Universitat
de les Illes Balears

DOCTORAL THESIS

2022

TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE TRANSLATION OF PIDGIN ENGLISH IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: THE CASE OF KEN SARO-WIWA'S *SOZABOY*.

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Doctor by the Universitat de les Illes Balears

ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this dissertation is to explore strategies for the translation of postcolonial texts into a "third" language, that is, a language other than the colonized vernacular and the European language of the colonizer, and to do so from a responsible position as a translator. The dissertation begins by establishing a dialogue with the existing literature on translation and postcolonialism, trying to ascertain what constitutes translator responsibility when working with postcolonial contexts, and how can translation be mobilized for counter-hegemonic purposes today, exploring the notion of translation as a means to enact a new universalism based on difference (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000; Santos 2004; Balibar 2004, 1995; Ngugi 1987, 2009). However, any discussion of cultural translation willing to avoid uniformization and assimilation should be grounded on a specific project, which in our case is the eventual translation into Spanish of *Sozaboy*, a novel written by the late Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995). The most salient feature of this book is that it is written in what the author himself defined as "'rotten English', a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English."

After the initial theoretical considerations, the dissertation performs a thorough stylistic analysis of the source-text taking as a general framework the structure put forward by Discourse Analysis (Munday and Zhang 2015; Baumgarten and Schröter 2018), but combining it freely with insights from other scholars. For the context of culture, the dissertation draws from Maria Tymoczko's holistic approach to cultural translation (2010) to deal with questions of genre, intertextuality and discourse, and culturally-marked signature concepts. Next, the study takes up the context of situation of the novel, both internal and external. For the latter, it considers the immediate circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of the book, including Saro-Wiwa's militant politics and his experiences during the Nigerian Civil War, the setting of *Sozaboy*. Consulting primary and secondary sources, we try to elucidate the intention behind Saro-Wiwa's linguistic choice and the pioneering function rotten English has served for later authors. Taking a closer look at the language itself, we consider its strong oral component, which is a staple of African narrative, but also a way to deal with traumatic experiences. Rotten English is a hybrid construct, and we break it down to determine its specific Nigerian Pidgin features, which constitute the core African substrate that any translator should strive to preserve. How to do that exactly is the crux of the dissertation and the main concern of the last block, where the study leaves strict analysis aside to search for solutions. We first look at the German, French, and Italian translations, which interestingly followed quite different strategies. The study maintains that the best option for the Spanish translator is to follow López Guix's (2015) advice and opt for a creative strategy which nevertheless observes the responsibility due to the disenfranchised Other by committing to the preservation of the unique African, postcolonial Pidgin feel (Bandia 2008). It is our contention that the best way to achieve this is by vindicating an often hidden legacy of Afro-Spanish language to draw inspiration for the syntactic and morphologic transformations the target text will have to deploy. Afro-Cuban *bozal*, in particular, offers an excellent source, because of the linguistic proximity of the African substrate and because its voice, now lost, can be heard not only in scholarly studies but in the literary work of writers who often were abolitionists and hence prioritized accuracy over parody when reproducing *bozal* speech (Lipski 2005).

RESUM

L'objectiu fonamental d'aquesta tesi és explorar estratègies per a la traducció de textos postcolonials a una "tercera" llengua, un idioma que no sigui el vernacle dels colonitzats ni l'europeu del colonitzador, i fer-ho a més des d'un posicionament responsable. La tesi comença establint un diàleg amb el material acadèmic publicat al voltant de la traducció i el postcolonialisme, tot tractant de determinar en què consisteix la responsabilitat del traductor quan treballa amb contextos postcolonials, i com pot aprofitar-se la traducció amb finalitats contrahegemòniques, explorant el seu potencial com a via cap a un nou universalisme basat en la diferència (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000; Santos 2004; Balibar 2004, 1995; Ngugi 1987, 2009). No obstant això, tota anàlisi de la traducció cultural que pretengui evitar la uniformització i l'assimilació hauria de fonamentar-se en un projecte concret, que en el nostre cas serà la traducció a l'espanyol d'una novel·la nigeriana, *Sozaboy*, de l'escriptor i activista Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995). El tret més destacat de l'obra és que està escrita en el que el mateix autor va definir com "rotten English," una combinació de pidgin nigerià amb anglès macarrònic i aparicions esporàdiques d'anglès estàndard.

Després del plantejament teòric inicial, la tesi realitza una anàlisi estilística detallada del llibre adoptant com a marc general l'estructura proposada per l'escola de l'Anàlisi del Discurs (Munday and Zhang 2015; Baumgarten and Schröter 2018), que s'anirà combinant amb aportacions d'altres autors. Per analitzar el context de cultura es parteix de l'enfocament holístic de Maria Tymoczko (2010) per a l'estudi de qüestions de gènere literari, intertextualidad i discurs, a més d'aquells conceptes culturals clau d'especial interès. A continuació, s'examina el context de situació de la novel·la, tant intern com extern. Aquest últim cobreix les circumstàncies immediates que van envoltar l'escriptura i publicació del llibre: el compromís polític de Saro-Wiwa i les seves experiències durant la guerra civil nigeriana que és el rerefons de *Sozaboy*. Prèvia consulta de fonts primàries i secundàries, mirarem de determinar la intenció que va dur Saro-Wiwa a triar aquesta variant lingüística, i la influència que el seu "anglès podrit" ha exercit per a autors posteriors. En examinar de prop el dialecte, estudiam el seu acusat component oral, que és no només una evidència de la tradició narrativa africana, sinó també una eina per afrontar l'experiència traumàtica. Es tracta d'una creació híbrida, i una anàlisi detallada ens mostrarà quins elements propis conté del pidgin, que forma la base del substrat africà que tot traductor hauria d'esforçar-se per mantenir. Com aconseguir-ho és el quid d'aquesta tesi i l'objecte principal de l'últim bloc, on es deixa enrere l'anàlisi pura i es passa a formular propostes. Examinam primer les traduccions a l'alemany, francès i italià, que segueixen estratègies molt diferents. L'estudi sosté que la millor opció per al traductor és fer cas de López Guix (2015) i adoptar una estratègia creativa que tot i així respecti la responsabilitat deguda a l'Altre desposseït, esforçant-se per conservar el tenor africà, pidgin i postcolonial característic de l'obra (Bandia 2008). La tesi conclou que la millor manera d'aconseguir-ho és reivindicar una tradició de contacte lingüístic afrohispànic que sovint s'ha passat per alt, en la qual trobar inspiració per a les alteracions sintàctiques i morfològiques que la traducció haurà de presentar. El llenguatge *bozal* afrocubà ofereix una font especialment interessant, per la proximitat lingüística dels substrats africans i perquè la seva veu, ja apagada, es conserva no només a estudis acadèmics sinó a l'obra literària d'escriptors que en molts casos van ser abolicionistes, més interessats en la reproducció fidel que en la paròdia (Lipski 2005).

RESUMEN

El objetivo fundamental de esta tesis es explorar estrategias para la traducción de textos postcoloniales a una "tercera" lengua, un idioma que no sea el vernáculo de los colonizados ni el europeo del colonizador, y hacerlo además desde un posicionamiento responsable. La tesis comienza entablado un diálogo con el material académico existente sobre traducción y postcolonialismo, tratando de determinar dónde estriba la responsabilidad del traductor al trabajar con contextos postcoloniales y cómo puede aprovecharse la traducción con fines contrahegemónicos, explorando el potencial de la traducción como vía hacia un nuevo universalismo basado en la diferencia (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000; Santos 2004; Balibar 2004, 1995; Ngugi 1987, 2009). Sin embargo, todo análisis de la traducción cultural que pretenda evitar la uniformización y la asimilación debería fundamentarse en un proyecto concreto, que en nuestro caso será la traducción al español de una novela nigeriana, *Sozaboy*, del escritor y activista Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995). El rasgo más destacado de la obra es que está escrita en lo que el mismo autor definió como "rotten English," una mezcla de pidgin nigeriano con inglés macarrónico y algún atisbo de inglés estándar.

Tras el planteamiento teórico inicial, la tesis realiza un análisis estilístico a fondo del libro adoptando como marco general la estructura propuesta por la escuela del Análisis del Discurso (Munday and Zhang 2015; Baumgarten and Schröter 2018), que se irá combinando con aportaciones de otros autores. Para analizar el contexto de cultura se bebe del enfoque holístico de Maria Tymoczko (2010) en el estudio de cuestiones de género literario, intertextualidad y discurso, amén de los conceptos culturales clave de particular interés. A continuación, se examina el contexto de situación de la novela, tanto interno como externo. Este último cubre las circunstancias inmediatas que rodearon la escritura y publicación del libro, que incluyen el compromiso político de Saro-Wiwa y sus experiencias durante la guerra civil nigeriana que constituye el trasfondo de *Sozaboy*. Previa consulta de fuentes primarias y secundarias, intentamos determinar la intención que llevó a Saro-Wiwa a escoger esa variante lingüística y el papel fundacional que su "inglés podrido" ha desempeñado para autores posteriores. Al examinar de cerca el lenguaje en sí, estudiamos su fuerte componente oral, que es no solo un testimonio de la tradición narrativa africana, sino también una herramienta para afrontar la experiencia traumática. Se trata de una creación híbrida, y un análisis detallado nos mostrará lo que tiene en concreto de pidgin, la base del sustrato africano que todo traductor debería esforzarse por mantener. Cómo lograrlo es el quid de esta tesis y el objeto principal del último bloque, donde se deja atrás el análisis puro y se pasa a formular propuestas. Examinamos primero las traducciones al alemán, francés e italiano, interesantes por seguir estrategias muy distintas. El estudio sostiene que la mejor opción para el traductor es hacer caso de López Guix (2015) y adoptar una estrategia creativa que aun así respete la responsabilidad debida al Otro desposeído, afanándose por conservar el cariz africano, pidgin y postcolonial característico de la obra (Bandia 2008). La tesis concluye que la mejor manera de conseguirlo es reivindicar una tradición de contacto lingüístico afrohispánico que a menudo se ha pasado por alto, en la que hallar inspiración para las alteraciones sintácticas y morfológicas que el texto meta deberá presentar. El bozal afrocubano ofrece una fuente de especial interés, por la proximidad lingüística de los sustratos africanos y porque su voz, ya apagada, se conserva no solo en estudios académicos sino en la obra literaria de escritores que en muchos casos fueron abolicionistas, más interesados por reproducir fielmente el bozal que por parodiarlo (Lipski 2005).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the long process of writing this dissertation I have been a part of the UIB faculty in the Department of Spanish, Modern, and Classical languages, and gratitude is due to all its members. Special thanks to Drs. Astrid Schwegler and Beatriz Zapata, and Xavi Fuster, for their support during this period. First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Dr. Caterina Calafat for her guidance, support, and patience; much of whatever is good in this dissertation is hers. Any mistakes are, of course, mine only.

Thanks as well to my friends, who have been a constant source of encouragement and have stoically listened while I expounded the minutiae of one aspect of the dissertation or another. Finally, all my gratitude to my family; without them, this dissertation would have been impossible in many respects. I am a palimpsest of them.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the elaboration of a strategy for the translation of a postcolonial literary work into a "third" language — i.e., a language other than the colonized vernacular and the European language of the colonizer — from a responsible, politically aware position as a translator. It will proceed by taking a case study, the Nigerian novel *Sozaboy*, first published by Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1985, and discussing its potential translation into Spanish.

Sozaboy, subtitled "A Novel in Rotten English," is particularly interesting as a case study because it is written in an experimental dialect which constitutes one of the classically postcolonial "englishes" described by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin (2002, 8). Rotten English is "a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English," according to Saro-Wiwa's own Author's Note to the book. Additionally, *Sozaboy* is further extraordinary in that it maintains its commitment to this postcolonial hybrid dialect for the entire length of the book, which is highly unusual in the case of Nigerian Pidgin, which so far had been mostly reserved to isolated passages where it served to illustrate the social origin or lack of formal education of stock characters. Therefore, the novel has been hailed as "the most thorough use of pidgin in a West African literary context" (McLaren 2009, 106) or "the most conscious and sustained linguistic experiment with non-standard speech in the West African first-person narrative to emerge from the tiny corpus of writing in NP [Nigerian Pidgin]" (Zabus 2007, 194). The mention to the first-person narrative is not idle, since this extended use of a non-conventional idiolect is grounded in the conceit that the book is written by a semi-illiterate young narrator, Mene, the titular *Sozaboy* (from *soza*, "soldier," itself a variation of the more common Pidgin form *soja*, see p. 189). Few, if any, prose literary works have taken up the gauntlet thrown down by Saro-Wiwa, and to this date, the literary use of Nigerian Pidgin seems still mostly confined to

poetry and drama; *Sozaboy* has nevertheless been acknowledged as a necessary precursor for an entire African subgenre of child soldier narrative where some degree of linguistic experimentation is the norm (Gehrmann and Schönwetter 2017; Tunca 2014).[1]

While there certainly exists a substantial and interesting body of literature on the subject of translation and postcolonialism (Robinson 2011; Tymoczko 1999; Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; to name just a few monographic works), many of the studies understandably focus on a more or less metaphorical characterization of translation roughly following one of two research avenues: (1) either the potential of translation for opening up "third spaces" through hybridization, including works created in the language of the colonizer by postcolonial authors, understood here as "translated men" (Zabus 2007; Bandia 2008) (2) or the study of the pitfalls of translation as a tool for (mis)representing the colonized, by obfuscating cultural difference and promoting an exoticizing representation that ultimately justifies imperialism (Niranjana 1994, 1992; Cheyfitz 1991; Carbonell i Cortés 1996; Rafael 1993, 2016). Of course, the lines separating both categories are blurry and overlaps do occur.

The scholars who focus on hybridization often depart from an analysis of the work of migrants that find themselves in contact with metropolitan culture, or natives who in a way are made cultural migrants in their own land by the dominance of the European language in education, public communication, and culture in general. The resulting bicultural contact in either case often leads to fascinating linguistic experimentation, a true pathway for newness to enter the world, to use Homi Bhabha's famous and felicitous formulation in *The Location of Culture* (1994). However, much less attention has been paid to the question of how to translate these already "translated" (and the meaning and pertinence of those quotation marks will be one of the issues

[1] Novels in this subgenre would include Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) and Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007), in English, or Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), in French.

broached below) authors into other languages, and the further power asymmetries and cultural discrepancies that arise from such an endeavor; probably, because very few anglophone African authors are ever translated into other European languages to begin with (García de Vinuesa 2013, 146). In the context of African literature, Elena Rodríguez-Murphy (2015) has studied the translation into Spanish of three Nigerian and Nigerian-American authors who also experiment with multilingualism in their work. Most notably, Paul Bandia has written extensively about the need to rethink conventional approaches to translation when working with African postcolonial texts. His seminal *Translation and Reparation* (2008), in particular, will be a constant reference in what follows. Nevertheless, when approaching the literary uses of West African Pidgin English, even Bandia focuses largely on its use in more or less isolated passages, as an example of code-switching providing realism, local color, and background sociocultural information. Even though he acknowledges the existence of *Sozaboy* and offers it as an example of "complete writing of fiction" in West African Pidgin English (122n), no further commentary is provided about the effect on translation strategy of working with a book where the presence of Pidgin English, far from being anecdotal, is felt more strongly perhaps than that of Standard or even Nigerian English.

It is perhaps the fate of the vocational translator, when confronted with such a novel insight into cultural difference, to feel with special force what Levinas called a "desire for a land not of our birth" (2007, 34); in other words, to wonder how a particularly challenging text could be translated into their regular target language, especially after learning that the book in particular has not yet been translated into it (as is the case of *Sozaboy* with Spanish). How to preserve that dual nature, that tension, when transferring the dialect to a language outside the locale where the original contact generating the hybrid language takes place? How to translate the translated? And, crucially, how to heed that Desire in true Levinasian spirit, not as a wish to assimilate the Other,

but as the fruit of our responsibility to welcome the Other (Horton 2018, 194). Not to conquer the source text and bring it in chains to the target culture, but to "move out" of oneself to avoid the imposition of one's personality and culture (López Guix 2018), to open oneself to be "contaminated."

This dissertations sets out to answer these questions following a classical hourglass structure that will start with broad questions having to do with the philosophical and political underpinnings of postcolonial translation, and then move on to more particular aspects, from the specific cultural context of our case study to suggested solutions for the translation of concrete grammar and vocabulary deviations from Standard English, which can then hopefully be extrapolated by other translators faced with similar texts.

Since our first avowed goal is devising a strategy for the translation of postcolonial texts, prior to a detailed explanation of the structure of the dissertation, a short discussion of this notion, *strategy* — of what it means and entails in Translation Studies — might be in order. In general, this study will adhere to the interpretation of the term outlined, for instance, by Yves Gambier in the corresponding entry of the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2010). There, he sticks to the quintessential distinction between strategy and tactics, whereby strategy could be defined as "a planned, explicit, goal-oriented procedure or programme, adopted to achieve a certain objective (with priorities, commands, and anticipations)" (Gambier 2010, 412).

Considerable attention has been devoted in recent scholarship, much of which will be addressed throughout this work, to prove that the long-term goals pursued as a part of any strategy are not articulated in a vacuum and cannot be reduced to suspicious or vague formulas such as "simply getting a text translated as faithfully as possible," as if the proper way to translate a text were self-evident or intrinsically contained in the very text and waiting for the perceptive

professional, like a statue hidden in one of the stone *Prigioni* just waiting to be freed. The fact that many translators do not explicitly or consciously develop a strategy before any given translation task does not necessarily mean that they do not work from one. This is where the notion of norms, popularized first within the field of Translation Studies by Gideon Toury (1995) and later developed by others (Hermans 1996, 2014; Baker 2001), comes into play. It would not be unreasonable to say that one of the main effects of (hegemonic) ideology is the establishment of a particular strategy as the default, "invisible" strategy, following the classical ideological transformation of a contingent way of doing things into common sense. Accordingly, any strategic (and tactic, for that matter) approach that deviates from the conventional norm is perceived as less acceptable and, often, "political/politicized" when issues of power are at stake.

On the other hand, this interplay between strategy and tactics, and ideology, cannot but bring to mind another classic dichotomy in Translation Studies: the traditional divide between theory and practice. Indeed, this thorny relationship can be almost reformulated in the terms we have been discussing so far. The positions are well known: professional translators are often critical of academic discussion and grand theoretical frameworks as disconnected from the everyday realities of their activity, where they would seem to bear no relevance (López Guix and Minett 1997, 163), while scholars might think that, caught in the whirl of their everyday work, professional translators can often take too much for granted. By doing so, they would help to uncritically perpetuate existing norms and conventions. In other words, it would be tempting to reformulate or caricature the theory/practice divide in terms of theoreticians focusing on strategies that all too often remain untested, while professional translators — often oblivious of strategic concerns — deal with tactics, approaching each commission *ex nihilo*, as it were.

By not shirking the ideological debate and indeed the deeper ideological, philosophical issues at stake in postcolonial translation, we intend to avoid this perceived lack of self-reflection. Our goal is to show that, on the one hand, any translation must be inscribed in the larger context of the debates of its time and must proceed from an understanding of what translation is and should be, and, on the other hand, that the practice of and reflection on translation has a key role to play in those debates. However, by taking a case study and referring all theoretical reflection to the eventual translation of an actual postcolonial text, we also want to draw from long years of experience in the practice of professional editorial translation to avoid the formulation of potentially facile grand theories or umbrella strategies that are later proven to be irrelevant — or even counterproductive — in practice. There is much that professional translators can contribute to the theoretical debate.

In short, there is no denying that any translation strategy will be largely dependent on the specific determining factors of the text at hand, but the translator should be aware of their own culturally- and ideologically-conditioned preconceptions (especially when there is a power imbalance involved), and of the possibility of resisting the existing norms regulating expectations about translation should it seem unethical not to do so. To discuss these preconceptions and this possibility, and how to tackle them, will be the objective of our first, theoretical section. It is important to keep in mind that the assumptions every translator brings into their work have partly to do with their own conception of what constitutes translation for them, an issue which has been subject to much debate in recent years, as we will presently see.

Next, we will delve into the interface of Translation Studies and postcolonialism, by examining scholarly literature but also the writings of key progressive thinkers from outside the discipline that have arrived at (cultural) translation in the course of their investigations. We will

try to distill a common substance from their different interpretations of translation and see how those interpretations interact with the conclusions of various translation scholars. We will try to draw a common set of principles and elaborate on what they could mean for ethically responsible translators. This will lead us to the convenience of grounding our discussion on the case study of the novel *Sozaboy*.

Saro-Wiwa's particular choice of what is basically a form of Nigerian Pidgin as the linguistic vehicle for the book adds a layer of complexity to the task of the eventual translator, who will face a contact language, separate from English but with English as a lexifier. This will complicate the adoption of clear-cut dual strategies based on "naturalizing" the standard English component and "foreignizing" the vernacular aspects of the language (Bandia 2008). Furthermore, the strong socio-linguistic connection between Pidgin and a lack of education and status is very present in the book, and in fact, it could be argued to be the source of a great deal of its (tragicomic) humor and even its discourse about the war, and how a corrupt elite duped a people into a fight where they had nothing to win. This aspect should ideally be preserved in the translation, but not at the expense of cultural specificity by having the narrator be just an uneducated, ignorant target-language speaker – no small challenge, as we will see.

Secondly, for a dissertation that will have much to discuss about the connections between translation, ideology, and power, the fact that Ken Saro-Wiwa was probably better known as a political and environmental activist than as a writer cannot but contribute an additional point of interest. As a staunch defender of the rights of the Ogoni, his small ethnic minority, his anti-colonial stance, and his take on the Biafran civil war which is the setting of the novel is again unique: Saro-Wiwa saw a continuation of colonial oppression in the treatment of Nigerian minorities by the three main ethnic groups that held most of the power in the country. An extension

of this outlook was his pro-Federal position during the war, despite being in Biafran territory. Another was his defense of the English language as a unifying tool that could overcome ethnic strife, a feeling reinforced by an elitist education which again introduces a layer of complication when trying to ascertain his motivation for the use of rotten English, as we will see.

After briefly introducing the novel and its plot, we will proceed to perform a thorough source-text analysis, which will also follow a top-down approach from the more general to the particular. Hence, it will start with a discussion of cultural considerations, which should not only precede any strategic decision (Tymoczko 2010, 248), but are deemed particularly important when dealing with texts of this kind, where colonized identity (African/Nigerian/Ogoni in our case) is always under threat of assimilation by an irreflective or domesticated approach to translation. Therefore, to help the translator avoid false presuppositions, the dissertation will locate the book in its immediate cultural context by studying it from the perspective of genre and by searching for any intertextual content that may elude unfamiliar readers. The discourses contained in the book which correlate with the Nigerian reality of the time will also be mentioned, before examining so-called cultural words and concepts that might constitute a stumbling block for the translator, from those reflecting the immediate physical environment to values and beliefs. After this block devoted to culture, the study will move on to stylistic considerations: matters of register and dialect, with the overarching focal point of understanding rotten English. With that intent, we will take a look at Saro-Wiwa's life and his written record to ascertain what could have been his intentions for choosing, as a substrate, Nigerian Pidgin, a popular contact language which is usually considered the province of the illiterate. Other biographical elements having to do with the setting and plot of the novel will also be considered. Next, the study will move on to the reception of the book and the external interpretations of rotten English and its function. Thus will conclude our foray through

what could, by and large, be considered extratextual factors, after which the dissertation will tackle the last block in the analysis: the textual level. For practical reasons, this will basically consist of a discussion of the actual features of rotten English and, very especially, of how on closer inspection it reveals itself as a "watered-down" version of Nigerian Pidgin — much more than an Africanized version of standard English. Finally, taking all of the previous discussion into consideration, we provide some guidelines on how the book could be translated into Spanish, always from a responsible, non-imperialistic stance. This will involve, first, a discussion of several existing translations into other European languages, along with some illustrative examples of how pidgin passages — and linguistic variation in general — have been historically translated when dealing with postcolonial literature. After that, in a search for models and inspiration, the study will offer a panorama of the little-known and scarcely acknowledged, but considerable tradition of African traces in Spanish literature, and how the vindication of that forgotten contact surface can be an enormous help for the translator.

Before moving on to methodology and the body of the dissertation, a quick word about another motivation for the approach adopted in this study that is maybe personal in its origin, but hopefully not irrelevant for other translators and researchers in Translation Studies. The idea of poring over every step involved in the approach to the translation of a particularly challenging text — from the translator's own ideology and conception of their role, to the prior research concerning the culture of the target text, the life and thoughts of its author and the specifics of its language and style — was attractive in that it offered a way to digest, in a reflective fashion, what is often applied in a rushed combination of presuppositions based on professional experience but also ideological givens, the common-sense "norms" we just referred to. The usual time and money constraints faced by translators conspire against the sort of detailed analysis carried out in this

study, and we hope that the opportunity to be unrealistically thorough for once serves as a personal satisfaction, certainly, but also as a more universal attempt at breaking down what goes on behind the decisions made by literary translators faced by a text of these characteristics. Perhaps the dissertation will offer a modest framework for other translators to structure their approach to other works, especially if they present similarities with *Sozaboy*: not only regarding their African, Nigerian, or postcolonial nature, but also, for instance, if they are the result of extreme linguistic experimentation, just like we have been able to draw from the experience of previous translators and scholars that have braved similar tasks. In that regard, the dissertation aspires, as well, to bridge the chasm between theory and practice that so often has separated scholars from professionals. This is, again, a personal concern that will hopefully be shared by others who may find something of interest in what follows.

As a final consideration, if one of the avowed objectives of the dissertation is reconciling theory and practice, it could be fair to wonder why not "just" translate the book and work from a commented translation as a starting point, following one of the models for translation research explored, for instance, by Jenny Williams and Andrew Chesterman (2002). Although the idea was certainly tempting, it was felt that such a displacement of focus would have ultimately been to the detriment of the theoretical depth of the dissertation and the adaptability of its conclusions to other literary texts. First, because of unavoidable time and space constraints, less attention could have been devoted to the groundwork, which we still feel is a most important part of the dissertation, since it is there that most of the essential issues arise. Second, to work with a finalized translation could have fostered a more defensive approach and a degree of confusion between the validity of the strategic approach and the actual tactical implementation of that approach in any of the myriad decisions that are to be taken in a translation, as well as a blurring of the focus from what we

consider to be the main issues of interest. That being said, no outcome for the dissertation could be better than to contribute in some way to the eventual translation of *Sozaboy* into Spanish, which is long overdue.

2. METHODOLOGY

If translation is by definition a multidisciplinary field, and increasingly so with the steady widening of its scope (Munday 2009, 4; Baker and Saldanha 2020, xxiii), perhaps the particular approach that has been chosen for the dissertation leans even more in that direction. By encompassing so many different stages of the translation process — from the very definition and the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the activity to cultural difference and universalism to questions of genre and reception, down to Afro-English and Afro-Spanish connections at the syntactic and lexical levels — while not foregoing the creation of a coherent whole, we have been driven to draw from very different sub-fields of Translation Studies and combine the work of various scholars, both from within and without the discipline.

Our ambition with the more theoretical first part of the dissertation is to reflect on the emancipatory potential of cultural translation as a possible way out of the intractable dichotomy between the falsely naïve, Eurocentric traditional understanding of universalism, characterized by an imperialist assimilation of difference, and a pessimistic denial of all universalist aspirations which is at heart, we claim, a denial of the very possibility of translation. To that end, we read together the work of several philosophers and political thinkers from different traditions and provenances who, following separate ways, have all arrived at some interpretation of (cultural) translation as a force for emancipation, and we try to find common threads in their thinking. We will pay special attention to the writings of Étienne Balibar (1995, 2004, 2010), Judith Butler (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000; Butler 2012), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1987, 1995, 1993, 2009), and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos 2004, 2012, 2014). Their insights are then contrasted with what translation scholars have written on the subject, especially those that have dealt extensively with postcolonialism and more generally the interaction of power and translation. From key voices

in decolonizing culture, authors of landmark essays within Translation Studies who cautioned against the adoption of an excessively rosy view of translation, which can be and has often been used to actually silence the subaltern (Niranjana 1992, 1994; Cheyfitz 1991; Rafael 1993; Spivak 1993, 1994)[2] to other, more recent studies which explore the possibilities of translation for subverting hegemonic discourse (Bielsa and Aguilera 2017; Bielsa 2018; Carbonell i Cortés 1996, 1997; Cronin 2017; Robinson 2011, 2017; Tymoczko 1999, 2010; Xie 2018).

The best bridge to link the aforementioned theoretical speculations with the beginning of the discussion of our case study is offered by Tymoczko's holistic approach to cultural translation (2010), since it explicitly broaches the question of translational strategy, and makes it dependent on a thorough prior analysis of the difference between source and target culture, and the "self-reflexive willingness to query the most automatized aspects of our received thinking" (165) that is to be expected in a responsible, postcolonial approach to translation. However, by staying at the level of culture (albeit considerably widening the scope of what had been traditionally understood in the literature as cultural analysis), Tymoczko's holistic model is not sufficient by itself to cover the sort of complete source-text analysis that was intended by the dissertation. Therefore, it has been circumscribed within a larger framework taken from the Discourse Analysis school, whose three-layered division into Context of Culture, Context of Situation, and Textual Level has served as a map to structure the dissertation in a systematic fashion (Halliday 2014; Baumgarten and Schröter 2018; Munday and Zhang 2015; Hatim and Mason 1990). The idea of applying this model to the prospective translation of a literary text was initially inspired, in turn, by the work of Josep Marco (2002, 2000). The other major model for translation-oriented source-text analysis, the

[2] This is, however, largely a difference of emphasis. Despite their exploration of the sometimes deleterious effects of translation as a part of the colonialist enterprise, many of these authors allow for an alternative, responsible use of translation.

functionalist approach of Christiane Nord (2018, 1991) — with her division into extratextual and intratextual factors — seems somewhat unwieldy for the discussion of literary texts, especially ones where cultural aspects are the topmost priority. That being said, Nord's model has been referred to on occasion, especially regarding the difference between author's intention and text function.

As far as the context of culture is concerned, the groundwork laid by Hatim and Mason (1990) and expanded on by their continuators has the advantage of mapping well into Tymoczko's categories for holistic cultural translation. The categories of Genre and Intertextuality are both covered by Tymoczko under the umbrella term of *overcoding* (2010, 243), while Discourse deserves a separate category in both models. Additionally, we analyze what some scholars call culturemes, cultural words, or *realia*, and we equate them to Tymoczko's "signature concepts," but we study them under the model of the logical levels developed by Katan (Katan and Taibi 2021), which allows in our view for a more systematic approach.

The next tier in the analysis would correspond to what Discourse Analysis describes as the context of situation. However, as it descends closer to the textual level and potential points of interest multiply, pragmatism requires that the study narrows the focus somewhat to identify those stylistic elements the preservation of which is felt to be more important. Thus, when dealing with the actual circumstances surrounding the creation of *Sozaboy* and its reception and interpretation, we will restrict our inquiries almost exclusively to the intention behind the use of rotten English and the function it served and is serving. Other aspects of Saro-Wiwa's biography will have to be mentioned only in the briefest of fashions, unfortunately. For the purposes of this study, several biographical materials have been consulted, taking always into account that we are primarily interested in those experiences in Saro-Wiwa's life that had some bearing on the writing of

Sozaboy, or offer some insight into his motives for writing it. We have consulted autobiographical texts such as *On a Darkling Plain* (1989), *A Month and a Day* (1995), and *Silence Would be Treason* (2013). These have been supplemented with biographical materials not written by Saro-Wiwa (Wiwa 2000; Ojo-Ade 1999; A.R. Na'Allah 1998; C. W. McLuckie and McPhail 2000).

Next, still within the realm of the extratextual, the study will consider the reception of *Sozaboy* applying the framework of Hasan's Context of Interpretation (Hasan 1989, 102), with a view to determining the *function* rotten English has served according to commentators, which might not entirely coincide with Saro-Wiwa's original *intention* for it, following Nord's distinction between the two concepts (2018, 28).

The next step in the discussion will take us to the purely linguistic components of style: register, on the one hand, and dialect, on the other. As regards the former, we will pay special attention to code-switching and the orality of the text. For the identification of oral markers, and their connection with the therapeutical processing of trauma we will draw largely from the work of Kathryn Batchelor (2015). As far as dialect is concerned, we will take a close look at the observable deviations from the Standard in rotten English and compare them to Nigerian Pidgin grammar in order to ascertain the degree of hybridity of *Sozaboy* and its chief structural components. To that end, the work of Nicholas Faraclas will prove essential (1996, 2013, 2021).

For the final block, the dissertation will finally move on from the identification of challenges to the proposal of possible translation solutions. First, the study will go over some of the existing literature on the translation of dialects and pidgins, with special attention to Juan Gabriel López Guix's writing on the matter (2015, 2018). The exploration will be enriched with the paratexts written by the translators of *Sozaboy* to French, Italian, and German (Saro-Wiwa 2003; 2005; 1997). As part of our proposal for an eventual Spanish translation, we will explore the

rich but scarcely studied tradition of Afro-Spanish literary traces, for which an enormous debt is owed to John Lipski (2005, 2008, 2007a), and we will trawl Spanish-based pidgins, especially the Cuban Afro-bozal proto-pidgin, as studied by Lipski and Luis Ortiz López (1998) and as preserved in literary works like *Cecilia Valdés o la loma del ángel* (Villaverde, [1882] 2011), *Sofía* and *La familia Unzúazu* (Morúa Delgado, [1891] 2007; [1896] 2020), and essays like *El monte* (Cabrera, [1954] 2019). The purpose will be to cross-check their features with those of rotten English to find potential translation solutions that are true both to the stylistic requirements of the novel and to the intention of preserving its postcolonial sense of difference, while simultaneously "contaminating" Spanish by vindicating the presence of a traceable legacy of Afro-Hispanic contact.

Before moving forward, a technical note: to avoid confusion, the page number for the numerous quotations extracted from the novel is always underlined, to set them apart from the rest of the citations. Unless otherwise specified, all references to *Sozaboy* correspond to the Longman edition (Saro-Wiwa 1994).

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: TRANSLATION, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND UNIVERSALISM[3]

It is well known that Translation Studies have been undergoing a considerable broadening of their field of study in the last decades. The discipline has experienced the oft-mentioned "cultural turn" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) by which it shifted its focus away from merely linguistic and textual considerations. A significant part of this transformation has involved a deeper study of the interplay between translation and ideology, politics and power in general, leading some to talk of a "power turn" (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002, xvi; Tymoczko 2010, 42) and of translation as "a field of power" (Spivak 2008). A part of this trend has been a wealth of studies focused on postcolonialism, from the seminal studies by Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1993), to monographies such as *Translation and Empire*. *Postcolonial Theories Explained* (Robinson 2011), *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999), or *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Niranjana 1992), to name just a few. This last author, in particular, offers a good example of a classical postcolonial, mainly negative revisionist view of translation as part of the Western imperial enterprise, and thus of some of the potential problems that arise from that interpretation.

[3] This section is partly based on a previous article published on *Translation & Interpreting*, "Cultural translation, universality and emancipation" (Dols and Calafat 2020).

3.1. Orientalism and complicit translation

In a paper published under the title of "Translation, Colonialism, and the Rise of English" Tejaswini Niranjana (1994) summarizes her positions roughly as follows: translation is one of the multiple sites and discourses where the "colonial subject" is constructed. The basic mechanism in the case of translation is the representation of the colonized — in colonial literature and reports — in such a way that it justifies its domination. In particular, Niranjana claims that Western philosophy promotes a "Hegelian conception of History" which "endorses a teleological, hierarchical model of civilizations," according to which all other cultures and ways of life are presented as backward or "distorted" versions of the more advanced, European civilization (1994, 126). Additionally, translation is conditioned by an entire Western philosophical apparatus with its particular notions of reality, representation, and knowledge. The end result is a "logocentric metaphysics" that postulates the possibility of "direct, unmediated access to reality" through representation. This, when applied to translation, creates representations of the Other that are deprived of their historic component, thus presenting as "natural" certain visions of the colonized peoples, which then become "objects without history," she says, quoting Edward Said (125). These "Orientalist" visions became the standard representation of the colonies both among the colonizers and — more significantly — among the colonized themselves, who ended up embracing imperialist (British, in Niranjana's example) education. This was often accompanied with religious conversion, a constant in all empires, at least in the Americas (Valdeón 2019, 66). Said's notion of Orientalism has also been fruitfully applied to translation by Ovidi Carbonell, who points out that the propensity to exoticize of Western translations when dealing with texts produced by cultures about which there exist long-standing traditions of representation and, hence,

stereotyping, can actually work towards separating cultures, instead of creating bridges between them (1996, 82).

Something that might stand out in Niranjana's thesis is the fact that the relationship she establishes between translation and colonial practices is one of analogy, a detachment from practical activity that is not unproblematic (Shamma 2018). This metaphorical engagement with translation will be one of our main focus of discussion in what follows, and it is shared to a large extent with other seminal researchers of the connection between translation and colonialism, like Eric Cheyfitz, for whom "at the heart of every imperial fiction (the heart of darkness) there is a fiction of translation" (1997, 15), under the guise of a "transmission of power" following the classic Roman formula of the "*translatio imperii et studii*" (xx). Much earlier, in the dawn of the Spanish imperial enterprise, Antonio de Nebrija had already underlined the close connection between language and empire, and both language and translation had an imbrication with the Spanish colonizing thrust that extended well beyond that early period (Valdeón 2019, 59–60).

Niranjana's and Cheyfitz's insightful denunciation is applicable not only to the discourses that have historically justified a ruthless colonialist ideology but also — perhaps more interestingly from the point of view of emancipatory politics — to a certain way of understanding the resistance to that ideology, from the standpoint of a universalism based on a linear idea of progress, whereby colonial subjects are patronizingly encouraged to get up to speed to the progressive discourse brought to them from the metropolis. As far as languages are concerned, this has had the effect of consolidating the position of English as the "natural" language of Reason, culture, and progress, while local tongues — in India, Africa, and all over the British Empire — were set aside as effectively incapable of articulating sophisticated ideas.

However, rather than as an overall condemnation of translation, Niranjana's views are perhaps best understood as a denunciation of a certain narrow, unidirectional understanding of translation (which is ultimately, we claim, a negation of translation, since it aims at the production of untranslated source texts moving always from the center to the periphery; the colonial conqueror does not translate: he *names*). Cheyfitz himself seems to strike a similar chord when he states that the Western approach still practices a "politics of translation that repress translation as dialogue" in favor of a monologue (1991, xix), while Bandia denounces the "one-way traffic" from major to minor languages and echoes the statement that "empires do not translate"(2021, 57).

3.2. The subversive potential of translation

Niranjana's work can be said to belong, in that regard, to what Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002) call "the early stages of the cultural turn in translation studies," characterized at times by "an uncritical application of power dichotomies" (xviii). After all, as they state, "translation is not simply associated with the 'perception of control or command over others' [part of the definition of *power* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*] and, hence, with colonization or oppression, but also with 'the ability to act upon' structures of command, so that translation becomes a means to resist that very colonization or exploitation" (xvii). How to manage precisely that, to use translation as a counter-imperialist tool, is a deep question that has been the object of agitated debate during the last years.

Perhaps an outsider's perspective can help bring new insights to the debate. Parallel to the "cultural turn" in translation, poststructuralism has brought about a "linguistic turn" in politics (Butler 2000a, 271), which, in a symmetricanti-colonial evolution to that of Translation Studies and its "power turn," has led some thinkers to develop their own "translation turn" as part of their

study of power. Étienne Balibar (2004, 2010), Judith Butler (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000; Butler 2012), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004, 2014), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1987, 2009), among others who will be mentioned more briefly below, have all arrived by different ways to translation as a potential vehicle for a new, non-imperialistic universalism, from which the articulation of global resistance becomes a possibility: translation as a basis for democratic alliances (Fernández 2020, 4). The operative term here is "non-imperialistic", since the notion of universalism explicitly or implicitly deployed by the authors examined here does not align with the traditional usage of the term. As a matter of fact, the political and philosophical backgrounds of many of these scholars have made them acutely aware of the pitfalls involved in any universalist program, however well-meaning, that entails an assimilation of difference.

It is undeniable that the concept of universalism has come under fire in the latest decades, largely as a result of the postcolonial critique of humanism and Enlightenment, but there have always been anti-colonial thinkers that have tried to go beyond particular, nationalist struggles. Perhaps the most compelling expression of this global vocation in the resistance against imperialism remains that of Franz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean Francophone who fought the French in Algeria:

> I am a man, and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world. […]. Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act. In no way should I derive my basic purpose from the past of the peoples of color. […]. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future (2008, 176).

[…]

> There is no Negro mission; there is no white burden. I find myself suddenly in a world in which things do evil; a world in which I am summoned into battle; a world in which it is always a question of annihilation or triumph (178).

What Fanon was aiming at was a humanist, combative universality, joining together all the particular struggles of the different colonial peoples into something larger than the mere sum of the parts, a global fight against subjugation and for "human behavior."

Articulating such a discourse is, nonetheless, a task fraught with dangers. The tension between the universalist claims of a more classic or Marxist-oriented Left, and the resistance in the face of what many postcolonial thinkers consider yet another attempt to impose Western ideas and worldview onto the former colonies has been raging for some time. In some cases, the debate has erupted under the guise of a debate about Fanon himself, as in the controversy between Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek and some thinkers from the postcolonial tradition such as Hamid Dabashi and Walter Mignolo (for an overview, see Wolters 2013). While Mignolo finds in Fanon's statements such as "So, my brothers, how could we fail to understand that we have better things to do than follow that Europe's footstep" a justification for his idea that "each population requires its own solutions to its own problems, which can be a disengagement from capitalism or communism or both," Žižek is famously attached to the idea of the continued importance of "The Idea of Communism" (the title of a series of lectures that later gave rise to a book), and he vindicates Fanon as one of his "heroes" in the formulation of a "universal goal" to overcome all apparent divisions: "the unity of the struggle for freedom and democracy with the struggle for

social and economic justice" (2015, 229). In his view, global capitalism is the enemy that must be defeated, but it is wrong to assume that every culture has to fight its own variant of capitalism and defend its way of life against the uniformizing offensive of global capital. On the contrary, Žižek claims that today's capitalism is more than happy to integrate local differences, in a "divide and conquer" logic that dooms any non-global resistance to ineffectiveness. In that regard, he is close to other radical thinkers evolved from classical Marxism who adopt a critical stance towards postcolonial studies, such as Aijaz Ahmad (2008) or Vivek Chibber, who undertakes a comprehensive critique of the Subaltern Studies school, and a vindication of "the idea, central to the Enlightenment tradition, that they [East and West] are bound together by common interests" (2013, 154-155).

While it seems hard to deny that today's global capitalism is in fact universal, and that the fight against its most pernicious effects requires a concerted, global resistance, the articulation of the "common interests" mentioned by Chibber cannot be the prerogative of any particular place of enunciation. Against globalization theories affirming the unseveralicity of the world, in other words, what is needed is a cosmopolitan perspective emphasizing the multiplicity of perspectives, where translation is bound to play a central role (Bielsa and Aguilera 2017, 2). This is something that has to be kept in mind when trying to articulate such commonality from any particular culture.

