party. But up to the very day of the party she had not managed to secure meat for her guests.

The people arrived and then went to her fields to work. Even then there was still no meat for their side dish. On her way to serve the workers with their mid-morning beer, she came across four tortoises which had a lot of mushrooms in their possession. She begged them to give her the mushrooms. They offered to assist, provided she gave them beer. She quickly agreed and then invited them to her home.

She then cooked food for her guests, after hiding the tortoises in a little empty granary and giving them beer and pleading with them to remain silent even if they should get drunk. The work party soon returned home from the fields. However, the drunken tortoises soon forgot their promise and broke into song:

"The senior wife in this home, zhiyaya, zhiyaya! She wastes our mushrooms. Zhiyaya, zhiyaya! Promising to give us beer. Zhiyaya, zhiyaya! Kwecha *kwecha zhiyaya!"*

The poor woman heard the pandemonium and tried to stop them. The tortoises fell silent. But no sooner had the woman left them than they started ululating as they resumed their song, dancing spiritedly. This reached the ears of the workers seated outside. On investigation, they found that the *door was now ajar, with the "fellows" inside the granary pounding the ground in dance, ready to* come out.

The beer people immediately killed the tortoises and left for their homes, after beating up the woman

- because they had not quite quenched their thirst.

At this point, the narrator died.

4.3.1 Textual Analysis of story

However they conducted themselves, and whatever the rewards that conduct earned them, the female characters in most Shona folktales are portrayed against a family background where the woman is married and has children. Without any reason being given, the woman in this story is presented as alone, but surviving within a context where all other people apparently come from ―normal‖ families. Given this, and the problems that she has to contend with, it is as if we are being told that spinsterhood cannot be accommodated in traditional society.

As if to drive this message home, no sooner is the woman introduced than she embarks on a course of action that is bound to fail, precisely because there is no man in her life: ―There once lived a woman. This woman held a work-cum-beer party. But up to the very day of the party she had not managed to secure meat for her guests!‖ The last two sentences in this quotation are contrastively coordinated by ―but‖, which serves to achieve cohesion, but which, at the same time, warns us that this cannot happen: the protagonist did this; yet that deed was not complemented by or was not complementing another, which is a prerequisite for the success of the deed. In other words, she should not have, because, without a man, she can not, do what she attempted to do. The deictive expression, ―This woman...‖ almost points an accusatory finger at the character.

The narrator unfolds a scenario in which the woman‘s improvisation to overcome her embarrassing quandary, by substituting mushrooms for meat, backfires. She fails to control the tortoises which she had hidden in her little, empty granary. First, she attempts to hold a traditional function when she herself is not living a traditional life. Then she finds a substitute for meat, but from creatures whose spirits she ignites with alcohol originally meant for people who had come to work for her. The tortoises inevitably forget their promise and break into a haunting song with lyrics that taunt her and are interlaced with nonsensical but eerie-sounding syllables:

> Zhiyaya zhiyaya!
> Kwecha kwecha zhiyaya!

These lines come after the tortoises have inappropriately called her ―vohosi‖, ―senior wife‖; that is, the first of several women married to a polygamous man. In the world portrayed in these tales, the polygamous man was a social phenomenon to be reckoned with. His big family enabled him to cultivate vast expanses of land and to have an abundant harvest. Particularly in a year of famine, he all but emptied his granaries of surplus grain to rescue the poor in exchange for their eligible daughters, while others pledged their adolescent ones to him. The ―vahosi‖ ruled over her husband's harem. There is therefore an element of sarcasm, however unintended, in the tortoises calling the woman ―vabosi‖.

On a day such as the one on which these things happened, people came to work in the polygamous man‘s fields as well as to gorge themselves on his bountiful feast. He provided meat and beer, and the

–vahosi‖ deployed her juniors to ensure that all were fed to satiety, after the work was done. By contrast, here –the beer people‖ beat up the hostess, the so-called –vahosi‖, after killing the tortoises, –because they had not quite quenched their thirst.‖

The contradictions persist right to the end: these are beer people in a place where there is no beer, so they riot and get out. Spinsterhood is here being equated with impotence in a man. It makes one a non-person.

