Kathryn Batchelor. (2009). *Decolonizing Translation: Francophone African Novels in English Translation*. **Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 282 págs.**

Out of some 1500 published sub-Saharan Francophone African novels, 72 have been translated into English and none of them has been translated more than once, except for one (Ahmadou Kourouma's 1998 *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*). In *Decolonizing Translation: Francophone African Novels in English Translation*, Kathryn Batchelor provides a comprehensive study of those 73 translations from the standpoint of postcolonial translation scholarship, paying special attention to the role of translation in the emergence of sub-Saharan Francophone African literature (following the "palimpsest" metaphor developed by literary comparatist Chantal Zabus) and the linguistic challenges involved in its translation into English.

Batchelor approaches translation in its intersection with four types of linguistic innovation, starting from so-called "visible traces" and, to a lesser degree, "traces within traces" (chapter 3). Visible traces are "idiosyncratic" borrowings from African-language terms to manifest the presence of African languages in the Francophone narrative, whereas traces within traces involve the typographic variation (e.g. italicization) of specific French words to manifest the presence of French lexical borrowings and adaptations in African languages and, in turn, to signal that, although the language of literary expression, metropolitan French is more importantly the language of translation of a particular African language, which the characters are "really" speaking. In contrast, the incidence of basilectal and mesolectal Creole varieties of French (chapter 4), particularly so-called "*petit nègre*" and "established" borrowings from African languages, points to Africanized usages of French in connection with sociolinguistic questions of power and prestige. Closely linked to visible traces, relexification (chapter 5), whereby the "character" of African speech is transferred into the colonial language, is another strategy seeking to underscore the polyglossic reality of sub-Saharan Francophone Africa and,

furthermore, one that raises the dichotomy of orality versus writing that often characterized colonial encounters. Lastly, onomastics and wordplay (chapter 6) also address resistance against the imbalance of power and prestige in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa and pose significant linguistic challenges for translation into English.

In addition, the book features a brief introduction to postcolonial translation studies, an overview of the criteria for inclusion in the corpus of study and its translation rates (chapter 1), a sociolinguistic approximation to the notion of "polyglossia" and linguistic diversity vis-à-vis African cultures and realities (chapter 2), some conclusions on the translation strategies analyzed in light of postcolonial translation theory (chapter 7), and, conversely, some remarks on postcolonial translation theory as informed by the translation of sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction into English (chapter 8). Ultimately, Batchelor seeks to explore the idea of a "decolonized translation practice" grounded in a metonymic conceptualization of translation (as developed by translation scholar Maria Tymoczko) whereby translation is acknowledged as a complex activity of intercultural negotiation and conflict to the detriment of dominant philological models of translation and textual accuracy.

In this regard, the most striking feature of *Decolonizing Translation* lies in the methodology displayed by its author as reflected in the macrostructural organization of the book. In the introduction, Batchelor argues that, although significantly inspired by postcolonial literary studies of translation (most notably, Kwaku Gyasi's 2006 *The Francophone African Text* and Paul Bandia's 2008 *Translation and Reparation*), hers is the first extended study of English translations of sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction. Whereas the contributions by Gyasi and Bandia circle around the notion of "writing-as-translation", as reflected for example in relexification and calquing processes, Batchelor underscores the need in postcolonial translation studies for more empirical research where translators' responses to the challenges posed by Europhone African literature are addressed— yet, an initial hypothesis concerning such responses is absent from her study. After a detailed and insightful account of the criteria involved in the selection of the corpus of translations, the author provides throughout chapters 3 to 6 an analysis largely anchored in the work of some of the leading figures of postcolonial translation theory, particularly in Antoine Berman's "*système de déformation des textes*", whereby the foreignness of the source text becomes naturalized in translation, and

Lawrence Venuti's notion of a "fluency aesthetic" that predominantly guides translation activity in the Anglophone literary publishing industry.