3.3. The translation turn in political thinking: Ngugi, Balibar, Butler, Santos

The interest in translation of the authors that will be the focus of our next lines is arguably linked precisely with their search for a way to articulate — universalize — different political claims without diluting or domesticating them in the process. After all, translation has often been

characterized as the art of achieving what Jakobson famously defined as "equivalence in difference" (1959/2004, 139). Ngugi wa Thiong'o is well-known both as a writer and as a vocal advocate for the use of non-European African languages. De-emphasizing the unifying role that English has played in avoiding ethnic clash, Ngugi argues that the true language of Africa is and can only be translation, the "language of languages, a language through which all languages can talk to one another" (Ngugi, 2009, 96).

Ngugi's position has many points in common with what Étienne Balibar has written concerning a very different context, that of Europe, where this French philosopher perceives the emergence of "a true European Apartheid" (2004, 170). To fight this trend he puts forward a number of proposals, some of which concern cultural and linguistic policies. Balibar claims that English cannot be the language of Europe, because it is both much more and much less than that (178). Instead, he echoes Umberto Eco in suggesting that this role is to be taken up by "the practice of translation," which is both "the only genuine 'idiom of Europe'" (2004, 234) and "a means of cultural resistance and a countervailing power, but not on the traditionalist and communitarian bases of identitarian 'national language-culture;'" it is also "distinct from the globalized circulation of information" (2004, 178).[4] Balibar then goes on to specify that the usual concept of translation must be expanded to "broaden the circle of legitimate translation" (thus including languages such as Arabic or Urdu) and must also make the move to a "broader cultural level" (2004, 234). Again, a third way out of a false binomial dilemma, made all the more necessary since some kind of universalized resistance is considered to be indispensable, due to the sterility of "the insistence on

[4] This idea of translation as "language of languages" or true language of a multilingual continent, is not exclusive of these authors. An earlier precursor could be seen, for instance, in Benjamin's notion of "pure language" (Bush 1998, 194).

exclusive identity and otherness, which the system already produces and instrumentalizes" (Balibar 1995, 70).

Judith Butler strikes a similar chord. She disagrees that true universality can be expressed from outside a particular culture and language: "The very concept of universality compels an understanding of culture as a relation of exchange and a task of translation" (2000c, 24-25). Cautioning that translation, nevertheless, is not intrinsically emancipatory, she follows the lead of Gayatri C. Spivak to vindicate the role of cultural translation "as both a theory and practice of political responsibility" (36). Multiculturalism, then, in her view, should not be reduced to a mere "politics of particularity" but understood as "a politics of translation" (2000b, 168); a politics of translation which, nevertheless, avoids a colonial, expansionist assertion of universalism (2000b, 35).

From the tradition of decolonial thought in Latin America, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, much like Butler, claims that any single theory which attempts to grasp the whole world is bound to presuppose "the monoculture of a given totality and the homogeneity of its parts" (2004, 36). However, Santos is also reminiscent of Balibar and Butler in that his rejection of universalism does not entail an entrenchment in particularism: "Recognising the relativity of cultures does not necessarily imply adopting relativism as a philosophical stance" (2012, 60). To find an alternative to such a grand theory is, precisely, the work of translation, acting through what he calls "diatopical hermeneutics," a sort of negative universalism predicated on the impossibility of cultural completeness (37).

Santos's negative universalism has many points in common with the "critical universalism" of the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji, who carries out a strong vindication of translation as well, from an African but also unequivocally universalist point of view. Like the rest of the

authors we have been discussing, he decries the false universalism of the former colonial powers, backed by an exclusionary, often overtly racist rationale. Nevertheless, this noxious and contradictory provincialization of the universalist ideal should not lead to the "furious particularism" (quoted in Dübgen and Skupien 2019, 148) that in his view characterized a large proportion of African philosophy: he was critical of coetaneous schools such as so-called ethnophilosophy, but also particularistic approaches such as the *Négritude* movement headed by Aimé Césaire or Léopold Sédar Senghor or the African socialism embodied by leaders like Julius Nyerere or Kwame Nkrumah (4). The task of the postcolonial philosopher was, according to him, to enrich the philosophical debate by making it more transcultural (149). For that endeavor, he lauded Kwasi Wiredu's "model of translation as critical appropriation and conceptual decolonization" (152). In his own words: "The untranslatable is the false universal, the relative that masks itself as universal under cover of the particularities of a language" (quoted in Dübgen and Skupien, 152).

In short, what these authors have found in translation is a way to "square the circle," to cut the Gordian knot formed by the interlacing of monocultural universalism and essentialist particularism in its various incarnations.

Some thinkers seem nevertheless loath to rescue universalism from its monocultural baggage and, while maintaining similar positions, prefer the use of concepts such as openness, or cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2006; Bielsa, 2018). To foreseeable criticism that cosmopolitanism is at its core a Eurocentric notion, Bielsa counters with recent vindications of a non-Westen reading of the concept, such as J. Go's study of Fanon's postcolonial cosmopolitanism (Bielsa and Aguilera 2017, 9). However, a similar postcolonial widening of meaning via Fanon can be effected for *universalism*, and has indeed been effected, not only by Žižek as we have seen; upon Fanon's

death, Francis Jeanson wrote, for instance, that "This Martinican … will remain for us a very living example of universalism in action" (Macey 2012, loc. 9705).

The effort to widen the scope of translation and associate it with such controversial notions rises the somewhat tired but inescapable issue of what is meant by *translation* in these extended usages and when, if ever, does it stop being the same as good, old interlingual translation. To answer those questions, we must start by examining exactly how thinkers like Butler, Ngugi, Balibar, and Santos understand the term.

3.4. Impossible but necessary

A good starting point could be the definition Ernesto Laclau used to summarize Butler's postulates on the subject: Butler's "cultural translation" would be "the deterritorialization of a certain content by adding something which, being outside the original context of enunciation, universalizes itself by multiplying the positions of enunciation from which that content derives its meaning" (2000, 194). The definition has the advantage of at least offering a refreshing alternative to the trite, pessimistic characterization of translation as a doomed endeavor, a minefield of mistakes or disloyalties: translation as an impossible endeavor. The adjective keeps cropping up: for Balibar, translation is both "an impossible task" (2010, 318) and a necessary one, the same adjectives that Ernesto Laclau uses to characterize the paradox at the heart of the construction of hegemony (2000, 66). "Impossible, Necessary Task" is, in turn, the title of the chapter in *Parting Ways* that Butler devotes to discussing Edward Said and Emmanuel Levinas, where she proposes "an act of political translation" that avoids both the assimilation of one experience to another and "the kind of particularism that would deny any possible way to articulate principles regarding, say, the rights of refugees on the basis of a comparative consideration of these and other instances of

historical dispossession" (Butler 2012, 53). This refusal to accept the assimilation-particularism dichotomy should ring a bell by now. Of course, the actual impossibility is not translation itself, but the "effort to establish universality as transcendent of cultural norms" (Butler 2000c, 20), the dream of cultural completeness that would allow the formulation of a general theory from within a single cosmovision (Santos 2012, 60). This "dream" has a reflection, we claim, in the traditional discourse on interlingual translation, where it is presented as the fabled *tertium comparationis*: a hypothetical universal, intermediate invariant (Munday 2009, 112) that upon reflection is necessarily predicated on the idea that there can be a monocultural affirmation of universality. The hidden subjectivity that is necessarily involved in such a process is analyzed, for instance, in Hermans' discussion of Toury's early theories (Hermans 2014, 57). The partiality of any translation, the inescapable choices involved in its elaboration, its contingency, in other words, is not a flaw but "a necessary condition of the act" (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002, xviii).

3.5. Objections to the expanded notion of cultural translation

Reasonable objections can be raised concerning the actual meaning of *cultural translation* in the senses we have been studying so far. Is there a divide between "translation" in the standard, restricted sense of the Jakobsian interlingual translation, that is, the "interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language" (Jakobson [1959] 2004, 139), and translation in the extended, apparently metaphorical meaning deployed by Butler and Santos?

Santos offers the beginnings of a possible answer to the question, when he acknowledges that, even if intercultural translation is usually conceived as a metaphor, metaphors tend to become literalized with repeated use. This is in fact the case with the standard Western view of translation as *transfer*, itself a metaphor that is not necessarily shared by other cultures (Tymoczko 2009,

177). Additionally, any interlingual translation involves cultural considerations, so the line between *interlingual* and *intercultural* is blurry at best (Santos, 2014, 215). This is an idea shared by Sherry Simon, for whom "there cannot be a clear-cut distinction between cultural translation and the ordinary kind, because … even the linguistic categories used to define translation are more than linguistic" (Buden et al. 2009, 210). The distinction between both kinds of translation, thus, is in the end one of "emphasis or perspective" (Santos 2004, 41). Similarly, for her concept of "cultural translation" Butler draws from the writings of G. C. Spivak and explicitly quotes from her foreword and afterword for the translation of Mahasweta Madi's book *Imaginary Maps* (Butler 2000c, 35), which suggests a continuity between *interlingual* and *cultural* translation. In other words, while Butler and Santos certainly use "(inter)cultural translation" in the wider, more metaphorical understanding of the term, they also seem to conceive it as a particular, politically-aware approach to the translation of texts: an "empowered translation," to use Maria Tymoczko's wording: "I argue that there is a recursive relationship between the openness of meaning in translation, the empowerment of the translator, and the enlargement of the concept translation beyond Western metaphors related to transfer" (2010, 8).

Douglas Robinson introduces a similar concept with his *translingual address*, defined as "empathic exposure to and experience of at least two cultures — such as cisnormative and transgender, binary and nonbinary, Finnish and English — and the resulting ability to shift attitudinally, perspectivally, in moving from one to the other" (2019, xi). While Robinson's proposal seems to deal more with the approach to the task than with the act of translating itself, he nevertheless would appear to veer towards a clearly "transcultural" understanding of the activity, since he claims to adopt the sociological model of translation developed by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour that posits translation as "all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of

persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred in itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force," (xvii) and he himself defines translation as "an umbrella term" operating not only on national languages but also on "sexual, ideological, or scholarly discourses, or discursive orientations" (xii).

Others might object to this wider use of the term "translation" because, however justified, by challenging dominant assumptions about what translation is and how it works, it could risk raising unwarranted resistances. Simultaneously, it can also invite the idea that cultures are transparently translatable and total substitution is possible, which would risk erasing the trace of the Other that is so crucial for postcolonial approaches. This explains, in part, why other terms have been proposed to refer to this broader understanding of the activity, leaving "translation" as a sub-set within them: transfer, mediation, and so on.

Is there any merit, then, in sticking to the term *translation*? The problem with establishing different terms for what we have been calling intercultural and interlingual translation is precisely that, by doing so, the latter in fact preserves the implication of total transparency that obfuscates its ideological component. In other words, the illusion of "total substitution" so endemic in interlingual translation is maintained and even reinforced by the existence of a separate practice under a different name — be it "equivalence" (Laclau, 2000, 194), "transfer" (Göpferich, 2010) or any other candidate — as a contrast. In a classical ideological maneuver, cultural translation could be perceived as "political," with the usual corollary that "proper" translation (the one carried out in compliance with the dominant norms) is neutral and apolitical (faithful, selfless, invisible when done right). Precisely in this repression of the difficulties inherent to translation Eric Cheyfitz, for one, perceives one of the basic workings of imperialism (1991, xvi). In other words, if our main contention is that no culture can fully contain the world, if we want a specific politics of

contamination, of cultural impurity (Butler 2000b, 276), to abide by the norms regarding "acceptable" translation could be counterproductive. This is why the authors we are examining generally make a point to specify that their allegiance to translation assumes a counter-hegemonic approach to the activity, with a specific set of goals and priorities.

3.6. Translation as responsibility

The first salient feature of the approach proposed by our authors is the emphasis on the purpose behind any given translation. Of interest for them is the potential of translation as a "means of cultural resistance and a countervailing power" (Balibar 2004, 178), its "counter-hegemonic potential" (Santos 2012, 61), or its "counter-colonial possibility" (Butler 2000c, 36) when applied against the dominant discourse "in the service of the struggle for hegemony" (Butler 2000a, 168). They all consider translation an instrument of resistance, a vehicle for emancipation. Stressing this goal is important, because translation by itself is not inherently counter-hegemonic. All of our authors point out that, without a conscious effort and a political commitment on the part of the translator, translation can be a vehicle for domination and oppression, colonial or otherwise (Balibar 2010, 317; Butler 2000c, 35; Ngugi 2009, 125; Santos 2014, 229). And we have already hinted at how Eric Chayfitz (1991) distinguishes between a "difficult" politics of translation which imagines "kinships across the frontiers of race, gender, and class" (xvi) while beginning by a questioning of one's own place, and a politics of translation that represses this difficulty in order to constitute as a monologue pretending to be a dialogue (xix). Vicente Rafael is another scholar who has devoted much attention to the nefarious role translation has played in imperial domination, but also to the possibility of "Translating Otherwise" as a resistance tool (2016, 141).

Again, this ambiguity of translation connects with investigations carried out within the realm of Translation Studies. If we go back to Douglas Robinson's (2019) notion of translingual address, we can see that it has to do with empathy and the ability to implement an attitudinal, or perspectival, shift. Not only that, but Robinson builds on previous studies by Sakai Naoki, who advocates "the restoration of all human communication to the *attitude* of heterolingual address" (Robinson 2017, xii). The very possibility of that change in attitude is predicated on a previous process of self-reflection on the part of the translator, to overcome "Eurocentric pretheoretical assumptions" that condition professionals to adopt and perpetuate hegemonic positions while they simultaneously "limit their own agency as translators" (Tymoczko 2010, 8). What is needed, then, is an attitude, an ethical approach to translation, acknowledging the political responsibility inherent to the task, as formulated by Spivak (1993). This is a responsibility that is not understood as a right, that Is "beyond the law and that must also be distinguished from the concept of duty" (Bielsa and Aguilera 2017, 7). This is almost inevitably reminiscent of Emmanuel Levinas and how relevant responsibility towards the Other is in his thought; just like Robinson's empathic exposure to other cultures and his perspectival shift can be seen in the light of Levinas's ethical opening to the Other and his dictum that "ethics is an optics" (2007, 23). And, in fact, Butler (2012), in turn, has explored the connection between Levinasian ethics and translation. Not in vain one of the avowed goals of Levinas was to make his way "towards a pluralism that does not merge into unity" (1987, 42), a leitmotif that will surely sound familiar by now to our reader. What Butler claims to take from Levinas is the notion that contact with alterity, "an opening to the unfamiliar," is the only possible way for ethical traditions to thrive by becoming "generalizable and effective." This reaching for what is outside of oneself, this (metaphysical) "desire for the Invisible," in Levinasian terms, a "desire to look at the world from new perspectives (Vidal Claramonte 2019, 7), is only

possible through translation, even though translation, despite claims of its granting historical continuity, always alters the message in the course of "the transfer from one spatiotemporal horizon to another,"[5] by opening a "chasm" that enables even long-standing, apparently immutable traditions to re-emerge as new (Butler 2012, 11–12). At this point, we can find coincidences between Butler and another crucial decolonial thinker of the Latin American tradition, Enrique Dussel. In his own investigations on ethics, this Mexican philosopher also finds a familiar middle way: he exposes how an allegedly universal ethical principle, that of utilitarianism, ended up working as a neocolonial emancipation theory, as has been so often the case with universal projects irradiating from the center, but he also refutes communitarianist claims that there can be no cultural translation between traditions. It is possible to articulate a truly universal ethics, according to Dussel, because the dialogue between traditions — as long as that intercultural dialogue is redefined in a non-Eurocentric way — is not incompatible with the certainty that every debate, conflict, or struggle has a sited origin, a specific cultural and linguistic framework. An interesting difference in the way Butler and Dussel have of broaching these matters is their point of departure, despite their ultimate claims that ethical messages are translatable. While by and large Dussel writes from the standpoint of the dispossessed, hence the "Liberation" so prevalent in his project (*Politics of Liberation* (2007), *Ethics of Liberation* (1998), *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977), etc.), in *Parting Ways* Butler struggles with the endeavor of criticizing Zionist policies and the State of Israel from a deliberately Jewish tradition of justice and equality, that is, from the traditional epistemic framework of the oppressor, vis a vis the Palestinian. The struggle derives from Butler's feeling that, despite the fact that such criticism of colonial state violence would help debunk the notion that any criticism of the State of Israel is necessarily anti-Semitic, it could simultaneously

[5] This quotation could incidentally offer another interesting tentative definition of "cultural" translation.

be counter-productive to claim that such a critique of Zionism is made possible by some uniquely Jewish access to ethical values, inasmuch as that would perpetuate a certain exceptionalism which is what some put forward as a justification for Israeli state violence and the colonial subjugation of Palestinians. This is interesting because it offers an example for those working from a similar conundrum: striving to generate an ethical translation of Western values without falling into the pitfalls of imperialist, Eurocentric universalization, as Balibar tries to do. This is often the case, as well, of the Western translator approaching a postcolonial text with a keen awareness of the responsibility which, as Levinas would have it, intrinsically derives from any contact with the Other.

3.7. Foreignizing or Domesticating?

That responsibility, though present, is not always heeded, and a common feature of most postcolonial approaches to translation is their denunciation of the transference of local cultures into English as part of the imperialist domination process. And it is not just any part: "the myth of transparency and objectivity of the translation" makes for a dangerous tool in the hands of the colonial enterprise (Álvarez and Vidal 1996, 21). Of course, when discussing the risks involved in the supposedly transparent intervention of the translator, it is unavoidable to mention Lawrence Venuti and his influential volume on the subject, *The Translator's Invisibility*: "British and American publishing […] has reaped the financial benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American cultural values on a vast foreign readership, while producing cultures in the United Kingdom and the United States that are aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to the foreign, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with English-language values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural

other" (1995, 15). Venuti's strategic solution is well-known: he proposes a foreignizing approach to translation intended to draw readers out of their comfort zone and make them aware of the otherness of what they are reading. However, part of Venuti's reasoning is not without some flaws, mostly derived, in our view, from his focus on Anglo-American translations, which sometimes leads him to draw questionable conclusions that prevent us from blindly accepting the foreignizing strategy as a universal solution.

First, even admitting that the prioritizing of fluency over other criteria when judging the acceptability of translations has negative effects (Venuti 1995, 15), it remains to be seen why is this to be considered a particularly Anglophone phenomenon. Any comparative analysis quickly shows that this is not the case. Pym (drawing from a paper by Maria Helena Luchesi de Mello) mentions the example of Brazil, where fluency in translations is also praised, but the percentage of translations is much higher than in English (over 50% as compared to 2-4%), "and the culture would appear to be remarkably heterogeneous at home and scarcely imperialist abroad" (1996, 171). It would almost seem that domestication is one of Gideon Toury's universal norms of translation. It is true, though, that as Hermans (1996) reminds us, norms have a "dynamic character" because they are, after all, "social realities, involving not just individuals, groups and communities but also the power relations within these communities" (35). Consequently, they can be changed, even though "the possibility of effectively subverting norms only arises in conditions of weak normative control, when the norm subject is relatively immune to sanctions, or prepared to accept them" (36).

This last observation maybe explains why Venuti and other academics would be keener to adopt transgressive, counter-intuitive strategies, since they usually operate from a safer position (the practice of translation being a secondary or, at least, complementary activity for them).

Nonetheless, the bulk of literary translations in modern, capitalist countries is carried out by freelancers, often working for big publishing companies. This severely limits their leeway for adopting a "resistant" strategy or any variety of translation style that undermines the fluency of the work, which is usually seen as a desirable feature by the publisher, under the assumption that "making things easier" for the target reader correlates with public acceptance and commercial success. The notorious precariousness of translators — as far as income and prestige are concerned — makes them quite vulnerable to the "sanctions" mentioned by Hermans, living as they do with the sword of Damocles of not being hired again hanging constantly over their heads. This can potentially lead to what Douglas Robinson characterized as a clash between professional and personal ethics, where the former has "often been thought to consist of the translator assuming an entirely external perspective of his or her work, thinking about it purely from the user's point of view" (2003, 19). On top of that, publishers have their own proof-readers and copy editors, who add an extra layer of standardization to any book, which, in the case of postcolonial texts, can even be understood as a "re-colonization" of the work (García de Vinuesa 2015, 213) To sum up, Venuti's proposal would require, at the very least, a grand alliance of translators and publishers — not unlike the one proposed by Ngugi, and also, for instance, by Tymoczko (2010, 214) — and a slow change in the literary tastes of the reading public, in order to be effective.

There is another, more essential problem with Venuti's formulation, derived from his position as an academic: even when he explicitly limits his study to the Anglo-American sphere, the very position of the English language in the world globalizes any theorizing emanating from Anglophone — and very especially American — institutions. Thus, to discuss Translation Studies nowadays is also, to some degree, to discuss Venuti's work, and not only in Anglo-American circles, but some of his ideas, ironically, do not "translate" easily to other languages and cultures.

When thinking, then, about the political aspect of translation, we should be aware that "no single translation strategy can be associated with the exercise of oppression or the struggle for resistance; no single strategy is *the* strategy of power" (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002, xx). To test that, it is enough to contemplate the implementation of Venuti's proposals outside the sphere of Anglo-American translation. Should a Spanish translator from English, for instance, adopt the same strategy as someone who translates from a minority language? "Foreignizing" the translation of an English original entails reinforcing "the global drift toward American political and economic hegemony in the postwar period, actively supporting the international expansion of Anglo-American culture" (Venuti 1995, 15), a drift the politically-aware translator should theoretically aim to fight. These contradictions do not arise in the case of translations into English because of the simple fact that English nowadays is never in a position of inferiority regarding any other language.

It would appear that a variable approach to translation strategy that takes into account the power balance between the cultures involved is in order for those target languages other than English. Yet this creates a series of other problems which are arguably even more perplexing. First of all, foreignizing is basically a mechanism to fight against the translator's invisibility, so that an approach to an English original, for instance, which encourages fluency in the translation (and that is the case of most books in the Spanish market) entails accepting the subsidiary, "invisible" position of the translator. Not only that: the selective use of foreignizing strategies poses an increased risk of incurring an insidious side effect that is inherent to all such translation procedures — that of exoticism, a phenomenon that has been studied in depth by Ovidi Carbonell, who links it with the well-known criticism of Western "Orientalism" by Edward Said (Carbonell i Cortés 1996;1997). The conundrum becomes even more intractable when dealing with texts written in

hybridized modalities of colonial languages, where the asymmetrical power relations within and without the text multiply to extraordinary levels. These cases, as we will see when we get to discussing *Sozaboy*, invite not only responsibility but also creativity; "to transpose a multifaceted cultural reality into a different lingua-cultural domain, it is necessary not only to be aware of the values it conveys, but also to be bold and take on the challenge, implementing innovative strategies" (Bruti, Valdeón, and Zanotti 2014, 239).

Ultimately, the choice of a right strategic balance between domestication and foreignization will depend on the nature of the text itself, just as the application of any strategy will be conditioned by its ideological and stylistic features. To avoid vagueness and prevent the temptation of lumping all non-Western literary manifestations under a uniformizing umbrella, it is important to anchor the discussion in a particular cultural context and a particular work or set of works. For that reason, if the translator wants to engage in cultural translation, they must keep in mind that the essential analysis of the source culture should always "be undertaken *as it relates to the text to be translated and to the translation project*," in order to account for the dynamic nature of culture (Tymoczko 2010, 236, her emphasis). This is, as we explained in the introduction, one of the main reasons that have led to this dissertation being anchored in a case study.

3.8. Common traits

Before moving on to our particular cultural context, there are some common traits in the approach to translation taken by most counter-hegemonic (anti-imperialist, feminist, emancipatory in general) authors that it would be productive to discuss. However hard it is to devise a specific counter-hegemonic strategy, there is something that all the theories we have explored have in

common, and that is a bottom-up approach characterized by a special attention to the disenfranchised. This is a natural offshoot of the explicitly decolonial projects of Ngugi and Santos, but the same emphasis on the vulnerable is found in Butler's and Balibar's projects, and in the thinking, for instance, of Hountondji, for whom the path towards critical universalism involves as a precondition the incorporation of "debates from marginalised and decentralised spaces of knowledge production" (Dübgen and Skupien 2019, 148). Thus, in keeping with Spivak's notion of the translator's responsibility, Butler is careful to stress how important it is to "keep as one's reference the dispossessed and the unspeakable" (2000a, 178), while we have already mentioned Balibar's concern with the plight of emigrants.

A second common trait is an emphasis on education and on promoting knowledge about translation itself, raising awareness about the existence and vitality of other languages and, hence, other ways of understanding the world. After all, a certain education about translation, or at least an effort to divulge the cultural aspect intrinsic to the task is a pre-condition for any widening of the field of acceptable translations, be it in terms of languages involved, procedures accepted, or extension of the term's definition. The fact remains that large sections of the translating process are out of the translator's hands. That is why Ngugi calls for "a grand alliance of publishers, translators, financiers, and governments" (2009, 126), just like Tymoczko enjoins that "engaged translators must work with publishers, people who control or have access to the media, and people who can find ways to fund the production and distribution of the translated material" (2010, 214). This need for systemic changes, as we have seen, is also implicit if any widespread application of Venuti's theories is to be achieved, in order to increase the translator's visibility and the acceptance of different translation strategies, including the more "foreignizing" ones. This in turn would ameliorate the conflict between personal and professional ethics for the translator. Ngugi's call for

an alliance is, in brief, another reminder that translation is indeed a social activity that cannot be dissociated from both material and sociocultural (and thus ideological) considerations.

3.9. Relevance of the above for standard, interlingual translation

By way of conclusion, from all of the above we can deduce a number of consequences for translators, especially (but not only) those dealing with postcolonial texts. First, any responsible approach starts with a growing awareness of the key role cultural and political considerations play in the practice of translation, since "precisely by becoming cultural, translation opens up the problem of its intrinsic political meaning" (Buden et al. 2009, 196). This, in turn, should entail a personal change of perspective: "a nonconformist attitude vis-à-vis the limits of one's knowledge and practice and the readiness to be surprised and to learn with and from the other's knowledge and practice" (Santos 2014, 227). Translators should maintain a certain sense of wonder at the mystery that still lies behind this elusive "equivalence in difference;" translation is "impossible but necessary," yet it is also everyday and extraordinary, just like "the event" of our responsibility towards others according to Levinas (1998, 10). When heeding the call to go out of themselves toward the Other, translators must learn to question received conventions and be open to an ethics of impurity, while at all times striving to provide a voice for the voiceless, by reaching out for the emancipatory potential of translation as a key factor in a cosmopolitan project including issues such as global democracy, human rights, and borders (Bielsa 2018, 115); "If we are disposed to respond to a claim that is not immediately assimilable into an already authorized framework, then our ethical disposition to the demand engages in a critical relation to power" (Butler 2012, 25).

4. *SOZABOY*: A CASE STUDY

As we have seen in the previous section, there is no single, universal strategy for the empowered translation of postcolonial texts: one should avoid vague platitudes, and the temptation of lumping all non-Western literary manifestations under a uniformizing umbrella. It is paramount to anchor the discussion in a particular cultural context and a particular work, or set of works. A complete, cultural study of the text should indeed be "antecedent to the choice of translation strategy," since it will form the basis for the "network of decisions" the translator will later enact (Tymoczko 2010, 248). This contextual work is essential before any translation since "the translator has the ethical responsibility of exploring the contexts and the conditioning factors in which an 'original' text is constructed" (Vidal Claramonte 2019, 5). This is what we intend to do for the remainder of this dissertation with the novel *Sozaboy*, by Nigerian author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995). The book has been selected for the reasons detailed in the introduction, which will be explored in depth in the following pages. This will offer the chance, as well, of drawing from the existing literature dealing with the subject of how to strategically approach African texts, both for their translation into other languages and as translations themselves. The point of departure of most such analyses is the fact that cultural life in most African countries is conducted in one of the European languages that were imposed by the colonizing country, which creates tensions for both readers and writers. It seems only fitting, then, to start by tracing that history of language domination in the case of Nigeria, and the consequences it had and is still having for the literary life of the country.

4.1. Postcolonial English Language and Literature in Africa and in Nigeria

Today English is spoken by around 335 million people in 101 countries all over the world.

Undoubtedly, the root of this extraordinary global presence can be dated back to the British colonial expansion and imperial domination until the 1950s, and to the extraordinary influence of the United States as an economic and cultural superpower afterwards. However, in many of those countries the adoption of English was not a choice but an imposition by the colonizers, who often discouraged and repressed the use of native languages. Not only language, but British culture and literature were also seen as a useful tool in the consolidation of colonial dominion, as pointed out by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in their well-known book *The Empire Writes Back*. Their following quote from Gauri Viswanathan is especially relevant to our discussion: "British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to supporting them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education" (2002, 3)

That coercive and oppressive history led some countries, such as Tanzania and Malaysia, to abandon the English language altogether right after independency but, by and large, it is safe to say that English has kept an important role in all the countries that at some point became colonies of the British Empire.

4.1.1. The evolution of English and Pidgin in Nigeria

In the particular case of Nigeria, English has had a presence since so early as the sixteenth century, imported by the British traders who landed on the West African coast in the course of their travels. In this first phase — we follow here the three periods established by Edgar W. Schneider (2007, 199-212) — the colonial presence was confined to the Atlantic shore. Nonetheless, those early trading contacts must have given rise to the first forms of Nigerian Pidgin, a *lingua franca* of sorts that would later expand inland. At first, it must have been a mark of prestige, the domain of a

nascent commercial elite, but Pidgin lost that status once the properly colonial period started and Standard English became “the language of administration, education, commerce, and the law” (201). This happened in the first years of the twentieth century, when Nigeria became first a protectorate (in 1900) and then (in 1914) a full-fledged colony of the British Empire. From that point on, a dual sort of expansion took place, whereby British English became firmly associated with all formal aspects of daily Nigerian life, even though it was only spoken by that minority of the local population that had access to a formal, colonial education. Pidgin, on the other hand, took up the role of interethnic vehicular language for everyday, informal contexts.

The third phase established by Schneider covers the period from the ending of World War II to the present day, thus including the years immediately before and after the independence of the country, which was achieved in 1960. As far as the linguistic situation regarding English is concerned, Nigeria maintained the status quo after becoming a sovereign state. English not only kept its foothold in the country — it became a requisite for Nigerians who wanted to access a post in the administration. Furthermore, the efforts to universalize education entailed an expansion of English to areas of the country where it had not penetrated previously. Coupled with that, Pidgin also followed a parallel expansive evolution, so that, to all effects, a diglossic situation emerged. Nowadays, estimates suggest that English is spoken and used by roughly 20 percent of Nigerians (Schneider 2007), while the percentage of Pidgin users is well above half of the population: some scholars mention figures as high as 3 to 5 million native speakers and more than 110 million second-language speakers (Faraclas 2021; Osoba 2021), to the point where it is “not only the African language with the largest number of speakers, but also the most widely spoken pidgin/creole in the world” (Faraclas 2013, 176). Because of interethnic marriages and other factors, Nigerian English is also becoming the first language of an increasing number of Nigerians,

while Pidgin "has creolised (and is still creolising) in some parts of the country" (Igboanusi 2008).

4.1.2. English as national literary language in Africa and in Nigeria

As we have seen, since the European language of the colonizer monopolized all forms of higher education and was the tongue of choice for the more affluent classes, it is only natural that the first literary manifestations (in the written form — a discussion of the rich tradition of oral literature or *orature* in West Africa is well beyond the scope of this work), took place in English, considered and taught to be the language of culture. That is certainly the case of the so-called first generation of West African writers. These are the authors who wrote in the 1950s and 1960s, the period just before and after independence in most African countries. They shared an active involvement in the struggle for emancipation that led them to "tackle colonialism head-on, dramatizing the tragic consequences of European intervention in West Africa" (Newell 2006, 22).[7] The most famous and representative of these authors is, of course, Chinua Achebe, and his seminal novel *Things Fall Apart*, published two years before the independence of Nigeria. When Achebe and several other African writers met on the occasion of the now-famous Conference of African Writers of English Expression held in Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda, in June 1962, they set the stylistic foundations for much of the postcolonial Anglophone African literature of the following years. After breaking away from the *Négritude* school of Senghor and Césaire, which was a first, albeit short-lived, attempt at "literary decolonization," and from any notion of a particular "African personality" — in the line of philosophers like Hountondji and Wiredu (see

[7] Newell, following other critics like Neil Lazarus and Robert Fraser, goes on to identify two further generations. The second emerged between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and was characterized by a so-called "literature of disillusionment" that reflected "their loss of confidence in the postcolonial governments of West Africa" and denounced widespread corruption and violence. Finally, since the late 1980s, a third generation of West African writers would have dropped realism in favor of a more experimental literary outlook.

pages 25-26) — they set on a new direction. The basic program was summarized by Ezekiel Mphahlele in a press report following the conference: "It was generally agreed that it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language and then look for an English transliteration approximating the original" (Wali 2007, 333). This concept of "transliteration," also known as "relexification" by some scholars (i.e. Zabus 2007), is one of the keys of this study and will be discussed at length in the following pages, but at least a clarification is warranted before we go any further. It is immediately apparent that the Makerere writers did not use the term in the usual sense one can find in the Oxford English Dictionary; that of "the rendering of the letters or characters of one alphabet in those of another." What they meant was what Michael Onwuemene defines as "a blend of *translation* and *literal* … [which] may be roughly glossed as 'literal translation'" (1999, 1057). Another way of characterizing the resulting works — these supposedly literal translations of an underlying invisible source text — that has gained some popularity in the literature is to see them as palimpsests,[8] a concept that will be relevant for our discussion and thus merits some exploration here.

According to the palimpsest metaphor, the final, European-language text would hide a *scriptio inferior* consisting of the African-language "original." By this token, reading (and translating) these texts would involve a sort of deciphering task, not entirely unlike Freud's revision (*Bearbeitung*) of dreams, which he himself compared to a misleading Latin inscription hiding a message in the reader's mother tongue (Freud 2010, 505). To understand how close this is to the idea of the palimpsest, it is enough to consider the praise Freud had for the work of James Sully, who precisely used the metaphor of the palimpsest to describe the workings of a dream,

[8] For instance, in Chantal Zabus's influential *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (2007). And Vidal Claramonte writes about "this eternal palimpsest that is translation"

which “discloses beneath its worthless surface-characters traces of an old and precious communication” (161). Dreams, like palimpsests, then, would hide a repressed original. Eric Jager (2000), in turn, draws attention to this tradition of textual metaphorization of dreams, and then goes on to point out how it connects with issues of censorship and domination, bringing us full circle to the postcolonial context: “manuscript palimpsests were often shown to conceal `pagan’ texts overwritten by Christian ones” (160). It seems that the motivation behind this erasing of the pagan tradition was ultimately motivated by economic, more than purely ideological concerns or any deliberate “campaign” of *damnatio memoriae.* The high cost of vellum fostered recycling; indeed, less popular Christian works were also written over when needed. However, the argument could be made that this is actually in accordance with how ideological constraints really work most of the time. Instead of a central, interventionist agent explicitly forbidding some course of action, a more or less invisible network of determining factors conspire to forestall it for (at least apparently, often truly) practical reasons in such a way that the ideological origin of the process is masked under a layer of common sense. Why were pagan texts less on demand? Is it conceivable that the fact that most intellectual activity was carried out in monasteries had no weight on the choice of Christian canon over pagan works when it came to recycling texts? A similar logic is at work with the advisability for the African author of writing in English, for perfectly sound, sensible reasons, and it is easy to imagine which sites have taken over from monasteries as hubs for the reproduction and distribution of knowledge, and the history behind that culturally dominant position.

Going back to the 1962 Makerere conference, a question may arise for those unfamiliar with the African cultural atmosphere around that time. If the writer was to “think and feel in his own language,” why translate — or transliterate — at all? Why should the author not simply use

his or her mother tongue? The answer lies partly in the perceived need for a national literary language, one that was able to overcome ethnic particularism in invariably multiethnic countries. The struggle for independence in those decades had a strong nation-building component. The admonishing words of Franz Fanon, writing in 1961, come to mind: "National consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe — a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity" (2004, loc. 2185). In that historical context, English (and French and Portuguese where relevant) were "seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state" (Ngugi 1987, 6-7). Nigeria has been no exception, and the need for national integration led to the adoption of English as official language "at all the levels of governance," while Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are acknowledged as "official regional languages" (Osoba 2021, 202–3).

The tension between national and ethnic literatures — between European language and African, ethnic languages — can be clearly appreciated in the following passage from Chinua Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (quoted in Onwuemene 1999, 1056):

> The real question is not whether Africans could write in English but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.
>
> But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there always will be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-

side with the national ones.

Gabriel Okara, poet and author of the novel *The Voice*, one of the most ambitious attempts at transliteration, about which there will be more to be said later, expressed similar feelings when he wrote in 1963:

> Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language: This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, arid English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? (quoted in Ngugi 1987, 9).

Even though he maintains the capital E, here Okara seems to adhere to the notion that, in front of an imperial British English, there exist nowadays multiple uncapitalized and distinctive "englishes" in the postcolonial world (Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin 2002). As we will see, transliteration is not the only weapon in the arsenal of those authors "writing back" from the periphery of Empire in an attempt to decolonize African literature, nor did all of them transliterate with the same intensity or even with the same goals in mind. Be that as it may, it can be said that, all in all, African authors definitely carved a place for themselves in English-language literature, with two Nobel laureates such as the Nigerian Wole Soyinka and the South African J. M. Coetzee, and other well-established figures such as the aforementioned Chinua Achebe and Ngugi

wa'Thiongo, Ben Okri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Ayi Kwei Armah, to name just a few (always keeping in mind that we are limiting our study to Anglophone authors). André Lefevere described this process (i.e. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin's "writing back") as a shift in patronage, whereby elements in the culture of a colonized country previously relegated to underground sectors were conferred status on the basis of their production of a "new hybrid poetics, which, as a result, acquired enough status itself to challenge the dominant, English poetics" (1995, 469).

4.1.3. Opposition to relexification and emergence of the "Pidgin option"

Despite the initial consensus generated around the idea of adopting English as the national language for literature and the consolidation of African Anglophone literature in the world scene, there have been dissenting voices from the very beginning, since right after the Majerere Conference. One of the first to adopt an oppositional stance was probably Obiajunga Wali, as early as in 1963, via a controversial article published in the September issue of the journal *Transition*. There, after briefly considering some passages from contemporary African writers, he stated that "African literature as now understood and practiced is only a minor appendage in the mainstream of European literature" (2007, 332). In response to the concept of *transliteration* advanced by the Makerere writers, he was categorical: "An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language." He deplored that, by adopting the conventional European manner, writers were "pursuing a dead end" and dooming African languages to "inevitable extinction." He made special emphasis on the fact that, by adopting that course of action, African writers were turning literature into an elitist domain, only accessible to those who had had the benefit of an exclusive English education. He used a pointed example to illustrate that: "Less than one percent of the Nigerian people have the ability to understand Wole Soyinka's *Dance of the Forest*. Yet this

was the play staged to celebrate their national independence" (332). At the time, these criticisms were "met with hostility, then silence" (Ngugi 1987, 25).

Twenty-five years later, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as we have already discussed, would recover Wali's critique and expand on it, from a distinctly humanist and socialist standpoint, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, written in 1987. In his Introduction, he announced his intention of abandoning English as a vehicle for his writing altogether. However, long before this announcement, he had already turned to Gikuyu, his mother tongue, for all his fiction. In a first-person echo of what Wali had said about Soyinka's play, the watershed moment for Ngugi came some time after publishing his English-language novel *A Grain of Wheat*, in 1967, when he "came to realise only too painfully that the novel in which I had so carefully painted the struggle of the Kenya peasantry against colonial oppression would never be read by them" (1993, 27). In *Decolonizing the Mind* he expressed his view that independence in Africa had led to a neo-colonial stage, characterized by two opposed traditions: imperialism, maintained by an alliance of the international bourgeoisie and the "flag-waving native ruling classes," and a tradition of resistance based on "the patriotic defence of the peasant/worker roots of national cultures, their defence of the democratic struggle in all the nationalities inhabiting the same territory" (1987, 2). The imposition of a European language in childhood creates a dissociation between written language and the language spoken at home which he terms "colonial alienation", a "seeing oneself from outside oneself" (17-18). While he does not deny the talent of the Anglophone writers and even their merits in the struggle for African dignity, their choice of language places them inevitably in a Euro-African (as opposed to merely African) tradition. By transliterating and borrowing from African languages to write in English, those authors effectively contribute to enriching Anglophone culture, while giving nothing back to their languages. Playing

on the title of Franz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, he describes this as "a case of black skins in white masks wearing black masks" (1993, 38).

For Ngugi, as we have seen, true universality cannot be the result of colonial imposition. Instead, it is achieved through the universality of local knowledge, as in William Blake's famous verse "To see a World in a Grain of Sand" (quoted in 1993, 25). This movement from the level of ethnicity or nationality to universality is achieved through translation, which for him is the truly universal language that English, with its past and present of colonial imposition, can never be. He further illustrates his point with a beautiful irony that invites reflection on the interactions between translation, power, and colonialism:

> The European missionary believed too much in his mission of conquest not to communicate it in the languages most readily available to the people: the African writer believes too much in "African literature" to write it in those ethnic, divisive and underdeveloped languages of the peasantry! (Ibid., 26)

This matter of the supposedly divisive nature of ethnic languages, in the particular case of Nigeria, is also discussed by Michael C. Onwuemene in his article "Limits of Transliteration: Nigerian Writers' Endeavors towards a National Literary Language." His standpoint is not exactly the same as Wali's and Ngugi's, even though he shares some aspects of their critique. In particular, he succinctly reiterates the point that the predominant Anglophone literature in Nigeria is "not a literature for the Nigerian populace. It is rather a literature of the people by the educated elite for the external world's consumption" (1999, 1062).

But Onwuemene goes on to point out some additional, practical reasons which make

English unsuitable as a national literary language. He questions the existence of a distinct, pan-national "Nigerian English" that is truly distinguishable from the standard, British variety (a Nigerian"english" as opposed to British English, to use Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's formulation). According to him, what Achebe and the others did was resorting to "various types of ethnic-Nigerian modified Englishes." Thus, what we find is "Ijaw English," for instance, in the works of Gabriel Okara, "Igbo English" in the case of Chinua Achebe, and so on. In Onwuemene's view, then, far from having a unifying effect, transliteration, by mobilizing all these ethnic variants of English, could potentially lead to an interethnic competition for national supremacy and prestige. If that has not happened it is because, upon close inspection, transliteration in its actual practice barely introduces any modifications in Standard English. One of the reasons, writes Onwuemene quoting André Lefevere, is that, contrary to what some scholars seem to believe, it is impossible to create a true "syntactic fusion" between two languages without quickly becoming unintelligible. Moreover, this kind of works, as we will see, create what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin call an "experiential gap" in contextually monolingual readers. That leads authors to cater for one of a pair of different readerships: they can either address an international public, through more sparing use of ethnic artifacts and transliteration, or write with a specific (ethnic) bilingual reader in mind, one that will be able to find aesthetic pleasure in the identification of cultural signs. Any attempt to strike a compromise between the two runs the risk of ending up in a "literary limbo."