The values which permeate the sociopolitical dispensation portrayed in these folktales are clearly comparable to those underlying the functionalist perspective of corporate human endeavor. Functionalists regard society as a structure made up of interrelated parts. As Jansen (1989: 18-19) explains,

> Although several individual parts may be distinguished, the significance of a part derives not from its own peculiar characteristics, but from its position in relation to the other parts. It follows from this argument that the structure is more than the sum total of its individual parts; the structure has a character of its own, since its nature and characteristics derive from the interdependence and interrelatedness of its constituent parts.

This perspective of society places emphasis on the notion of –function‖, that is, the –contribution‖ which each part makes to the operation and maintenance of the structure. This, for Jansen (ibid), is a systems approach to understanding the dynamics of social organization. She writes that –A properly functioning system is in a state of balance or equilibrium‖ and that this balance has to be adjusted in response to changing circumstances. Such adjustments and re-adjustments are –accommodated‖ only when they are effected delicately, as to do otherwise would threaten the equilibrium with disintegration. The system becomes dysfunctional when a part of it fails to make its –specified contribution.‖ The woman in this story was isolated from the others in what was supposed to be the same cultural space for fellow citizens.

5.0 Conclusion

In the introduction to the book on the music of Zimbabwe‘s liberation war, I was striving to find a way of expressing my experience of that music and of the war which inspired it. I was fortunate to come across the German composer [267]Richard Wagner‘s pronouncement on the matter when he wrote that –It is a truth for ever that where the speech of men stops short, there, music‘s reign begins‖ (emphasis added). The immutability of this efficacy of music to articulate that which ordinary language cannot, or dare not, is evidenced by the universality of contexts in which humanity resorts to song. These range from celebration to mourning, from commanders seeking to galvanize their armies in war to politicians canvassing the populace at election time, and from individuals humming a tune in moments of crisis in order to vent their frustrations in a crumbling marriage to Heads of State leading their compatriots in singing the national anthem, and all the way down to children playing let‘s-pretend games. Besides the air that we breathe, what else is as all-pervasive and as quintessential in our lives?

[267] Richard Wagner http://azquotes.com/quote/797289

From this, it seems inevitable and commonsensical that building bridges between cultures should, of necessity, entail translating the song lyrics which each culture employs for entertainment and for articulating emotions and thoughts that concern it most.

With regard to our folktales, I dream of a collection of stories that includes both our folktales in *translation and the products of our Writers" Workshop, as well as those of established creative* writers. Such a collection would serve to remind us of and to emphasise the fact that story-telling is a human activity which affords us the opportunity both to articulate our lived reality and to contemplate the endless possibilities, life-affirming as well as life-threatening, which are the legacy *that we owe to Adam and Eve"s conduct at the Creation.*

The bottom line of the functionalist perspective of social organization places a premium on conformity. The woman who, through no fault of hers, lives with a loving but jealous husband, has to accept her isolation from society, suffering in silence. And the name she gives to her son could be the only way in which she can protest against and begin to shake her male-imposed ostracism. The spinster is an obvious threat to the social equilibrium and is publicly lynched by a horde of disgruntled conformists.

We are thus left contemplating a monolithic sociopolitical dispensation serviced by a draconian legal system and ethno-logic, and which treasures its equilibrium above the welfare of individuals within it. Any questions that we might have as to why things are as they are, and why they must not change, must remain unanswered. The formulaic ending to the Shona folktale makes sure of that: –At this point, the narrator died‖. And so we are left to philosophize, as Bascom (1965) does, in order to clarify things in our own minds:

> Here, indeed, is the basic paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.

Bascom means that the apparently impregnable traditional sociopolitical edifice can or may be shaken, however slightly, even by an ostracized and harassed bride singing a forlorn tune as she pounds grain, or by a woman, who finds herself living in a –prison‖ created by her jealous husband, naming her child Mandinetsa, –You have nagged/been nagging me.‖ Anthropologists have claimed that in order to understand cultures other than our own, we should seek to discover what they eat, as opposed to what we eat. This takes care of our physical wellbeing only. The argument of this paper is that this search for cross-cultural understanding should be extended to searching for meaning in the oral traditions of others, and that such a process can be facilitated by translation.

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