By the end of chapter 6, a number of important questions arise in the reader's mind: do the findings in Batchelor's analysis (namely, the systematic normalization of linguistically innovative features in English translation) actually shed light on translation dynamics as approached in the paradigm of postcolonial translation or do they reveal instead an excessive dependence on postcolonial translation theory, particularly as articulated by Berman and Venuti? If, according to Batchelor, her findings confirm "this system [Berman's *système de déformation des textes*] to a large extent […] that Berman argues to be characteristic of any translation" (206) as well as "Venuti's assertion that 'translation practices in English cultures (amongst many others) have routinely aimed for their own concealment, at least since the seventeenth century'" (207), what is the actual contribution of this type of empirical research to translation studies—merely corroborating Berman and Venuti's theories *à propos* of sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction or rather informing those theories by questioning their implicit epistemological assumptions? To put it differently, if both Berman's *système de déformation des textes* and Venuti's fluency aesthetic (taken to *routinely* characterize *any* translation) underlie an assumption of the inevitability of textual deformation/domestication, should not the kind of empirical research advocated by the author of *Decolonizing Translation* begin by problematizing such assumption or, at least, by providing the so-called "working predictions" about the corpus of translations being researched?

Even if, by its evident empirical character, this study interrogates Berman's and Venuti's approaches to translation (otherwise there would be no need for this type of empirical research), the methodology employed by Batchelor ultimately complies with the universality embedded in their models in view of the absence of an initial hypothesis and the pragmatic instrumentalization of the concepts of *système de déformation des textes* and fluency aesthetic to account for the strategies displayed in the corpus of translations. Throughout her analysis, Batchelor identifies recurrent cases of so-called "*ethnocentrique*"/"domesticating" translation but fails to provide critical reflection on those strategies beyond the dominant approaches that form the theoretical background to her study. While including a detailed and insightful compendium of translated textual features, the reader cannot help but question the appropriateness of the author's application of the *ethnocentrique*/domesticating translation model to sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction independently from

extratextual sources of information (e.g. commission, patronage, editorial policy, intended audience) —even if some of those sources are partly addressed in the introduction. Once concluded the analysis, Batchelor's push for more empirical research in translation studies barely holds the significance initially argued by the author. For, what is the goal of such empirical research if its findings have been accurately anticipated in influential translation models dealing with naturalization and the Anglophone literary translation industry? What is it exactly that the kind of empirical research discussed by Batchelor may contribute to translation studies?

The answer is found in the two final chapters of *Decolonizing Translation*, where Batchelor engages with the implications of sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction for the study of translation and vice versa, and interrogates the capacity of the models previously incorporated to foster a decolonized translation practice. Although she starts by affirming their general applicability to the analyzed corpus of translations, Batchelor subsequently employs Berman's *système de déformation des textes* and Venuti's fluency aesthetic as a springboard to approach the implications of a decolonized translation practice for the conceptualization of translation itself. According to the author, the purported "untranslatability" of sub-Saharan Francophone African literature often underscored by literary critics and academic translators alike (whereby the normalization of linguistic innovation in English translation is portrayed as virtually inevitable) is founded on two different aspects: the linguistic hybridity of sub-Saharan Francophone African literature (as reflected in the types of linguistic innovation analyzed) and the interplay between the languages involved (i.e. French and African languages). Whereas linguistically hybrid texts have commonly served as a paradigmatic example to support the idea of untranslatability due to their inherent heterogeneity as opposed to supposedly homogeneous linguistic systems, Batchelor calls attention to the importance of historical, political, and cultural confrontations between specific languages for the meaning of linguistically hybrid texts in order to articulate her notion of "translation-as-relocation". From this perspective, the ultimate goal of translation is not so much to reproduce linguistic hybridity *per se* in another language as to relocate the complexities and effects embedded in the encounter of languages featured in the source text in connection with the "translation situation".

In this respect, Batchelor succeeds in departing from the translatability-untranslatability axis toward a new ethos of translation whereby the willing "suspension of disbelief" upon which translated literature is assumed to rest is

substituted for the recognition of the geographic, historical, and cultural setting of the source text and, furthermore, for an interplay with the broader implications of the alterations made to the language of literary expression. In this way, even if translation-as-relocation points to the shifts (e.g. linguistic, cultural, historical, geographical, temporal) derived from translation practice, it also seeks to underscore the potential of translation to expand and inform the "contact zone" (to borrow the term coined by Latin American literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt) from which the subversive elements of the original narrative context emerge. Following up on the question of a decolonized translation practice, the author returns to the four types of linguistic innovation analyzed to exemplify the challenges of translation vis-à-vis the model of translation-as-relocation, this time incorporating a number of extratextual factors, such as editorial policy, intended readership, and receiver-effect, and problematizing the approaches drawn upon in earlier chapters.