Nevertheless, even though this "macaronic" [sic] literary English is ultimately inadequate, in Onwuemene's view, for those searching a national cultural language, the efforts of the "transliterators" were by no means in vain. On top of their internationally-recognized literary merits and the fact that they "placed Nigeria in the literary map of the world," by creating an

autochthonous medium of literary expression for their country they challenged the "overbearing and daunting power of international Standard English." By doing that, they paved their way for a second phase, according to the model set by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin: "[T]he appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, [which] marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (2002, 37); a process of "appropriation through subversion" (Bruti, Valdeón, and Zanotti 2014, 235) And here comes the crucial point of Onwuemene's argument: having a nation-wide literary language is both possible and desirable, but the straightest path to this second phase would involve the implantation of Nigerian Pidgin, and not English, as a literary medium. After all, Pidgin is already a lingua franca spoken by a large majority of Nigerians. Any shortcomings in formal grammar or prestige could be overcome over time, and in fact, Owenmene points out some early attempts at using it in "serious literature." The appeal in such literature lies in its potential to reach the masses, even illiterate people, who would be able to understand and enjoy the book if read aloud to them. It is a diagnosis shared by Chantal Zabus, who in *The African Palimpsest* identifies in Pidgin the possibility of "closing the gap between mother tongue and other tongue," in her words, a possibility embodied in the novel *Sozaboy* and its "move beyond the original trace towards a potential, albeit experimental, *tertium quid*" (8).

Indeed, Pidgin seems to offer a way out of the dilemma between using the European language of the colonizers and risking a fall into ethnic division. Thus, for instance, Ngugi wa Thiong'o includes pidgins in the ranks of the rest of African languages, praising them as fine examples of how, when the peasantry and the working class had to create "new African languages, like Krio in Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria", by appropriating the language of the master, they did it without any complexes and "without any of the respect for its ancestry shown by Senghor

and Achebe" (1987, 23).

Despite these arguments to recommend the use of Nigerian Pidgin, the language is still largely relegated to informal status, not taught at schools, with no official recognition or standardized grammar, and little prestige even among its speakers, who mostly associate it with illiterateness and poor (English) grammar (Igboanusi 2008; Faraclas 2013). This is probably why most writers that have included Pidgin in their work have used it as a mark of low social and educational status, usually for comedic purposes (Egbokhare 2021, 91; Todd 2005, 48; Deuber and Oloko 2003, 5). In this regard, it follows a tradition of using the oral register for humor, even though early attempts generally failed to capture real Pidgin: from the early missionaries who mistakenly equated it with poor or broken English to the moralistic and precarious novellas of Onitsha market literature and even the acclaimed *The Palm Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutola (Todd 2005, 44–46). The passing years seem to have brought about a growing awareness of the expressive potential of Nigerian Pidgin, which is progressively being used in more and more works and with purposes that transcend its comedic beginnings. This evolution is often observable even in the work of particular authors, with Achebe being again a case in point (McLaren 2009, 106; Todd 2005, 48). However, despite this growing maturity, Nigerian Pidgin has not left behind a strong association with orality, which is probably why there are established examples of its use for poetry and drama, while it is still relatively rare in prose. Thus, we find poem collections such as *Pidgin Stew and Sufferhead* (Aig-Imoukhuede 1983) or *If to say I bi soja* (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1998), for instance, and well-known plays like *Katakata for Sofahead* (Oyekunle 1983) or *Grip Am* (Rotimi 2017). This oral association and a certain halo of street-wise "coolness" have similarly turned it into the language of choice for stand-up comedians and many hip-hop artists, and for advertising purposes as well (A. T. Akande and Salami 2021). Pidgin also features prominently in

many radio and TV programs, but in the prose department it seems largely confined to the press, with opinion columns and news articles (BBC News launched a Pidgin news service in 2017). As far as novels are concerned, *Sozaboy* (published in 1985) is still largely the only example, and is consistently cited as such in academic literature. This is all the more remarkable because the book is not written by any means in "pure" Nigerian Pidgin, but in an idiolect halfway between Pidgin and broken English which the author called "rotten English." Still, the novel has been consistently hailed "the most daring experiment" in the use of literary Pidgin (Onwuemene 1999), "thus far the most conscious and sustained linguistic experiment with non-standard speech in the West African first-person narrative to emerge from the tiny corpus of writing in Nigerian Pidgin" (Zabus 2007, 194) or "the best effort so far at producing a completely pidgin novel" (Egbokhare 2021, 91).

Sozaboy will indeed be the focus of the rest of this dissertation, but before delving into the fascinating particularities of the language used in the novel (and its eventual translation), we need to properly contextualize this unique and significant book.

4.2. General introduction and plot

As announced in our Methodology section (see page 12), for the analysis of the novel we have followed the same top-down approach, from the general to the particular, that has informed our progress thus far. We have started with a general theoretical discussion on translation, universalism, and postcolonialism, to then center our focus on Nigeria and the linguistic situation there, in particular the dominion of English in the literary sphere and the consequences for those writers with a strong anti-colonial sensibility. This has taken us to Pidgin and, finally, to *Sozaboy*. However, before dealing with the more specifically linguistic points of interest in the novel, we should properly contextualize it, moving down onto the next concentric stratum of our exploration.

Therefore, we will start with a discussion of the cultural context of the novel, to then progress steadily towards the textual level. In terms of established, translation-oriented source-text analysis models, it could be said that we will be moving from extratextual factors to intratextual factors, *à la* Christiane Nord (2018, 1991), or journeying down from the context of culture to the context of situation and then to the text itself, if we were to apply the discourse analysis model (Halliday 2014; Munday and Zhang 2015; Hatim and Mason 1990). We will take a page from both these schools and further supplement it with recent work from other scholars, but first, the time has come to sketch at least a brief summary of the plot of *Sozaboy*, to ground the subsequent analysis.

Sozaboy is undoubtedly Saro-Wiwa's best-known novel. It tells the story of a young man, Mene, who lives in the small town of Dukana. Through many sacrifices, his mother put him through school and managed to secure him a job as apprentice driver for the one lorry in town, "Progres" [sic]. Prospects are relatively good for Mene, who one day will inherit his master's post and, moreover, has just found a girl he wants to marry, Agnes. Unfortunately, despite the enthusiasm with which the villagers had welcomed a change of regime at the beginning of the book, war breaks out and the military starts looking for soldiers. Willing to impress Agnes and earn the respect of his fellow villagers, Mene naively decides to join the army, and thus he becomes Sozaboy.

Of course, war soon turns out not to be what he expected. Utterly confused as to why and whom they are fighting, he nonetheless discovers that corruption is still rampant within the troops, and after a dull period of trench warfare, his unit is decimated by the enemy. Having miraculously survived, Mene runs away and falls severely ill after days of sleeping in the open while hiding from soldiers from both sides.

After spending a long time in a hospital, and then being tortured and put to work for the other side of the conflict, Mene goes back to Dukana to find it deserted and in ruins. Then he starts a nightmarish tour of several refugee camps looking for his wife and his mother. He finds some of his fellow villagers living in appalling conditions. The chief and the priest, two corrupt "bellymen" that keep stealing from their people even in that dire situation, sell him out to the authorities as a deserter, but he manages to escape again.

Back in Dukana, he finally learns that Agnes and his mother had been killed during the bombing of the town. Upon his arrival, his fellow villagers, who have slowly begun to settle back, take him for a ghost and blame him for a disease that is plaguing the town. He is forced to leave to find his luck, a pariah with no family, no home, and no friends.

4.3. The Context of Culture

Everything we have said so far should leave no doubt as to the convenience of starting our discussion of *Sozaboy* with a study of its cultural context. First, it seems a better framework for the general upper-tier information about our book, such as its genre and overall place in the Nigerian and African literary polysystem. Second, we need to keep in mind how particularly crucial it is for the translator to open themselves to the source culture in the case of postcolonial texts. If we accept the palimpsest representation of postcolonial literature, the hidden cultural levels lying underneath the merely linguistic surface become essentially important, for the scholar, certainly (Katan 2020, 134), but also for the prospective translator. This is acknowledged by, among others, Paul Bandia, who writing specifically about the translation of African postcolonial texts states that deciphering "the indigenous orature or writer's metatext of culture" should be the

first step in the process, so that it can be followed with "a cross-cultural analysis of the representation of Africanness in the author's European language" (2008, 114). Taking the metaphor one step further, we could agree with Vidal Claramonte that the ultimate goal would be to create a canvass "open to plurality and diversity" in an effort to "transform our translations into *pentimentos*, where all voices, colours, sounds and noises are welcome (2019, 8).

It goes well beyond the scope of this work to enter into a lengthy and detailed discussion of such a thorny and debated topic as what culture is. We will stick to the general notion that culture is, for our purposes, a shared way of understanding the word, a filter of sorts or "frame," to use David Katan's word for it. As such, it includes not only the "technical" aspect of culture, such as dress, food, institutions, etc., but also norms and conventions such as literary genres and style, and beyond that also beliefs, behaviors, and more (Katan and Taibi 2021, 112). Tymoczko, in her analysis of cultural translation, is also insistent on this point (2010, 233, 238).

It is precisely Tymoczko who, in our view, provides the best framework to approach a study of the cultural problems to be found in the translation of *Sozaboy*. She characterizes her model as holistic, in an effort to differentiate it from previous approaches that, she claims, were too selective in their focus and did not do enough to address "the mainsprings of cultural difference — the largest frameworks of culture or the habitus — in any systematic way" (2010, 233). In line with one of the goals of this dissertation, Tymoczko points out the potential usefulness of making explicit what many translators do on an intuitive level: to draw an "inventory of the principal features of the cultural field in question that are relevant to the text being translated and that present difficulties for the receptor audience" (234). This is what we intend to do next, without any claim to absolute exhaustiveness, drawing from Tymoczko's categories, but supplementing them with insights from the work of other scholars who have tried to tackle this issue, most notably from the

school of Discourse Analysis which we are using to inform the general structure of the dissertation. Thus, we will start with what Tymoczko calls *overcodings*, by which she means "linguistic patterns that are superimposed on the ordinary ranks of language to indicate a higher-order set of distinctions in language practices" (243). In particular, we will study two categories of overcodings that are well-established in the literature, such as genre and intertextuality. Next, the focus of the discussion will move on to discourses, to then end with a section devoted to specific cultural elements which bundles together Tymoczko's categories of signature concepts, keywords and conceptual metaphors, and cultural practices and paradigms.

4.3.1. Genre

The first subdivision within literary genres to which *Sozaboy* may be said to belong is clearly anticipated in the second part of the title, "A *novel* in rotten English." Of course, the novel is also notorious for having numerous subgenres, and to properly contextualize *Sozaboy* in the literary scene, it would be well to begin by taking a closer look at the evolution of the novel genre in Nigeria. Whenever appropriate, links will be established with the West African or just African literary tradition in general.

The novel as a genre was of course imported from the European tradition and in Nigeria it is largely associated with the English language even today. In 1989, for instance, 4 years after the original publication of *Sozaboy*, out of a total figure of 1444 published books, 1380 were written in English, and merely 32 in Yoruba, 20 in Hausa, and 12 in Igbo, according to a UNESCO tally (Griswold 2000). Before the establishment of anglophone literature, there was a written tradition in Ajami and even some novels in Yoruba and Hausa, but most surveys of Nigerian literature seem

to begin at the publication of the seminal *The Palm-Wine Drunkard* by Amos Tutuola in 1952 (e.g. Griswold 2000; Irele 2009). The controversial issue of European languages as a proper vehicle for African and Nigerian literatures and the attempts to decolonize them has already been addressed on pages 44-55). The fact is that, in a very condensed timespan, Nigerian fiction underwent its own evolution to respond to the aesthetic and political needs of national authors, developing its own set of genres (which often coincide at least partly with African genres in general). Thus, following a thematic classification, *Sozaboy* falls squarely into one of the eight major genres of Nigerian novel identified by Wendy Griswold (2000), that of the Civil (or Biafran) War. However, if we pay more attention to the protagonist, as regards both his voice and his arc, we could ascribe the book to a more generally African group of child soldier novels that has been characterized as postcolonial, "war" bildungsroman (Okuyade 2009; Amoko 2009), or sometimes even anti-bildungsroman (Gehrmann and Schönwetter 2017). Of course, the two affiliations are not mutually exclusive, so *Sozaboy* could be perfectly said to be a "Biafran war postcolonial bildungsroman." Nevertheless, both aspects will be analyzed separately, drawing any pertinent connections along the way.

4.3.1.1. *Sozaboy* as a Biafran War novel

The brutal civil war that tore Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 was "the major traumatic event" (Akwanya and Anohu 2001, 8) of the post-colonial era in Nigeria and, as such, it generated and is still generating a slew of literary works. The echoes of the conflict, both in its savagery and as a symbol of the disillusionment (Amuta 1985, 74; Griswold 2000, 225; Newell 2006, 22) that followed the initial optimism after the independence processes, were felt in the whole continent (and beyond). Thus, even though in numerical terms (as far as published works with Biafran war

was a theme are concerned), it ranks last in Griswold's classification of genres, with just 6% (29/476) of the total number of Nigerian novels by the year 2000, it is routinely awarded a special place in monographs about West African and African literature in general: "In terms of cultural repercussion, perhaps the Nigerian Civil War has generated the widest body of literary works among historical events in post-colonial Africa" (Amuta 1985, 152). It is even "often endowed with far greater significance to Nigerian history and private life than colonialism" (Newell 2006, 157). From works actually written during the war, such as V. Nwankwo's *The Road to Udima* or Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand*,[9] or immediately after its conclusion, like *Behind the Rising Sun*, published by Sebastian Okechukwu Mezu in 1971, to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the 2006 novel by acclaimed author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or *There was a Country*, the long-awaited Biafran memoir published by Chinua Achebe in 2012, it seems obvious that the conflict has been the inspiration for some of the major works in Nigerian narrative, of which *Sozaboy* is one more example. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth Losh, who studied Saro-Wiwa's poetry, claims that for him the civil war was also "the central drama of his nation's poetics," a "founding literary event" even over decolonization (1999, 218). To the war he devoted the novel that is the focus of this dissertation, the poetry volume discussed by Losh, *Songs in a Time of War*, and also his only memoirs, *On a Darkling Plain*, to complete what some have described as a trilogy (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 165).

On top of having the civil war as a backdrop, novels belonging to this genre have been shown to share some other narrative constituents, and *Sozaboy* is no exception. This can be easily

[9] Although the manuscript for *Divided We Stand* was written during the war, the novel was not published until 1980.

appreciated by going over the usual structure of works in this genre as listed by Griswold (2000, 232–33), which *Sozaboy* follows to the letter:

1. *An initial moment of confidence and high hopes*. This is reflected in *Sozaboy*, at the beginning of which the villagers of Dukana think that "everything will be good in Dukana because of new government" (1). Mene joins the army because he is enamored with the uniform and the manly prestige attached to soldiers, and he wishes to impress his beloved Agnes. It is worth noting that some non-combatants such as Chief Birabee still pay lip service to that delusion even when he and his people see themselves forced to live in a refugee camp, a "rotten rubbish human compost pit", in Mene's words: "we shall be in a new country where nobody will tief, there will be no hungry again, everything will be free, from water to food, to cloth to wear to medicine to lorry and licence … In short, after we have win the war, there will be life more abundant." (154-55) This initial optimism can also be appreciated in the throngs of young people wishing to enlist that stream towards the Pitakwa stadium, who even have to actually fight for a coveted spot in the army. Finally, when Mene is already a soldier, but before he and his unit see combat, we witness the disappointment of his brothers in arms when they are told (wrongly, as it turns out) that the enemy is tired of fighting and victory is at hand, so they might not get the chance to fight. As we will see when discussing the temporal environment of the novel, this optimism is not a mere literary device but strictly historic. A mixture of aggrieved ethnic patriotism and propaganda had most Igbos deluded about their winning chances and the expected length of the war. Although Mene does not share this ethnic and personal involvement in the incoming

war, a combination of vanity, endangered manliness, social pressure, and false expectations (fostered by Zaza, the World War II veteran) prove equally fatal to him.

2. *The first intimations that all might not go well*. Of course, the reader is fully aware that, indeed, all did not go well by any means, and this is used to implicitly emphasize Mene's naivety since the beginning of the novel. Our protagonist, in turn, has the first inkling of what the future might hold before he even decides to join the army, via an ominous dream he shares with his mother (more about the supernatural in African fiction and *Sozaboy* below, on page 126). After that, he is soon to experience the incompetence and, very especially, the corruption of the military, and the chaos of a war he does not understand. Even before that, the shortage of food (especially salt) and his clashes with the paramilitary elements of the "Simple" (Civil) Defense corps manning the roadblocks make it apparent for him that all is not well in the new, secessionist country (even though it is not clear at all that he understands that he is now supposed to be living in a different country: namely Biafra, not Nigeria).
3. *The ups and downs of wartime*. Mene's experience on the frontline is as savage as brief. After the disastrous bombing which results in the death of his entire company, he alternates between fending for himself as a deserter and a period serving as a driver behind the lines for the erstwhile enemy. However, according to Griswold, this stage usually includes suspicions of internal enemies and the point of view of a civilian but also, sometimes, that of a naïve soldier. The latter is the heart of *Sozaboy* and does not merit specific discussion here. As far as internal enemies are concerned, it is worth mentioning that Mene and the rest of the soldiers are soon to discover the corruption of their officers — who would be the obvious, foremost "internal enemy" — but that they

do so goaded by an actual, external enemy, the mephistophelian Munmuswak, whom they have no qualms welcoming in their midst after he buys their sympathies with some cigarettes and a bottle of *ginkana*. This speaks of the harsh conditions in which the soldiers were living, of course, but also of a certain lack of strong emotional commitment to the war, which would be understandable in young people who did not really know what the war was about or what was at stake, all the more so when they were part of an ethnic minority (as it is certainly the case of Mene, whom Saro-Wiwa doubtlessly pictured as an Ogoni). This has some significant derivations, both in the novel and in the actual war.

4. *Increasing despair and chaos*. As we just mentioned, we do not witness a slow increase in the ferocity of the fighting itself — the initial period of high hopes gives way to a shorter period of boredom and senseless drudgery in a sort of *drôle de guerre*, which is cut short by abrupt, unforeseen death and destruction. Nevertheless, we do witness a nightmarish spiraling of despair as we follow Mene from a prisoner stockade, first, to one dismal refugee camp after another, and finally to what used to be — and is no more — his village and his life. Griswold points out that the horrors of this stage often involve great betrayal, and indeed there is no other way to characterize chief Birabee and Pastor Barika's hoarding of food at the refugee camp while their own neighbors are dying: "[T]hese men can sell their children so that they will eat plenty of food when other people are suffering" (158). Not only that, but they deliver Mene as a deserter to the military authorities, and certain death, to further ingratiate themselves with them.
5. *Death of someone who is educated, wise, or otherwise valued*. A first name that comes to mind is that of Bullet, Mene's young but world-wise mentor in the army, but the

final tragedy is the death of his wife and his mother. Their passing, unseen, is only confirmed after a long and perilous search that ends up revealing itself as pointless because everybody in his village knew all along that they were dead but did not care to tell him. Pointlessness, confusion, and ignorance make thus their final and most tragic appearance right before the end of the book.

6. *Survival plus disillusionment*. Mene's learning of the death of his loved ones is accompanied by the news of his own demise, at least as far as his fellow villagers are concerned. Completely disillusioned, he "takes on the task of telling the story" (Griswold 2000, 233), a cautionary tale told by a (near) ghost. The fruit of that determination is of course the book we have just finished reading, and with its conclusion, we circle back to that whimsical initial "Although" to create the admonishment that is the novel itself.

On the topic of pointlessness, it is worth mentioning that *Sozaboy* is representative of the Biafran war novel also because of the themes it touches upon. Thus, Griswold identifies "the utter meaninglessness of war" as the most prominent message in this genre of works (2000, 231), and that is indeed the moral of the entire novel, as we just saw. Griswold goes on to list three possible forms for civil war novels: allegory, extensive structural analysis (which is very rare), and the much more common representation of the war "through a microscope" (234). She finds several examples of allegory in *Sozaboy*, starting with the titular name itself, while also characterizing the entire work as "an allegory of naïveté being replaced by bitter experience" (236). On the other hand, the war in *Sozaboy* is not only symbolically but actually depicted, so that it could just as well fall into the category of the Biafran war examined "by concentrating on a single individual coping

with the adversities of the time" (234). Saro-Wiwa himself stated that his novel dealt with the impact of the civil war on the common people (1989, 9).

Any translator would have to take into account all those factors for the target text to be an accurate exponent of the original genre, but there are also some discrepancies that make *Sozaboy* unique in its genre. We will see that, to a large extent, they have to do with Saro-Wiwa's ethnic background, but very especially with his values and beliefs, so they are better left for our discussion about ideology and discourse (they will be touched upon, again, to some extent, when dealing with the context of creation, on page 134). It is sometimes a thin line between the two categories, but guidance can be obtained from Hatim and Mason's distinction: "Genre and discourse, then, reflect the social occasion and the attitude towards the occasion respectively" (1990, 142). Before broaching discourse, however, we should take a look at the second literary descent of *Sozaboy* as a postcolonial, "war" Bildungsroman.

4.3.1.2. *Sozaboy* as a paradigmatic African "war" Bildungsroman

As an exponent of postcolonial African literature, the particular case of *Sozaboy* carries another factor of interest: the condition of the novel as a prime example of a genre which could be considered postcolonial in itself. Several authors have postulated the existence of a distinctly African and postcolonial variety of *Bildungsroman* (Okuyade 2009; Amoko 2009), and Saro-Wiwa's novel certainly seems to contain most of the elements contemplated by these scholars. Taking into account the other works that are usually included in this sub-genre (Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of no Nation*, 2005; Chris Abani's *Song for Night*, 2007, for instance), we could even say that *Sozaboy* is a precursor or pioneer in its genre (Tunca 2014, 146). All the more so, if we give

credit to the notion that the child soldier novel is part of a transformation in African literature that started more or less with the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (Gehrmann and Schönwetter 2017, 1). As a matter of fact, according to Gehrmann (2010), *Sozaboy* stands out as the most important intertextual reference for fiction revolving around small soldiers from 2000 onwards.

With the original, European "novels of formation" these African texts share some foundational elements that we are going to see cropping up in *Sozaboy* as well. Taking as a reference the classic work on the subject by Marianne Hirsch (1979), it is obvious that we have a young protagonist who is coming of age and will face major life-changing decisions during the story — the main staple of the genre. Moreover, the narrative point of view is "characterized by *irony* toward the inexperienced protagonist," (298). One of the main effects of the particular variety of "rotten English" deployed in the book is precisely to reinforce that irony. Another effect of the pidginized dialect used in the narration that is also categorized by Hirsch as germane to the *Bildungsroman* is the way that it emphasizes the passivity of our hero (297). Mene is not adequately equipped, educationally or even linguistically, to fully understand what is happening around him, which leaves him at the mercy of fate and the machinations of unscrupulous men. Coming to understand this fact will constitute the tragic basis of his character arc throughout the novel, which also "maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal and explores that interaction" (299).

Concerning that portrayal of the social realities of the time, if some authors have seen in the early novel of formation and its young protagonists a symbol of the dynamism of the Modern Age in its inception (Moretti 1987, 5), it is equally true that many scholars of African literature have echoed Fredric Jameson's claim that the African novel can be read largely as a "national allegory" (Amoko 2009, 197; Irele 2009, 10). Thus, it is only natural that the *Bildungsroman* genre

has completed a process of expansion that started by turning it into the most salient genre for the literature of social outsiders (Hirsch 1979, 300) within Western societies and has finally made it an optimal vehicle for the globally subaltern. In the words of Apollo Amoko (2009, 197):

> Both autobiographies and Bildungsromane have provided important avenues for African writers to explore new ways of being in the colonial and postcolonial worlds. By telling stories of individual passages from childhood into adulthood, the authors critique the past and present and offer alternative futures.

Within this postcolonial framework of the African novel of formation, O. Okuyade (2009) identifies two major strains: the "female" and the "war" *Bildungsroman*. Needless to say, *Sozaboy* belongs to the latter category, even though Okuyade does not make explicit mention of it. Some of the features that attest to its belonging to this subgenre are, besides the child-soldier protagonist, the fact that Saro-Wiwa reflects the chaos of the continent and the corruption of its leaders; his use of Mene's stunted personal growth and development as a synecdoche for his time and society; and the ending, where our hero "[c]ontrary to the conventional *Bildungsroman* […] constructs an identity that runs counter to those prescribed values of society because they are crippling" (2009, 9). Especially relevant for this study is one additional feature introduced by Okuyade: "[A] narrator-protagonist who is afforded self-expression and to present social commentary. The novelists provide their protagonists with opportunities for self-expression by creating the impression that the text is unfiltered or unedited, [a] raw account of the narrator" (ibid.). This connection between the "small soldier" African novel and experimental language is also

highlighted by Susanne Gehrmann, who — as we have seen — does explicitly mention *Sozaboy* as the founding text in the genre and in the experimental use of English, that so deftly combines comedy and tragedy in a way that can seem strange to the Western reader (Gehrmann and Schönwetter 2017; Gehrmann 2010).

Going back momentarily to Jameson's notion of the African novel as a national allegory, in the case of *Sozaboy,* there are grounds to agree with Maureen Eke (2000) when she says that, for Saro-Wiwa, "the war is only a manifestation of what is wrong with the country and its leadership" (99). The book is doubtless, as William Boyd points out in his Introduction, "a great anti-war novel," but also a "great African novel," paradigmatic of the continent's recent history. It would be hard to find a more poignant expression of the disillusionment so characteristic of the so-called second generation of Nigerian writers (Amuta 1985, 75; Griswold 2000, 52; Newell 2006, 22). To pick up the threads linking the novel with the historical and cultural background requires the translator to go beyond genre and delve into the remaining aspects of the cultural context.

4.3.2. Intertextuality

Closely related to genre, we find intertextuality in general as a type of overcoding. Much like *discourse, intertextuality* is by now a polysemic term, that has been used by many scholars with slightly different meanings, well beyond the interpretation of its original popularizer, Julia Kristeva. For the purposes of this study, we adhere to the wider conceptualization of intertextuality as a property of all texts — a "standard of textuality," according to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 15) — and to its use chiefly as an analytical instrument (Sakellariou 2020, 270).

We will focus, specifically, on intertextuality understood as identifiable allusions to other texts, be they overt or covert. The identification of those references becomes particularly important when the translator is dealing with an African postcolonial text, where special attention must be paid to the presence of an underlying oral narrative, a "palimpsest" unfamiliar to most professionals, who overwhelmingly work with metropolitan texts. We know that according to Bandia the first step of the process in any such translation consists of deciphering the "indigenous orature or writer's metatext of culture" (2008, 167), since we are dealing here with writers who are at the very least bilingual and bicultural, so that there are at least two traditions the author can trawl for allusions. Additionally, the allusions in those non-Western texts are often harder to identify because of a lack of published intertextual material in the target language culture and other related factors (Batchelor 2013, 209). That is why it becomes all the more essential that the translator has a deep knowledge of the initial meta-culture as well, accompanied by a good measure of the responsibility addressed in the theoretical introduction to the dissertation. The set of difficulties outlined above is somewhat ameliorated in the case of our novel, since it is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of a barely literate young man. This naturally conditions the scope of intertextual elements, which are effectively limited to oral materials, which can, in turn, be grouped into four wide categories that will all warrant some further classification later: propaganda, songs, religious references, and proverbs. Of course, there is some overlap; propaganda, in particular, is often expressed through songs or reinforced by religion.

4.3.2.1. Propaganda

The official warmongering rhetoric is a strong, though often just hinted, presence in the novel, as we pointed out earlier. This is no coincidence: the effects of the propaganda alluded to

in the book are something Saro-Wiwa experienced first-hand with profound disgust. The chapters in his wartime memoirs (*On a Darkling Plain*) concerning the months immediately before and after the outbreak of the war convey a palpable frustration, and a mounting feeling of isolation from the majority mood, as he impotently watched while the situation quickly spiraled out of control. This trend started probably when he was at the University of Ibadan, when the pogroms against Easterners reached a bloody peak in the North. Even though he declared himself appalled by the killings, he nevertheless expressed annoyance at his "weak-minded" peers that fled East in a panic (1989, 40), the assumption being that the situation was not so serious in the West (where Ibadan is located); thus, in his view, the sudden exodus reflected poorly on Easterners. However, shortly after, he would himself refrain from going back to Ibadan after a holiday, out of concerns for his safety, a contradiction pointed out, for instance, by McLuckie (2000, 42). Therefore, he stayed East, at Nsukka University, where he, in turn, would witness the joy of staff and students alike at the news of the Biafran secession, and their mindless eagerness for war, even though, as the brightest of their generation, often the recipients of the same sort of British education that Saro-Wiwa cherished, he felt they should have known better. This was a severe blow for him: "I reminisced sadly what Western-type education had done to us … The lack of analysis, the failure to weigh the problem carefully, the uncritical acceptance of all that government or [Biafran head of state, colonel] Ojukwu said, all these did not show that the staff and students of Nsukka were properly educated" (94).

This failure, this lapse in judgment by the elites, understandably pushed by their horror at the massacres perpetrated on Easterners and the Biafran propaganda machinery, has been raised even by observers sympathetic to the Biafran cause, such as Ralph Uwechue, who actually served as ambassador of the secessionist republic in Paris: "The Biafran masses, enslaved by an extremely

efficient propaganda network and cowed by the iron grip of a ruthless military machine, had neither the facts nor the liberty to form an independent opinion. The case of the elite was different…" (quoted in Achebe 2012, 123). Saro-Wiwa's deep dislike of Ojukwu, in particular, is made amply evident throughout *On a Darkling Plain*. Ojukwu, the Sandhurst- and Oxford-educated son of a fabulously rich knight of the British Empire, comes across in Saro-Wiwa's narration as arrogant and condescending, particularly vis a vis the military head of state of Nigeria at the time, Yakubu Gowon, an impression that many other witnesses shared at the time (Achebe 120). Soyinka, too, would write about "the élitist smugness of Ojukwu's administration" (1985, 171). It is important to stress this, since the colonel's alleged eloquence, on which Saro-Wiwa repeatedly insists, expressed chiefly through his bombastic, over-optimistic speeches, is almost certainly the template for the "big grammar" that Mene, the sozaboy, keeps hearing on the radio prior to the war: "when grammar plenty, na so so trouble plenty" (3). There are frequent references to Oyukwu's speeches throughout *On a Darkling Plain*, where he deplores that the secessionist leader had the capacity to entice not only the "semi illiterate" but also the educated (80). Perhaps one of the educated admirers whose judgment Saro-Wiwa considered clouded by Oyukwu's elocution was Chinua Achebe, who took on an active role in the nascent republic and considered that Ojukwu "had a gift for oratory" (Achebe 2012, 128). Achebe was not uncritical of Ojukwu's rhetoric excesses, though, and in fact, he writes about his "euphoric verbal heroics" (127), while he also reproduces passages where fellow Biafrans point to Ojukwu's stubbornness or ego, or his unwillingness to relinquish power, as a major factor in making war possible or, at least, unnecessarily extending it. Again, Saro-Wiwa shares this notion of an overconfident leader that becomes increasingly isolated and surrounded by sycophants: "Thus driven by forces too big for any single man, ill-prepared and impelled by his own rhetoric, Ojukwu took on a back-breaking job" (1989, 85). Saro-Wiwa's state

of mind at the time connects with a tradition of pacifist writing that is keenly aware of the dangers of propaganda. One is reminded, for instance, of Stefan Zweig's words in 1915, after sharing a train car with wounded and dead soldiers during World War I: "I had recognized the foe I was to fight – false heroism that prefers to send others to suffering and death, the cheap optimism of the conscienceless prophets, both political and military who, boldly promising victory, prolong the war, and behind them, the hired chorus, the 'word makers of war' as Werfel has pilloried them in his beautiful poem" (1964, 252).

This rhetoric is clearly echoed in *Sozaboy,* even though Ojukwu is never explicitly named, of course. For instance, when the "Chief Commander General" is speaking to the soldiers with his "fine fine grammar," he ends his speech with the triplet "We shall overcome. The Enemy will be vanquished. God is on our side" (78), which is reminiscent both of the military songs discussed below and of the way Ojukwu actually liked to close his addresses (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1996).[10] For comparison, in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Adichie 2006) we also encounter fictionalized examples of how this rhetoric found its way to the Biafran vocabulary during the war and became entangled with patriotic feelings with regard to both external and internal "enemies," and also how it sometimes served to mask the truth when it was unpalatable:

> The clapping soon gave way to singing.
>
> *So-lidarity forever!*
>
> *So-lidarity forever!*
>
> *Our republic shall vanquish!*

[10] See, for instance, the ending of his broadcast of 22nd September, 1967, when he warned about the presence of traitors in the midst of Biafra: "Nothing can wrest our freedom and sovereignty from us. We shall fight to the last, until victory is won and our enemy vanquished. God be our guide. We shall vanquish. Thank you (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 122).

> Ugwu sang along and wished, again, that he could join the Civil Defence League or the militia, who went combing for Nigerians hiding in the bush. The war reports had become the highlights of his day, the fast-paced drumming, the magnificent voice saying,
>
> > *Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty!*[11] *This is Radio Biafra Enugu! Here is the daily war report!*
>
> (198)

> "Yes, of course," Richard said again. "Port Harcourt is safe, isn't it?"
>
> There was a pause on Madu's end. "Some saboteurs have been arrested and half of them are non-Igbo minorities. I don't know why these people insist on aiding the enemy. But we will overcome." (314)

To reflect this warlike rhetoric coated in good, eloquent English and contrast it with the rotten English spoken by the masses, which were — one could say — duped into embracing the war is going to be one of the most — one is tempted to say even *the most* — crucial challenges faced by the translator. This contrast is even made explicit in an intriguing passage of *On a Darkling Plain*, where Saro-Wiwa refers to Oyukwu as someone who "did not ever express himself in 'rotten' English" (1989, 86). In yet one more apparent contradiction, Saro-Wiwa, the avowed "stickler for correct usage" and admirer of British education, depicts a situation where high prose is disingenuously used to lend weight to ideas and actions that would ultimately lead millions to death and ruin. There is in *Sozaboy* a denunciation, or lament, concerning the poor education of the common people (the Ogoni, in particular), to be sure, but the novel also makes clear that an education which would grant the required command of English is, first, well beyond the possibilities of common people, as he well knew, and secondly, that, when the time came, it was

[11] Saro-Wiwa would mock this formula in *On a Darkling Plain* after describing the Igbo efforts to guarantee that Port Harcourt remained a part of Iboland after the proposed creation of new States for minorities: "No, the Ibo State Union was not about to rest on its laurels. Eternal vigilance is the price of domination." (184)

no guarantee against the stupendous warmongering rhetoric emanating from the top, and the sort of overconfidence and even bloodthirst which he witnessed at Nsukka.

4.3.2.2. Songs

Songs are arguably the most easily spotted allusions in *Sozaboy* since they are usually set apart and indented, except for some brief verses. As with most cultural references in the book, they are more common in the first half of the story, when we get a glimpse of regular community life in a peacetime Ogoni village and in Pitakwa (Port Harcourt). They feature still during Mene's rushed military training before chaos engulfs everything and our protagonist is left basically to fend for himself. By and large, there are two types of songs in *Sozaboy*: military marches and highlife songs, both with very different functions.

The presence of **military songs** and marches in *Sozaboy* stands in contrast with the samples of highlife music and has a close connection with the importance of propaganda. These were songs destined to boost troop morale but also to attract new recruits and spread nationalist ideology. As we have seen, Saro-Wiwa got to know them well during his stay at Nsukka immediately before the war, where soldiers sang them every morning amid a warmongering atmosphere that baffled and appalled him (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 69). However, the fact that the topic and their *raison d'être* were contemporary should not obscure the fact that they connected with and drew strength from a previous oral cultural tradition. Some of them even tried to establish a continuity with an idealized heroic past (Agu 1991). As far as their actual creation is concerned, "some were drawn from Igbo traditional war songs and some simply adapted from Christian songs" (8). The latter were mostly in English, and it is this type of song that is represented in *Sozaboy*. Interestingly, they are among

the very few instances in the novel where we can appreciate formal, metropolitan English in full. This of course reinforces, again, Saro-Wiwa's depiction of the predominant ethnic groups (and the Igbo in particular for him during the time of the Biafran secession) as direct heirs of the colonial powers. The connection must not have been very difficult to draw since some of the songs were direct adaptations from those sung by the Nigerian troops who fought for Britain in the Second World War. Thus, one of the songs that soldiers sing in the book ("We are sozas marching for our nation / In the name of Jesus we shall conquer") was indeed sung by Biafran combatants, who just substituted "Biafra" for "soldiers" in some cases, although there were many variants (Ugochukwu 2012). Saro-Wiwa maintains the original term (transformed into the topical "sozas") instead of using the name of Biafra; as a matter of fact, even though most of the locations mentioned in *Sozaboy* (except Dukana) are real and there is no mistaking that the events in the novel take place during the Nigerian civil war, the term Biafra does not appear once in the book. This may have something to do with the fact that Saro-Wiwa loathed the name, which he systematically uncapitalized (Lock 2000, 4), but it also serves a dual narrative purpose: first, to universalize the message of the book by not anchoring it to any local circumstances (Mene ends up consistently talking about "war" in general), but also to show the extent to which these national conceits meant very little to minorities whose lives would be scarcely altered independently of which one of the major ethnic groups was in power at any given time. Indeed, the words *Nigeria* or *Nigerian* do not appear in the book either. Going back to our song, there is another, obvious connection to originally Western values in the reference to Jesus, which adds another dimension to the song and the ideological framing of the war, as Agu points out (1991, 9). "God is on our side," will say the elegant District Officer looking for recruits in Mene's dream; the same words will be uttered later,

in the waking world, by the “Chief Commander General” when he is reviewing the newly trained recruits (the religious aspect of the cultural context will be explored more in full below).

Other Biafran war songs had the function of denouncing saboteurs and renegades (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1996, 531), and there is one such example in the book:

Why do you delay

Come and save the nation

Why do you delay

Come and save the nation

Oh why do you delay

Come and save the nation

There is danger

Why do you delay? (48)

Finally, there is a theme in one of the military songs that we already saw in the previous section, from the mouth of Mammuswak and his friend: that of the acceptance of the inevitability of death:

My father don't you worry

My mother don't you worry

If I happen to die in the battlefield

Never mind we shall meet again. (48)

This is part of an entire tradition of Biafran military songs along the same lines, evidence of a certain climate of resolve, but also despair, that must have been prevalent among soldiers (other examples include lines such as "Take my boots off when I die" or "Save my bullets when I die, O Biafra!") (Ugochukwu 2012). Not in vain, the sentiment was expressed in the very anthem of the incipient nation: "But if the price is death for all we hold dear, / Then let us die without a shred of fear." Not only that, but the leader of the secessionist state, Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, went as far as to claim that his people were ready to "Commit mass suicide" (Jowett 2019, 5).[12] In the case of the soldiers this acceptance of death can be constructed as bravery or abnegation, but behind it all, just as in the lines "If I die tomorrow / Mami water go bury me," ultimately lies the same nihilistic acceptance of the low value of life, which is so easily exploited by unscrupulous, reckless leaders. Interestingly, this is the only song that is repeated in the book (pages 48 and 72).

One final observation is that both pop songs and military marches have in common the fact that they are highly localized in the book. In the case of the Biafran war songs, they are located almost exclusively in Lomber 5, where they feature in an ominous dream in which Mene is summoned to the church along with the rest of the villagers, only to be told that he is to be conscripted. He panics and flees, and the soldiers chasing him sing the songs we just discussed. By the time he circles back to the village he finds it deserted, his house empty and his mother gone, foreshadowing what will actually happen when he returns to Dukana after his experiences at the front. It is interesting that some of the few explicit examples of "big grammar" that we see in the book take place during the dream. We are confronted with not only the highfaluting verses of the

[12] As an illustration of this frame of mind, we can read the thoughts of Kanayo, the protagonist of Nathan Nkala's *Drums and the Voice of Death* (1996), another Biafran War novel, who is an Igbo (although in the novel the author uses the word *Nno*): "Kanayo was not in dalliance with death: death was his new sweetheart, sitting by his side day and night. He knew this and loved it all the more. For no sacrifice was great enough for the new nation" (133).

military marches but also some samples of the language of the "man with fine shirt" who leads the recruitment delegation into Dukana, reproduced below complete with Mene's signature commentary:

> Fine fine English. Big big words. Grammar. "Fantastic. Overwhelming. Generally. In particular and in general." Haba, God no go vex. But he did not stop there. The big grammar continued. "Odious. Destruction. Fighting". I understand that one. "Henceforth. General mobilisation. All citizens. Able-bodied. Join the military. His Excellency. Powers conferred on us. Volunteers. Conscription". Big big words. Long long grammar. "Ten heads. Vandals. Enemy." (46-47)

His words are then translated into Kana, because the people in the church have clearly understood very little. "Vandals" was the common disparaging Biafran term to refer to Northerners and Federal soldiers, while the "ten heads" could well be a reference to a propaganda poster circulated in the new republic showing a uniformed ten-year-old who, according to the caption, had "sworn to bring back ten heads of Nigerian soldiers in strict obedience of the charge made to the nation" (Daly 2020, 102). The formula is echoed, for instance, by the *Nno* [Igbo] villagers of Nathan Nkala's *Drums and the Voice of Death*: "Each warrior of the clan should bring back ten heads from Awusaland [Hausaland], no more, no less. The order was clear, unequivocal" (1996, 100).

Pop songs in *Sozaboy* are generally associated with leisure and sophistication, a certain carefree attitude that will offer a stark contrast to what the immediate future has in store. Most of

the songs are mentioned when Mene is in Pitakwa, in the African Upwine Bar where he meets Agnes, who is also the embodiment of a certain sophistication. Time and again we are reminded that she is a Lagos girl ("Ah, Lagos. No wonder you smart like this," 16), which implies a certain worldliness (which can be a detriment if the "Lagos baby" in question is thought to have been promiscuous — more on patriarchal views later). In a similar vein, the songs featured in the first half of the book belong to the broad West African genre known as *highlife* music, a name apparently coined in the 1920s by poor Ghanaians who gathered outside exclusive dance clubs where they could hear the street songs they were familiar with being played by sophisticated big bands (Collins 1989, 225). Although that etymology was probably assimilated by the 1960s, when *Sozaboy* takes place, the music must have retained some of that halo of cosmopolitanism for the people living in rural areas. Indeed, having a radiogram at home is mentioned as an indication of luxury several times in the book: "Look my house. Fridge, radiogram, carpet, four wives; better house for my village" (2); "All those fine fine chairs, and radio and radiogram inside the house" (140). Even the possession of a simple radio is beyond the reach of most people: "The people of Dukana are fishermen and farmers. They no know anything more than fish and farm. Radio sef they no get" (4). In fact, one of the few people whom we know to have a radio is Terr Kole, a rich and respected man in Dukana. This uneven distribution of access to pop music is a reflection of the wider contrast between the village and the city, which was more explicitly explored by Saro-Wiwa in *A Forest of Flowers*. Moreover, the contrast between rural and urban life is a standard theme in Nigerian literature (Griswold 2000, 123*ff*). Although this is arguably a fairly universal theme, in Nigeria it acquires a distinct flavor because it usually includes a juxtaposition between African tradition and Western modernity, and an emphasis on the sharpness of the clash and the ambivalence of people in front of that clash. This can be clearly appreciated in *Sozaboy*, however

brief the appearance of the city is in the book, as we will see when discussing the environment (see p. 97).

The specific songs that are referenced or quoted from in the book are “Mame Wata,” by Kwaa Mensah, “Bottom Belly” by Herbert Udemba, and “Sawale,” which seems to be the official name of the song referred to as “Ashewo” in the book, by Cardinal Rex Lawson, which was very popular in and outside Nigeria at the time.

4.3.2.3. Religion

Religion is another major source for textual references found in *Sozaboy*. It is worth noticing that we are still within the domain of oral cultural transmission since it is fair to assume that Mene’s access to religious texts, as in the case of the overwhelming majority of his fellow villagers, had taken place through the words of clergymen, missionaries, teachers, and maybe the radio. It is also worth keeping in mind that in this case we are dealing with the Christian religion (roughly half of the Nigerian population is Muslim, while 40-45% are Christians). We will focus here on the intertextual appearances of religious content and the way it is presented, but the general outlook of the book towards religion will be discussed below, in the section about beliefs (see p. 126).

Mene is evidently familiar with the Scripture and often quotes from it, especially in moments of distress. Interestingly, when turning to religion he mixes registers, sometimes adapting the source text to his idiolectal rotten English, sometimes keeping it in the original version in which he probably heard it first — down to the use of “Biblical” pronouns — and sometimes even alternating between both options in the span of two sentences, as in this passage, which is very

representative of Mene's growing sense of cosmic injustice in the second half of the book and of the skill with which Saro-Wiwa's combines true anguish with the broken and often hilarious way of speaking of the sozaboy to great pathetic effect (the italics are ours): "Yes, I was like anmal. No shirt, only knicker, wound for my body, no food to chop, no house to sleep, only inside bush and rain beating me like no man business. *Oh my God, why has thou forsaken me?* That is what I was saying to myself as they used to say in the Bible. *Oh my God, why has thou forsaken me?* Have I tiefed? Have I called another man's wife?" (117). The highlighted quote is taken from Matthew 27:46, where it is delivered by Christ at the cross, while Mene's protests of rectitude refer of course to the ten commandments ("Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery", respectively). Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew is very present in *Sozaboy*. In the next passage, Mene, once more, combines Matthew verses with allusions to the ten commandments, and mixes rotten English with formal, Biblical English: "You know I love my neighbour as myself. Even I am good Samaritan several times. I have not called another man's wife. I have not tief another person money. I do not go juju house. Forgive me my trespasses" (47-48). The last sentence comes from the Lord's Prayer (Mat 6:9-13), whose first verse is also invoked by Mene — this time almost fully pidginized — in the moment of horror when their camp is bombed: "*Oh God our father wey dey for up*, why you make man wicked like this to his own brother?" (111). And there is yet another episode where the Gospel of Matthew comes to the fore: the speech about the "salt in the soup" that the "thick man" delivers in church and which so funnily confuses Mene. It is, of course, an allusion to Matthew 5:13 ("You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost her saltness, what can be salted with it? It is thereafter good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden underfoot by men."), that is worth quoting in full:

But today, the thick man is very serious. He just take one line from the Bible. "You people are the salt in the soup." Salt in the soup! Have you heard anything like this before? Porson is salt in the soup? I begin to turn this thing for my mind and after some time I begin to understand. Because if salt is not inside soup, then it cannot be soup at all. Nobody can fit to chop it. Therefore, that salt is very important to everyone. To the soup and to the people who will chop the soup too. Then the thick man asked: 'Suppose that salt no get salt inside it, what will happen?' This kain question na war oh. How can salt not get salt inside it. Ehn? How can salt not get salt inside? Will it be salt? It cannot be salt. Oh yes, it cannot be salt. That is what the man was saying. I 'gree with am. Awright, if na we be the salt, and we no get salt inside our salt wey be ourselves, can we be ourselves? Wait oh. Wait oh. Wait small. Make I no too confuse. Say this thing again, thick man. Yes. If na we be the salt, and we no get salt inside our salt wey be ourselves, can we be ourselves? Look, my friend, I no dey for all dis *ugbalugba* case. Abi, dis man think that we are in University? Am I not common motor apprentice? How can I understand this salt and ourselves and no be salt and 'e be salt? Anyway, any salt wey no get salt inside no be salt and it must be thrown away. Awright, thick man. How this one concern we people for this Dukana? What he mean to say, therefore, is that any man wey no be man, he will be thrown away. He is useless man. (42)

The Biblical passages quoted in the novel tend to focus on community relations and what constitutes moral behavior in a Christian society, and this aspect will be discussed below.

There are other, isolated religious expressions strewn throughout the book (i.e. “Allelu! Alleluya,” “Man proposes and God disposes” — again in uncharacteristically formal English —,

"sweating like river Jordan"). Mention should be made as well of Mene's recurrent (fifteen times) expression for averting bad luck, "God no gree bad thing." This is a version of the Nigerian Pidgin "God forbid bad thing" that in Spanish would probably require some play with the equally popular "Dios no lo quiera." Finding equivalents for the rest of these expressions (or at least to use them as a basis for a modified variant) should prove similarly easy, since both cultures seem equivalently steeped in Christianity, as far as its incorporation into everyday vocabulary is concerned. That is not to say that there are no differences — they are numerous and significant (consider the time Christianity has been dominant in both cultures, for instance, or the fact that most Spanish-speaking countries are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, while the Christian half of Nigeria combines Catholicism with a strong Anglican presence and other sects (Evangelical, Methodists, etc.). However, the intertextual references tend to be immediately identifiable: maybe "sudar como el río Jordán" is not a common expression in Spanish, but it is both understandable and identifiable as a (foreign) idiom at first sight.

4.3.3. Discourse

As in the case of intertextuality, there are several, often conflicting definitions of discourse (Baumgarten and Schröter 2018, 135; Kim 2020, 120). Nevertheless, the consideration of discourses is still regarded as essential for the translator, especially when issues of function and ideology are at stake. For this purpose, the holistic approach advanced by Tymozcko seems particularly apropos, since it allows the translator to reconstruct and make coherent sense of discourse fragments that quite often appear as "isolated or even fragmentary elements" (Tymoczko 2010, 240). For our discussion of discourse, we will adopt a dual approach: first, we will try to articulate the singular discourse embodied by the novel itself. As a starting point, we will follow

the distinction by Hatim and Mason mentioned in the previous section (see p. 66) and focus on the particular attitude of the analyzed work towards its own genre, understood here as that which makes *Sozaboy* unique as a Biafran war Bildungsroman, what sets it apart ideologically from other works. Although some overlap is inevitable, we will try to stick to the connections between the texts themselves, without delving too much, at this point, into the critical reaction to *Sozaboy* or Saro-Wiwa's personal politics. Our second avenue for the analysis will be the depiction of the different discourses represented within the text of the novel itself, understood here in the sense put forwards by Norman Fairclough, as "particular way[s] of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world," which differ and often compete among themselves and are associated with "groups of people in different social positions" (2003, 17). We will focus, in particular, on how different voices in the novel structure their thinking and actions in a time of war, when laws, standards, and values break down.

4.3.3.1. What separates *Sozaboy* from other novels in its genre

While *Sozaboy* observes the structure of the classical Nigerian Biafran war novel and most of the characteristics of the postcolonial Bildungsroman, as we have seen, there are some specific features in its approach that distinguish it from other works. To begin with, because of the strong ethnic component of the war and the fact that the Igbo secessionists were ultimately and traumatically defeated, most Nigerian novels about the conflict (about 85% by the year 2000) were written by members of that ethnic group (Griswold 2000, 235). *Sozaboy*, however, is narrated from the point of view of the Ogoni (although that name is absent from the book, and Dukana, the protagonist's home village, is fictional, under that name at least). We know that Saro-Wiwa was an Ogoni /Nigerian nationalist, who sided with the federal government against the Biafran rebels.

In this, Saro-Wiwa's actions were similar to those of other notable non-Igbos who found themselves in the Biafran side at the onset of the war, such as consolidated writer Elechi Amadi, but also Lieutenant-Colonel George Kurubo, who led the Biafran Air Force at the beginning of the war, and musician Rex Lawson (Jeffs 2012). Thus, in concordance with the author's position, what the novel reflects is a double marginalization: that of a people roped into fighting a savage war on the losing side of the war, while at the same time suspected and sometimes harassed by the dominant element in their camp because of ethnic differences, and therefore subject to dual violence, by friend and foe alike. In that regard, the perspective is representative of the "internal colonialism" which was Saro-Wiwa's main concern with regard to the plight of the Ogoni. This is stressed in the novel by the continuity and parallelism established between Mene and the character of Zaza, the World War II veteran who fought in Burma for the British, even though, like Mene later, he was basically in the dark as to why, where or against whom. Zaza "passes the torch" to Mene (who will at one point even identify his unknown — to him — enemy with that of the Burma veteran: "as our own Hitla who they call Enemy," 81). Both men enter their respective wars for spurious reasons; in Mene we do not see any of the betrayed patriotism of the Igbo intellectual that is so prevalent in other novels set in the Biafran war, although he is relatively representative of the "specifically Nigerian theme of the Disappointed Young Man who has education but no future, who cannot succeed despite his individual efforts, or who is unable to resist the temptations that will derail him" (Griswold 2000, 222) and the way Nigeria can be cruel with its intelligent young. Although he is by no means an intellectual, thanks to his mother Mene has a rudimentary education that raises him above others in the village, and some prospects for the future (also paid at great cost by his mother) as apprentice driver of the aptly named town lorry, "Progres" (sic). His unique way of writing, this "rotten English" which will be studied in depth in the section devoted to dialect

(p. 187), is one more feature — perhaps the most obvious — that sets *Sozaboy* apart from other civil war novels. Suffice it to say, at this juncture, that the fuzziness and incomprehension that this idiolect so skillfully reinforces can also be interpreted as a representation of the filter through which minorities (mis)understood a war which was not their own.

4.3.3.2. Visions of war in *Sozaboy*

We move on now to the study of the different discourses, as "perspectives on the world" (Fairclough 2003, 124), present in *Sozaboy*. Since we are dealing with a novel with a first-person narrator, it seems obvious that the number of "voices" heard in the story is going to be limited, and always filtered through Mene's understanding of them. Our protagonist does not move in circles where ideological or political issues are discussed in any depth. That being said, we do get to appreciate different points of view about the war, which is the overwhelmingly predominant focus of the story. These diverse takes on the conflict, however, shed some light on the characters' — and especially Saro-Wiwa's — values and ideas about the country and the moral fiber of his fellow Nigerians. The first thing to point out is that Mene is not the only one to take up arms without a clear notion of what the war is about. At no point in the book is there a mention, much less a discussion, of the reasons for the conflict or the merits of any of the sides. Everything is vague. War is a given, almost an impending natural catastrophe, something external that is inevitably going to happen, offering purely particular opportunities and risks, depending on the position and propensities of each character. One element of the relationships that these characters will establish among themselves — friendship, domination, admiration, etc. — will be the relationship between their discourses (Fairclough 2003, 124).

Mene

The predominating feeling is, of course, that of Mene himself and his rapid disillusionment with the war, which has already been discussed at some length in the section about genre. Mene's discourse on the war evolves as the story progresses: from his early enthusiasm, born of a desire to impress Agnes and his fellow villagers, and of his fears of feeling — and being perceived as — less of man in case he does not join, to some initial doubts, overruled by a more pragmatic approach and the prospect of being promoted and thus earn more respect back in the village:

> "Why are we fighting? I used to confuse plenty any time I ask that question to myself. I cannot ask Bullet because some time he will think that I am not doing what the soza captain said about obey before complain. So I just keep quiet so that they can give me one rope or two ropes [rank insignias]. I am sure that as Bullet like me plenty he will soon give me rope. Only I want something to happen so that I can show them that I am good soza. Then they will give me rope. If I have that rope, then those Dukana people will know that I am not just Sozaboy but really tough man who can bring Hitla home" (90)

For all his eagerness, Mene lacks any violent proclivities and, far from succumbing to the bloodthirst that seems to possess so many people once war suspends normal rules of conduct, he does not even fire a single shot in his entire career as a soldier. After those early stages in his thinking, horror will rapidly pile upon horror, leading him to the wholesale denunciation of war with which the book concludes.

Moving on to other explicit opinions, the most elaborate points of view about the war that Mene confronts and reflects about are those of two other soldiers that offer a distinct contrast between themselves: his friend Bullet and the ubiquitous and menacing Manmuswak.

Manmuswak

This fascinating character is introduced early in the novel, even though he is still anonymous at that point. According to the glossary, the name (or rather, the expression it comes from, "man must wak") means "a man must live (eat) by whatever means." The phrase is first pronounced by Bullet when he sits to share a drink with him, even though he is the enemy ("all of us who are here can die any time. Any time. So while we live, we must drink. Because, as you know, man must wak," 95). Although the expression, in the way Bullet uses it, could indicate a sort of live and let die attitude, the reader can guess from their first encounter with Manmuswak, and will certainly learn as the novel progresses, that this is not the best way to describe his personality. When Mene first meets him, at the African Upwine Bar in Pitakwa, "[t]hat tall man with plenty tooth" is engaged in a conversation with a friend about the inevitability of war. They both face the prospect of fighting and dying with humorous cynicism, opting for drinking instead of worrying, while they merrily sing that "if I die tomorrow / mamy water go bury me" (15).[13] This grim *carpe diem* attitude, incidentally, was also illustrated by Saro-Wiwa through characters singing this very song (in two separate instances) in his dramatization of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (Dunton 2000, 207). However, there are differences in the discourse of those two men that Mene will use to symbolize his mental back and forth when he ponders whether to join the army.

[13] They are probably singing "Mame Wata" by the Ghanaian Kwaa Mensah 1920-91), popularly known as the king or godfather of palm-wine highlife music.

While his friend sees the war eminently as a disruption in his fruition of the simple things in life ("as for myself, I like to chop *ngwongwo* and drink *tombo*. Anything that will disturb me and stop enjoyment, I cannot like it."), Manmuswak almost relishes the prospect of using violence ("I like to fight. Yes. It is good thing to fight … Praps they will use gun and bomb and rifle. It does not matter. Fight is fight and war is war. Anytime it comes, I am ready."). This acceptance of — if not penchant for — violence is what will allow him to effortlessly adopt so many different roles during the conflict, even those about which other people would have moral qualms. As a symbol of how far people can let themselves go during war, Manmuswak in his ubiquitousness ends up acquiring an almost hallucinatory quality, to the point where the reader cannot help but suspect that Mene's brain is playing tricks on him after the ordeal he has had to endure, or that maybe he is trying to make a point (as Saro-Wiwa is undoubtedly doing) through the condensation of this type of discourse and behavior in a single character.

Bullet

The most obvious contrast with Munmaswak is Mene himself, of course, with his innocence and his almost physical incapability for violence. Munmaswak "is war," while one is tempted to conclude that war would be impossible if all combatants were like Mene. However, it is also interesting to study the differences between Munmaswak and another world-wise young man who nevertheless shares very little with him other than that. Indeed, Bullet has no delusions about the nature of war and his general attitude seems rather one of mocking resignation, which sometimes exasperates Mene ("I no like as Bullet dey take everything for joke," 90). This knowledge of the ways of the world is further emphasized by his motivation for going to war: the only son of his parents, "he knows that when the war don finish all those who have fight the war

well will become big man" (91). These expectations are grounded especially on the fact that Bullet is a truly educated man, a fact that is stressed repeatedly during the novel: "Bullet is proper book man" (73), "And 'e sabi almost everything" (87), "he have gone to school plenty and he can type letter and he have read plenty book" (91). He is also patient and helpful with those who know less. This didactic attitude is part of a general, sincere care for his companions, for the common man. This makes him an obvious candidate for "san mazor," or sergeant major, in charge of A company, with Mene at his orders. And indeed, even after he is demoted, the rest of the soldiers tend to ignore their new sergeant and keep looking up to Bullet for instructions, even over the captain. This natural authority, emanating from an ingrained kindness and democratic outlook, speaks of a promise that makes his loss to the war all the more tragic. In a way, Bullet could be a good candidate for a more typical Biafran war novel, as the quintessential "Disappointed Young Man who has education but no future, who cannot succeed despite his individual efforts" (Griswold 2000, 222), a promising young man who joins the war with high hopes and is soon cruelly and brutally disillusioned, first and foremost by his own side. Despite his ambition, it is his personal sense of justice that moves him to outrage at the duplicitous but true revelation by Manmuswak that the captain is hoarding and feasting on supplies (cigarettes and alcoholic drinks) intended for the soldiers. This ingrained sense of righteousness then leads him to steal back the supplies from the captain's tent and, worse, to immediately share them with the rest of the soldiers, which in turn makes it inevitable that they are discovered and cruelly punished. In an illustration of the deleterious and self-defeating effects of corruption, the humiliations to which Bullet is submitted after being caught by the captain turn this fine young man into a shadow of himself, who will only recover after killing the captain in revenge. This action not only turns him into a cold-blooded

murderer but deprives the unit of its leader and contact with the high command, which in turn leaves them defenseless when the enemy attack finally comes.

Thus, we seem to be presented with three possible ways to face war in a society where corruption is rampant, as Saro-Wiwa always denounced. One can leave any moral code aside and "go with the flow" as Manmuswak does, down to the most extreme consequences, or one can try to hold onto some principles and inevitably crash against the rocks of disinterest and corruption. Given what we know about the rest of Saro-Wiwa's life and work, it is inevitable to conclude that this view extends to the Nigerian society of his time in general, not just to Biafra and certainly not only to war. Tragically, his own death is a reminder of the fatal consequences of standing against corruption and arbitrariness in such a situation. In a middle ground between Manmuswak and Bullet resides Mene, trying to find his own path and survive while holding on as much as possible to his sense of decency. Once he realizes the true nature of war, he adopts the attitude of one that does whatever he needs to do to stay alive (changing sides, helping Manmuswak in his marauding), while simultaneously never killing or even harming anyone and never profiting from those actions. Significantly, he has an external focus (his love and worry for his mother and Agnes) as a motivation. His efforts as we know are not ultimately rewarded, because in war (and in Saro-Wiwa's Nigeria) decency seldom pays off.

The villagers

Outside the fighting and the combatants, we have the attitude of the villagers, by and large, portrayed as ignorant and gullible, who push Mene to war and greet the coup and independence with open arms, who let Chief Birabee manage their affairs despite their obvious (and justified)

distrust of him (it is significant how at some point they seem to forgive his foolishness and venality just because they credit him with having managed to put the name of Dukana on the radio). How misguided this faith in their leaders is (also spiritual leaders, since here we must add Pastor Barika) becomes painfully clear when we find them later, in the refugee camp, engaging in monstrous profiteering by hoarding "bags of gari, rice and bundles of stockfish" (158) while their people suffer and die of starvation and kwashiorkor. This is one more indication (if there was any need for one) that Saro-Wiwa was uncompromising in his denunciation of corruption and collusion with the colonizers, be they internal or not. Dukana to people, and especially their leadership, are never depicted under a condescending light, in the same way that the Federal side is not represented as morally superior to the Biafrans, despite the fact that Saro-Wiwa aligned with them during the war.

A discussion of the different outlooks on the war that are present in the book would never be complete without addressing a key voice that is defined, though, mostly through the contour of its absence: the pompous, grandiose discourse of the elites that first declared independence and then plunged the newfangled country into war. This mixture of highfaluting messages (the incomprehensible "big big grammar") and unrealistic promises is delivered to the people in Dukana through the radio, which plays an important role in the first part of the book, and through the "broken telephone" which is Chief Birabee. This all further contributes to the disconnect between our characters and the rationale of the war, in yet another poignant reflection of the idea of "internal colonialism" that Saro-Wiwa heartily subscribed to. The scattered references to specific Biafran propaganda slogans have already been tackled in the intertextuality section, however, where the topic of warlike rhetoric has been broached in more depth.

4.3.4. Signature Concepts

This last section devoted to the context of culture will essentially address the presence in *Sozaboy* of what Maria Tymoczko calls "signature concepts" of a culture: these are "cultural elements that are key to social organization, cultural practices, and dispositions constituting the habitus of a culture" (2010, 238). The *habitus* is a concept borrowed from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu which offers Tymoczko a broad enough framework to problematize culture in accordance with her holistic approach to the analysis of source-text cultural aspects. "Holistic" because with it she distances from what she perceives, in modern theories within and without Translation Studies, as an excessive stress in material culture, which according to her should be "not forgotten but … contextualized within larger frameworks and supplemented by attention to many aspects of culture that are less tangible on a physical level" (238). Among these one could include "such cultural elements as signs, symbols, codes, beliefs, values, ideals, and ideologies, all of which form systems and cohesive or networked structures, often stratified or hierarchically organized" (226). In this, she seems to be in agreement with Anna Wierzbicka, according to whom "what applies to material culture and to social rituals and institutions applies also to people's values, ideals, and attitudes and to their ways of thinking about the world and our life in it" (1997, 2), and with David Katan (Katan and Taibi 2021) who, in his discussion of culture, which Tymockzo values as "[t]he most systematic contemporary survey of cultural translation" (2010, 224), establishes as well a hierarchy of Logical Levels that go all the way up from a very wide "Environment" ground level to "Behavior," "Capabilities/Strategies/Skills," "Values," "Beliefs" and, finally, "Identity," which ultimately frames all the previous ones.

In what follows, then, we will adopt Tymoczko's empowered approach, but we will structure the discussion following Katan's stratification. We feel this to be not only

methodologically solid, but also very helpful to explore the cultural elements in a work of fiction without excessive preconceptions; we can set out to investigate the cultural environment of our protagonist, construct his cultural identity and compare it along the way with what we know about Nigerian and Ogoni culture, and about Saro-Wiwa's own outlook. It has the added advantage of taking account of how different cultural elements interrelate to one another — how a certain behavior can be the expression of a value, for instance, or how a determinate element of the environment conditions behaviors and belief, following the congruence that always attains between the different levels (Katan and Taibi 2021, 74).

These signature concepts of the source culture are often to be found in its lexicon, which holds a close connection with the social life (Tymoczko 1999, 124; Wierzbicka 1997, 2). Wierbicka uses the concept of "key words" to denote what Peter Newmark had already described in *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) as "cultural words": those that pose translation problems when there is no cultural overlap between source and target language (94), and most of them are easily identified because "they are associated with a particular language and cannot be literally translated" (95). However, there are problems with this association between language and culture, as Newmark himself pointed out when he talked about "broad and fuzzy distinctions" and the fact that different cultures can share one language (94). Indeed, the confusion arises as soon as one tries to export to cultures the "Language A" to "Language B" template of discussing translation, all the more so when dealing with postcolonial works. Tymoczko sees in this a Western bias that also associates language with nationalism (2010, 173). Who would say that *Sozaboy* belongs to English culture, for instance? It is perhaps more productive to turn to Hans Vermeer's definition of cultureme, quoted by Christiane Nord (2018): "A cultureme is a social phenomenon of a culture X that is regarded as relevant by the members of this culture and, when compared with a

corresponding social phenomenon in a culture Y, is found to be specific to culture X" (34). The key distinction is that culturemes, or signature cultural concepts, in the terminology we are using, are not to be considered essential to one culture, but they arise *or not* always in the contact between two given cultures: they are an expression of specific and contingent cultural difference. Furthermore, the contingent nature of culture is not only predicated on external difference, but also on internal dynamism, since "cultures are not monolithic, homogeneous, or static" (Tymoczko 2010, 240), and to conceive of them as such, as more "rigid and deterministic that they are experienced in practice," is a common misperception among external observers — as translators are most of the time — which a holistic approach helps to avoid (127).

Let us take a look, then, at the signature concepts in *Sozaboy*, working our way from the physical environment up, following Katan's model and bearing in mind that we are going to focus on nodes of cultural difference; that is, following Vermeer's definition, those social phenomena that an Ogoni Nigerian would consider relevant to their culture and that a Spanish-language reader would consider culturally "foreign." Again, that degree of foreignness is not static across the Spanish-speaking domain: most aspects of environment and material culture, for instance, will seem much less alien to a Guinean reader, say, than to a Spaniard. How to deal with this heterogeneity will be part of the necessary self-reflective process that any responsible translator will have to undergo.

4.3.4.1. Environment

Physical and political environment

Sozaboy takes place in a specific area in the southeast of Nigeria, the present-day Rivers state, on the Niger Delta, a characteristic environment which "gives identity to its indigenous peoples" (Ojaide 2000, 55). This is where the Ogoni people live, one of the smallest ethnic and linguistic groups (Doron and Falola 2016, 21), and it was one of the main theaters of the Biafran war. The importance the Ogoni attach to territory can be easily imagined by the fact that they use the same name to refer to their people and their land, a fact that Saro-Wiwa himself liked to point out (Doron and Falola 2016, 21). At any rate, the very fact that the novel is set during the Biafran war — *is* about the Biafran war, one might say —, which was fought over the secession of a part of Nigeria, indicates that the political environment plays a crucial role in the story.

However, *Sozaboy*, like so many other interesting literary works, allows for several levels of reading and has the potential to exert a powerful effect on any reader, whatever their degree of familiarity with Nigerian history and culture. The problem lies with the translator, who ideally should be able to accommodate all those different readings, an often unrealistic aspiration (Boase-Beier 2014, 116). This, of course, requires the translator to have a deep knowledge of the source culture and, especially, to do careful research not to miss any of those presuppositions Christiane Nord postulated as part of the source-text analysis (2018, 58). The ultimate goal is that they can, in turn, "adjudicate difficulties caused by disparities and asymmetries in cultural understanding and cultural presuppositions" (Tymoczko 2010, 231) between source and target audiences.

As for the readings of *Sozaboy*, at its most general, the book can be — and has been — interpreted as a blanket condemnation of war, of all wars — their senselessness, the hypocrisy that

lies behind patriotic rhetoric everywhere, and so on. This is surely sustained by some of Mene's own denunciations: "war is very bad thing" (113), "war is useless nonsense" (127), "a very bad and stupid game" (151). The realization of the true nature of war leads him to the famous ending of the book: "now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will just run and run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely." This wholesale, well-meaning but almost trite conclusion is helped by the deliberate fogginess that surrounds any particulars of the war in Mene's eyes, and therefore in those of the readers of his narration that are unfamiliar with the Biafran conflict and Saro-Wiwa's take on it. Adding to that impression is the characterization of war as an unstoppable, almost natural force with its own immutable and inscrutable rules, as exemplified by the resigned maxim repeated, by different characters, no less than sixteen times throughout the book: "war is war".[14] Saro-Wiwa reinforced that deliberate blurriness with his omission of any main names that would help the unsuspecting reader to locate the action: Nigeria, Biafra… even the choice of the "Pitakwa" form over the more international "Port Harcourt" contributes to this. Mene and his comrades are fighting an undefined entity whom our protagonist even begins to call Mr. Enemy. The conduct of both sides seems equally deplorable, the frontlines are indistinguishable, the consequences universally ghastly. In fact, this ghastliness is one of the factors that allow for the antiwar message of the book at is most basic not to sound platitudinous: one can feel true pain behind those words, even if they are expressed in the "very limited English vocabulary" of a naïve young soldier.

What political territorial realities lie behind all this suffering, though? Learning them becomes doubly imperative if we take into account a risk that *Sozaboy* shares with other child soldier narratives and which is explored in Daria Tunca's *Stylistic Approaches to Nigerian Fiction*

[14] In pages 18, 75, 80, 83, 90, 104, 113, 128, 139, 147, 148, 163, 164, with some repetitions.

(2014, 147–48): the violent experiences depicted in the text work to reinforce the idea that Africa is a brutal place, while having a child protagonist reinforces the idea that it is helpless but can be saved. This danger can be prevented through proper contextualization, that is, by "the writers' 'explicit' identification of the 'historical setting' of their narratives," adds Tunca, quoting Eleni Coundouriotis (148). Even though Saro-Wiwa deliberate obfuscates that contextualization, as we just saw, it would probably be a good idea for the Spanish translation to contain paratextual material providing some historic context, especially when more than 50 years have elapsed since the Biafran War. The German translator of *Sozaboy*, Gerhard Grotjahn-Pape, for instance, provides a brief summary of the conflict in his Epilogue (Saro-Wiwa 1997, 263). At any rate, a mere cursory glance at the back cover will inform the most oblivious of readers that the book has to do with the Nigerian Civil War and the succession of Biafra, which is still associated today, at an international level, with horrifying images of famished refugees. It is important, then, to understand that the events in the novel take place in the Biafran side, but even more important it is to realize that Dukana (and Ogoni in the real world) occupied a peripheral position within Biafra, which was the name that the Eastern Region of Nigeria adopted after Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu declared independence in 1967. Ojukwu was an Igbo, and it was predominantly that ethnic group — which accounted for 60-70% of the population of the region and was one of the three major groups which have traditionally dominated Nigerian politics — who had nationalist aspirations. The fact remains that the Eastern Region was the most densely populated and most ethnically heterogeneous of the three (Doron and Falola 2016, 52), and the rest of the peoples in it were not necessarily so enthusiastic with the prospect of secession. This led to serious misgivings between ethnic groups. Some of the minorities complained that the Igbo were behaving like the former colonizers, and Saro-Wiwa was certainly among those. It must be taken into account that the minorities in the

South, and the Ogoni among them, were sitting upon the newly-found (in 1956) oil, the profits of which were being managed essentially by the central government and the ethnic majorities, in a continuation of what Saro-Wiwa considered to be a long history of marginalization of the Rivers minorities: not only the Ogoni but also Ijaws, Ikweree, Etche, Abua, Odual, Etepeye, Engenni, and Ogba (Ojo-Ade 1999, 223). While Saro-Wiwa is hardly an objective source as far as these matters are concerned, and Biafran propaganda always insisted that their national project transcended ethnicity, it seems that the true situation was more ambiguous and fell somewhere between the two extremes, with an increasing alienation of the minorities after the trial of Victor Banjo in 1968 (Daly 2018, 108; Achebe 2012, 91).

The Igbos, in turn, once the war started — and especially after the aforementioned Banjo trial — became suspicious of the commitment to victory of the minorities, a point of view which was shared by some of the Federal commanders, who indeed expected less resistance in non-Igbo areas (Achebe 2012, 279). This intensified any preexisting hostility between ethnic groups and at times devolved into atrocities. At the same time, the minorities were still targeted by the Federal forces, who considered them equally *yameri*, a term used in the North for the people in Eastern Nigeria. This would lead Saro-Wiwa to proclaim that "the real victims of that war were the Eastern minorities who were in a no-win situation" (1989, 10).

All of this sheds a different light on some of the events in the novel, that the potential translator must keep in mind at all times. The attitude and looting of the Biafran soldiers add to the general denunciation of military arrogance a touch of the colonizer humiliating the colonized, complete with the subserviency of collaborators such as chief Birabee, happy to be servile and live off the scraps. And something like Mene's annoyance with the "Simple Defence", which may seem just peevish and misogynistic — he seems particularly aggravated by the fact that it is girls

who stop him at the checkpoints — takes a different connotation once the reader is aware that this is a term Saro-Wiwa used to disparage the Civil Defence, a corps of ill-trained soldiers who often acted violently against civilians on very little suspicion and who have been argued to have been a major factor in the quick alienation of ethnic minorities from the Biafran project (Doron and Falola 2016, 51; Jowett 2019, 10).

Political geography, which in Nigeria is indissociable from ethnic geography, plays a crucial role in *Sozaboy*, as it did in the life of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who welcomed the defeat of Biafra and the creation of smaller administrative units, such as Rivers State, but was ultimately to realize that this did little to improve the situation of the Ogoni.

As far as the physical environment is concerned, there are three major settings in the novel: the village and surrounding farmland, the city of Pitakwa (Port Harcourt), and the mangrove area which makes up most of the non-populated terrain. It is in the latter — in Iwoama, specifically — that Mene's unit is stationed once the war erupts. Additionally, there are some settings with a lesser presence that would more properly belong to Katan's category of the built environment, such as a hospital or the refugee camps. We will proceed to go over these different environments in the novel, with no intention of offering an exhaustive description, since we aim to focus here on whatever "isolates" constitute cases of cultural difference, specifically for a Spanish-language readership.

Village and farm

In the 1960s the Ogoni, living in the Niger Delta region, had been "traditionally a riverine agrarian people" (Doron and Falola 2016, 21). As Meme himself explains: "The people of Dukana are fishermen and farmers" (4). In the novel, none of these activities are described in any detail,

and fishing, in particular, does not feature at all beyond that mention and the references to fish dishes (see below, "Food"). The culturally-charged terms belonging to that area, therefore, are not going to be as challenging for the translator as they would in a book more preoccupied with customs and day-to-day life. At the same time, the simplicity of the description should not let us lose sight of the crucial importance these fruits of the land have for the Ogoni. The intimate, sometimes spiritual connection they feel with their land extends of course to its farming: yams and plantains, in particular, are used as ritual foods for spirits and honored in festivals, such as the Annual Festival of the Ogoni which is held at the time of the yam harvest, while the planting season is also a religious and social occasion (Saro-Wiwa 1992a, 12; Kpone-Tonwe 1987, 110). The translator, therefore, must pay careful attention, especially when some of the produce farmed in Dukana will be unfamiliar to the Spanish reader (but not so much in Equatorial Guinea or even Latin America, much in the same way that an English-language reader will have first-hand knowledge of them or not depending on their socio-geographical circumstances). Some potential stumbling blocks for the translator are: the distinction between *bananas* and *plantains*, which would correspond to the difference between both "plátanos" and "bananas" for the former, and "plátanos machos" for the latter. A similar asymmetry can be observed in the case of *yams*, a true staple of West African agriculture. In Spain, although "ñames" are still a relatively exotic and recent addition to fruit shops, the word itself is well documented, since the root is to be found in recipes from some areas of Latin America and in Equatorial Guinea. However, the careless translator may fall for the wrong equivalence "boniato" or "batata," because yam is also a variety of the sweet potato in the United States, and a poor bilingual dictionary might contain this as the only meaning. Other tropical crops present in the book, such as *pawpaws*, *kola (nut)*, and *cassava*,

although still relatively exotic in Spain, have established, univocal equivalences and are often common in Spanish-speaking tropical areas.

The farm animals mentioned in the book (goats, rabbits) do not present special difficulties for translation. It is worth pointing out that Mene rarely if ever refers to them other than to exemplify stupidity, cowardice, and/or general proneness to die ("I don't want to die like chicken, no burial," 56). This is especially true in the case of goats, which are considered to symbolize foolishness in Eastern Nigeria (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 65): "those with safe legs and safe mind come to Nugwa to suffer and die like hen and goat and ant" (145); "some of the sozas just lie down there begin to sleep like stupid goat" (101).

The village itself is succinctly described in a few, not very flattering brushstrokes: "All the houses in the town are made of mud. There is no good road or drinking water. Even the school is not fine and no hospital or anything" (4). An important spot is what Mene calls the *playground*, the town square where most of social life takes place: the town meetings with the chief, the casual conversations with Duzia, Bom, Terr Kole, and Zaza. There is more information to be found in other works of Saro-Wiwa: we know that Dukana is basically "a clearing in the tropical rain forest peopled by three or four thousand men, women and children living in rickety mud huts" (1995a, 2).

City (Pitakwa)

The city of Pitakwa (the local name for Port Harcourt) has a brief but significant presence in the book. Firstly, it offers a stark and explicit contrast with Dukana: far from the village and their mud constructions, the closest city is "Pitakwa, township with plenty brick house and running water and electric" (4). The opposition in building materials is the manifestation of the break

between backwardness and modernity. Pitakwa represents "the modern world of the brick town" (Saro-Wiwa 1995a, 1). We get to know two specific locations in the city: the motor park which is the terminus for the lorry in which Mene works as apprentice driver, and Diobu, a populous neighborhood full of people "like cockroach" and of "proper cockroach," too. "Diobu that used to smell urine urine." It is deep within this district where we find the American Upwine Bar, also known as "Mgbaijiji," which means that "the place can bring plenty fly" (13). This nickname should be kept the same in Spanish, of course, since it means very little to any non-local English-speaking reader, and the same holds for the proper names, fictitious or not. Special care should be devoted as well not to suppress any of the elements that work to evidence the village-town opposition, which will be discussed below when addressing Values.

Mangrove

The mangrove swamp is the predominant terrain in the Niger Delta, where most of the action takes place. Ogoniland, in particular, boasts the third-largest mangrove forest in the world (Chereji and Wratto King 2015, 57). It surrounds Dukana, which can be inferred by the fact that the villagers are made, daily, "to go to the swamp and cut the mangrove because the enemy sozas are hiding there" (132) once the war reaches the zone. This pluvial environment, "a geographically perplexing maze of inlets, mangrove swamps and tropical verdure that stretches over thousands of square miles" (Baxter 2014, 31), made the conduct of war messy and slow, and the life of the soldiers miserable. It features most prominently during Mene's sojourn at the front, in Iwoama, close to Pitakwa and not far from Dukana. Sozaboy is familiar with this geography, as was Saro-Wiwa himself, who acquired first-hand knowledge of the approximate area where the Iwoama of

the book is located when he became the civil administrator of Bonny, arriving there in 1968.[15] Other soldiers, probably coming from farther north, are terrorized instead by the very sight of water and the prospect of boarding a canoe since they cannot swim. Once settled there, however, they all struggle with the living conditions: they have to drink water from the same swamp they use as a latrine, and the trenches they dig — and sleep in — get regularly filled with rainwater, a well-documented problem at least in that theater of the Biafran war (Baxter 2014, 31; Alabi-Isama 2013, 20.38).

Likewise, once Mene flees the advance of the enemy after losing most of his unit to a bombing raid, the mangrove proves both a blessing, in that it conceals his escape, and a curse because it also impedes it, to the point of almost costing him his life. Almost naked, he keeps stumbling and hurting himself, in almost complete darkness where day and night start blending into one another. Finally, he succumbs to fever and exposure, only to be rescued by none other than Manmuswak. This dual nature of the mangrove as an insalubrious hiding place for the Ogoni is far from a literary invention. After Saro-Wiwa's arrest and the subsequent crackdown against the Ogoni, with documented episodes of raping, murder, and looting, thousands fled their villages and took refuge in the bush, where many would die of exposure and disease (Boele 1995); among the survivors was, for instance, Noble Obani-Nwibari, vice-president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) under Saro-Wiwa, who later would remember his time "in the bush, where he was eaten alive by insects while still suffering from injuries inflicted in torture" (King 1998, 115).

[15] At that time, he had the chance of witnessing the effects of war with his own eyes, including the craters left by bombing planes, which must have served as inspiration for the passage in the novel where Bullet and so many others die to an air raid.

This grim aspect of the mangrove is very present in the book, and in Mene's mind. He imagines it full of fierce predators (leopards, tigers, and snakes, he says), although they do not seem as dangerous to him as the soldiers. Once more, animals are mentioned by the narrator figuratively, more than in any attempt at description, even though we are introduced to some of the inhabitants of the mangrove, to wit: crabs, vultures, birds in general, crickets, mudskippers, and toads. Only the mudskipper could pose a potential source of strangeness for most of the Spanish-speaking domain, but luckily for the translator the same species is also endemic in Equatorial Guinea, where it is called "saltarín del fango." Toads are considered "not sign of good omen" by Mene, but many folklores in the world seem to share at least some degree of bufonophobia. Another example of the ominous nature of the mangrove even for someone familiar with it such as Mene is the haunting image he creates when he compares a mass of emaciated, sick refugees to a "bad forest in the night or like mangrove swamp when the water have gone to visit the ocean" (149).

Another potential problem for the translator is that Mene seems to use mangrove, swamp, forest, and bush somewhat indistinctly, which can lead to confusion if not handled carefully. As for the term itself to be used, *manglar* seems the obvious choice, since the word *mangrove*, according to the OED, most probably derives from the same Spanish root, *mangle*, itself taken from the Cariban or Arawak language, in America.

Temporal setting

The temporal context of the novel is of course closely tied with the political environment. And similarly, the ramp-up leading to war can be followed, if somewhat vaguely because of

Mene's disjointed narrative, by any person unfamiliar with the details of the Biafran war, although it will resonate differently for anyone who is aware of the tragic actuality of the events alluded to. The absence of dates and proper names can obscure a timeline that strictly follows historical events. The very first pages of the book describe the initial popular joy at the "new government of soza and police" (1). That a coup is welcomed with such jubilation may sound strange to those who are not aware of how unpopular the first Nigerian Republic had become by 1966. Saro-Wiwa himself described both his initial incredulity upon hearing the news and the glee with which the coup was received at the University of Ibadan, where he was living at the time (1989, 17); the reaction was similarly positive across the country (Doron and Falola 2016, 45; Baxter 2014, 6:21). Equally anchored in historic fact are Mene's later, and no less vague, reports about the massacres of Eastern Nigerians in the North that took place in May and especially September of 1966 and the subsequent mass emigration towards what by then was still the Eastern Region: "the radio and other people were talking of how people were dying. And plenty people were returning to their village;" "they are killing people in the train; cutting their hand or their leg or breaking their head with matchet or chooking them with spear and arrow" (3). The estimated amount of slaughtered Easterners, almost all of them Igbo, oscillates between 8.000 to 10.000 (McLuckie and McPhail 2000, 239) and over 30,000 (Baxter 2014, 6.41). An estimated 600,000 to over one million people returned to the Eastern Region as refugees. The novel keeps following the chronology of the escalation: the shortages caused by the strain on resources occasioned by the influx of refugees and the federal blockade, which in the book is felt through the tax levied by Chief Birabee, the depredations of the army, and the eventual interruption in the supply of salt; the start of the war and the initial unfounded optimism bolstered by propaganda, which falsely claimed some military victories (McLuckie and McPhail 2000, 240) and concealed setbacks: "our sozas are doing very

well. Killing the enemy like fly" (66); "the Chief Commander General said that the Enemy is tired for the fight" (79). Before the conflict erupted, Ojukwu himself had boasted that he expected the war to last three months (Jowett 2019, 3). Even Mene's initial rejection when he tries to join the army because there are just too many candidates was a common experience for many young Biafrans at the onset of the war (Jowett 2019, 11). These and the following stages of the conflict evoke clear episodes for anyone familiar with the conflict but are also general enough to be perfectly understandable to any reader as the ramp-up to and development of any war, particularly as experienced from a region distant from the initial front that is later engulfed in the onslaught. As usual, the translator should be able to function on both levels at once to allow for both readings in the target version.