At this stage, further questions related to methodology and macrostructure arise: if a decolonized translation practice that not only is empirically-based but that also explores translation in light of polyglossic linguistic innovation is the subject of the book, why are the primary reflections on the subject placed in the last section? If, as the author contends, *Decolonizing Translation* seeks to explore a decolonized translation practice "not only in terms of overall principles, but also in terms of the intricacies and challenges posed by the linguistically innovative features of postcolonial texts" (230), why is the main body of the study (chapters 3 to 6) carried out following general models of translation that, in addition, fall short of accounting for the intricate network of facets involved in translation practice? Differently phrased: why does Batchelor not give more prominence to her model of translation-as-relocation from the outset of her study, even when it draws from the translation data gathered *a priori*? Rather than in the predictability of the translation data as formulated in Berman's *système de déformation des textes* and Venuti's fluency aesthetic, the source of the reader's discomfort with the macrostructure of the book lies in the deductive approach adopted by Batchelor and, more specifically, the amount of space dedicated to formal textual correspondence to the detriment of the author's articulation of her own translation model, which could have been more effectively developed had a more inductive methodology been adopted in conjunction with a more exhaustive argumentation of the implications of the translation-as-relocation model for translation studies *ab initio*.

This is made particularly acute in the last chapter of the book (chapter 8), where Batchelor engages with the postcolonial turn in translation studies in connection with her professed goal of a decolonized translation practice. While championing the facets of translation put forward by Berman and Venuti, Batchelor questions the connection that their models draw between translation strategies and intended effects to (finally!) problematize translation a propos of reception theory. Drawing from the indeterminacy of the relationship between the source text and the target text from the perspective of reader-response, the author turns to the notions of "in-betweenness" and "time-lag" developed by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha and Maria Tymoczko's notion of "translation-as-metonymy" to approach translation as a multiplicity of possible readings that, rather than moving linearly from pheno-text 1/source text to pheno-text 2/target text, involves a projection backwards through which the initial time-lag between event and enunciation is reopened and towards the enactment of the reader's secondary responses in connection with the broader significance of the text. Extrapolated to the four types of linguistic innovation analyzed, Batchelor effectively triggers a reconsideration of the theoretical implications of the translation of sub-Saharan Francophone African fiction into English that dissociates itself from the predominantly source text-oriented translation analysis displayed in chapters 3 to 6 and yields significant insights into and beyond postcolonial translation theory.

Despite the limitations of the translation situation from which her articulation of translation-as-relocation stems (i.e. translation of sub-Saharan African literature from French into English) and even when the conceptual framework of her study (as reflected in such recurring notions as "decolonized translation practice", "hybridity", and the very construct of "*la francophonie*") would benefit from a deeper critical interrogation, Batchelor formulates in *Decolonizing Translation* a translation model that should inform translation studies. Nevertheless, the implications of translation-as-relocation are ultimately downplayed by the excessive amount of space dedicated to the collected textual data—which could have been presented using a more condensed format (e.g. graphs, tables, and charts)—and by the insufficient degree of interaction between the corpus analysis and the discussion of a decolonized translation practice. Although chapters 7 and 8 are meant to explore such interaction, they do not eventually suffice, particularly due to their conceptual density and undue brevity. Batchelor displays an extensive use of postcolonial translation theory but, as argued above, postcolonial translation models tend to be

instrumentalized to conform to the general argument of the book without previously questioning their embedded epistemological assumptions—of course, such a procedure might drastically lengthen Batchelor's study, but it would also strengthen the arguments articulated in it.

Overall, *Decolonizing Translation* not only stands as an example of the empirical research championed by its author, but it also points in the direction of a new research trajectory in translation studies that, along with the work that is being done in other postcolonial geopolitical spaces (for example, by R. Anthony Lewis in the Caribbean and Vicente Rafael in the Philippines), will not only influence contemporary discourses on the ethics and politics of translation but also trace new intersections between postcolonial scholarship and translation studies. In this regard, the critical exploration of those intersections by way of a more fully developed model of translation-as-relocation should be the priority of the follow-up to this study.