Olfaction and food

The cultural significance of food and drink beyond the mere necessities of subsistence is by now well established. There is an ever-growing body of scholarly literature on the subject, building on the seminal work carried out in the 1960s by the likes of Levi-Strauss, Bourdieu, and others. By now, it is hardly controversial to state that in food we find not only "a reflection of the social and symbolic relationships at the very heart of a culture," but also something "essential to self-identity and instrumental in the definition of family, class, and ethnicity" (Vidal Claramonte 2017, 189).

Given this strong connection between food, language, and identity, it is perhaps surprising that Translation Studies have paid relatively little attention to the subject until now (Vidal Claramonte 2017, 191; Chiaro and Rosatto 2015, 237). Indeed, food has always provided prime

examples for (modern era) theorists, starting with Roman Jakobson, who used the fact that Russian had two unrelated words, творог and сыр, for the food products that in English are known as *cottage cheese* and its superordinate *cheese*, respectively, to illustrate that different languages partition reality differently and dispel the illusion of the existence of one-to-one equivalence between code-units (Munday 2009, 37). In general terms, food terms are usually among the "usual suspects" whenever issues of untranslatability are discussed. This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the notion of untranslatability; let it be said, however, that the term is sometimes used rather ambiguously, so much that it might even seem unadvisable in academic discussion. Cronin writes, much more productively in our view, about the "incommensurability in food translation — the untranslatable that generates endless translation" (2017, 51).

Food has also provided metaphors for aspects of translation. Charo and Rossato (2015) establish an analogy between translation and the preparation of a dish, for instance, and as they do so they extend the trope of the multicultural melting pot to that of a "huge transcultural cooking pot in which translation plays a major role" (238) to characterize the twenty-first century. With a more postcolonial focus, it is impossible not to mention *Antropofagia* and the use of the cannibalism metaphor as a way forward for Brazilian culture. Just like the Tupinambà tribe eating the flesh of a priest could be understood almost as a homage — all the more so when he preached a religion based partly on the eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood of God incarnate — the subversive appropriation of the language and culture of the colonizer to empower one's own culture could be characterized as the act of devouring Europe, a means of both challenging and making the most of the inescapable colonial legacy, a profanation and, simultaneously, a homage (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999). More recently, Cronin has vindicated Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's postulation of a "slow language movement" (itself a proposed transposition of the principles of

slow food to everyday writing and speaking) to state that it is precisely "in the area of food translation itself that we can begin to imagine what a 'slow language' movement would look like" (2017, 60).

As we have seen, national or regional dishes are always a source of loanwords, a quintessential example of what most people consider untranslatable words. *Sozaboy* is no exception: food (and eating) feature prominently, both literally and metaphorically, in the book, and there is a long list of staple Nigerian foods that appear inevitably in their original form, and we will go over them below. Furthermore, food, and hunger, have a presence in the book that goes well beyond local color or the mere setting of a cultural stage. Many of the major themes in the book are recoded in terms of eating. The greed that pervades Nigerian society and is behind the widespread corruption and even the war (understood as a fight over the recently discovered oil resources) is depicted time and again as insatiable hunger. Government officers and political leaders, for instance, systematically *chop* money and bribes, the same word that is used for *food* or *to eat*, according to the glossary included at the end of the book.[16] When, in the depths of moral degradation, some people take to reporting their own countrymen to the military authorities in exchange for food when they are starving in the refugee camps, they are said to be thinking with their belly, so that they become *bellymen*: "they chop everything. Because they want to chop for today, tomorrow and even for many tomorrows to come, they even hear things which nobody have

[16] The translation of this important word poses singular problems for the translator, since it combines English form with a strictly Pidgin nature as regards its meaning and its usage as both verb and noun. Treating it as a regular loanword, using something like *chopear*, seems unadvisable, since the term does not immediately convey the notion of eating for most Spanish speakers and it is moreover used with other purposes in some areas. Both the French and the Italian translators, whose work will be discussed later in he dissertation (see p. 205) chose to preserve the orality mark by using an informal word for *eating* that felicitously alluded to the acceptance of bribes as well — *bouffer* and *pappare* respectively (Saro-Wiwa 2003; 2005). As a Spanish precedent, in their translation of Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Maya García de Vinuesa and Terri Ochiagha employed a similar solution with the informal couplet *manduca* / *manducar* to cover the uses of *chop* as both verb and noun: "—¿Que qué manduco en mi casa? —repitió—. Pues la manduca de nuestra tierra" (Achebe 2011, loc. 864).

said, they see things which their belly told them to see and they smell things according to how their belly tell them to smell. So these bellymen are friends of the sozas and of the politicians and the traders" (156). This philosophy of "anything goes," especially in war, is embodied, as we have seen, in the figure of Manmuswak — literally, "a man must eat" — who, in a book with very little physical description, is depicted repeatedly as a man "with plenty tooth." How different are those bellymen from "all those children with small big belly like pot, their eyes run go inside inside their head," the victims of starvation and kwashiorkor with whom they coexist. And indeed, extreme, mass starvation is what the word *Biafra* evokes for most people in the West. As Jonathan Highfield (2006) insightfully points out, the starvation and ruin that war has brought on the people of Dukana can be contrasted with the description of the simple life of the villagers as fishermen and farmers that is found at the beginning of the novel, where the reader can see that, despite their relative backwardness, "[t]he one thing the people of Dukana have been able to count on is producing enough food for themselves" (46). And in fact, the first blow to this relative self-sufficiency comes with the shortage of salt, the first tangible effect of the war in Dukana.

Food and drink were also used as a way to humiliate enemies. When the captain discovers that Bullet has stolen back some of the goods he has been hoarding, on top of having him brutally beaten and imprisoned, he forces him to drink urine. This tactic — along with eating feces — was also used on some of the few Igbo officers who survived the 29 July coup (Jowett 2019, 3). In this climate of rapacious profiteering and craving for violence, Mene will soon start to even fear that he is going to be devoured. When he is being fed as a prisoner in an enemy hospital, he becomes suspicious that they are making him "fat like llama" just to kill him, so he goes on a hunger strike. Manmuswak himself seems to vindicate those fears when he threatens to cut and eat his tongue, penis, and testicles (47). This idea of being fattened just to be eaten afterwards becomes one of the

images to describe how naïve young men are duped into joining the army: "And then I will remember that war is useless nonsense and all this uniform and everything is just to cause confusion and make porson fine like goat that they have make fat and ready to kill for chop during Christmas" (127). The Army, and Nigeria itself, as cannibals of their own people.

If we narrow our focus to key words, in *Sozaboy* we find a wealth of non-English words for dishes and food products. We have already discussed farm produce in the physical environment section, so the focus will be here on food as part of material culture. The terms are borrowed from the underlying African languages into the English original, which is why they are one of the clearest manifestations of the existence of a vernacular substratum. In the treatment Saro-Wiwa makes of food terms we can also appreciate how the intended readership of the book is not only Nigerian, because we seldom if ever find pure transference, in the sense that they are usually accompanied by a gloss: some additional, clarifying information that would presumably not be there if the novel was meant just for anglophone West Africans. First of all, most of them appear in the glossary at the end of the book, which is already a form of amplification (i.e. "*gari*: a local food, powdery like rice. See also *water don pass gari*;" "*okro*: okra"). Furthermore, they are usually marked as loans by the use of italics (although this is not systematic; *tombo*, for instance, is sometimes italicized and sometimes not; *gari* and *eba* are always in Roman type, while *okporoko* and *ngwo-ngwo* appear always in italics…) Finally, some of them appear with a gloss inserted in the very text for the benefit of those unfamiliar with them: "And you can chop *okporoko*, stockfish. Or *ngwo-ngwo,* goat-head and particulars in pepper soup." "I drink my tombo, super palm wine" (14).

The reasonable strategy for the translator here seems to involve following the general guidelines established by Paul Bandia: to retain any "instances of orality and postcoloniality" while

doing a more or less "transparent" translation of the glosses in English (2008). This is in line, we claim, with the ambition of creating a "relevant translation," in Derridean terms, as a procedure that "respects the plurality of the original" (Vidal Claramonte 2017, 198), which becomes, if anything, more important when dealing with food terms understood as a "system of communication" and a vehicle for "social, religious, and moral values," as is so often the case in postcolonial texts (191). Likewise, the strategy observes Cronin's "commitment to the situatedness of place and the pre-eminence of context" (2017, 15).

Mention must be made as well of the presence of food in proverbs and idioms which are also a reflection of the underlying meta-culture and, as such, will probably feel foreign to Spanish readers. It is important here to ascertain in which cases they would be equally unfamiliar to the European anglophone reader, to maintain that strangeness and "contaminate" the metropolitan worldview. To name just one representative example we can consider the following short passage: "I know immediately that water don pass gari. Water don pass gari" (104). The repeated expression literally means that there is more water than gari (or garri), which renders the combination inedible; *gari* is a granular flour made by grating and then soaking tubers of cassava. According to the glossary, the phrase is used to indicate that matters have come to a head. Incidentally, *garri*, a staple dish in Nigerian cuisine, is interesting in itself because the cassava is actually an American import dating back to the 16th century and, thus, a fruit of slave-trade and the so-called Black Atlantic, a prime example of how "any attempt to locate food must bear in mind prior histories of *translatio*, of the movements across and through space, culture and language (Cronin 2017, 52). Among food-related idioms we find expressions like Agnes is "sweet like tomato;" to "see pepper," used when someone is expected to have a hard time, as in "if trouble begin proper, Dukana go see pepper" (36); or the exclusively Nigerian variant "show someone pepper," meaning to "give

someone a hard time, punish someone" (Callies 2017, 79), as in "I was praying that you should come back to show all these useless sozas pepper" (132).

Dress

Clothes do not feature very prominently in *Sozaboy*, and if they are worth separate mention here is mainly because of the importance military uniforms have in the story. Mene repeatedly alludes to it as one of his main reasons for joining the army: "But when I see all their uniform shining and very very nice to see, I cannot tell you how I am feeling. Immediately, I know that this soza is wonderful thing" (53); "I must go to join army immediately. I will wear uniform like those boys" (54); "But I know that whether the war reach Dukana or not, I must be soza so that I can wear uniform" (66); "Oh how I am prouding because of this uniform!" (72); and so on. Of course, by the end of the book he will have very different ideas about the subject: "that uniform that they are giving us to wear is just to deceive us. And anybody who think that uniform is fine thing is stupid man who does not know what is good or bad or not good at all or very bad at all" (113-14).

Our first contact with the appeal of the uniform is introduced by Zaza when reminiscing about World War II and how the uniform acted as a lure for recruits: "I was prouding plenty. When they gave me the uniform with big black boot and hat, I wear am return to Dukana for just one day. It was by that time that plenty young boys saw me and they begin to say they will join army too" (27). This must have been a common occurrence since, for instance, in Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2008) — also a "war" Bildungsroman about a Nigerian (Hausa, in this case) boy soldier fighting, like Zaza, for the British in Burma during World War II — the protagonist explains how all the young men in his village "had rushed to answer Kingi Joji's [King George's] call once they

saw Ali and his two friends, some to show off a few weeks after joining the army, in their smart khaki drills." Ali, "whose tiny feet had known no shoes before," is especially proud of the boots he has been given, although he takes to wearing them hanging around his neck since he is much more comfortable walking barefoot (43). Back in *Sozaboy*, Mene meets a prisoner of war whose main lure to join the Army seems to have been the cap (probably a field cap, or a Biafran beret): "I joined the army because I like as the sozas were marching and singing and wearing fine fine uniform and boot. The one I like most is the cap. Even for that cap alone, I can join army one hundred times" (163).

As in the case of city life vs. village life, to the appeal of the uniform per se we must probably add the halo of sophistication entailed by its European provenance. While war was obviously not new for Nigerians (and we have seen that many Igbo military marches were adaptations of prior war songs), the European way of conducting it must have seemed a sign of changing times, of modernization, as we will see in the section devoted to behavior, below.

On a particular clothing-related note, there is the problem of translating *loin cloth* into Spanish. The first word that probably comes to mind, "taparrabos," could be considered to have connotations indicating backwardness or primitiveness.[17] The fact remains that an alternative is hard to find, especially with any degree of naturalness; on the other hand, the word has been used, for instance, in Equatorial Guinean Spanish works, even with a certain vindicative connotation, as in the following verses from "El prisionero de la Gran Vía," by Francisco Zamora Loboch, where the poet addresses his mother: "Si superas / que no me dejan los días de fiesta / ponerme el taparrabos nuevo / donde bordaste mis iniciales" (Ndongo-Bidyogo 1984, 131). The translator

[17] See for instance the definition in the María Moliner dictionary: "Prenda de vestir, banda de tela o calzón muy corto, con que se cubre solamente la parte inferior del vientre y la más alta de los muslos, *usado por ciertas tribus y pueblos primitivos*" (our emphasis)

needs to choose between following that usage at the risk of the word being perceived as somewhat degrading by some readers, and opting for a more neutral alternative like "faldellín," which is more commonly associated with the *shendyt* worn in Ancient Egypt.

4.3.4.2. Behaviors

Most of the daily activities in the village do not offer particular difficulties for the translator at first sight. Whenever they are not fishing or at their farms, Dukana people seem to enjoy playing football or shooting the breeze in the village square. As we said earlier, farming and fishing activities are not described in great detail, so they should not pose major obstacles beyond what has already been discussed in the environment section. Perhaps the activity of tapping palm wine could be considered culturally alien to most Spanish readers, unfamiliar with the practice and the alcoholic drink that is obtained through it. Learning this art was part of the traditional education of Ogoni youth, and incidentally Saro-Wiwa seems to have excelled at it (Doron and Falola 2016, 36). Luckily for the Spanish translator, as in so many other cases an answer, and a way to bring forward the often-ignored African trace in Spanish, can be found in Guinean culture. Thus, we learn that *sangrar* is the action of drawing wine (locally known as "vino de palma," "malamba,", "tope," or "yamba") from a palm tree (Ngen Djo Tiogang 2007, 73). The word ("bleeding") is graphic enough to be easily understandable for any reader, and it is a common term for any activity consisting of drawing liquid from trees (resin, in other cases, for instance).

A behavior that can provoke something of a cultural clash to non-African readers has to do with what Chinweizu (quoted in Bandia 2008) identified as one of the features of African narrative tradition: "the open and healthy treatment of sex in contrast to the Western obsession with either

prudery and prurience" (218). This is obvious in several passages of the novel: Duzia and the others are wont to make lewd, explicit remarks about their own sexual prowess or the specific sexually arousing features of the soldiers' (Zaza and Mene) girlfriends. In that regard, the virile aura supposedly accompanying the soldier seems to extend immediately to their sexual life in the eyes of the villagers. The outlook of Bom, Duzia, and the other cronies is rather patriarchal, and they tend to objectify women (more on that below). However, Agnes herself is considerably straightforward in her treatment of sex, often to the embarrassment of Mene, to the point where it would almost assuredly elicit a sense of cultural difference in, say, the Spanish reader. Additionally, everything surrounding breasts and genitalia is an occasion for the use of Pidgin, and generally colorful idiosyncratic expressions: Agnes's breasts are time and again described as "J.J.C.", for Johnny Just Come, because they "stand like hill." Mene's penis is referred to as *prick*, but also as his *man* and, more often, his *snake*, often supposed to be standing "like snake wey no get house" (35, 37, 58, 59). From Nigerian Pidgin, we read also about *blokkusare* (testicles), and the *toto* (vagina), while the bottom is usually referred to as *yarse* (all of them, except *snake* and *prick*, appear in the glossary).

4.3.4.3. Values

One of the traditional themes that are usually found in African narrative, according to some scholars (Chinweizu, quoted in Bandia 2008, 214) is a certain communalist ethos and a lesser prominence of the individual in society. This is a vision shared by Chidi Amuta (1985), who identifies a primary preoccupation with the experiences of the individual as typical of the Western novel. This dichotomy between community and individualism can sometimes adopt the guise of a contrast between the village and the city (Griswold 2000, 124), a duality that features prominently

in Saro-Wiwa's short story collection *A Forest of Flowers*, divided into two separate parts: "Home, Sweet Home," set in Dukana, the same fictional Ogoni village where *Sozaboy* starts, and "High Life," with its eleven stories set in the city (be it Aba, Lagos, Bori or Port Harcourt). The topic is also present in *Sozaboy*, although it does form more of a background. Firstly, it must be said that Saro-Wiwa, despite his commitment to the Ogoni, did not idealize life in small communities by any means. Ever the moralist, he understood literature to be "a mirror held up to society" (quoted in Neame 2000, 166), and, therefore, had no qualms presenting Dukana as "predominantly a place of squalor, ignorance, superstition, fear, and intolerance" (McPhail 2000, 70). Having omniscient narrators or using the point of view of a person coming back to Dukana after a long absence (as in "Home, Sweet Home") allowed him to be more discarnate about his representation of rural life in *A Forest of Flowers*, whereas through Mene's voice it is hard not to feel sympathy for a place which he obviously loves, despite his complaints. Nevertheless, Mene's position as somewhat of an outsider, because of his rare elementary education and his occasional visits to the city, enables him to notice how poor his fellow villagers are ("Dukana people no get money and they no get property," 8) and how out of touch they are with the outside world and the tragedy that comes hurtling toward them with the imminent war ("these Dukana people no get sense at all. How can they be dancing, singing and jollying when there is trouble for the country? … If trouble begin proper, Dukana go see pepper," 36). It is easy to glimpse the chastising voice of Saro-Wiwa the activist behind Mene's exasperation at the docility, even downright servility of the villagers (and very especially their chief) when confronting outside authority, however abusive (in this case, a policeman): "Useless people. And when they are fearing like that, they cannot say what is inside their mind. Just smiling idiot foolish smile like that Chief Birabee smile" (46). On the other hand, this silence and passivity is sometimes the only strategy of resistance for the utterly powerless, and

we will see the soldiers react similarly towards their new officer after the captain's inhumane treatment of Bullet: "when the new san mazor [sergeant major] is there, they will all keep quiet and you will think they are *mumu* [idiots]. But if Bullet talk to them, they will do exactly as he tell them. Even sef, they cannot respect the soza captain as they respect Bullet" (107). The difference is, of course, that Bullet has earned the respect of his subordinates, while Chief Birabee is obeyed but always grudgingly and often mockingly. The villagers are overtly critical of him and are under no illusions about his honesty. And yet, some of them seem to condone the chief's obsequiousness with the soldiers when they realize that, by doing this, he gets his name mentioned on the radio:

> "Ah — ah. This Chief Birabee is strong man after all, oh. To hear the name of our own Chief in the radio is not small thing at all. This Dukana will be important place in the world after all."
>
> Duzia was very happy. Bom too. Even Kole begin to smile small small.
>
> "Chief Birabee can tief any money he likes. If he can make Dukana name to get inside radio he is very good chief for me. Believe me," Bom said. (25)

Because one thing is abundantly clear: despite all their complaining, Dukana is a source of pride for them. Mene will haughtily state on several occasions that he is a "freeborn of Dukana," and most of his actions are motivated by a desire to acquire status in his birthplace. He knows and is fascinated by the city, but his life is in Dukana. He is at his happiest and proudest during the brief period when he is just married and his fellow villagers know that he is about to join the army. Just before departing for training, he realizes that he is going to miss those same people that have

often exasperated him with their endless chatter and their — often tasteless (see above) — barbs at him.

This local communitarian pride is one of the values to be found as a cultural background in the novel. And the pressure to join the Army does not stem just from Mene's desire to impress Agnes or the other villagers, but from a collective feeling that it would be wrong for Dukana not to provide any soldiers, whatever the reason for war: "I will take foto of myself inside new uniform with gun and then I will send the foto to Agnes and then she will show it to all those Dukana people. And they will be prouding when they know that one of their picken [children] is now big soza" (88). In this, again, he follows in Zaza's footsteps, since he notices the enduring respect that having fought in Burma has earned him. Here we encounter once more the idea of taking the name of Dukana to faraway places as a source of pride: "he saw that they were happy and prouding of him [Zaza] as Dukana man. Because in Dukana if your son goes out and brings something good, then you will begin to proud because he have made your name to go far place" (33).

Other values regulating life in Dukana are expressed indirectly, by the intertextual tapestry of dictums that informs moral decisions. First, as we saw, we have the Christian set of values. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the religious references are taken from the Gospel of Matthew, as we just discussed in the Intertextuality section since much of Matthew revolves around "issues of community identity and community relations that are very much African issues" (Iorjaah 2013, 268). It is certainly the case of the Sermon of the Mount and the saying on salt and light, focused on "community ethics and discipline," which are the sources of many of the discussed allusions (see p. 81). Together with these literal commandments, Dukana people can rely on another intertextual source regulating community life, which is proverbs. Proverbs are always informative of culturally-dictated values and behaviors (Katan and Taibi 2021), but they

are infinitely more important in communities that largely relied on oral culture and literature (orature) before the advent of the colonizers (Bandia 2008). Throughout Nigeria, in particular, "the use of proverbs in oral contexts is a tribute to one's native land, a clear evidence of one who had had a rich traditional education before adulthood" (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1990, 38). Such was the case of Saro-Wiwa who, addressing the students of a university creative writing course, would fondly reminisce the "vernacular" lessons he had in his school, where "boys from different villages retold the tales they had heard in the moonlight story-telling sessions which were a normal part of village life" (quoted in Neame 2000, 170). The proverb in Nigerian Pidgin English, in turn, offers a convenient inter-ethnic communication strategy, combining the morals and norms of different locales (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1990, 39). Thus, if Mene invokes the Biblical commandment against stealing to protest that he has led a moral life, when offered the actual opportunity to pillage, he resists (twice) alluding to the pidgin proverb: "Everyday is for tief, one for owner of the house" (127). Similarly, when Agnes passionately kisses him, he mentally implores "Oh Agnes, I take God beg you, *softly softly catch monkey* oh. Softly, softly, I beg you" (60), in reference to the notion that when things are as elusive as a monkey it is better not to hurry, as explained by Nwachukwu-Agbada (39), who collects the variant "Sofri sofri you catch monkey im tail." We can see Saro-Wiwa at his most critical of the insensitive "common sense" that is also a part of village culture when Mene goes back to Dukana for the first time — after his flight to the mangrove, his brush with death and eventual recovery — to find it empty except for Bom and Duzia. The latter tells him (lying, as we will discover at the very end of the book) that he thinks his wife is alive but is fairly sure that by now she must have been taken by a "soza captain" for himself, only to callously comfort him with the aid of another Pidgin proverb: "as fish borku for river na so woman borku for the world" (136) ("As fish is plentiful in the river, that is the way

women abound in the world," in Nwachukwu-Agbada's translation; ibid.). This speaks of a way of understanding gender relations that will be discussed shortly. Precisely Duzia and Bom, together with Zaza this time, sing another pidgin proverb on the eve of Mene's departure to join the army: "Porson wey no get power / Make 'e no go war" (69), which translates as "One who has no strength should not fight" (42).

The city, and all it represents, stands in stark contrast with the communitarian values of the village, for good and bad. It has been said that the opposition between both lifestyles is a staple of many literatures, while perhaps it could be added that particular to African works is the association between city and modernity with the colonizing West: modernity as something brought — imposed — from outside instead of bred from the inside. This can be appreciated even in a novel such as *Sozaboy*, where the city (in this case, Pitakwa) is little more than a backdrop for some of the early passages. We learn, for instance, that the seedy neighborhood of Diobu is also known as New York, because there are "plenty people" there. The motor park is similarly boisterous, but also a vital source of products and news that are likewise unavailable in Dukana: "As I am going to Pitakwa every day, I am learning new new things. In the motor park, I must speak English with the other drivers and apprentice and passengers" (12). English, and particularly Pidgin, are the languages of the city, where people from different geographic and ethnic backgrounds meet. And indeed, the first time Saro-Wiwa experimented with writing an entire tale in "rotten English" was in his short story "High Life," a frantic panorama of the happy, crazy, sordid atmosphere of the city, for which this "disordered and disorderly" language seems particularly apropos. Highlife, as we have seen, is also a reference to the music genre which dominated West Africa at the time. The songs that feature in the "urban" segments of *Sozaboy* belong to this genre, which can be (somewhat simplistically) described as the interpretation of traditional West African melodies and

rhythms played with Western instruments, which could, in turn, be another interesting metaphor to represent "rotten English" and so many other postcolonial literary experiments. This place where westernized modernity transforms (dilutes?) tradition at the frantic pace of jazz music is doubtless fascinating, but it has a dark side that can sometimes seem to reign over the good, and Saro-Wiwa was keenly aware of that. His works tend to reflect the same ambiguity towards the city that he described towards rotten English: like the language of the novel, the city can be "fascinating" and "vibrant", but it also "thrives on lawlessness, and is part of a dislocated and discordant society" (these are all taken from the Author's Note, where they are used to characterize rotten English). The carnivalesque atmosphere of the city in his works is often indicative of "the astonishing lightness of the living—the incredible lack of moral density and communal commitment found in the cosmopolitan landscape," in Aubrey McPhail's words (2000, 78). McPhail is talking about the short stories in *A Forest of Flowers*, but the same could be observed regarding Saro-Wiwa's TV show *Basi and Company*, which was incredibly popular in Nigeria. As suggested by the name of the lorry that links Dukana to Pitakwa, the path from village life to this nascent modernity is a very imperfect "Progres" (sic).[18] The clearest expression of this ambiguity in *Sozaboy* can be perhaps found in Mene's attitude towards Agnes, and by comparing her to his mother. But this matter of gender values in the novel deserves separate treatment.

In the mirror Saro-Wiwa puts in front of society, the reflected position of women in Dukana society is one of evident subordination within a neatly patriarchal structure, common in many African countries where a tradition that was all too often oppressive of women was reinforced by the Victorian values imported with British colonialism (Stratton 1994, 7–8). There are numerous

[18] Saro-Wiwa used a similar image to criticize General Babangida's transition program, by saying that his "touted transition truck is completely rusty, without a roadworthiness certificate or an insurance policy; its licence has expired. Yet his driver insists on taking it on an endless journey (1995b, 112).

examples of this asymmetry in the novel. If Olomara Ogundipe-Leslie warned that "[w]omen are 'naturally' excluded from public affairs; they are viewed as unable to hold positions of responsibility, rule men or even be visible when serious matters of state and society are being discussed" (1987, 130), then Dukana is certainly no exception, as Mene lets us know on the occasion of a village assembly to discuss a new tax: "Women do not talk in Dukana meeting. Anything the men talk, the women must do. Dukana people say woman does not get mouth. And it is true" (8). Again a proverb as an expression of a traditional value, which is still regrettably common in rural areas of the Niger Delta (Joab-Peterside 2018). Even worse is the violence against women that was and still is too pervasive throughout Nigeria, including the Ogoni (Patrick and Ugwu 2013). By the way it is presented in the novel, we can see that this was the norm even before the war: "You know as we people in Dukana dey make our thing. If you like a girl you cannot show it to everybody openly. It is not as they used to do in the cinema, those white people, kissing every time. No. In fact, if you love a girl in Dukana then you must beat her small small. That will show that you love her" (37).[19] When the war actually reaches Dukana, it is again women who suffer the worst under both "friendly" and enemy soldiers alike: "Because from that time more and more sozas [soldiers] begin to come to Dukana. Every time when they come they will cut all the plantain plus banana. Some time sef they will enter porson house begin to ask for chop [food]. And if the porson do not give them chop, they will hala and hala [yell] and then begin to beat the women" (40). After all, "[s]oldiers from both the Nigerian and Biafran armies were notorious during the war in their sexual escapades, which involved rape and kidnapping of women" (Ojaide 2000, 63). In one more illustration of the "acute marginalization" and even objectification of

[19] The disapproval of public displays of affection is not exclusive to the Ogoni, either: in *Drums and the Voice of Death*, Igbo elder Akunnia is appalled by the behavior of his son, because "only a shameless oaf of a son would hug and kiss and prance about a woman in the market place" (Nkala 1996, 72), and the reasons are equally misogynistic.

women in Dukana (Eke 2000, 91), they are even offered up to the soldiers by those who have no other goods to appease them (39). If Eastern minorities were the true victims of the war and "the oppressed in Nigeria," as Saro-Wiwa wrote, that is doubly true for the women in those minorities.

Mene merely narrates these abuses, and in fact, he accepts and assumes the hierarchical superiority of men over women in his society with a flippancy that is bound to feel shocking for some if not most modern-day Spanish readers. He values Agnes as a prospective wife because she is clever and beautiful, but also "because she can take good care of me as she used to take good care of her master in Lagos" (22). We have already touched upon the implications of Agnes's cosmopolitan associations: Not only does Mene meet Agnes in a city (Pitakwa), but she has been living in Lagos, the big city *par excellence* (even though she is originally from Dukana). This immediately makes her more enticing for Mene, despite (or maybe because of) the fact that urban sophistication, as we have seen, can often have a scandalous reverse; in Nathan Nkala's *Drums and the Voice of Death*, for instance, the villagers can be shocked by the "outrageous hemline that was the newest things in Lagos" (1996, 18). IThe big city indeed evokes connotations of promiscuity, as Mene is well aware: "I can marry better baby who have travelled to Lagos. Not just Lagos baby, oh. Because Lagos baby can be useless. Plenty people go don sleep with am. And she will be useless" (20). These Babylonian associations are reinforced by Agnes' choice of song in their first encounter at the American Upwine Bar: "Ashewo," which means "prostitute" and was indeed a popular highlife song by Sir Cardinal Rex Jim Lawson. This is problematic for the infatuated Mene: "And why she play that *ashewo* record? Is she *ashewo* too? Oh nonsense. Agnes cannot be *ashewo*. She is good girl" (20). Mene's admittedly short-lived misgivings are compounded by Agnes's overtly sexual attitude and language, which she will change once she settles in Dukana. These concerns of Mene can be linked to the popular Onitsha market literature

and its prudish, patriarchal tradition of pamphlets dealing with the topic of supposedly deviant female behavior, whereby "unmarried young women living alone in the cities are frequently labelled 'harlots' and 'money mongers'" by authors who had had a Victorian, missionary-school education (Newell 2006, 105). Saro-Wiwa himself wrote another novel, *Lemona's Tale* (1996), which is essentially the story of a young woman arriving from the village to the city who has to deal with poverty and ends up making a living as a prostitute and kept woman. She ultimately ends up in jail charged with murder. As we have mentioned, being ordered around by the women in the Civil Defence corps is one of Mene's motivations for joining the army: "I was very angry, you know, because it is not good for my persy [dignity] to have woman giving me orders" (54). Shocking or not, it seems obvious that the translator should not try to sweeten these unpalatable passages, in as much as they are one more element in the unflattering depiction of life in Dukana.

4.3.4.4. Beliefs

Judging from the novel, from the religious point of view Dukana is nominally Christian, but with a high degree of cultural syncretism through the continued existence of African traditional religion in the shape of some rituals (see above) and deities such as Sarogua, along with a belief in curses and the spirit world, summarized under the umbrella term of *juju*. This involvement in more than one religious tradition is common still today (Religion and Public Life, 2016), and many rituals of African Traditional Religion are deeply ingrained in the everyday life of African Christian or Islamic communities, as we have seen. The Ogoni are no exception, and they incorporated Christianity but kept many of their traditional religious beliefs (Chereji and Wratto King 2015, 58).

Focusing on the novel, we can see that the people of Dukana worship the Christian God and go to one of several churches (Pastor Barika's Church of Light of God is only "the most important church in Dukana.") Mene quotes Christian scripture, as we have seen in our discussion of Intertextuality, and frequently addresses God to ask for help or when he is worried about the future in general ("What will I tell my God when I return?," 9); many of his expressions would be perfectly normal for any European Christian, were it not for his particular idiolect: "Jesus my Lord," "God in Heaven," "Oh, God, help me," etc. Others are more distinctly pidgin, such as "God don butter your bread."[20] This coexists with many rituals and customs which are inherited from African traditional religion, as we have seen, and also with an acceptance of the actuality of magic and curses, which in the novel take the form of *juju*.

It has already been pointed out how important their land is to the Ogoni. This is reflected in their beliefs as well. According to Saro-Wiwa, the surrounding land and rivers were not only a source of abundant sustenance but "also a spiritual inheritance. The land is a god and is worshipped as such" (1992a, 12). According to Chereji and Wratto King (2015), this was a goddess called Waa Bari, and "the libations to Waa Bari are poured on the earth, the Ogoni believing she receives them as the water or gin sinks into the earth" (57). There are several examples of such libations in the novel, and Saro-Wiwa himself documented his practicing them on the occasion of the creation of the twelve states by the Federal Government, including his longed-for Rivers State: "Towards midnight we stood at the cross-roads in Bori and poured libation to the guardian spirits of our nationality" (1989, 81); and again, on the eve of his departure on the risky journey to Lagos during

[20] The expression, incidentally, was used by Prince Charles when he visited Lagos in 2018 as a show of respect to his guests (Maresca 2018).

the war, his cousin "poured libation before the family shrine;" for good measure, this is combined with prayers at the urging of her mother, who was "an occasional Christian" (127).

Another example of how traditional beliefs are reconciled with Christianity in the novel is the attitude towards *juju*. But first, the word itself deserves some attention: according to the glossary it can be interpreted as "medicine man, shaman or magician," but also as "magical"; however, in the novel it is also used, depending on context, to refer to an object imbued with mystic properties ("She wanted to give me juju"), some sort of spirit ("He cannot be ghost or spirit or juju") or a curse (maybe the work of a spirit): ("others have been killed by illness and some by juju"). Mene's attitude towards *juju* seems to be one of fear and distant respect. He even denies having ever gone "to juju house" in the same breath as stealing or killing a neighbor, and he refuses when his mother offers to give him juju. Despite these misgivings, what is not in doubt is that he and the rest of the people in Dukana believe in the existence of those occult forces. Even Pastor Barika takes the syncretic approach when he asks God for mercy because "others have been killed by illness and some by juju and even if he is not blaming God for anything, all he is asking God is to help those who are still living and those who are sick that they will not die again" (151). Like Pastor Barika, the rest of the villagers seem to seek explanations in juju increasingly the more tragic their situation becomes. When Mene finally arrives back to Dukana, for instance, he finds his neighbors engaged in the ritual of burying anyone that has been touched by juju in the "bad forest." This "evil forest" was "the abode of wicked spirits," whence "they occasionally managed to sneak into society" (Kpone-Tonwe 1987, 41). It is at this point, by the end of the book, that Mene learns that he himself is considered juju now: ten times Duzia addresses him as "Sozaboy, juju," often accompanied by "smallpox," to imply that he is like a plague that has descended upon the village. The surviving villagers are convinced that he died during the war, and he who wanders

Dukana is but the ghost of Mene, come to haunt them.[21] They associate him, for instance, with a so-far unknown disease that is claiming many lives (maybe dysentery, since it involves intestinal problems); they consult "the juju," who prescribes a specific ritual ("money and seven white goats and seven white monkey *blokkus* and seven alligator pepper and seven bundles of plantain and seven young young girls that we will give to the juju to make sacrifice") and then burying Mene again, "proper" (180). It seems obvious that, at least to some extent, Saro-Wiwa is making a statement about the superstition of the villagers, which can be read as a sign of ignorance but also of a certain cynical desire to "betray one's own conscience by burying it," as McPhail (2000, 75) points out when discussing a short story by Saro-Wiwa where a family buries a man even as he is protesting that he is not dead ("A Family Affair", in *A Forest of Flowers*). Once the collective denies someone their humanity, this "brings with it abeyance of individual compassion—a willing suspension of common decency and human sympathy" (ibid.). Here traditional religion functions in accordance to a Steve Weinberg dictum that Slavoj Žižek is wont to quote: "while without religion good people would have been doing good things and bad people bad things, only religion can make good people do bad things" (2010, 7). Mene is not only a scapegoat for their present evils, but also an undesirable reminder of their past foolishness.

[21] The same misapprehension is depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun* when young Ugwu returns to his family after the Biafran war and his father's second wife repeatedly throws handfuls of sand at him to make sure he is not a ghost. However, in this case the misgivings are soon dispelled and the boy is warmly welcomed, even though he finds, just like Mene, that his mother has died (Adichie 2006, 419–20).

4.4. EXTERNAL CONTEXT OF SITUATION

To anchor our first conclusions about the discourse in *Sozaboy* and Saro-Wiwa's use of rotten English, we move away now from the context of culture and onto the communicative dimension, following the traditional discourse analysis roadmap as outlined, for instance, by Munday and Zhang (2015, 328). In particular, we will combine tenets of Discourse Analysis — such as the study of linguistic variation from the point of view of the user, or Hasan's split of external context into context of creation and context of interpretation (1989, 101–3) — with functionalist notions such as Nord's category of extratextual factors for source-text analysis (1991). This should prove useful to discern one key question: the function rotten English serves in the book. This seems of the utmost importance for our analysis since that dialect/idiolect is inarguably the foregrounded stylistic element in the novel, right from the subtitle itself: "A novel in rotten English." Most of the scholarly literature on *Sozaboy* focuses on this aspect (see "Context of Interpretation" on p. 160), in an attempt to ascertain how this foregrounding makes "readers rethink their views of the world" (Boase-Beier 2014, 91).

The reason why Nord's extratextual factors, included within her model of translation-oriented source-text analysis (ibid.) are particularly suited for our purposes is her interesting distinction between *intention* and *function*: the former "is defined from the viewpoint of the sender" who *intends* to achieve a purpose, but it is the receiver who "'completes' the communicative action by receiving (i.e. using) the text in a certain *function*" (53, emphasis added). To think otherwise involves the risk of falling into the "intentional fallacy" since "[i]it is not what the author intended, but what a text actually says, that makes interpretation possible" (Boase-Beier 2014, 33). In other words, there is no absolute guarantee that the text will end up serving the

function the author set out to achieve, nor that this function will be the same for all audiences. Another way to look at it is that text intention is assigned at the time of production, while function is not determined until text reception. Furthermore, a corollary of Nord's definition would be that text intention remains immutable at heart (however difficult or disputed its reconstruction), while function is intrinsically an ever-changing attribute of the text. This is consistent with what we perceive in reality, where the "value" assigned to a given book, or its aesthetical or ideological degree of acceptance, is in a state of constant flux. This is, again, reminiscent of Lefevere (1992) and his idea of how the "literary fame" of a text was constantly being "manipulated" by different agents who engaged in various "rewritings" (interpretations, we could say) of said text. It should be apparent, then, how this split between intention and function can be mapped into Hasan's division between context of creation and context of interpretation. The reason why this is deemed particularly relevant in our case is that there seems to exist insufficient grounds to put forward a solid argument regarding Saro-Wiwa's intention for using rotten English in *Sozaboy*. Moreover, what can be gleaned from his writings and the biographical materials about him may seem sometimes at odds with the — rather voluminous — literature about the book in general and its rotten English in particular, or even, one could say, with the very existence of the novel (i.e., there seems to exist a clash between context of creation and context of interpretation, in Hasan's parlance).

As part of this exploration, we will try to answer several questions regarding the function of the particular linguistic variant chosen by Saro-Wiwa for his book: Is it a vindication of Pidgin as a literary medium, maybe opening up an unexplored literary seam? Is its main purpose not only to portray chaos but to embody it? And if so, is it the chaos of the war, or the confusion and lawlessness he perceived in Nigerian society in general? Does the use of this pidginized English

respond to a wish of creating a popular work, for the masses? Or is it an experimental, artificial creation, equally inaccessible to its Niger Delta addressees and its potential Western readers? Was Saro-Wiwa striving only for comedic effect, making use of a tradition of deprecating Pidgin use to couch a picaresque-like narration, or is there more to it below the surface?

In answering all these questions, among others, we will necessarily be ticking off, along the way, other extratextual factors listed by Nord: we will need to take a look at key events in Saro-Wiwa's biography (**author**), without being exhaustive, and the concrete (physical) circumstances in which the book was published (**sender**, **medium**). Our basic search for intention, of course, requires the identification of the intended **addressee**. As we have seen, **function** will be best determined under the umbrella of the context of interpretation. The remaining extratextual factors (**time** and **place** of publication, and **motive**) have already been studied in our discussion of the Context of Culture.

The context of creation, according to Hasan (1989, 101–2), includes the "taken-for granted-realities" of the author's community, which would correspond with a wide interpretation of Nord's presuppositions as culturally-bound *realia* (Nord 1991, 105–6), and therefore have already been dealt with in the Context of Culture section. However, he also includes the choice of language itself for the work and the literary conventions that the book conforms to or tries to subvert. In the case of *Sozaboy,* these two elements are intimately connected, since the language of choice *is* the subversion, boldly foregrounded in the title itself. We have already studied the linguistic situation in Nigeria, the status of Pidgin in the country and the wide cultural context in which the novel is situated. We have determined, as well, how the novel connects with the postcolonial, Biafran-war Bildungsroman genre and how it also subverts it in some ways to create a unique discourse. It is time now to focus on the more immediate aspects surrounding the making of the book itself in

order to understand the circumstances in Saro-Wiwa's life and multi-faceted career that informed that discourse and his political thought in general and, in particular, the intentions behind Saro-Wiwa's decision of writing a book in "rotten English." That ascertaining source-text *intention* is by no means irrelevant despite the existence of the separate concept of *function* is an idea supported by Nord herself, who stresses the importance of the sender's intention for the translator since it, on the one hand, "determines the structuring of the text with regard to content … and form," where she includes "stylistic-rhetorical characteristics," and, on the other hand, it "is also important in connection with the principle of loyalty" which every translator must observe (Nord 1991, 53–54).

The problem remains that, despite the best research efforts, there is no silver bullet in these cases. First, the original intention might not be retrievable, at least to the point where all interpretation doubts are cleared. Secondly, it seems overly simplistic to state that there exists such a thing as *the* intention of a literary work. There will often be a blurred combination of purposes, sometimes even unacknowledged by the very author (Boase-Beier 2014, 34). With that *caveat*, we will take a look at those elements in Saro-Wiwa's life that are deemed more relevant for an eventual translator of *Sozaboy*, using two main sources of documentation: first, biographies of the author and remarks about him by people that are or were close to him. Secondly, observations by the very author about his work or the topics on which he touched upon.

For the purposes of this study, several biographical materials have been consulted, taking always into account that we are primarily interested in those experiences in Saro-Wiwa's life that had some bearing on the writing of *Sozaboy*, or offer some insight into his motives for writing it. First and foremost, Saro-Wiwa himself left a number of autobiographical texts. These usually deal with particular aspects of his political activity, and not so much with his views about artistic creation. Essential for this aspect of our work are his wartime memoirs, *On a Darkling Plain*

(1989); to supplement the information contained there we have his detention diary, *A Month and a Day* (1995), and a collection of letters and poems published alongside biographical writings by other authors: *Silence Would be Treason* (2013). Biographical materials not written by him include his son Ken Wiwa's *In the Shadow of a Saint* (2000) and several works straddling the line between biography and scholarly study: focused mostly on his life as a writer, we have the aptly-titled *Ken Saro-Wiwa: a bio-critical study* (Ojo-Ade 1999), while *Ogoni's Agonies*, an edited volume (A.-R. Na'Allah 1998), features many collaborations related to the different facets of Saro-Wiwa's life and work. Finally, halfway between the political and the literary, we have consulted another edited volume, *Ken Saro-Wiwa, Writer and Political Activist* (McLuckie and McPhail 2000), which is both comprehensive and academically oriented.

From all these texts, interesting details can be gleaned concerning our main focus of interest here — namely, the intention of Saro-Wiwa in using his revolutionary "rotten English" and to what extent this use can be accounted for by ideological or political motivations. In other words, to what extent is it fair to describe Saro-Wiwa as a postcolonial writer (as opposed to a post-colonial writer, in the merely chronological understanding of the term, which he obviously was). To have a clear idea of the answer to these questions should prove invaluable when deciding a translation strategy if the loyalty principle is to be respected, but first, we need some context concerning when and how was the novel written and published.

4.4.1. Context of creation: relevant biographical information

4.4.1.1. Circumstances of the writing and publishing

Saro-Wiwa began writing *Sozaboy* during or shortly after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), when it is set. However, it became one of several manuscripts that ended up in a drawer when

he left writing aside and took up trading in 1973 (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 57–58). He turned again to writing and publishing when he became disillusioned with "military politics" in Nigeria in 1983, and it was during this period that he wrote the second half of *Sozaboy*, his first novel, and sent it to Longman Nigeria, which had already published his children's books in 1973 (58). After the publishing house failed to respond in over a year, Saro-Wiwa "got tired of waiting" and decided to publish the novel on his own. This, together with Longman's refusal to publish his poetry collection *Songs in a Time of War*, moved him to create his own company, Saros International Publishers, in 1985. This decision should not seem extraordinary once we take into account first, that Saro-Wiwa had been essentially a businessman for the previous ten years (in fact, the headquarters of the new publishing house shared an address with his other company, Saros International Unlimited) (McLuckie and McPhail 2000, 235), and secondly, the existence of a "strong tradition of self-publishing in Nigeria" (Neame 2000, 154). Nevertheless, his avowed main concern as he turned to publishing was not to make a profit. His son Ken Wiwa would explain the decision in a 1997 interview:

> He agonized over a number of things. He didn't want to publish on his own obviously because it wasn't a money spinning venture. He would lose money, he knew that, but the publishers at that time were not interested in books that were purely set in Africa, or indeed with a very strong Africa message, they just weren't commercial. He felt that his message was so strong that it was worth publishing and be damned, and at his own cost as well (Telephone interview quoted in Neame 2000, 154).

4.4.1.2. Saro-Wiwa as a politically-committed writer

This is one more example of how Saro-Wiwa's three facets (activist, businessman, and writer) constantly interact with one another. In fact, his activist work was probably the main source of his international recognition, and it could be argued that, in his own view, it always took precedence over his literary activity, were it not for the fact that, for him, all these aspects of his life were inseparable. In his view, "literature in a critical situation such as Nigeria's cannot be divorced from politics." It was not enough to take a "critical look at society": the writer had to actively *intervene* and become "*l'homme engagé*: the intellectual man of action" (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 81). He was unequivocal about that to his son as they were driving around Port Harcourt one day and he was showing him his "business empire": "Everything, he revealed, was for one purpose: to secure justice for our people. His books, the properties, the business—everything was subservient to his hopes and ambitions for our people" (Wiwa 2000, 9). His commitment "to the improvement of the life of the Ogoni people and, by implication, the ethnic minorities and indigenous people of Nigeria, of Africa" (Saro-Wiwa 1995b, 49) had been an overriding passion for him since he was very young; it was "conceived of in primary school," by his own telling (ibid.), and was to cost him his life in the end. As a matter of fact, his first published work was a political pamphlet, *The Ogoni Nationality Today and Tomorrow*, issued in 1968 while the civil war was still raging. In turn, he claimed that his period of exclusive devotion to trading was a result in part of his awareness that he would need the money in order to organize the Ogoni people properly (56). By the time he created Saros International Publishers, his only experience in the sector consisted of having edited student magazines, and he would later regret having proofread *Sozaboy* on his own, since the first edition came out with several typos. He decided to take publishing courses in London, where he met and became good friends with the Scottish writer

William Boyd, who would write an Introduction for the Longman edition of *Sozaboy*, when it finally saw the light together with the short story collection *A Forest of Flowers*, in 1986 (Neame 2000, 155).

Saro-Wiwa, as a writer and a publisher, both in background and in the challenges he faced, shared much with his Nigerian peers of the period. Writing in 2000, Wendy Griswold pointed out how unrepresentative of their society Nigerian authors were in general, and how disconnected from the masses they intended to educate. Saro-Wiwa, just like 85% of them, was a male; he was also a Christian, like four-fifths of the writers studied by Griswold, in a country which was roughly 50% Muslim. The religious divide mirrored the split between North and South, with over 80% authors from the West and East (like Saro-Wiwa) and only 10% from the North (when roughly 28-30% of the country's population were Hausa-Fulani "Northerners" (45). As far as his elitist education is concerned, Saro-Wiwa was also no exception, considering that only 4% of Nigerians had studied tertiary education by the time of Griswold's writing, for 72% of the novelists (49% of them had postgraduate studies). Equally typical was the fact that Saro-Wiwa had to turn elsewhere for income, given that "Government or private patronage is virtually nonexistent," although he is exceptional in his opting for trading, because most writers made a living as teachers or in the media (46). Even his initial problems with the proofreading of his books were a common experience, given the shortage of skilled specialists, which made good editing and proofreading a luxury for most companies. The same can be said about distribution (Neame 2000, 155; Griswold 2000, 69).

4.4.1.3. His position toward Biafra and the war

Concerning the writing of *Sozaboy* (and his wartime memoir *On a Darkling Plain*, also published by Saros in 1989), Saro-Wiwa would state that "it came from a very impressionable time of my life, a time of great drama and even greater challenges" (1995b, 59). We have already

touched upon the generational drama of the Nigerian civil war when situating the novel in the context of culture (p. 60). As his son attests, the Biafran war "had a profound and lasting effect" on Saro-Wiwa as well: "Everything flows in and out of that conflict" (Wiwa 2000, 35). Therefore, some attention should be devoted to his personal attitudes towards the war and vicissitudes during the fighting. As we know, he opposed Biafran independence from the very beginning. He felt that the war "was mostly about the control of the oil resources of the Ogoni and other ethnic groups in the Niger River Delta" and that, "confronted with the possibility of the Ogoni existing as one of 200 or so ethnic groups in Nigeria or as one of 50 or so ethnic groups in secessionist Biafra," he would rather choose the former (Saro-Wiwa 1995b, 50). It is important to stress that, despite his focus on the Ogoni interests, Saro-Wiwa considered himself a Nigerian patriot as well. Even in the end, when he was campaigning for Ogoni self-determination, he made it clear that he was no secessionist (Lock 2000, 11; Saro-Wiwa 1998). It seems more justified to share Íde Corley's opinion that his commitment was not informed by some "ethno-nationalism" or a "belief in the intrinsic identity or separate destiny of the Ogoni People" (Saro-Wiwa 2013, location 389-395). Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka also saw in the Ogoni struggle the fight for the future of the entire country. According to him, it was "the first Nigerian experimentation with 'ethnic cleansing' … a model exercise toward the far more thorough subjugation that is planned for other parts of Nigeria." The whole nation, in sum, risked being "Ogonised" if the authorities had their way (Soyinka 1996). Saro-Wiwa's Nigerian patriotism, however, was never chauvinistic: "I am unfortunate to be a Nigerian. I would rather not be, but I am doing my level best to be one, and a good one at that" (quoted in Awelewa 2021). It could be said that he had a love-hate relationship with Nigeria, as shown in "Dis Nigeria Sef," a poem included in his *Songs in a Time of War* (1985), the poetry collection that, together with *Sozaboy* and *On a Darkling Plain* completes what could

be described as his "Biafran war trilogy" (novel, memoir, poetry, respectively). The poems included in the volume are in English, except for "Dis Nigeria Sef," which is significantly written in a variant of Nigerian Pidgin, akin to but more "pure" that the rotten English of *Sozaboy*. After a long tirade denouncing the problems of the country and the vexations involved in living there, followed by a mention of its redeeming qualities and the inescapability of it in characteristically colorful fashion ("Nigeria and myself we be prick and blokkus"), the poet ends on an exasperated note: "Because I don confuse well well at all / Sake of dis I-love-I-no-love Nigeria / I TIRE" (Saro-Wiwa 1985, 44).

On the other hand, Saro-Wiwa's position vis-à-vis the war, and the way he depicts it in his autobiographical work, is not without critics. His stance has been described, for instance, as "contradictory at times," and as having "ethical problems at its base" (McLuckie 2000, 40). A part of the issue stems from his ambivalent position as an Easterner (and thus a reluctant Biafran when the new republic was declared) but not an Igbo, whereby he seemingly combines active participation with the detachment of an external observer. He deplored the "senseless killings" in the North and claimed to "detest" those responsible for them, but perceived them nevertheless as "the results of the struggle for power between the three major ethnic groups, a struggle in which the minorities were mere pawns" (1989, 88); some Nigerian scholars have seen in this a deliberate attempt to downplay the ethnically-motivated massacres (Ojo-Ade 1999, 14) — we have seen how they are only vaguely referred to in *Sozaboy*, which certainly contrasts with other chronicles, fictional or not, of the ramp-up towards the war, where the massacres and the reaction of Igbos to the returning refugees are awarded much attention, often with bone-chilling detail. It is the case of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Destination Biafra* or *Drums and the Voice of Death*, to name just a few written from the Igbo point of view, as most Biafran War novels are. However, a Yoruba such as

Wole Soyinka also saw the pogroms as the chief immediate cause for the war, going so far as to claim that they made it inevitable (1985, 19). Saro-Wiwa, instead, sometimes seems to convey in *On a Darkling Plain* the overall impression that an initial overreaction to the killings, fueled by sensationalist press coverage, was one of the factors that precipitated the war. He repeatedly underscores the role of propaganda in feeding popular outrage: "The newspapers and radio gave full coverage of the carnage (so to dramatize its more gruesome aspects to the people). This brand of propaganda was meant to incite feelings against the perpetrators of these acts" (1989, 42). And again, when narrating the first massacre of Easterners in the North, he points out that "the event was fully reported in several world newspapers, and certain foreign correspondents reveling in the details were too apt to see the similarity between the fate of the 'Ibos' [here in quotation marks because the term was used to refer to all Easterners, Igbo or not] and that of the Jews under Hitler" (56-57); as the violence kept escalating, he reported, already settled in the East, the "general distress and panic" in the region, specifying that "[t]he government radio and newspaper did not spare the least detail of the gory events," of which "photographs, eye-witness accounts, and commentaries … were made freely and copiously available" (58). "The rebel radio had been making capital of most things since October of 1966. And its propaganda has gone very far to confuse thinking" (91). This accusatory reiteration of the nefarious influence propaganda had in escalating an already volatile situation is to be found throughout his war memoir and constitutes a key element in *Sozaboy*, where delusions about the war, supported by the ever-present radio, are the norm (see p. 70, above).

This perceived down-playing of the massacres on the part of Saro-Wiwa, combined with his propensity to indict Biafran leadership by claiming "premeditated antiminority intentions in their every action and policy" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, quoted in McLuckie 2000, 40), has led some to

accuse Saro-Wiwa of "Igbophobia." It is perhaps understandable, given his recurrent — and often harsh — criticism of the Igbos, the dominant ethnic group in the region, who had a "history of oppression, exploitation, and alienation" of the Ogoni (Ojo-Ade 1993, 13). Hence his numerous references to the "indigenous colonialism" that characterized Nigerian society at the time (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 63). He also referred to this as "domestic colonialism," and considered it a direct offshoot of British colonialism and its structures of domination (72-73).

Saro-Wiwa, however, must have been aware of how his position about the Igbo could be perceived, since he took care to explain in the Author's Note to *In a Darkling Plain* that he did not

> hold them as a group responsible for the cruelties of the war. I am aware that war brings out the worst and the best in any people, and I am persuaded that most other Nigerian ethnic groups placed in the same historical situation and subjected to the same propaganda would have done the same, possibly worse. Nor can I blame the Ibos [sic] as a people for the social inequities that preceded the war. (1989, 10)

Indeed, never in his many tirades about native colonialism and the oppression of the Ogoni does he describe this as something explainable by any endogenous causes particular to the Igbo. On the contrary, he would often point out that the situation must have been the same for all minorities in Nigeria — Igbos just happened to be the dominant group in his region. The only differentiating factor between the West and the North (and the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani, respectively) was the crucial issue of the enormous oil reserves discovered in the Niger Delta, with the associated issues of unequal distribution of both the sudden windfall of money and the

pernicious environmental side effects. We can find supporting evidence for these assurances throughout his writings. For instance, he claimed to have discovered "how deep the ethnic grain runs in Nigerian society" not from his contact with Igbos, but as a student at Ibadan, where it was the Yorubas who were in the majority and tended to monopolize power positions; this made him "see the need for creating a proper identity for the small ethnic groups" (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 46). And indeed, one of his reasons for opposing the creation of "biafra" [sic] was the fact that, in his view, it was just "Nigeria with a different name" (88). Thus, the reading of Saro-Wiwa's texts about the war reveals no ethnically-motivated dislike towards the Igbo, even though they do reflect some grievances towards them. First, Saro-Wiwa was aware that most works on the Biafran war had been written by Igbos, and therefore tended to focus on their suffering during the conflict, while often supporting "the argument so eloquently put before the world by biafran [sic] propaganda that the Ibos were and are the oppressed of Nigeria" (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 10). As we know, he set out to refute that claim and prove that minorities were the real victims. And while it is true that there are instances of true animus in his wartime memoir, this seems directed at the Igbo leadership and, very especially, at colonel Ojukwu, the Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria who declared independence, precipitating the war. This is made explicit in the continuation of the quotation from the Author's Note to *Darkling*, reproduced above:

> I am fully convinced that were Ibo LEADERS of a different persuasion in their attitude and in the objective analysis of the situation before and during the war, the Ibos as a people would have behaved differently. Hence I accuse the Ibo leaders, and particularly Ojukwu, of exploiting Ibo suffering for their private purposes and of destroying the community that was Eastern Nigeria. (Ibid; the capitalization is Saro-Wiwa's)

4.4.1.4. Saro-Wiwa during the war

Moving back to Saro-Wiwa's vicissitudes during the conflict, he was at Nsukka, having fled from Ibadan at the time of the pogroms, when Biafra was declared and war broke out. Disgusted and alienated by the euphorically warlike dominant climate, he moved back to Rivers State after a while. There he became restless and increasingly dissatisfied with passivity, and started nursing the idea of putting up an internal dissenting voice: "Biafran propaganda invariably claimed that the Biafrans were one. But this was a lie, a hoax. I saw it as my responsibility to fight that lie. I did" (Saro-Wiwa 1992b, 155). A poem about that period when he was "sitting idle at home, grumbling or bemoaning our fate" (1989, 115), "Thoughts in time of war," captures both those feelings, and at the same time foreshadows some of the themes he would reproduce in *Sozaboy*, partly through the use of "rotten English": "Over there at the front, young men / Clobber one another to the din / Of mortar shells and rockets / They groan painfully and die / For a cause they barely understand" (1985, 24). The poem includes yet another indictment against the Biafran leadership, "bakers and hawkers of lies;" this reflects his ever-present irritation at the ongoing campaign of chauvinistic propaganda which "consistently claimed victories which they had not and could never win" (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 95).

His mind made up about actively fighting the Biafran "lie," he departed with his wife on a daring flight to the Federal side. This involved an eventful canoe trip down to Bonny, which was already in Nigerian hands, under the constant threat of air bombings, a fear which would find its way to *Sozaboy*. After six days in Bonny, where he witnessed skirmishes between Federal and rebel forces, he traveled by sea to Lagos, where he immediately set out to contact Rivers State elements, which had rallied under the leadership of Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye. He resolved to

commit all his efforts to the pro-States cause and forego any ideas of post-doctoral studies, and he was eventually selected to become the civilian administrator of the crucial oil port of Bonny in 1967 (although he did not take up the post until early 1968). There he would have long and close contact with the Federal military and with the effects of the war. He would have poignant evidence, for instance, that brutality was not the exclusive parcel of the Biafran armed forces. Despite the efforts he makes in his chronicle to separate the local high command (Colonel Akinrinade, "a fine soldier and gentleman") from the troops, he witnessed, for instance, the unchecked excesses of a bloodthirsty, brutally cruel captain who "looted property, beat up men and women, raped and shot civilians and soldiers with reckless abandon", and who could well have been the model for *Sozaboy*'s Manmuswak, since he belonged "more to the realms of fiction than of reality" to begin with (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 164). Despite it all, he seems to have truly thought that he was having a positive impact on the people under his administration: he brought food from Lagos and took care that it was justly distributed, and made sure the region saw an improvement in medical care and education. All in all, he felt satisfied with his decision of wholeheartedly siding with the Federal camp, despite the incidents he mentions and others which he chooses to omit. In this staunch defense of the reason of one side in the war he differs from other writers — a contrast with Soyinka would perhaps be illuminating.

We just saw how Soyinka and Saro-Wiwa, later, shared a vision of the true scale of the Ogoni suffering and what it meant for Nigeria, but they differed at the time of the war in the denunciation of the Igbo pogrom that preceded the conflict. This was part of a more fundamental difference in their outlook: while Soyinka vocally repudiated "both the secession of Biafra, and the genocide-consolidated dictatorship of the Army which made both secession and war inevitable," and even went to federal prison for it (1985, 19), Saro-Wiwa decidedly cast his lot

with the federal side, chiefly because it had promised the creation of the Rivers state for which he and others had insistently lobbied. His decision to flee the besieged region and side with the Federal "enemy" was bound to be unpopular in many quarters back home, and in fact, he feared for the safety of the rest of his family, who had stayed in the "biafran" [sic] East (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 150). Proof of his commitment to the Federal cause is, for instance, the fact that he consistently writes of the "liberation" of the cities taken by federal forces, or his befriending many federal officers, whose excesses as we have seen he was regrettably prone to forgive, as part of a confessed "indulgent attitude toward military rule in Nigeria" (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 209). He shared with many of them an elitist education, but it seems undeniable that he enjoyed the opportunities for advancement and ostentation that his closeness to the federal military elite provided him. This was to be, according to some observers, a constant of sorts: "There was little self-evidently virtuous or noble in the career of Saro-Wiwa. He had many opportunities to advance or to enrich himself, and he took them" (Lock 2000, 12).

4.4.1.5. After the war

Even though his activism for the Ogoni ended up antagonizing the government to the point where they got rid of him through "judicial murder" (to use British PM John Mayor's phrase), for a long time he was a true insider. During the war and in its immediate aftermath, after serving as an administrator in Bonny, he was appointed as a member of the Rivers State Executive Council, where he served first as commissioner for works, land, and transport, and later for the Ministry of Education (1969-71), and the Ministry of Information and Home Affairs. It is in this period that his first two books (other than the pamphlet) are published and adopted for the school curriculum. In 1973, however, he is removed from office and turns to trading in frustration, as we have seen, and he appears to have been a successful businessman. In 1977, urged by his friend Sam Amuka,

he took up writing again for the newspaper *Punch*, edited by Amuka, and also for an occasional column in the *Sunday Times* (Neame 2000, 153). He would come back to public office more than a decade later, in 1987, for a short time as executive director of the National Directorate of Social Mobilisation (MAMSER), a "public relations arm of the Nigerian government" (McLuckie and McPhail 2000, 235). By that time he had moved his column, called "Similia," to the *Vanguard*, where he began to be increasingly critical of the government, until the column was canceled (Neame 2000, 154), just like his term in MAMSER lasted just a year. Far from having learned the lessons of 1973, "he appeared to be blind to the consequences of openly criticizing an administration of which he was part" (Wiwa 2000, 40). He also served as director of the Nigerian Newsprint Manufacturing Company, under the military presidency of general Ibrahim Babangida, until 1993, and from 1990 to 1993 he was also the president of the Association of Nigerian Authors. After general Sani Abacha's coup in 1993, Saro-Wiwa — who by then was already president of the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa — definitely poured all his energy into the Ogoni cause and the defense of minorities in general. Before his execution in 1995, he served as president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and he was appointed vice-chairman of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, in The Hague. After years of brave, intense political struggle, including a spat in prison without trial in 1992, he was sentenced to death in 1995, under the accusation of incitement to murder. The alleged victims were four Ogoni elders who were killed during a riot in a town where he was supposed to address a rally. As William Boyd writes: "The fact that he was in a car some miles away and going in the opposite direction made no difference" (1998, 53). It must also be said that Saro-Wiwa repeatedly and insistently repudiated the use of any kind of violence as part of his struggle (see, for instance, the "Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights" in Saro-Wiwa 1992a, 99). Despite international

outrage and appeals for clemency, he was hanged along with eight co-defendants in November, 1995. Writing to William Boyd in a letter smuggled out of prison in that final year, he summarized his multifaceted life as follows: "…the most important thing for me is that I've used my talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do it as a politician or a businessman. My writing did it" (Boyd 1995, xv).

4.4.2. Context of creation: the intention behind "rotten English"

4.4.2.1. The Author's note

Back in 1968, when the war was still raging and Saro-Wiwa was already posted as civilian Administrator in Bonny, as we just mentioned he had the chance to witness the conflict "from very close quarters among young soldiers." Saro-Wiwa mentions this in the Author's Note to *Sozaboy*, where, right before that passage, we find his first explanation for the unprecedented, experimental choice of language for the novel, which on the face of it seems almost cavalier:

> Twenty years ago, at Ibadan University, I wrote a story titled 'High Life' and showed it to one of my teachers, Mr. O.R. Dathorne. He read it, just possibly liked it; but he did say that while the style I had used might be successful in a short story, he doubted that it could be sustained in a novel. I knew then that I would have to write a novel, some day, in the same style.

Further down in the Note, he goes on to add: "Both 'High Life' and *Sozaboy* are the result of my fascination with the adaptability of the English Language and of my closely observing the speech and writings of a certain segment of Nigerian society."

It would seem ill-advised not to take an author at their word when they discuss their own work, and the desire to prove that he could do what a teacher had deemed impossible, and furthermore had never been done before, must have been a strong driving force for the young Saro-Wiwa. After all, later in life he allegedly undertook what was to become his most commercially successful endeavor, the comedy series *Basi and Co.*, almost on a dare: "A friend and director of Programs at Nigerian Television Authority, Victoria Ezeokoli, asked him, as a joke, to become a television producer. He took up the challenge" (Ojo-Ade 1999, xv). He was always a pugnacious character, and especially in his formative years he seems to have felt pressured to prove his worth, fully aware that he often was the only Ogoni student (as in Umuahia) or one of maybe only two (as in the University of Ibadan). Therefore, becoming a literary pioneer, while at the same time proving an authority figure wrong, must have seemed an attractive enough prospect. However, it seems somehow unsatisfactory as a full explanation, and almost — dare we say — frivolous when one considers the subject matter of the novel. Because "High Life" — the precursor — is, after all, a highly urban short story. As we have discussed when dealing with the context of culture, Pidgin was more strongly associated with the frantic, chaotic life of a big city, the melting pot of ethnicities where scandalous modernity clashed with the more traditional life of the village. Lagos, for instance, is by now a "translation space" where linguistic barriers are constantly being crossed and "NP has become an essential language" (Rodríguez-Murphy 2021, 431). "High Life" is a humorous, light-hearted story despite its critical undertone: a masquerade. To choose the same experimental language, with a long history of comedic associations, as the vehicle for an

admittedly satiric, but also deeply tragic anti-war novel set in the traumatic Civil War seems, on the face of it, almost baffling. It is not unreasonable, then, to endeavor to find other, complementary explanations in the biographical literature.

4.4.2.2. Other possibilities: the Irish revival

According to his son Ken, as a graduate, when he wrote "High Life," Saro-Wiwa was influenced by the writers of the Irish revival and James Joyce's experimentation with language (Wiwa 2000, 33), which may lie at the base of his starting to experiment with vernacular varieties, although it does not quite explain why he chose to extend the experiment to a civil war novel (nor why did he abandon it almost completely afterwards). The connection with the Irish revivalists is intriguing. It was already raised by Michael Onwueme (1999) in his informative article on the use of transliteration in Nigerian literature. He was, in turn, quoting Molly Mahood, who advocated, in an inaugural lecture given at Ibadan in November 1954, bringing together the oral, local (Nigerian) tradition with the bookish component of the English literary legacy, "as Welsh and Irish writers have often done" (quoted in Onwuemene 1999, 1059). Onwuemene picks up the thread and indeed acknowledges a "generic resemblance" between the "Hibernian English" (also called "Irish-English") of John Millington Synge, for instance, and "the ethnic-colored expressions that Nigerian writers subsequently used" (ibid.) And, indeed, a part of the scholarship about the language used by John Synge bears an uncanny resemblance to most discussions of Africanized English and even Saro-Wiwa's language experiments. Compare, for instance, the above quotations with the following description of the language of *Basi and Co*'s Madam: "What we have in these samples is a mixture of pidgin, grammatical English, ungrammatical English and English in transliteration. The latter (English in transliteration) may well be referred to as Ogoninglish" (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 177). Likewise, if we consider the following passage: "[P]eople are

speaking in a language which appears to be English, but it is an English once or twice removed … But the sets and the setting tell you that this is *Ireland*, and these are people who would be speaking *Irish* if the audience could only understand them" (Titley 2009, 92; emphasis added), could not the italicized words be changed to "the Niger Delta" and "Khana," respectively, and the sentence be perfectly applicable to the language of *Sozaboy*?

Furthermore, Synge shared with Saro-Wiwa a fascination for common people and their way of speaking that nevertheless did not entail a patronizing or sacralizing view of the vernacular, and in fact was suspicious of those who attributed any broader cultural and political significance to it (Titley 2009, 97). One should not take these analogies too far, however. Synge, for instance, was of the opinion that Irish as a living language was dying out, so that to create an "Irishized" version of English was, in a way, an effort at preservation. This is not at all the case of Saro-Wiwa. Despite his professed love of the English language, we have seen that by the end of his life he was using his native Khana more and more, and it would have been inconceivable for him to resignedly accept its eventual demise. Quite the opposite: in the Ogoni Bill of Rights the defense of Ogoni native languages is explicitly vindicated (Saro-Wiwa 1992a, 95). Despite their differences, nevertheless, one can see how Saro-Wiwa could have found inspiration in Synge, whose forte, just like his own, was drama and the representation of orality. If according to Arland Ussher, the Irish playwright and poet with his "Irish-English" was the only one who could give strangers some idea of the expressiveness of the "Gaelic folk-idiom," "a language of quips, cajoleries, lamentations, blessings, curses, endearments, tirades — and all very often in the same breath" (quoted in Titley 2009, 101), it might well be that Saro-Wiwa saw in rotten English (which, like Synge's Irish English, is not quite English, nor pidgin or Khana), a way to represent what he saw popular Nigeria to be: exasperating, funny, superstitious, corrupt, naïve, profane and deeply tragicomic: *dis Nigeria*

sef. As a self-perceived educator maybe he longed for Nigeria to be lived in Queen's English, but he probably thought that its soul expressed itself in rotten English, even when plunged into such tragic circumstances as a civil war. Of course, it is largely the contrast between language and subject matter that makes *Sozaboy* such an extraordinary masterwork, and what makes us suspect that there might be more behind Saro-Wiwa's explicit intentions than meets the eye, but any contention that Saro-Wiwa was perhaps putting forward a post-colonial stylistic manifesto of sorts with *Sozaboy* must be contrasted with his explicit stance regarding the issue of the search for an African literary language.

4.4.2.3. Saro-Wiwa's position on the African literary language debate

While the negative characterization of the dialect used in the novel contained in the Author's Note ("disordered and disorderly. Born of a mediocre education … having no rules and no syntax") can be explained away, up to a point, as a *captatio benevolentiae* of sorts, intended for an international readership that would largely be unfamiliar with Nigerian Pidgin, everything suggests that Saro-Wiwa was not postulating or envisioning Pidgin as the language for the literature of his country in the future. He was, indeed, very explicit about the subject in the article "The Language of African Literature: A Writer's Testimony" (1992b), where he engages directly with the thorny issue. He proclaims himself "not impressed by Dr. [Obiajunga] Wali's arguments" (154) inasmuch as he does not consider himself a writer of African literature, declaring that he is content to leave classification for critics (for Dr. Wali's views, see p. 50 of this dissertation). He deplored the need for an "African" literature at all and the entire debate about the language in which it should be written: "there is an Ogoni literature, a Yoruba literature, a Wolof literature. Most of this literature is oral because these societies are, in most cases, pre-literate. That is a fact" (155). Predictably, to the argument that English is the language of the colonizer, he counters that

colonial oppression in Africa is not only a matter of European dominance over Africans: "Africans have practiced colonialism as much as Europeans. In most cases, this colonialism has been harsh and crude; it is as detestable as European colonialism" (156). This extended to the language front, as evidenced by the twelfth point of the Ogoni Bill of Rights: "That the Ogoni languages of Gokana and Khana are underdeveloped and are about to disappear, whereas other Nigerian languages are being forced on us" (Saro-Wiwa 1992a, 94). If Achebe, while using English for his work, acknowledged that to do so produced "a guilty feeling" (quoted in Onwuemene 1999, 1056), Saro-Wiwa wrote instead that he felt no guilt when using "the language of our erstwhile colonial masters" (1992b, 155). He also addressed Ngugi's position as the most vocal opponent to the use of European languages in African literature, and stated that Ngugi was welcome to write in Gikuyu, but he nevertheless detected certain "posturing" in the Kenyan author, who had already made a name for himself by writing in English before he switched to his mother tongue (156). The same skepticism is applied to the notion of adopting a single "continental language" for Africa, which he finds both "totally impractical" and without "intellectual or political merit." Both Ngugi himself and Soyinka had put forward the idea of using Swahili, but Saro-Wiwa dismisses this with his familiar line of argumentation: "Once a language is not one's mother tongue, it is an alien language. Its being an African language is a moot point" (ibid.). His reasons for adopting English, instead of his native Khana (or Kana), are eminently practical and remind again of Achebe ("I have been given this language"): for Saro-Wiwa, English is a tool, "much like the biro pen or the banking system or the computer, which were not invented by the Ogoni people but which I can master and use for my own purposes" (ibid.). And he goes on to clarify that this mastery over the English language in his view does not need to be Africanized in any way, as he concludes in a crucial passage:

> I myself have experimented with the three varieties of English spoken and written in Nigeria: pidgin, "rotten," and standard. I have used them in poetry, on stage, on the radio, and with television comedy. That which carries best and which is most popular is standard English, expressed simply and lucidly. It communicates and expresses thoughts and ideas perfectly. (157)

There are many significant takeaways in the article, and especially in this concluding fragment. First, we can see that he considered the "rotten" English he used for *Sozaboy* an actual variety of English "spoken and written" in Nigeria. We will see that some scholars question this, at least in the literal sense. Likewise, he includes pidgin as a variety of English, which again begs some qualification. It is very telling, as well, that he finds standard English not only the best carrier, but also the most popular. As we have seen, this popularity could not be based on numbers, not even in Saro-Wiwa's time. It has more to do, probably, with popular expectations, since barely any pidgin literature existed, popular or not. The best-selling Onitsha books, for instance, were purported to be written in standard English, poor as their grammar seemed to be at times. If anything, they sometimes erred on the side of "big grammar" (Zabus 2007, 70). Yet, be that as it may, that this was no mere posturing is attested by the fact that, when he again opted for portraying a cast of low-life but essentially likable characters in the immensely popular TV series *Basi and Company* (1986) "he insisted on [it] being in Standard Nigerian English" (Zabus 2007, 198; Saro-Wiwa 1988), in spite of the fact that it was a comedy set in an urban environment, two factors that could have justified opting for Pidgin. Interestingly, Saro-Wiwa later admitted that, even though the show was recorded before a paid live audience, "To the very last, we were unable to make

them laugh spontaneously. This was probably because they did not catch the humour in the English language easily" (quoted in Neame 2000, 165).

Some scholars, such as Ojo-Ade, have seen in Saro-Wiwa an evolution, from the would-be academic of his youth, obsessed with the "correct usage" of English, to the later activist who used "his native Gokana" when addressing Ogoni audiences and whose "choice of language serves as a means of promoting his vision and grassroots philosophy" (1993, 6-7) — we have already mentioned the Ogoni Bill of Rights that he wrote in 1990, one of whose demands was "the use and development of Ogoni languages in Ogoni territories" (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 69). While there may be some truth to that evolution, it seems unquestionable that he retained till the end his fascination with the English language to which he referred in the Author's Note. Not only that; he clearly valued his elitist, Western education. He whole-heartedly admired British life in general and "the British public school tradition that permeated Government School," which he attended. As a student, he enjoyed Latin, "devoured" Dickens, Arnold, and Shakespeare and was fond of cricket (Wiwa 2000, 33). As soon as he had the means to do it, he sent his children to English public schools like Eton, Roedan, or Tonbridge "[f]or reasons that have never been properly explained and which seem at odds with his political agenda" (Maja-Pearce 2005, 124). As we have said, he took pride in his command of the "language of the erstwhile colonizer" and valued those who shared it; he found the Bonny people "highly enlightened," for instance, partly because most of them spoke "excellent English" (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 162). His quarrel was perhaps with a certain pompous, dishonest use of the language, especially when applied for propaganda purposes, not with English itself. English was, in his view, tantamount to formal education, a subject which deeply concerned him (another concern he had in common with the authors we covered in the theoretical introduction).

4.4.2.4. Saro-Wiwa on education

Indeed, a key element in Saro-Wiwa's fight for the rights and the future of the Ogoni was education, a topic on which he touched upon time and again. "Education," he insisted to the very end, "is basic for progress in the modern world; I did whatever was possible to encourage the Ogoni to acquire it" (Omotoye Olorode et al. 1998, 344). In his own words, "[t]rudging over the one hundred rural villages in which the Ogoni live," he "brought them education and hope." He found that "the Ogoni people, the masses, were ready to follow dedicated leadership. However, that leadership had to be provided by educated people" (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 51). He harbored no doubts that this almost messianic responsibility fell on his shoulders. In this, he claimed to be following the Ogoni tradition of the Wiayor, a mythical figure who "acquires unusual powers of clairvoyance that make people accept their judgment and views" (Wiwa 2000, 46).

This privileging of education, coming from a man proudly formed in elitist institutions, would combine with a deeply-rooted fear of ethnic factionalism — and the dire consequences it could have for micro-minorities (Saro-Wiwa 2013, location 430) such as the Ogoni — to conform a belief in the power of the English language as a force for personal improvement and national unity (something he was far from alone in believing). Thus, one of the conceivable functions of "rotten English" in the novel is to convey the confusion of a people unable to understand the events unfolding around them ("They groan painfully and die / For a cause they barely understand"). Ojo-Ade makes the argument that Mene perhaps would have avoided his tragic fate had he been the beneficiary of a better education (1993, 61). It is even possible to go one step further and see in the protagonist of *Sozaboy* almost an alter ego, a parallel Ken Saro-Wiwa having not enjoyed access to the same relative privileges. Some autobiographical coincidences would seem to support this idea, such as the fact that Mene starts the book as the apprentice driver of the only bus in

Dukana, while for Saro-Wiwa purchasing a bus was precisely the first step in what would become a rather successful early career as a businessman (Ojo-Ade 1993, xiii).

This should lead the would-be translator to several conclusions. First and foremost, that it is going to be essential to capture somehow, in the target text, that feeling of a "mediocre education and severely limited opportunities." Whatever the sacrifices made in the name of intelligibility or comedic purpose, the translation must convey the same sensation of everything happening beyond the reach of Mene and, indeed, most of the characters. In addition to his struggling with the "big grammar," almost all the important events in the novel are surrounded by this veil of confusion: Mene and the rest of the soldiers do not understand that the plane circling over them is eventually going to bomb them, and even laugh at the beginning when they see the bombs dropping. In his later wanderings, it is very hard to follow (for him and the readers alike) on which side of the front he is. His wife and mother are not only killed by another stray bomb, but he does not learn of their fate until the very end of the book, even though he meets many fellow villagers that are supposed to know it but still do not tell him. The list could go on. A second conclusion we could draw from the previous discussion is the necessity of adopting a certain caution when considering the possible subversive, anticolonial motivation behind the use of a form of Pidgin in the book.

4.4.2.5. Intended readership

The debate about a writer's intention cannot be dissociated from the readership their book is intended for. By the mid-eighties, when *Sozaboy* was published, there was a growing reading public in Nigeria, as reflected in the increase in national publishers, which had become dominant after having been "negligible" in number before the mid to late seventies (there were previous novels by Nigerian authors, of course, but they were all published in London). Unfortunately, the problems associated with distribution and the economic situation of the country, with rampant

inflation, caused a decrease in the sales of books despite their being a valued good. The physical quality of the books also witnessed a long and steady decadence since the Nigerian government implemented austerity measures in the 1980s. Nevertheless, in that economic context, they became a luxury of sorts, especially when they were often perceived as "irrelevant to Nigerian realities" (Griswold 2000, 88). This notion that books were the province of a small elite was reinforced by the traditional Nigerian style of book launching, which was often the only promotion a book received. It was customary to organize a lavish event for a small number of friends, who were expected to buy a copy at an exorbitant price. Saro-Wiwa opposed this way of doing things, as he personally told Griswold: "He thought publishers like Spectrum make a mistake by holding launchings at luxurious hotels and concentrating on getting participation from wealthy people, for this creates the impression that books are only for the elite" (87). At launches he sold his works at the published price and saw the occasion as a chance to make contacts and advertise the book, and also to advance his political agenda, which was becoming more and more important for him, in front of a large crowd (Neame 2000, 158; Saro-Wiwa 1995b, 82). Even though he clearly wished to be recognized by the intellectual elite, Saro-Wiwa always longed for popular acclaim. His son Ken elaborated on this in an interview with Neame, whose quotation we reproduce in full because of its interest towards answering the question of Saro-Wiwa's intended readership:

> My father always used to lament that he could actually write a book that would be read in the literary circles of Europe, like Wole Soyinka does … but what he was interested in as a writer was reflecting the social conditions of Nigeria, *for Nigerians*. That's why he self-published, because his stories were deemed not to have a market … *He was writing*

specifically for that market, and not for a worldwide market, or for people in literary circles (quoted in Neame 2000, 160; emphasis added)

It is interesting that he uses Wole Soyinka as an example of a writer disconnected from Nigerian realities. First, it is inevitable to read without at least a modicum of suspicion the claim that he could write like the Nobel laureate, only he chose not to. His own son admitted that Saro-Wiwa here could have been acting out of envy of "Soyinka's literary fame and profile outside Nigeria" (Wiwa 2000, 45). On the other hand, he was not the first to accuse Soyinka of foreignizing, literary pyrotechnics. Dr. Wali, with whom Saro-Wiwa disagreed apropos the question of the language of African literature, since the former was a staunch defender of the use of African languages, had already accused Soyinka of obscurity, a prime example of how English-language literature was inaccessible to the Nigerian masses. It has to be kept in mind that the literacy rate in Nigeria is only 52% (and much lower in the case of women); as Naeme explains, "those who can read at all read English" (160). Neame is quick to point out, nevertheless, that in the same article where Saro-Wiwa confronts Wali's ideas, he argues — as we have seen above — that one of the reasons for his choice of English language is the potential 400 million people readership, so a worldwide audience was at least in the back of his mind. That would explain, for instance, the glossary included in the Longman edition of *Sozaboy*. Ojo-Ade, for one, points out that the author's note at the beginning and the inclusion of a glossary at the end seem to support the notion that Saro-Wiwa had his sights on an international readership. However, Ojo-Ade reminds us, that does not mean "that his primary audience is not local, Nigerian, and therefore informed and engaged in the use of rotten English," and thus, perfectly able to appreciate the humor in the novel (39). The translator, therefore, should have some pause before assuming too "Bandian"

a position, since rotten English works differently for a Nigerian readership, for whom apparently the novel was mainly intended, than for a European (Western) audience. As we hinted earlier, rotten English might as well be classified as foreignized Pidgin (towards English), rather than foreignized English (towards an African *scriptio inferior*). This popular outlook was a direct consequence of his political commitment: "His writing, like everything else, had to serve a higher, communal purpose. And that meant keeping it simple and relevant to the masses" (Wiwa 2000, 46). The duality of a text widely considered as experimental, and at the same time addressed at the Nigerian masses, poses one of the greatest challenges for the translator, who probably should not put excessive emphasis on the experimental nature of the work to the point where it becomes inaccessible; nevertheless, this is easier said than done, especially when there is a willingness to avoid cultural adaptation or neutralization born of a desire to preserve difference

To conclude, from the information available it seems fair to surmise that by using rotten English the overarching intention of Saro-Wiwa was to reinforce the impression of the uneducated masses being led by highly-educated crooks, to dire consequences. This is sustained by his insistence on education and the deleterious effects of propaganda. Thus, his experimentation with rotten English could be argued to represent an early attempt at finding a popular, fully Nigerian language, while simultaneously putting his writing chops to the test, but it still can be located well within the paradigm of using Pidgin traces as a mark of "bad" English. The fact that in West African literature dealing with colonial times Pidgin was often used to represent the speech of native Africans working for the colonial administration (Bandia 2008, 125) can only have been an added benefit for Saro-Wiwa, to further drive home his thesis that a domestic colonialism had come to perpetuate the frameworks of colonial times. He most definitely did not seem to have felt that he was making a statement for the literary use of Nigerian Pidgin as a way forward, but his

"experiment" was so successful, at all levels, and is still, to this day, so unique, that it could not but be interpreted as a pioneering work by many writers and scholars.

4.4.3. Context of interpretation

4.4.3.1. Recognition

We regrettably do not have precise information concerning the sales of *Sozaboy* in Nigeria and elsewhere, but thanks to Taiwo Olorontuba-Oju (1998) (who claims that Saro-Wiwa took "the Nigerian literary scene literally by storm in the middle to late 80s") we know that, at the time, it was praised from some quarters as the work of "'A versatile writer … a consummate stylist' (Professor Theo Vincent); 'A major new figure in our (Nigerian) national literature' (Professor Abiola Irele); 'An entertainer who can tell a good tale' (Robert Moss), etc" (159). As far as prizes are concerned, in 1987 *Sozaboy* won an honorable mention in the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. The Longman edition adds, on the back cover, praise for Saro-Wiwa from introduction-author William Boyd ("…an extraordinary man and an extraordinary writer"), and for the novel itself by Kole Omotosho ("…a triumph worth celebrating") and Helen Birch, literary editor of *City Limits* magazine, according to whom the novel is "a kind of sombre picaresque lifted by the vivacity of its language"). Birch's opinion is stressed by the blurb text, where it is stated that it is rotten English which "makes this a unique and powerful novel" (Saro-Wiwa 1994, back cover).

This uniqueness of the language is undoubtedly the aspect of the novel that has attracted the most scholarly attention as well, and here, as in other parts of this study, we are going to focus our discussion on those books and articles centered, at least partially, around the characteristics and functions of rotten English. There are, however, studies that contemplate other facets of the

book (often in combination with the experimental language), focusing on ideological and sociological aspects over stylistic considerations. Maureen Eke (2000), for instance, understands *Sozaboy* as an allegory where the Biafran War "is only a manifestation of what is wrong with the country and its leadership" (99). Quoting Fanon, she identifies the corrupt and treacherous leaders of the village with the weak and decadent emergent middle classes of the postcolonial state. In this, she agrees with Olorontuba-Oju (1998), according to whom "his [Saro-Wiwa's] philosophy was Fanonian in orientation and expression" (168). The story of the book, then, according to Eke, would be that of the progressive disillusionment and embitterment of the formerly naïve Mene, and rotten English, a ploy, a "masked weapon" for the dominant culture to perceive the novel as not serious, while "the so-called masses" are made aware of the "rottenness" of their society. Some scholars have even perceived in the novel a "prescient" insight into emerging forms of neoliberalism (Perera-Rajasingham 2017). Most interpretations, nevertheless, do not go that far. Even though Saro-Wiwa was well aware of the dangers of unbridled capitalism (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 11), which he denounced especially through his campaign against the abuses of the Shell oil company, there is little evidence in *Sozaboy* that the masses are made aware of the rampant corruption in their society, at least any more than they were at the beginning of the novel. There is no collective protagonist, and Mene's fellow Dukanans in fact turn their back on him and will rather use him as a scapegoat than confront their leadership. There is "Fanonian" denunciation of the comprador class that is complicit with exploitation, but the novel is also scathingly pitiless in its depiction of Dukanan society. There is affection, too, towards the common people, to be sure, but little hope of collective action for the immediate future.

4.4.3.2.Takes on the language

The particular language of *Sozaboy* is probably the most salient characteristic of the book, and "the vast majority" of studies about the novel focus on this aspect (Ojo-Ade 1999, 32), trying to fathom both its intention and its function. Most of the studies dealing with *Sozaboy* and its rotten English take a cue from Saro-Wiwa's own remark in the Author's Note that the language of the novel is "disordered and disorderly," that it "thrives on lawlessness, and is part of the dislocated and discordant society in which Sozaboy must live", to emphasis precisely this aspect: the chaos and confusion (two words that will keep cropping up time and again in the literature) embodied by the dialect of the book. Uwasomba, for instance, claims that "The language of the novel reflects the lawless and chaotic environment in which Mene, the Sozaboy and his people find themselves" (2010, 19), while according to Oloruntoba-Oju, "Saro-Wiwa means the language to express, through infelicitous syntax and vocabulary, the underlying sense of chaos that characterizes the environment of war and madness which the novel depicts" (1998, 177). Other authors read the confusion inherent in rotten English as representative of issues that go beyond just the war. Perera-Rajasingham**,** for instance, in keeping with his interpretation of *Sozaboy* as a denunciation of emerging neoliberalism, states that "Rotten English compels us to understand neoliberal formations and critically evaluate their terrible consequences" (2017, 4–5). Less specifically, some scholars insist that the confusion exemplified through rotten English is a reflection of Nigerian society as a whole, and not just the situation during the conflict (Eke 2000; Utudjian Saint André 2002). This would certainly align with its being used in the poem "Dis Nigeria Sef" and even in the short story "High Life," none of which deal exclusively with the war. These authors, moreover, understand the use of rotten English as a typically postcolonial subversive device, a way to denounce and deliver criticism through the language of "the masses." As to who precisely those

masses could be, there are different interpretations. Some scholars make a more local, less Nigeria-wide interpretation of the language in the novel. Mary Harvan (1997), for instance, observes in *Sozaboy* "a unique perspective on the Nigerian Civil War: that of the Ogoni minority" (170). Uwasomba (2010) and Zabus (2007), in turn, emphasize that Pidgin English is the dominant means of communication in the Niger Delta area, a key component in the "linguistic and cultural ecology of the area" (Uwasomba 2010, 24).

Others instead, such as Michael North (2001) and Jeffrey Gunn (2008), choose to stress the universalizing potential of the language, by claiming that "rotten English" can be interpreted as the "voice of the voiceless" (Gunn 2008, 3) in general, the language of all Nigerian (and not only Nigerian) minorities caught up in a war. The vulnerability of these minorities is further stressed by the deliberate ambiguity of some of the key words in the novel ("trouble," "soza," "war," and others). According to North, by using this "hybridised, syncretic language" Saro-Wiwa proposes "a Nigeria that is not divided along ethnic and linguistic lines." This leveling of the playing field "explodes the centre/periphery model and offers a post-colonial version of English" (quoted in Gunn 2008, 3).

This writing about the Nigerian masses, for the Nigerian masses, was a guiding principle for Saro-Wiwa, as we have seen above, whether by choosing a popular, radically non-elitist linguistic variant in *Sozaboy* or though more or less standard English in his TV comedy series. In this, Utudjian connects him with a Nigerian school of popular novel authors, in the company of Kole Omotoso, Festus Iyayi, and Ben Okri, for instance. In contrast with "illustrious predecessors" (*illustres prédécesseurs*) such as Achebe, Soyinka, or Armah, these popular authors forsake the elitist attitude and are much closer to the masses (Utudjian Saint André 2002, 7). He was, therefore, one of those authors that had to write for the "newly literate" (Griswold 2000), whose books tended

to be short, entertaining, accessible, and with a moral. Saro-Wiwa took up this tradition first with the Mr. B series for children, which was very successful. This, in turn, aligned with his concern for education: "As a means of increasing reading and literacy levels within Nigeria, his works and his marketing methods are admirable" (Neame 2000, 165). As we have seen (p. 157), this interest in reaching a wide public was extended to what we know about his outlook as a publisher. Using Pidgin, the most spoken language in Nigeria, could have seemed a reasonable way to implement this popularizing desire. We have already covered elsewhere (pp. 49-55) the potential of Pidgin English as an all-Nigerian vehicle for literature that is not burdened by the colonial past of Standard English (and also its drawbacks). To back the notion that the language in *Sozaboy* cuts across ethnic boundaries, Uwasomba (2010) lists several words in the text that are left in their original form, each in a different Nigerian language, such as "'lailai' (Hausa), 'Okporoko' (Igbo), 'Wayo' (Yoruba), 'tombo', 'yanga', 'ginkana', 'wuruwuru' . . . mixed freely with core pidgin vocabulary items" (24).

These interpretations merit further discussion, especially when some of them may seem to fly in the face of Saro-Wiwa's own statements. Most glaringly, perhaps, is the identification of a postcolonial disposition to "Africanize" English in someone who so unmistakably opposed that particular literary strategy. In his writings, Saro-Wiwa was vocal in his defense of standard English and his disapproval of even the notion of a Nigerian literature not written in that language, while he would have vehemently opposed to his being read as an anti-colonial author were that anti-colonialism to be limited to the English erstwhile masters, when his overriding concern was what he perceived as the perpetuation of colonial dominance over Nigerian minorities by means of the "native colonialism" exercised by the country's three dominant ethnic groups (and particularly, in the case of the Ogoni, the Igbo during the Biafran period, when *Sozaboy* is set).

Nevertheless, some of Saro-Wiwa's stated opinions are not free of contradiction with some of his acts, and those scholars' considerations are based on something more than mere voluntarism. First of all, as far as his defense of standard English is concerned, we might keep in mind that, as Losh (1999) points out, this apparently "reactionary" purist argument responds to a wish for "inter-class communication and a broader definition of Nigerian literary culture" (221). Not only that, but this position, this fondness for standard English, is somewhat undermined, writes Losh, by the fact that he seemed to be writing in Khana at the time of his death and by his characterization of English as a "borrowed" language ("Sotey you borrow anoder man language") in his poem "Dis Nigeria Sef," written precisely in a variety of rotten, or pidginized, English (222). His professed interest in the Irish revival writers would also point to an exploration of the possibilities of subverting received English, at least to a certain degree. But perhaps even more significant is the very fact that he chose to write an entire novel in a quintessentially postcolonial linguistic variant in the first place. The seriousness of the subject, and the profound personal impact the war had for him, would seem to preclude any ideas of the book being a mere *divertimento*.

Some qualification is also in order as regards the issue of the chaos and confusion embodied by rotten English. Despite the hybrid nature of the language, which will be discussed in more depth in our section devoted to dialect, a strong foundation of rotten English is undoubtedly Nigerian Pidgin, to the extent that, in a way, it can be more accurately described as a watered-down version of Pidgin instead of a broken version of standard English. The question is that, just like any other language, Pidgin does have rules and a syntax, contrary to what Saro-Wiwa himself seems to indicate in his note (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 177). Of course, *Sozaboy*'s rotten English is not "pure" Pidgin and it does show confusion in its alternation between broken English and Pidgin, as we will see, but this pertains to the particular mix chosen by the author, and not so much to the true

language of "a certain section of Nigerian society." Understanding this is essential for the scholar and the translator. This oscillation between "wrong" and "Pidgin" is also apparent in the different appreciations as regards the primary-school feel of the language in *Sozaboy*, which is emphasized by some scholars more than others.

4.4.3.3. Humor

On a different note, Femi Ojo-Ade shifts the focus to an aspect often neglected by other scholars, but enormously important to understand the working of the novel: humor. It seems incontestable that, despite the underlying tragedy and the bitter ending, *Sozaboy* is a novel with a strong ironic and satiric content, written in such a way as to even elicit laughter in more than a few passages. The translator should, then, endeavor to convey to the TL the humor of the novel, which according to Ojo-Ade flows basically from two sources: one the one hand, we have the narrator's basic lack of understanding, which reflects a complex of inferiority and leads him to commit funny mistakes; in that, we perceive another connection with the genre of the book, since we saw (see p. 67) that the establishment of a certain ironic distance between protagonist and reader is one of the features of the Bildungsroman. The second major source of comedic content is the examples of "dark humor" that permeate the novel (1999, 59). These recourses to humor connect with the familiar tone of the narrator, and with the numerous expressions of shared experience which also work to reinforce the orality of the text ("As you know," "I will not tell you a lie," "My brother, if I tell you that..." "Believe me, yours sincerely," to name but a few of the phrases quoted by Ojo-Ade) to create a feeling of "complicity and lightheartedness" (57). The translation, then, should present the same mixture of humor and tragedy that permeates the original. On top of that, an additional consideration is the fact that Mene is a likable character through and through, so the satire should never descend into outright cruelty or lack of sympathy, especially considering that

in Mene we see a reflection of the plight of a people on whom mediocre education has been largely an imposition. In that, *Sozaboy* draws from a tradition of pidgins, with their strong oral component, being used for comedic purposes (Todd 2005, 48–49; Deuber and Oloko 2003, 5), but it takes it one step further.

4.4.3.4. Rotten English as an expression of trauma

There is another promising avenue of research to supplement a model strictly centered around the palimpsest representation, whereby the experimental elements to be found in an African literary work are chiefly the expression of an oral substrate. Recent scholars have associated the often anomalous language used by first-person narrators in child soldier novels with the expression (or repression) of trauma. It is the case of Kathryn Batchelor (2015), for instance, in her study of the first-person fictional narrative of another child soldier, Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000), also written in a heavily idiosyncratic language characterized by heterogeneity, with elements of Pidgin English, Malinké, and broken French. While acknowledging the value and pertinence of a "Bandian" reading of the book as an example of "intercultural writing as translation," Batchelor also espouses "another critical paradigm" based on a metaphorical application of translation: "the translation of trauma, or pain, into writing." (2015, 192). Referring to the work on the subject by Madeleine Hron (2009), Batchelor explains that Hron's list of "the kinds of techniques associated with a rhetoric of pain shows a clear overlap with many of the stylistic features that are often linked to translations of orality in African writing" (ibid.), the latter being especially prominent in child soldier narratives. This overlap between trauma fiction and postcolonial fiction is only natural once we take into account, following Anne Whitehead, that both are largely concerned "with the recovery of memory and the acknowledgment of the denied, the repressed, and the forgotten" (quoted in Novak 2008, 38). This, in turn, connects with Gunn's

opinion that “rotten English” can be interpreted as the “voice of the voiceless” (2008, 3) and the focus Spivak, Butler, Balibar, and Santos put on using translation to “keep as one’s reference the dispossessed and the unspeakable” (Butler, 2000a, 178), which makes this interpretation very promising for a translator wishing to adopt a responsible outlook such as the one advocated in this dissertation.

By this token, Saro-Wiwa could be considered a pioneer, a necessary reference for later writers such as Kourouma, but also Uzodinma Iweala or Chris Abani. The idea that rotten English could be a vehicle for the expression of trauma and pain is not far-fetched at all. Despite his characteristic self-confidence, Saro-Wiwa felt the shock of the war and struggled to find a way to express it: “Mi forte, if there was such a thing, was, I always thought, either short-story writing or the drama. But at that time [the war], my thoughts came only in verse” (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 111). In verse and, we might add, in rotten English, since we know he started writing *Sozaboy* at around the same time. His friend and reviewer Theo Vincent echoed the thought in his introduction to the poetry collection *Songs in a Time of War*: “The trauma of war, the unspeakable bestialities of war are not material for expansive prose” (1985, 9), and the feeling was shared by Achebe, for instance, who also felt compelled to express himself through poetry during that period (Achebe 2012, loc 181).

There seems little doubt that Mene, just like Birahima, the protagonist of *Allah n’est pas oblige*, is subjected in the novel to events liable to induce trauma, in as much as they include “physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death,” as established by Judith Herman (1992, 34), whose classical work on the subject is also referenced by Batchelor. These are the sort of events with the “power to inspire helplessness and terror” (ibid.), as Mene certainly feels. One way to try to overcome that feeling of helplessness lies

precisely in having recourse to storytelling in an attempt to restore some measure of power and control (Batchelor 2015, 193). However, the inability to come up with the words to recount such experiences is in itself a traumatic symptom, as observed by Amy Novak in her study of two Nigerian "trauma novels," one of which (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*) is set in the Biafran Civil War, as we have seen (2008, 33). This difficulty is compounded by a rejection of the usual representations of Africa in the Western imagination (38); Richard, one of the main characters in *Half a Yellow Sun*, a British man himself, feels the inadequacy of standard modes of chronicling when he tries to write about the war but realizes that "the sentences were risible. They were too melodramatic. They sounded just like the articles in the foreign press" (Adichie 2006, 168). Just like Adichie seems to increasingly rely on the figure of Ugwu, a youth who is forcibly recruited into the war, as a witness and narrator of the Biafran war, Saro-Wiwa may have found in Mene a unique voice able to reconstruct "the traumatic event as a recitation of fact" (Herman 1992, 177) and to do it in such a way that deviates from "the Western addressee's interpretive privilege" (Novak 2008, 42) while simultaneously making use of stylistic devices that can be read not only as markers of an orality reflecting the African storytelling tradition, but also as a channel for deeply traumatic experience (Batchelor 2015, 194). As Theo Vincent wrote, from that point of view, the language of *Sozaboy* can be perceived as "an artistic realization of the eponymous hero's dislocated consciousness of his new vision of himself" (quoted in Inyama 1996, 37).

Batchelor focuses her analysis on the use of repetition, parallelism, and anadiplosis in the narration of particularly traumatic events. Jean Boase-Beier, in her studies on stylistics and translation, has also found that repetition, "[i]n the Freudian sense … can result from an inability to come to terms with traumatic experience" and, as such, be seen as "a reflection of a cognitive

state" (2014, 94). This is the case, too, with *Sozaboy* (with lesser use of anadiplosis), as evidenced in the passage where Mene is first made acutely aware of his powerlessness by the extreme violence with which he and Bullet are punished after distributing among the troops their captain's stash of spirits and cigarettes.

> I will not tell you a lie. Because lie is not a good thing. When I opened my eyes, day have broke well well. And we were not near the pit at all. We were inside one place they used to call Kampala. If you know as this Kampala dey, you will sorry for me when I tell you that we were inside Kampala. Both Bullet and myself and all the boys. This Kampala is like hell. Anybody who goes inside there cannot return the same as before. I think you understand. This Kampala is the worst prison that anybody can go inside. The floor is the bed. The floor is the latrine. The floor is everything. And you will stay in that tent without water and no food. And then they just barb your head *mala*. No single hair at all. Then one san mazor will come every time and call all of you out and you will mark time, left right, left right, left right for up to four hours. And if you just stop for even one minute, he will use the *koboko* and beat you until you piss and shit. And you will call your mother and you cannot see her. And you will call your God and there is no God. And every time the san mazor will continue to shout: "You anmals. You think soza work na picken work. You think war front na hotel bar. God don punish all of you today. When una finish or dis Kampala, una go remember de day wey una mama born una. Anmals." (101)

In the above passage we can see how even a character as pious as Mene feels disconnected from God in the face of such brutality. This is highly significant since the questioning of one's deepest system of beliefs is one more symptom of traumatic experience (Batchelor 2015, 196). We can see this at work again in a fragment containing what is probably the most traumatic event depicted in the novel, the air raid that kills Mene's friend Bullet and most of his unit:

> After the plane have disappeared, then I got up from where I was hiding. Oh Jesus Christ son of God, the thing wey I see my mouth no fit talk am. Oh God our father wey dey for up, why you make man wicked like this to his own brother? Oh Mary, mother of Jesus, pray for us to God to forgive us all our sins and not to kill us like fly because of our wickedness. Angel Gabriel, please beg God if he does not want us to live, make 'e no make us only to kill us after like goat or rat or rabbit. Oh, I can never never forget what I saw that morning. (111)

The passage shows first the classical reaction of being at a loss for words to describe the traumatic experience, and then the incomprehension of the narrator regarding God's plan, which nevertheless never evolves into rebellion, but takes the guise of absolute resignation. As Batchelor insightfully points out, this uncomprehending acceptance of fate, of God's will, far from being reassuring and making trauma manageable, works instead to "make trauma infinitely possible" (2015, 197). This is coherent with Mene's general incapability to understand the forces that shape his life, elsewhere expressed through his poor understanding of the pompous English used by authority figures. The paragraph immediately following the one reproduced above offers a superb

example of how, in the depiction of trauma, rotten English sheds its comedic overtones and becomes something else.

> All our camp don broke down well well. Everywhere was full of pit and pit and pit. And inside one pit, you will see the head of soza, and in another pit, the leg of soza and in another pit, the hand of soza. Everywhere, soso human flesh in small small pieces! finger, nail, hair, *prick*, *blokkus*. Oh, I just begin cry like woman. Oh, foolish man, na who send me make I go join soza? Then I just remember say I never see Bullet. My heart just cut one time. *Abi* Bullet don die? Ehn? God, whosai'e dey? I begin run about dey hala well well, 'Bullet, Oga Bullet, Bullet where you dey?' I look everywhere. 'E no dey. All de sozas wey no die or no wound join me begin dey look for Bullet. So we come to one pit and I see one hand with watch dey stretch from inside de pit. I know say na Bullet watch be dat one. So, me and one soza begin pull de hand sotey we pull Bullet from de pit. I see say 'e don die. The bomb just make grave for am one time. So I just cover my friend up. Then I kneel down there begin cry like woman. I see say my best friend for dis war front don die. And I know say my life don begin spoil small small. Before dis time, I no know wetin to die mean. All my life just sweet dreams. Now, today today, I don see say life no be as I dey see am before. I know say wickedness plenty. And I know say my life must change one time. (111)

This passage is interesting for several reasons. First, there is an abundance of parallel structures and repetitions, the likes of which we have seen above associated with the narration of traumatic experience; this is, after all, the moment when Mene learns what to die means, his rude awakening after living a life that was "just sweet dreams." However, decontextualized, the insistent

repetitiveness used to describe the scattering of body parts around the area could almost be read as gallows humor; all the more so when it is followed by a second list of body parts which includes *prick* and *blokkus*. The dissonance created by these stylistic choices is further reinforced by the strong presence of Pidgin in the passage. In addition to the *blokkus*, we find quite a panoply of the Pidgin lexical and grammatical traces that permeate the book, such as the interrogative particles *wetin* (what) and *abi* (introducing a yes/no question), samples of the three copular elements, *na*, *dey*, and *be*, and auxiliary-plus-invariable-verb constructions with *go* (as irrealis markers) and *don* (as completive); these, moreover, are coupled with other examples which are not so frequent in the book, such as *sotey* (until), and the interrogative particle *whosai* (where).[22] Thus, when the narration is at its most dramatic (and traumatic), instead of going back to a more conventionally solemn register, which doubtlessly could have sounded too melodramatic, to the point of being risible, as Richard feared in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Saro-Wiwa doubles down on the more idiosyncratic elements of rotten English to achieve the opposite: constructing true dramatism from building blocks that are usually reserved for the risible. In other words, if rotten English is the foregrounded element from a stylistic point of view, sticking to Boase-Beier's model we could argue that these passages constitute "nexus of foregrounding," "eyes of the poem" to which the translator must pay special attention (2014, 93). These examples, along with others interspersed throughout the book, seem to support the idea that rotten English functions, at least in part, as a way to come to terms with trauma, and as such it should be handled with care by the translator, who must be attuned to the nuances of the register to detect those dissonances and move back and forth, like Saro-Wiwa, from humor and parody to tragedy and trauma.

4.5. Internal context: A stylistic translational analysis

Having established the immediate external context for the creation of the novel and its reception, we move on now to linguistic considerations, though still associating them with their particular circumstances. Not in vain, style has increasingly "ceased to be viewed only in terms of its linguistic features and has come to include such issues as voice, otherness, foreignization, contextualization and culturally-bound and universal ways of conceptualizing and expressing meaning" (Boase-Beier 2014, 2). The discussion will begin with an analysis of the variety of English/Pidgin that is used in *Sozaboy* following the framework of discourse analysis, since as Boase-Beier writes quoting Leech, "stylistics with such sociolinguistic awareness can be seen as

[22] For reference, *whosai* only makes one more appearance in the book, while *sotey* is used in 6 occasions, as opposed to 35 instances of *until*.

'the variety of discourse analysis dealing with literary discourse'" (17). We will observe the traditional twofold division into variation associated with different groups of speakers, i.e. *dialect*, and variation occurring in specific situations of use (Biber and Conrad 2009, 5). The exact purview of the latter category oscillates in the literature (Baumgarten and Schröter 2018, 153), but for the purposes of this dissertation we will focus our discussion of use-dependent linguistic variation on the classical concept of *register*.

4.5.1. Register

The categories making up the Hallidayan notion of register have been well-established for a long time: field, tenor, and mode (Halliday 2014, 33). It should be noted that the context to be studied with respect to the language in our case is the "inner situation" (Marco 2000, 3), that of the fictional participants in the communication act, as opposed to the outer context established between the author and the reader, which has been covered in the previous section.

Field: Life in the Army

The category of field has to do with the nature of the action being narrated as a social activity. It studies the subject matter, but also the way in which information is transmitted. Thus, we can speak about oral and written fields, with different degrees of technical specialization that condition vocabulary choices, among other things. In *Sozaboy*, we can identify some overarching themes, such as war, life in a small Niger Delta village, and corruption and the impotence of the small and uneducated member of an ethnic minority in a post-colonial African country. When dealing with the context of culture we have explained how these themes heavily involve culture-

specific elements which require special attention on the part of the translator, lest they do a disservice to the original. In the second half of the book, we also find a mosaic of the tragic consequences of the war, in hospitals and refugee camps. The degree of technical specialization is clearly low since the entire novel reads almost as an oral account told by Mene, the protagonist. A brief list of the relevant institutions present in the book would have to include the Army (in particular, the Biafran armed forces at the time of the Civil War, even though they are never identified as such in the novel), the corrupt institutions of the village of Dukana, including Chief Birabee and Pastor Barika, and the beliefs of its people, characterized in general as superstitious and gullible, but again this has been explored already in the section on culture.

The lexical field pertaining to the army poses a particularly interesting challenge for the translator. The Biafran (and Nigerian) armed forces took on people from all walks of life and ethnic origins, and consequently, they were an institution where the role of pidginized English as *lingua franca* came to the fore. Today, for instance, Pidgin is the most popular language among Nigerian soldiery (Babalola 2021, 252). However, most of the Biafran officers were trained in the British "spit and polish" tradition, and thus partial to ritualistic, square-bashing drills which must have seemed esoteric to their rural, uneducated recruits, all the more so when the orders "were shouted in accents often straight out of Sandhurst" (Jowett 2019, 11). The recruits, nevertheless, were usually keen to put on a good show as soldiers, and dutifully learned the different commands, however lost their meaning was on them. This is reflected in the novel through the use of the soldier's mistaken pronunciation (on page 77, for instance): *solope arms* (slope arms), *ajuwaya* ("as you were"), *quashun* (attention), or *tan papa dere* ("stand properly there"). This last expression, often repeated during training, is the origin of the name the soldiers assign their sergeant major ("San Mazor," to them), a veteran who nevertheless is also poorly educated.

Military ranks, with names and insignias that probably seemed arcane to the Biafran enlisted men, are likewise an occasion for phonetic interference, as in *corple* (corporal), *sarzent* (sergeant), or *san mazor* (sergeant major).[23] This is not uncommon in child soldier African narrative, as attested by the example of *Burma Boy* (Bandele 2008), set in World War II, where the Nigerian soldiers (*sojas*) deployed in Cambodia to fight with the British Army (under "Kingi Joji") turn sergeant major into *samanja* (37), captain into *kyaftin* (39) or general into *janar* (61). The comparison between the two works is interesting not only because of the revealing differences between the accents (most of the characters in *Burma Boy* are Hausa), which will be taken over shortly (p. 189), but also because it offers one more illustration of how some aspects of the Biafran Civil War could bring to mind the fighting for a colonial power, something Saro-Wiwa certainly felt very strongly. This disconnect between the high command and realities on the ground plagued both sides of the war (Baxter 2014, 38), but in the Biafran case it was arguably more detrimental for their military objectives (Jowett 2019, 15). The stark contrast between the immaculate, "spit and polish" officers and the ragged rank and file of boy soldiers armed with sticks under their command was characterized by some journalists as "tragic or amusing" (ibid.) — just like the contrast between "big grammar" and "rotten English;" just like *Sozaboy* itself.

Tenor: code-switching

Tenor concerns the relationships between the people taking part in the discourse (Baker 2011, 14). This includes the study of power asymmetries, which is particularly relevant for our purposes. Not in vain, there is a tradition of using Pidgin in West African literature to mark the

[23] These appear throughout the book, but instances of all of them can be found on p. 102, for instance.

social status of "half-literate" or "low-life or low-income" characters (Zabus 2007, 77; Egbokhare 2021, 91). While this is still true in *Sozaboy* to a large extent, the effect is not achieved so much through register contrast as in other works. One reason for this is that much of the dialogue in the novel takes place between equals who share with Mene his particular variety of "rotten English." However, the main factor in the relative dialectal homogeneity of the book is, of course, the role of Mene as a first-person narrator and, therefore, translator. While most works of fiction where Pidgin has a presence feature just one character or perhaps a handful of them who are shown to use it to indicate lower class or education (Lambert 2011, 285; Deuber and Oloko 2003, 5; Bandia 2008, 122; Zabus 1992, 123), *Sozaboy* is unique in that it uses its own variety of "Pidgin *in vitro*" (Zabus 2007, 193) as a literary language, a vehicle for the entire novel, down to paratextual elements such as the use of "Lomber 1," "Lomber 2," etc. instead of "Number 1" or "Number 2" to identify the chapters. The justification is simple: the book is the fictional autobiography of Mene, and the domesticated Pidgin that Saro-Wiwa created for him is his way of communicating with and (mis)understanding the world, and then translating the experience for the reader/listener. Mene dislikes standard or sophisticated English — to follow Inyang Udofot's classification (Schneider 2007, 206) — which he usually refers to as "big grammar." He finds it difficult to understand and is usually irritated when anyone uses it; on most of those occasions, he will just reproduce a few isolated words and make a general allusion to the meaning of the communication or to his inability to understand it. A good example of this is a dream sequence including the visit of a politician to the village church to announce the start of the conscription campaign. Here, instead of providing an exact translation of the officer's words, Kana (Saro-Wiwa's mother tongue, sometimes spelled Khana) serves as a way to cut through the bombastic wartime rhetoric and expose the gist of the message:

> The man with fine shirt stood up. And began to talk in English. Fine fine English. Big big words. Grammar. "Fantastic. Overwhelming. Generally. In particular and in general". Haba, God no go vex. But he did not stop there. The big grammar continued. "Odious. Destruction. Fighting". I understand that one. "Henceforth. General mobilization. All citizens. Able-bodied. Join the military. His Excellency. Powers conferred on us. Volunteers. Conscription". Big big words. Long long grammar. "Ten heads. Vandals. Enemy." Everybody was silent. Everywhere was silent like burial ground. Then they begin to interpret all that long grammar plus big big words in Kana. In short what the man is saying is that all those who can fight will join army (46-47).

This is just a dream (conscription was not implemented in Biafra until 1968; as a matter of fact, at the onset of the war there were more volunteers than could be trained, which is reflected in the novel), but one can almost picture Saro-Wiwa wishing there had been someone to translate, in such a merciless way, the propaganda that in his view was inciting so many to an unnecessary war. We have seen how Mene is incapable of following the supposedly cultured English of the "man with fine shirt," contenting himself with — somewhat implausibly — transcribing several of the grandiloquent words he uses, which so vividly bring to mind the language used by Ojukwu and Biafran propaganda at the time (see pp. 70-75).

There are other examples of this power-based asymmetry in the use of language throughout the book, especially when dealing with military authorities. Particularly revealing is the contrast between orphaned Mene's respect for the Sergeant Major, on the one hand, and his fascination

with the superior officers who review the troops later in the book, on the other. The former is something of a father figure to him — a man who "no sabi book but he know how to teach something and you will enjoy it" (75) and who tries to warn Sozaboy after a fashion about the dangers of war. Superior officers, on the other hand, display —again— "fine fine English" delivered with "brass band voice," which Mene cannot really understand: "Tall man. Speaking fine fine English. 'You boys must be smart. Salute properly …' To tell the truth, I cannot understand everything he was saying" (77); "…the Chief Commander General was speaking: 'You boys have got excellent training. You must be brave and proud of your country.' Fine fine grammar" (78). There is one thing that Mene comes to clearly understand, when he sees how, in front of them, Tan Papa (the sergeant major) is forced to march like the rest of them, forlorn of all his authority: "power pass power," he concludes, in yet one more demonstration that highest power is linked with fine, incomprehensible, highfaluting English, which in this world always trumps common sense, caution, and accessibility.

It must be noted, though, that the use of Standard English is not widespread among all military officers in *Sozaboy*. Those who share more time with the soldiers, be it in training or in the field, tend to speak the same variety as Mene. It is certainly the case of the aforementioned *San Mazor* (sergeant major) Tan Papa: "Because, as you see the gun, it is not small thing. If soza will live or die, it is gun. Don't joke with am. Love am, respect am, keep am clean every time. Don't allow cold to catch it" (74). But it is not only the NCOs who speak "rotten English;" consider the captain of Mene's unit, once deployed, when he reprimands Mene's friend Bullet for stealing his stash of alcohol and cigars: "So una no wan smoke and drink hot again? Una no go come for my tent for night come tief my drink and cigar? You bastard *ashewo* Bullet. I think you are the ring leader. I will show you pepper today" (102).

This hierarchy of registers is not exclusive to military life. Often, when reading the novel, one has the feeling that Mene's rotten English acquires a stronger Pidgin coloration when reflecting the speech of people who would indeed be speaking in Pidgin in reality. This is also observable, for instance, in some of the dialogue with Mene's driver master, whom we know to be "from another country" (11), and with Manmuswak, also a non-Dukanan. However, in *Sozaboy* the dominant rationale behind code-switching tends to respond to stylistic or expressive requirements, over any systematic, realistic distribution, which is something that the translator should keep in mind. In the following passage, for instance, Chief Birabee goes from mumbling obsequiously in strongly pidginized English when addressing a military officer, to confidently delivering instructions in Kana, the latter of which Mene relates/translates as almost correct, standard English, which contrasts not only with the chief's earlier gabbling but with the rotten English he uses himself for narrating the events:

"Who is the chief of this village?"

"Na yourself sah".

"What?"

"Well, you know, sah... ehm... ehm."

"Look, do you understand English at all?"

Chief Birabee begin to shake him head. Then he called me with hand to come. To tell you the truth when I see how Chief Birabee is confusing before this man, I am very very angry. How can Dukana chief begin to fear before small soza, even if sef that sozaman

is soza captain. If na Dukana man now, this Chief Birabee will be shouting and prouding and bullying on him. So when I came near him he begin to speak Kana to me. This time no fear for him voice. He is not smiling idiot fool smile. He is giving order.

"Ehm, tell everybody to bring out all the goats, chicken and plantain they have. We must give it to these big sozas, my friends who have been sent by the government to come and see how we are getting on here in Dukana. Do you hear me? Get moving. Tell everyone what I have said."

Look ehn, this thing surprisised me *helele*. This is Chief Birabee who is fearing for the soza, but giving me order in big strong voice. What does that mean? (39)

Also, at other points in the narration, when a transition could be expected to signal the switch from Pidgin or rotten English to Kana, it is hard to notice any difference in register. For instance, when Mene and Agnes first meet, there is no indication that they are switching languages once they discover they both hail from the same village (18). That being said, there are some instances in the book where we do witness more consistent variations in register that are not "translated," so to speak. Pastor Barika displays a Bible-influenced, standard variety of English (though not completely free of errors) when Mene appears at the refugee camp after all the villagers had thought him dead (152). The priest's is not the only case where register variation is used to show that a character comes from a more educated background. Mene's friend and big-brotherly figure in the Army, Bullet, seems able to move up and down the ladder of "sophistication" of Nigerian English. This can be appreciated in the following fragment, where Bullet moves from pidginized to standard English, complete with subjunctive. Mene reacts characteristically:

"What is the meaning of this handkerchief?!" is what I asked Bullet.

"It means surrender," he answered. "That mean to say that the porson who is holding that handkerchief does not want to fight again. He want make we settle our quarrel. Make we talk. Make we no fight again."

"So true that this enemy don tire for fight as the Chief Commander General was talking that day?" I asked.

"I no think so."

"You no think so? Are you saying that the Chief Commander General was telling lie that day to all of us? Is it?"

"I am not saying so. But sometimes, even the Chief Commander General, as you call him, can make mistakes. If he were correct, why should we be here today? And you remember the greeting we had when we first arrived here?"

As Bullet was speaking was confusing me again. I don't like how he used to talk big big grammar sometimes. (92)

Code-switching, the mix of language levels, is not exclusive to *Sozaboy* in Saro-Wiwa's work. On top of his original use of rotten English in "High Life" and his experimentation with Pidgin in poetry, some of his television characters, like Madam from *Basi & Co*, oscillate similarly between different levels of English and a number of African native languages — her mother tongue and Yoruba, in the case of Madam (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 176). Code-switching is of course not

strange in African postcolonial works. Bandia (2008) identifies it as one of the "mechanisms of polylingual postcolonial writing," and then goes on to clarify that it is "never a neutral act, since it occurs in situations of unequal power relations between languages" (142). This is of course the case of *Sozaboy*, as we are exploring, albeit with a key difference: the ground level from which the switching starts and to which it returns is not standard English. Thus, if the vernacular words included in Euro-African texts have been described as "traces" — reminders that the postcolonial writer is, in essence, a translator which do not entail "any significant disruption of the flow of the postcolonial European language discourse" (Bandia 2008, 113) — in *Sozaboy*, "fine" English is not the medium but the source of many of the "traces" that are found interspersed throughout a discourse which constantly challenges the European anglophone reader.

By and large, as opposed to Kana and Pidgin English, which are usually uniformized by Mene into rotten English, English remains untranslated in the novel. It is sometimes omitted, as we have seen in the speech of the "man with fine shirt," while at other times it is conveyed as it would happen in the fictionalized allocution, as in Bullet's blend of registers. In these flashes of "correct" English, whose faithful reproduction would be, strictly speaking, inaccessible to Mene, we can see more than ever the author winking at the reader through the narrative latticework.

One more case should be noted where Standard English makes an appearance in the text, and that is songs; in particular, soldiers' marches (the villagers use their own variety of English when singing, for instance, on page 69). Those songs play a non-irrelevant part in the story, as we have seen in the section devoted to intertextuality (pp. 75-79), since they are one of the reasons for Mene's fascination with the military that eventually leads him to become a soldier, a *soza*.

Mode: Orality

Mode, the third component of register, has to do with the role "being played by language and other semiotic systems in the situation" (Halliday 2014, 33), including the study of channel and medium. Accordingly, it can be said that *Sozaboy*, while obviously being a written text, is clearly designed to feel almost like an oral narration, as if Mene were telling his story to the reader. The naturalness of the writing contributes to that effect, aided by the use of Pidgin English, a quintessentially popular language strongly associated with orality (Deuber and Oloko 2003, 6; Romaine 1996). By adopting this mode we know that the novel is following one of the conventions of the "war" African Bildungsroman (see p. 66); it would also seem to be in accordance with Bandia's (and others') strong emphasis on the underlying orality of West African postcolonial intercultural narrative (Bandia 2008; Barbag 1978, 56; Zabus 2007, 5). It bears keeping in mind, however, that other scholars consider these oral traces to be a transitionary feature (Amuta 1985, 110), or play down their weight altogether as part of their rejection of any African essentialism (Griswold 2000, 15). Whatever the position as regards that debate, it is undoubtable that *Sozaboy* evidences most — if not all — of the lexical and syntactic markers of oral discourse which, for instance, Batchelor compiles from the work of Bandia and other scholars and identifies in Kourouma's books (Batchelor 2015, 192). Many of those features (e.g., exclamations, ideophones, repetition) are integral as well to the use of Pidgin and will be dealt with presently in the dialect section (see p. 189).

Among the rest of the oral markers listed by Batchelor we can find, first, direct interaction with the reader, of which examples are numerous throughout the book. From the trademark closing of the novel, "Believe me yours sincerely," which is repeated on four more occasions, to expressions such as "I will not tell you a lie," "I tell you," and "I am telling you," and the use of

"you know": "I think you know New York" (13), "As you know, when catechist stands up to preach in pulpit, thing can never end" (42). The use of proverbs, another oral marker, has been covered elsewhere in the dissertation (pp. 113, 120-22), but there are at least two refrains worth mentioning. "God no gree bad thing!" is repeated up to fifteen times, although significantly the first appearance comes only past the first half of the book (on page 99), signaling the point where society and morality break down, with the ensuing questioning of faith (see p. 171). The radical lawlessness and absurdity of the situation created by the conflict are further reinforced through the frequent (no less than 25 times) repetition of the tautological "war is war," which is most often equivalent to "anything can happen." Even the figure of the trickster, a staple in West African oral narratives, can be argued to be represented after a fashion by Manmaswak. On top of being male, immoral, quick-witted and prone to deception, he plays a key role in the story and would seem to be invested with an almost supernatural quality (see p. 90) which makes him into something of an evil-maker mythic figure, the agent of social dissolution.

This intended orality has several implications when considering an eventual translation: first, any deviations from the written standard must not stem from lexical or syntactical complexity (except in the occasional flashes of "big grammar") but insufficiency, misuse, and ambiguity. Second, despite the unavoidable feeling of strangeness that the language of the novel will undoubtedly elicit in any new reader, that sensation should little by little give way to an illusion of naturalness. This demands a certain coherence in register that is bound to restrict the margin for foreignizing procedures.

At the same time, caution must be applied not to adopt an excessively essentialist reading of orality. To do so would be to incur the risk of discounting the stylistic choices behind the adoption of certain devices, as long as those can be somehow absorbed into a uniformizing label

of “orality” which is then taken for granted in every and all African texts. The point is raised by Batchelor (2015, 202), whose discussion of oral markers that can also be symptomatic of trauma is, in our view, remarkably valid for *Sozaboy* as well, if one only changes the name of the protagonist from Birahima to Mene: “[T]he focus is not on traditional oral narrative structures or events, but rather on the importance of writing down Birahima’s spoken words in such a way that many different kinds of people, speaking different varieties of languages, can read his story. Orality, in this case, is used not to valorize tradition, but to individualize experience, turning a ‘child-soldier’ from a faceless, almost abstract, category into an individual with charisma and a sharp sense of humour” (ibid.).

4.5.2. Dialect

We have seen that *Sozaboy* is considered, still today, one of the most ambitious experiments in the literary use of West African Pidgin, a pioneering work in many respects. We have tracked the evolution of English and pidgin in Nigerian culture and literature in previous sections, and now we will turn to the actual features of rotten English, the particular variant of Pidgin deployed by Saro-Wiwa. And this is, precisely, the main point that should be made clear from the beginning: despite its trailblazing recognition for the use of Pidgin in literature, what we find in the novel is far from "actual," unadulterated pidgin.

Despite what he claims in the Author's note, Saro-Wiwa did not simply replicate what he heard from the mouth of soldiers and common people. His rotten English is in no small measure a literary creation, an act of "imaginative transfer" rather than mere "replication of forms" (Charles Bodunde, quoted in Newell 2006, 129). A part of Saro-Wiwa's merit lies in his ability to blend widespread procedures from different provenances into an artificial, yet plausible whole that in reality would not be found in any individual speaker (Utudjian Saint André 2002, 13). By doing so he creates what Chantal Zabus defines as a "pseudo-pidgin." This is a term which intends to stress a difference with true Nigerian Pidgin, since the two are not infrequently confused, which leads to the extended misconception that Nigerian Pidgin is indeed an incoherent, unruly mix between different levels of English with some Pidgin words and expressions thrown in the mix, very similar to what we find in *Sozaboy* — a sort of "bad English donning a top-coat of NP [Nigerian Pidgin] structure," in the words of Omamor (1997), who precisely cites Saro-Wiwa's work as an example of this pseudo-pidgin (221). Saro-Wiwa himself was well-aware of the difference, as it is apparent from his note; as a matter of fact, when he chose to replicate elsewhere the actual speech of the soldiers and NCOs he met in Bonny, the result was closer to actual pidgin:

"If una no move, the man wey dey inside no fit see una. But if una move, na dat time e fit bomb you" (1989, 137). "Yes. See wetin una don do. You see am? Idiot. Keep moving. Left, right, left, right! Una go see today! (138) "We don capture Enugu. War don end" (149).

Rotten English is, thus, a hybrid language (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998, 179; Zabus 2007, 194; Utudjian Saint André 2002, 7), an idiolect that serves, according to Chantal Zabus (2007), as a "tertium quid" with the potential of overcoming the intractable dichotomy between mother tongue and other tongue. This heterogeneity of the sources from which rotten English draws its unique vocabulary and grammar is compounded through its unsystematic application, which has been touched upon in the previous section.

To take a closer look at the specific features which make up this hybrid language, then, we will be straddling the line between the context of situation and the textual level itself, to get as close as possible to the base level at which most translation decision-making takes place. This section is based both on personal observation and on previous studies by Uwasomba (2010), Oloruntoba-Oju (1998), Zabus (2007), and Utudjian Saint André (2002).

To begin with, since we have been recently discussing the strong oral component in the book, it is worth mentioning that despite that, there is relatively little **phonological interference**. The graphical representation of the words tends to follow the conventions of English (*wey* instead of *wé*, *same* not *sem*, and a long etcetera), something which should not necessarily be a given. This is a common practice among those who use Nigerian Pidgin in creative writing, not only in the case of words with English origin, but also vocabulary from other provenances. This practice has created a certain degree of orthographic confusion (Omamor 1997, 232), and it partially explains the limitations of Pidgin as a literary vehicle: the excessive reliance on English spelling (and vocabulary) reinforces the false impression that Nigerian Pidgin is basically an inferior,

unsatisfactory variant of English, good only for those with no access to the "proper" standard (Mensah, Ukaegbu, and Nyong 2021, 179).

Most of the examples of phonological interference that do appear in the text are those relative to military terms, as we have seen: *corple* (corporal), *sanmazor* (sergeant major), etc. Interesting differences emerge when comparing those with other instances of mispronunciation in child-soldier narratives, like *samanja* instead of *sanmazor* or *soja* instead of *soza* (soldier) in the case of *Burma Boy* (Bandele 2008). The zeds in the *Sozaboy* version of the ranks would appear to be an Ogoni phonetic trace that is also found in the book in words such as *enzoy* and *zentle*. Therefore, the title itself of the novel could be argued to constitute one of the clearest examples of Oloruntoba-Oju's "Ogoninglish" (1998, 177). Also from Ogoni (or Khana) pronunciation habits, we have the peculiar use of *lomber* instead of *number* for the chapters (Zabus 2007, 196).

Another interesting feature that is strongly connected with the oral component is the abundance of **onomatopoeias and ideophones** in the novel, which are rather idiosyncratic. Ideophonic words are an important part of Nigerian Pidgin (Faraclas 1996, 194), and thus they appear in *Sozaboy*, too. Behind their use lies the willingness to reflect most immediately the chaos and confusion of the war, as in the case of the sound of guns firing ("*Gbagam*! *Gbaga gbagathe gbagam*!! *Kijijim*!! *Kikijijigim*!," 31; "*Tako, tako. Tako - tako – tako*," 47) and bullets whistling past ("*Heeeuun*! *Heeeuun*!!, 105). This is often accompanied by the drumming of Mene's panicked heart: "tam tum tum" (47); "My heart begin cut, *gbum*, *gbum*, *gbum*, *gbum*" (38; see also Uwasomba 2010, 24).

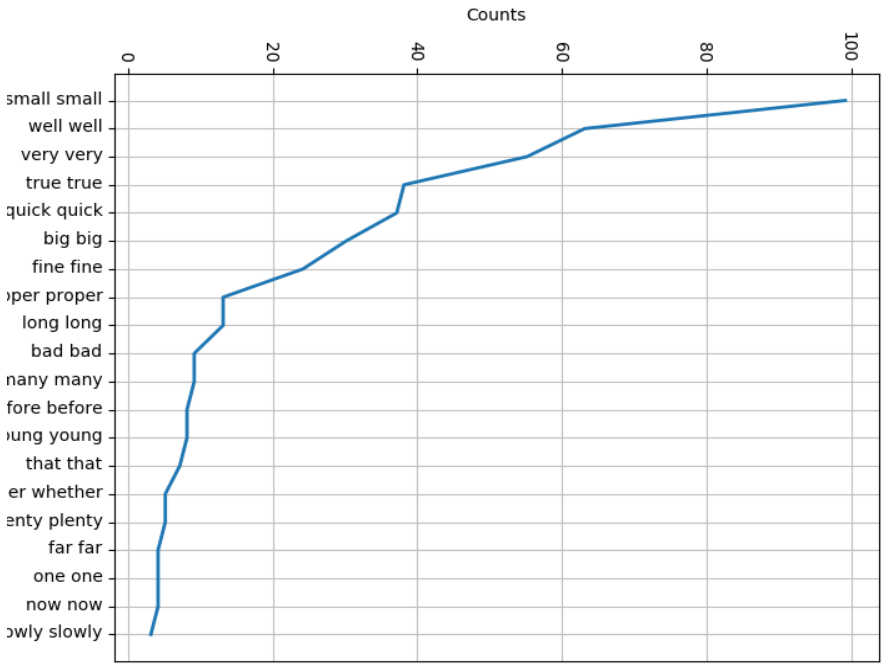
Similarly, many sentences are ended with interjections, another clear sign of orality: "Wait oh, wait oh" (42), "Girl is strong eh?" (50). The phrase-final particle *ò*, in particular, is characteristic of Nigerian Pidgin, sometimes as part of the expression "na waya oh" (in Saro-

Wiwa's rendering): "this no chop na waya oh" (29). Likewise, the exclamatory word "Chei" appears repeatedly in the novel: "Chei! You see how this prisoner is talking about death as if it is nothing to him" (162). Not only that, but very often these particles and expressions appear in one combination or another: "Chei, this Agnes go kill porson oh" (58); "Chei, this Zaza man na waya oh" (33). (For the usage of interjections in Nigerian Pidgin, see Faraclas 2013, 275). Next to *chei*, though much less frequent, we find *haba*, as in "Haba! What kain trouble be dis?" (6). The former is of Igbo origin, while *haba* is borrowed from Hausa (Unuabonah and Daniel 2020).

The most intuitive solution for the translator in these cases is to maintain onomatopoeias and interjections in the original form. However, it should be kept in mind that not even sounds are immune to cultural conventions, and some onomatopoeias are not even perceived in the same manner depending on the language (Igareda 2017, 347; Boase-Beier 2014, 102). That being said, since the sounds reflected in the novel, as we have seen, do not follow English standard conventions but seem to offer a direct look onto the underlying African reality as a case of "linguistic iconicity" (Boase-Beier 2014, 102), it seems advisable in this case to follow a foreignizing strategy and leave them as close to the original sound as possible, which might require some orthographical adaptations if sound is to be prioritized over form, as it seems it should. Therefore, "heeeuuun" might be rendered as "hiiiuuun" or even "fiiiuuun," while "kpuhu!" would probably accept the strong *j*: "kpujú."

Reduplication, on the other hand, has a very strong presence. It is one of the clearest traces of Nigerian Pidgin, where it is a common occurrence with different purposes (see, for instance, Faraclas 1996). It is used for marking number, as an intensifier device, to signal "quality in large measure" (ibid.) and for derivation. In the case of *Sozaboy*, we mostly find reduplicated adjectives ("true true"), but also adverbs ("before before") and — very seldom — nouns ("work work work").

The most frequent reduplicated word is, by far, “small,” with 99 occurrences. This can be used as an intensifier (“the small small people”), in the meaning of “gently” (“My master was laughing small small”) or “a little” (“my man begin to stand small small”). Below there is a graph of the twenty most frequent reduplications in the book, for reference. Even though reduplication is abundant, most of the couplets appear just once (as many as in twenty occasions) or twice (seven). The number of common reduplications is, instead, relatively low, and it quickly declines as we move down along the top five, from “small small” (99) to “well well” (63), “very very” (55), “true true” (38) and “quick quick” (37). Replicating this mechanism offers an excellent opportunity for the translator wishing to “foreignize” the target text while respecting the underlying structures of the specifically African substrate. Furthermore, reduplication is also common in Spanish-based creoles, where it serves approximately similar functions (Bartens 2004).



It is worth noting that, in addition to reduplication, repetition in general is also prevalent in the book. This is used expressively by the author to reinforce certain impressions. It is significant, for instance, a passage commented by Utudjian Saint André where the word "trouble" is repeated no less than twelve times in a single paragraph (2002, 10). This abundance of repetitions could be considered a sign of impoverished vocabulary, and also one more marker of orality and therapeutic storytelling (Batchelor 2015, 194). For a total number of 84,177 words, *Sozaboy* presents a vocabulary range of 2,887 different words (TTR 0.03). This can be compared with *Romeo and Juliet*, which having 4,955 types for 100,553 tokens presents a TTR of 0.04, higher than *Sozaboy* despite being over 25% longer as far as token count is concerned. Admittedly, the type/token ratio, while a simple and popular measurement method, is not without acknowledged problems, but it is probably safe to assume that as far as vocabulary range is concerned, *Sozaboy* lies in the lower range of the spectrum. This "very limited English vocabulary" is forewarned by Saro-Wiwa in his Author's Note, and it is also a feature observed in most new learners of any language. This is, indeed, one of the reasons which have led many scholars to characterize rotten English as "primary school English" (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998; Raji 1998; Utudjian Saint André 2002; Dathorne, quoted in Zabus 2007), which is entirely compatible with Mene's background: we know from his own telling that he only studied as far as elementary six, but he could not move on to secondary school because her mother could not afford the fees. He is nonetheless very proud of what English he knows, which is heavily influenced by the Pidgin he must have heard in his visits to Port Harcourt as an apprentice driver, especially to the motor park. This characterization of the dialect as primary-school English offers a promising source of inspiration for the translator, since the particularities of speakers of Spanish as a Second Language are extensively documented, and

easily recognizable by every speaker. However, attention must be paid not to fall into stereotypes, or in taking recourse to distortions that are incompatible with the Pidgin/Khana substrate.

Another lexical feature that is especially emphasized by Uwasomba (2010) and which definitely moves us away from primary school is the abundant use of **lewd vocabulary** to be found in the novel. The word *fuck* and its variations appear 21 times in the book, especially in the bantering conversations held by the group of villagers made up of Zaza, Duzia, Bom, and Terr Kole. It is also them who are very explicit in their quips to Mene about Agnes and their sex life. Their vocabulary on those occasions is particularly colorful, with terms of pidgin provenance such as *blokkus*, *toto,* and the like. Special mention must be made, in this category, of Mene's ever-present expression of choice for erections, which he seems to take up from Agnes after she uses it with him for the first time when they meet and she points out that his "snake" is standing "like say 'e dey hungry" (14). After that, Sozaboy will often remark that his own "man begin to stand up like snake wey no get house." Preserving this playful obscenity, and the rest of them will doubtlessly pose difficulties for the translator, who should refrain from attenuating them since this unprejudiced and open treatment of sex is one of the contributions of oral narrative to the African novel according to some scholars (see p. 116).

The matter of **Pidgin traces** in the novel, beyond reduplication, deserves a closer look. Although, as we have repeatedly stated, rotten English is in no way "pure" Nigerian Pidgin, it can be more or less accurately placed in a continuum that ranges from it to English. Chantal Zabus uses Rebecca Agheyisi's classification of six levels, where most African writers adapt their representation of Pidgin to levels three or four. Somewhere in between these two levels lies, according to Zabus(2007), the balance between two risks that should be familiar to us by now: the more "faithful" transcription of level three could soon make for tiresome reading for even a well-

meaning foreign reader, while the more anglicized spelling of level four is dangerously close to a mere corrupted version of standard English. Reproducing some of the examples could perhaps be informative at this point:

> **Level 3**: Andrew, carry you trobu comot fo dere. You no see say na work i dey do? Hen! Wetin you dey talk? [...] If you hear de money wey dem tek buy'em, you go run.
>
> **Level 4**: Andrew, carry you trouble come out for dere. You no see say na work he dey do? Hen! What ting you dey talk? [...] If you hear de money which dem take buy'em, you go run.
>
> **Level 5**: Andrew, carry your mischief come out from there. You no see that is work he doing? Hen! What thing you talking? [...] If you hear the money that they paid, you go run.
>
> (Zabus 2007, 194–5)

Saro-Wiwa, as most of his colleagues, settles for the fourth level, according to Zabus; this makes even more sense if we take into account that he is unique among them in his using this variant for a book-length work, even though one of the complications with *Sozaboy* is that it does not stick to a homogeneous idiolect at all times but oscillates depending on the linguistic situation depicted at any given time and the stylistic and expressive requirements of the author. It could be more accurate, in our view, to describe rotten English as existing mostly in an alternation between levels four and five. While a full list of pidgin traces seems a doomed and somewhat pointless

endeavor, the translator should be well aware of the most salient pidgin elements in the book, and how they alternate with more standard forms. Later, when studying translation solutions, we can take back this short list as a basis to propose alternatives. We will use Faraclas's chapter on Nigerian Pidgin in the *Survey of Pidgin and Creole Languages* as a checklist of sorts (Faraclas 2013). We will skip those features that are indistinguishable from standard English usage (for instance, the use of *di* to mark definiteness, or *dis* and *dat* as demonstratives, since Saro-Wiwa spells them with *th* and *e* at any rate). For the sake of concision, no mention will be made of any Pidgin features that are *not* used in the novel:

1. Nouns

   Noun number is, exceptionally, unmarked as in Nigerian Pidgin (NP). The stative verb "plenty" is sometimes used to signal plurality as well: "Tears just **plenty** for my eye but I cannot cry." (137). "[I[f you go inside the African Upwine Bar, you will see **plenty** cockroach **man** and proper **cockroach** too" (13). Irregular plurals such as *children* and *people* are usually maintained: "Kole have **plenty wife** and **plenty children**" (24).

2. Pronouns

   Rotten English replicates — again, not systematically — the basic features of the NP pronoun system, which in turn follows many of the characteristics of Bene-Kwa languages. Thus, it is not uncommon to find the second person plural pronoun *una*: "**Una** don sleep for last time today" (80). This coexists with the un-pidgin plural *you* ("but as **you** all know," "**you** are all hearing what I am saying"), sometimes even in the same passage coming from the mouth of the same speaker: "**You** think war front na

hotel bar. God don punish all of **you** today. When **una** finish for dis Kampala, **una** go remember de day wey **una** mama born **una**" (101-2). NP makes no gender distinction in pronouns, using *im* in most cases for the third person singular. In *Sozaboy*, however, as subjects we find both *he* (sometimes *'e*) and *she*, and *him* (again, anglicizing *im*): "Tan Papa go vex if **he** see soza wey **him** don train begin to cry because of water" (82). No occurrences have been found of *him* as a feminine subject, although the object form *am* is used indistinctly for *him* ("Because he is very good man … Bom and Duzia dey respect **am** plenty," 23), *her* ("Agnes laugh again, and me, I join **am**. Then I ask **am** what 'e think of the trouble," 19) or *it* ("Agnes. Na good name. Na English name. I like **am**," 18). Something similar happens with the invariable third-person singular possessive *him*: "Is this the picken that when **him mama** born am everybody was very happy and dancing and drinking?" (139); "By the time I get to the house of **Agnes him mama**, my brain don begin clear small small" (35). The third person plural invariable *dem* is also used in several occasions, not anglicized to *them* in this case: "They were laughing small small and looking at us. I no like as **dem** dey laugh" (83).

3. Adjectives

Although Saro-Wiwa sticks by and large to the standard English usage of adjectives, instances are found of the use of stative verbs in verb position, accompanied especially by *pass* to express superlative relations: "Praps the fight will **strong pass** the fight in motor park" (18); "He cannot talk like that to Kole and Bom and Duzia because they **old pass** am" (30).

4. Prepositions

   NP tends to use the general preposition *for* in a great variety of functions (Faraclas 1996, 130), and *Sozaboy* echoes that in several occasions: “If they hear **for** Dukana that woman is commanding me…” (54), “my master motor still dey **for** garage” (65).

5. Articles

   In NP, indefiniteness is marked much less often than definiteness, which is indicated by the article *di* (anglicized to *the* in *Sozaboy*). When indefiniteness *is* marked, there is no article, but *one* and *some* can be used for the singular and plural, respectively. There are examples of this all along *Sozaboy* (coexisting with the non-pidgin article *a*): “It was evening time that I saw **Ø** white handkerchief” (96), “Every time you will see him without shirt and tying **one** big cloth on his waist” (25).

6. Verbs

   Verbs in Nigerian Pidgin are invariable, while, following again the practice of Benue-Kwa languages, tense, aspect, and mood can be indicated by specific markers. *Sozaboy*, once more, alternates between Pidgin and English usage. Thus, at times third-person singular marking is omitted: “He **have** not married any white woman at all.” Furthermore, we find instances of most of the particles used to indicate mood, tense, and aspect (TMA):

   - *Make* (NP *mek*) is — often — used for the subjunctive: “Dem no want **make** I chop?” (5) “You say **make** we no give trouble” (7). Notice how this is the only

marker to appear before the subject, and not before the verb, both in NP and in *Sozaboy*'s Rotten English.

- The completive aspect is indicated at times both by the realis marker *come* and (more often) the past-tense completive indicator *done*: "So as I was thinking all this thing, the lorry **come** stop" (81). "By that time all those sozas **done** become like woman" (28). This is sometimes accompanied by *finish* appearing after the verb: "when we **don** marry **finish**, she will tell my Mama wetin him want make him husband do" (59).
- The future marker *go* also makes some appearances: "Anybody who get money, chop or cloth must bring it. We **go** give am to those porsons wey just return." (6).
- *Dey* is quite common as an incompletive or progressive marker: "Him bottom **dey** shake as she walk" (13).
- The anterior marker *bin* makes one appearance: "Zaza have begun to answer the very question wey I **bin** wan ask am" (33).
- The modal *fit*, working roughly as "be able (to)," is also frequent in the book: "…we no **fit** hear the noise of gun again" (145).
- Likewise with the verb *sabi*, as "knowing how (to)": "Then you can get your licence whether you **sabi drive** or you no **sabi**" (1).
- For the rest of the modal verbs, Saro-Wiwa tends to stick to the English usage (e.g. *like to* + V instead of *like* + V), with some rare exceptions: "I **want** see how him breast dey" (13); "The fear no **gree** make I chop" (121). (Ironically, with the modal *must* Mene sometimes deviates from Pidgin when this would

coincide with English: “So we **must to** believe you,” 7; “Bullet say **we must to** be careful,” 105).

7. The copula

   The three forms used for the copula in Nigerian Pidgin can be found in numerous passages of the novel, coexisting of course with the English *to be*. These are the identity copula *bi* (*be* in the novel): “This gun wey dey shoot no **be** like other guns you know” (112); the locative-existential copula *de* (*dey*): “This time, not me alone **dey** for the room. Plenty of us” (161); and the copular highlighter *nà* (*na*): “Everybody think he is small boy but **na** lie. He knows something” (41).

8. Word order

   While the basic word order in Nigerian Pidgin is SVO just like in English and Spanish, the negation is carried out through the negative marker *no* between subject and the pre-verbal marker slot, and this is reflected occasionally in the novel: “So I **no go** miss anything that the white handkerchief will do” (93).

9. The passive voice

   As Faraclas points out, “there is no true passive voice in Nigerian Pidgin” (2013, 182), but the two mechanisms described by him to move subjects from the initial position can be found as well in *Sozaboy* (along with true passive English sentences): the third-person pronoun *dem* as impersonal (“Na one place **dem** dey call FRONT we dey go,”

81), and the interchange of subject and object with some verbs ("Then fear come catch me," 174; "But sleep catch me well well," 85).

10. Questions

The NP lack of order inversion in yes-no questions makes occasional appearances, especially coupled with the particle *abi*, borrowed from other Nigerian languages: "**Abi** your Commanding Officer dey chop all the food by himself?" (96).

Some of the compounds used as question-words both in many Bene-Kwa languages and in Nigerian Pidgin can be found at some point in the novel, very particularly *wetin* (from *what thing*), but also (just twice) *whosai* (from *what side*): "'**Wetin** be your name?' she asked" (18); "Before dis time, I no know **wetin** to die mean" (112); "**Whosai** dem dey keep una chop?" (96).

11. Subordination

As far as subordination is concerned, there are numerous examples of the relativizer *wey*: "[H]is ghost must move round like porson **wey** no get house" (180); "I see something like bird with sharp noise **wey** fly near my head" (89). The verb *say* is also used as subordinator for noun clauses in more than a few cases: "You tink **say** na my salary I use for all dese things?" (2); "I see **say** my best friend for dis war front don die" (111). Again, this coexists with pure English particles, even in sentences with other Pidgin elements (such as reduplication and invariable verb, in the following example): "All those fine fine things inside the shop **which** the people have leave" (140).

12. Topicalization

    The topicalizer particle *sef* (from the English *self*) is used to emphasize, as Faraclas points out, "almost any element in the sentence, including the verb" (183): "You are juju **sef**." (132); "He said I have already dead **sef** by the time he saw me" (123); "Hardly **sef** that I can hear them" (173); "Okonkwo is bigger bigger man in new government than before **sef**" (2). The construction *even sef* is very common as well: "He just sit down cool, no trouble. **Even sef** he does not smile" (63).

From the lexical point of view, we find core Pidgin **vocabulary**, with words such as "chop," which appears 105 times in the text (135 if we include the curiously un-pidgin derivatives "chopped" (10) and "chopping" (20)), and which coexist with equivalents like "eat" (54 appearances, including derivative forms) and "food" (53 occurrences). There are many other examples, most of which can be found in the glossary included at the end of the book: "mumu," "wahala," "picken," or "palaver," to name just a few. Together with this, we find words borrowed from other Nigerian languages, such as the Hausa "lailai," the Igbo "Okporoko," or the Yoruba "Wayo" (Uwasomba 2010, 24). Special attention must be paid by the translator to maintain as much as possible the scarce words of Khana origin: "'wuruwuru' (chicanery; cheating); 'ugbalugba' (problem); 'tombo' (palm-wine)" and 'Sarogua,'" (Zabus 2007, 196). In turn, the name of Mene's village, Dukana, is itself a "coinage ('a market in Khana') based on the pattern of the existent Gokana ('village in Khana')" (Feuser 1987, 54).

4.6. Towards a strategy for the translation of *Sozaboy*

The question of how to translate *Sozaboy* into another European language, specifically Spanish, is, of course, the ultimate concern of this entire dissertation, but it is important to keep in mind that, in some regards, the source text, the original novel, is already a translation itself, albeit not in the usual sense. We have discussed the expanded notion of cultural translation and how the act of writing in a European language that is not their mother tongue can be already considered an act of translation on the part of postcolonial authors. Naturally, this is also the case in African literature, where "most writers have embraced standard English or French, in some cases indicating that such use represents African languages 'in translation'." (Buzelin and Winer 2008). This is, once more, best explored in the African context by Paul Bandia (2008), who draws several parallelisms between postcolonial intercultural writing, understood as "an attempt to recreate in a dominant colonizing language the life-world of the colonized," and translation. After all, they both describe a "movement from one language culture to another," even though the direction of that movement is inverted in each case: in the case of postcolonial intercultural writing the displacement is metaphoric and outwards from one's own culture, as opposed to what is usually the case in standard interlingual translation (3). Thus, rotten English is without a doubt one of those "instances of interlanguage" found in postcolonial texts that far from being impoverishing or a mere case of interference constitute a "felicitous blending" (36), a "third code" different from the writing in untranslated works (Boase-Beier 2014, 24) which sets it apart and makes it one of those cases whereby newness enters the world, to use Bhabha's famous phrase.

Therefore, *Sozaboy* could already be considered a translation in this metaphorical sense. However, one would do well to remember that inside the conceit of the novel Mene himself, the narrator, is often acting as a translator as well, in the conventional, practical, interlingual

understanding of the word. All the interactions between Dukanans, in particular, are delivered in the same "rotten English" as the rest of the narration, even though they presumably are conducted in Kana, which is sometimes made explicit in the text.

4.6.1. General considerations on the translation of linguistic variation

When dealing with "lectal" variations of language, the translator faces, in broad terms, a couplet of successive alternatives: first, they must decide whether to keep the marked nature of the language or neutralize it and forego any such code-switching in the target text. Then, if the former option is chosen, there remains the crucial decision of whether to try and find a more or less "equivalent" dialect in the target culture or to "create" a variant of their own. We will consider the implications of each of these decisions in short but, as is so usually the case with literary works, the actual advisability of one option over another will largely depend on the stylistic characteristics of the text itself. This is one of the reasons why it felt important to ground all the general considerations discussed in this dissertation on the analysis of a specific case study. Thus, without straying from the case of Nigerian Pidgin, it is not the same to have a work essentially written in Standard English where some mesolectal variant halfway towards Pidgin is used sparsely for comedic purposes, for instance, than a poem fully written in "true" Pidgin like those found in Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *If to say I bi soja* or plays such as Segun Oyekunle's *Katakata for Sofahead* or Tunde Fatunde's *Oga Na Tief Man*, where Nigerian Pidgin has a much larger presence, that goes well beyond a passing joke at the expense of the speaker's lack of culture.

Of course, the process is not as sequential as it might seem. On the face of it, the very fact that relinquishing such a potentially important feature of the source text is even considered an

option points towards one of those issues that tend to lead to discussions about the notion of "untranslatability." As is often the case when dealing with cultural problems in translation, the difficulty stems not so much from the need of an abstract mental effort on the part of the translator to try and find the proper equivalent, but from the absence altogether of such an equivalent in any meaningful sense of the word. At this point, the dangers involved in the use of the analogies entailed by cultural equivalence should be clear, especially when dealing with an asymmetry of power whereby a subaltern culture is particularly vulnerable to invisibilization or unwanted assimilation. Not only that, but such adaptations are almost invariably jarring for even the least politically aware of the readers. As Rabadán points out, even social dialects or sociolects have an associated geographical component that renders their transformation into a local variant unsatisfactory and unacceptable (1991, 84).

Faced with this conundrum, it is understandable that some translators opt for neutralizing the problematic linguistic variance altogether, especially when preserving it is not perceived as crucial for the proper understanding of the text — for instance, when their appearance is highly localized or just intended to provide some local flavor, without signaling essential differences between characters depending on their geographical of social background. There is loss involved, of course, but it could be argued that the strangeness caused by the use of a dialect that very obviously does not belong to the social or geographical context of the narration is even more detrimental for the enjoyment of the work in question. Other translators, however, are loath to lose that aspect of the source text, which can sometimes be integral to the proper reception of the intended meaning. In the case of *Sozaboy*, subtitled "A novel in rotten English", this must undoubtedly be the case, since we have seen that the particular dialect is the most essential stylistic component in the novel.

We move on, then, to the possible avenues for the conveyance of linguistic variation. We have already touched upon the issues associated with the usage of an existing dialect in the target language. In the case of literature, as López Guix points out, these can usually be understood as a loss of the reader's *ilusio*, a breakdown of the suspension of disbelief (2015, 266). Furthermore, even if the reader were to "buy" into the adopted equivalent dialect, the assimilation of cultural realities, equating social differences in the source culture to others in the target context, can contribute to concealing difference and assimilating more vulnerable cultures. It also tends to perpetuate stereotypes in the target culture, where some dialects are commonly perceived as uncultured or incomprehensible. For those reasons, in recent times translators have often tried to create their own variants, using different techniques. After all, even though translators willing to preserve or even enhance reader engagement rifle through dialects and registers in the target language in search of solutions, their goal usually has more to do with experimentation than mimicry (Boase-Beier 2014, 68).

4.6.2. Existing translations and their approaches

Focusing our attention on *Sozaboy*, in the existing translations we can find examples of the approaches we just discussed. As of this time, there exist no Spanish or Catalan versions, to the best of our knowledge, but there are translations into French (2003), Italian (2005), and German (1997) that we have been able to consult. All of these books include metatexts about the process of translation. Interestingly, very different strategies have been followed in every case. The French translators, Samuel Millogo and Amadou Bissiri (credited on the cover), write a brief "Note des traducteurs" where they explain that, in order to maintain the oral style and the linguistic stratification of the novel, they have opted for an adaptation procedure that substitutes a variety of French Pidgin — the language that originated around the shores of the Abidjan Lagoon, in the

Ivory Coast — for the original rotten English. Consequently, they have elaborated their own glossary, which they include at the end instead of the one found in the OT. It is worth mentioning again that the recourse to a "functional equivalence" between dialects is usually frowned upon among translators, unless, perhaps, it be part of a wholesale "cultural transportation" of the original, i.e. the adaptation of a theatre play to a local setting.

The Italian version is also the result of a cooperative process between two individuals, but in this case one is the translator, Roberto Piangatelli, while the other is the editor Itala Vivan, whose contribution is registered on the title page ("Traduzione di / Roberto Piangatelli / a cura di / Itala Vivan"). It is Vivan who writes the critical note at the end of the novel, where translation is discussed among other points of interest in Saro-Wiwa's life and work. Perhaps that explains her emphasis on the "impossibility" of the translation the reader will have by then just read (locations 3491, 3498). The Italian version was published some years after the French version. Vivan acknowledges that fact, while also explaining that the strategy used by Millogo and Bissiri was not available to the Italian translator (who would have had to turn to a non-creole dialect). Instead, the solution resided in the participation of a translator gifted with two decisive qualities: a) a familiarity with Nigerian Pidgin and culture, and b) a fast-paced writing style that, coupled with a deep sense of compassion, allowed him to get under the protagonist/narrator's skin and "feel" the same way he must have felt. She concludes the passage devoted to the translation by mentioning the different linguistic transgressions deployed by Piangatelli to "make the text come alive" for the Italian reader: atypical use of adverbs, verb tenses, and conjunctions; repetitions, ellipsis, etc. (loc. 3510).

The German version was the first of the three to be published, in 1997. The translator, Gerhard Grotjahn Pape, also wrote a 6-page afterword in which he mainly contextualizes the novel,

providing information about the Biafran war, along with an overview of Mene's arc in the book. Towards the end, he broaches the subject of the language. Grotjahn-Pape's stress is on the popular nature of the original, on how fluid and easy to read it is. One can assume that this is also the reason to include the historical overview of the war since, as he explains, the memories of the conflict were still very much alive and Nigerian readers would know exactly what the book was about despite the absence of proper nouns. We pointed out something similar in the Context of Culture section, when we mentioned that there were different layers of interpretation depending on the familiarity of the reader with the Nigerian background, although it must be taken into account that the German translation was published almost twenty years ago at the time of writing these lines. However, there are reasons to believe that today the echoes of the conflict still "haunt" the country, to paraphrase an article published in *The New York Times* on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war (Siollun 2020). After the inevitable mention to the Author's Note, Grotjahn-Pape clarifies that "broken" is not simply "bad" English, but a self-confident, innovative use of this language, on the way to something new, perhaps Nigerian. His emphasis on the popularity and accessibility of the original to the Nigerian public leads him to reject any excessive literality that could be cumbersome to the reader. He also discards the use of an inexistent German-based pidgin, or the adaptation to an established German dialect, such as "Berlinerisch," or even a sort of standard foreigner-German (Ausländerdeutsch). Instead, he claims to have opted for a variety of German that feels as everyday as Nigerian "broken English:" Mene speaks just like any not particularly educated young man.

All of these translation strategies entail their own risks. If we place them in a continuum ranging from less to more domestication, with the French edition on one extreme and the German on the other, respectively, we can see that both approaches have been criticized under the inevitable

charge of unfaithfulness. It is not unusual for translations to be discussed only in terms of their shortcomings, often with anecdotal evidence and no attention to the translator's explicit or implicit motives, or — more seldom — to be praised in the most general terms. The fact that in this case the criticism comes in the form of academic articles speaks of the challenges associated with translating this sort of work, which is both positive, in that attention is being paid to authors, cultures, and linguistic variants which not long ago would have been dismissed out of hand — the case of Amos Tutola and the initial criticism to his *Palm-wine Drinkard* comes to mind, (Garuba 2009, 244) —, and negative for the translators, who know that they are going to come under additional scrutiny, often prejudiced, destructive or uninformed, though perhaps well-meaning. Regardless of the merits of these criticisms, it is still useful to consider them even if only as cautionary tales of the dangers associated with each strategy, regardless of how grounded (or not) they are in each particular case — something that would require more space and linguistic competence in the languages involved. In the case of the French translation, D. Delas (2002), interestingly, does not really object to the choice of an existing French-based pidgin, but to the fact that, by using it, Millogo and Bissiri have tended to "overpidginize" — even to the point of caricature — the target text, at the expense of the rhythm, the vibration that in Delas's view is key to the quality of the novel. In other words, he claims the translators have overestimated the "language" factor to the detriment of the "speech" factor. After all, he says, except for the mimesis of a certain Nigerian everyday dialect, translating Ken Saro-Wiwa is neither more nor less difficult than any other literary translation. One is reminded here of Boase-Beier's crucial questioning of "which aspects of style are universal and which are inextricably linked with a particular language" (2014, 12), and also of Luis Magrinyà, and his emphasis on the difference between linguistic and stylistic features — between what is conventional in a language and what belongs to the particular

style or author —, to the point that, in his view, the capacity to correctly identify that difference between the two is perhaps the key mark of the good literary translator and, indeed, the good writer (2015, loc 181). In connection with this, I have found in my experience as a translator but also as a lecturer that one of the hardest things for a translator is resisting to reveal in some way the amount of research they have had to carry out for a certain text, especially when it has proven particularly challenging. This may be partly explained by the fondness one so often develops for the source text, and the desire to make sure that the readers do not miss out on anything, including what goes on "behind the scenes." However, another possible reason is the — probably justified — fear that otherwise the time and resources devoted to a difficult text which may not necessarily seem so *prima facie* will go unappreciated. It might be that the felicitous circumstance of there existing a West African French-based pidgin to be vindicated led the translators to abuse it, "overtranslating" the source text, to use Delas's term. To conclude with the French translation, below are two examples "pris entre mille" of what Delas understands to be the excessive additions and interventions on the part of the translators, which on the face of it could be argued to be not uncharacteristic of any translation from English to a Romance language:

- You must go far in motor before you can get to Pitakwa : *On doit prendre camion partir loin avant d'arriver à Pitakwa*
- When I reached home that night, I cannot sleep because of thinking how I will get the money to give that Mr. Okpara so that he can take me as soza. Then before daybreak I said I must tell my mother about it: *Quand je suis arrivé à la maison cette nuit-là, je peux pas dormir parce que je suis là penser comment je vais faire pour gagner l'argent pour donner ce M Okpara-là pour que il va me prendre pour foire minitaire. Mais avant matin, j'ai dit il fout je vais parler ça ma maman.*

The complaints leveled by Nkechi Obodoeze and Nneka Ugagu-Dominic (2016) at the German translation are almost the opposite. It must be said that in this case, in our view, we are dealing with a somewhat poorly grounded article, which for instance does not engage with the afterword written by the translator (who is only mentioned by name in the title); this is but one example of their general failure to address the possible motives for the choices they criticize. Despite this rather judgmental outlook, some of their observations align with certain issues that could reasonably be expected to arise from a translation of the sort advocated by Grotjahn-Pape, with his emphasis on naturalness and fluidity for the target reader, and this is why they will be considered here. The German translation, in their view, "contradicts" or "falsifies" the original text by indulging in intolerable omissions, by failing to reproduce the characteristic reduplications, by literally translating some idioms (which would seem to contradict the overall professed strategic outlook of the translation), by translating Pidgin English into standard German, by correcting the wrong use of pronouns and the improper concordance of verbs in many passages of the source text, by adding articles that should also be there in the original were it written in standard English, and by improving punctuation. They do approve, on the other hand, that Grotjahn-Pape creates his own neologisms to translate words such as *surprisation* (Überraschierung) or *gratulate* (gratulationieren), and that he preserves culture-specific items in the original word, adding a definition in the glossary (which also happens in the source text).

4.6.3. Applicability of the different strategies for a Spanish translation

If we move on to consider the applicability of each of these strategies in a hypothetical Spanish translation, we could begin by studying the "French" solution: finding a similar linguistic/colonial context and adapting the language of the entire novel to it. Leaving aside the debate on the legitimacy of such a procedure, the fact remains that the Spanish-language domain, much like the Italian situation portrayed by Vivan, does not have such an isomorphic cultural environment to draw from. Despite Spain's colonial past, its footprint in black Africa is reduced to Equatorial Guinea. However, the imposition of Spanish shared with that of French a sort of *dirigisme linguistique* (Zabus 2007, 20; Ndongo-Bidyogo 2001, 515) that has prevented the appearance of a distinctly separated Guinean dialect (Lipski 2007b). One reason for this is precisely the preexistence of an English-based pidgin that works as a *lingua franca* among the masses, despite the fact that Spanish is the language of education. The upshot of this situation is a scarcity of Guinean literary works that explore any local usages of Spanish that may deviate from the standard norm, and the absence of a truly experimental postcolonial literature from where to draw inspiration (Ndongo-Bidyogo 2001, 516). Even works praised for their use of a lively popular language and specific dialectal forms (ibid., 521), such as the collection of short stories Adjá-adjá (Nkogo Esono 2000), barely contain a few isolated words derived from local languages (*adjá*, *ongua-ongua*…) or the local variety of Pidgin (i.e. "pus-pu'," from *push*, referring to a wheelbarrow) and some sparse attempts at imitating an uneducated or foreign pronunciation ("sosio" for *socio*, or "idangtitat" for *identidad*, respectively). That being said, recent years have seemingly witnessed an increase in the academic interest in Guinean Spanish, and it would most likely be worth comparing those deviations from the standard in search of "functional equivalences" to be applied when translating *Sozaboy*, and other similar works. For her translation

of the Pidgin fragments in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, for instance, Marta Sofía López Rodríguez tried to replicate the speech of Guineans he knew, although she acknowledges the difficulty of the task and declares herself not entirely satisfied with the result (Rodríguez-Murphy 2014, 249).

It would seem, nevertheless, that the Spanish translator is bound to end up using a solution similar to the one applied by the Italian translator, who had to adopt "una strategia da scrittore" (loc. 3504). It is roughly the same approach used by Gabriel López Guix in his translation of Tom Wolfe's novel *A Man in Full* (2014), where he had to deal with the many "dialectal" variations portrayed by the author, who tried to provide a realistic rendering of the speech of so-called American rednecks; poor, urban African-Americans; and, interestingly for this study, Hawaiian-Pidgin users. In his Translator's Note, he starts by explaining that modern literary reception patterns preclude the use of dialects in the Translation Culture that could work as "functional equivalents," since that would be considered an "abusive adaptation" (thus sharing Rosa Rabadán's opinion, quoted above, on p. 204), and discarding the mythical cliché that the translator's task involves replicating the same effects operated by the original text on the original readers. One of the reasons that advise against this Utopian endeavor, according to López Guix, should sound familiar by now: the cultural diversity of the Anglophone world prevents the construction of any "ideal reader" to whom the original book is addressed. (To this we might add: it prevents the construction of any ideal reader *outside* an imperial logic whereby the ideal reader is always the "metropolitan" reader.) Faced with those obstacles, his strategy has been that of renouncing all pretensions of realism, opting for *creation* instead of *imitation*, although he quickly stresses that this is not just an arbitrary sort of creation: the result must be coherent and follow as much as possible the formal features observed in the original (syntactical variations, non-English vocabulary, etc.). In this, he can be agued to be in agreement with Boase-Beier's observation that

literary translators tend to "make stylistic choices which echo the original" (Boase-Beier 2014, 69). To that effect, for his Spanish version of the Hawaiian creole, López Guix took resource to a number of techniques based on the premise of identifying the major formal features of the linguistic variant and then trying to reproduce them in Spanish. Most of the procedures he used will be analyzed in due time, but among them there was the search for inspiration — especially with a view to effecting the many necessary alterations in the verbal system — in one of the few existing Spanish-based pidgins, the *Chabacano* spoken in the Philippines (López Guix 2015, 273). In particular, López Guix mentions the adoption of the Chabacano preverbal particle *ya* to indicate past tense, to mirror the simplified verbal system of the Hawaiian pidgin that uses *wen* for the same purpose. This is particularly interesting for us since Nigerian Pidgin shares this feature with Hawaiian Pidgin and, in fact, with all creoles, which "use of a system of preverbal particles to express tense, mood, and aspect" (Bakker 2008, 141). This opens up the possibility of exploring other Spanish-based pidgins and creoles in order to find strategies for the transference of some of the formal features of "rotten English" into Spanish, especially those more clearly associated with Nigerian Pidgin. To do that, we can carry out a brief survey of the oft-overlooked history of the influence of African speakers in the Spanish language, and of the present-day pidgins with Spanish as a lexifier and an African-language substrate.

4.6.4. Vindication of Afro-Hispanic language as a source

4.6.4.1. Early pidginized Afro-Hispanic language

For this section, a large debt is owed to the work of John Lipski, since, as he asserts in his *A History of Afro-Hispanic Language* "despite the central importance of Africans in the

development of the Spanish language and its spread throughout the Americas, the African contribution to Spanish is rarely considered on a par with more 'traditional' language contact situations" (2005, 2). This contact started apparently when the Moorish invaders brought black Africans to the Iberian peninsula, while their presence among Christians can be dated back to the conquest of Seville in 1248. Before the end of the 13th century, black slaves were present in Majorca, Valencia, and Aragon as well (19). The figures would of course be boosted after the colonization of America and the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. The actual number of slaves brought to Spanish America is hard to calculate, but the best estimates range from 1,555,000 to 1,687,000, of which almost half ended up in Cuba (46). Despite this prolonged contact, as we said, testimonies of African influence on the Spanish language are scarce. There are two main obstacles to the study of Afro-Hispanic language according to Lipski. First, there is the fact that, at least before the 19th century, very little effort was made to depict the particular use of Spanish by blacks outside of literature, where it was employed almost exclusively for comedic purposes, and often with racist overtones (as is the case of some *sainetes* and *entremeses* of the Golden Age). Exaggerations and misrepresentations were common, and the humor tended to revolve around the trope of "the *negrito* who spoke 'bad' Spanish" (8). Another obstacle was the fact that "Afro-Hispanic speech was never considered systematically 'different' enough from natively spoken Spanish for any particular attention to be paid to this variety" (ibid). Part of the reason for this is that, with the (only relative) exception of big trading hubs like Cartagena and Havana, the proportion of African-born *bozales* — "workers who learned Spanish as a second language" (11) — to native Spanish-speakers was always small.

Lipski carries out a very thorough study of early Afro-Portuguese and Afro-Hispanic texts, which will not be reproduced here for reasons of space. The masters of this *habla de negros*, as it

was known, were the great playwrights Lope de Rueda in the 16th century, and Lope de Vega in the 17th century. These early works are rife with xenophobic characterizations and crude puns, and it seems fair to assume that comedic intent often took precedence over any effort towards faithful representation. In fact, over time some linguistic stereotypes became established that may have had little to do with actual Afro-Hispanic language. Nevertheless, according to Lipski, there are grounds to consider, with all due caution, that these literary texts of the Golden Age offer a true window into early Afro-Hispanic speech. The features he identifies go beyond the more or less universal phenomena to be found in the speech of any non-native speaker, regardless of their origin, and can be connected to "phonetic and morphological traits which are empirically documented in existing Afro-Iberian pidgins and creoles, or which are logical extensions of African areal characteristics" (93). These features identified by Lipski in particular Spanish authors of the Golden Age are doubtlessly interesting for the prospective translator of a text also born from the contact of European and African languages such as *Sozaboy*. However, as we are about to see, the linguistic developments in South America and the Caribbean can prove even more fruitful, for several historic and geographic reasons.

4.6.4.2. American Afro-Hispanic pidgins

Despite the considerable volume of African slaves transferred to the Spanish-conquered territories in America, which amounted to 16.5% of the total Atlantic slave trade, with the figures we have seen above (Lipski 2005, 46), there is a scarcity of Spanish-based creole languages whose cause is the subject of debate (7). A possible explanation can be found in the suggestion by McWhorter that "most if not all Afro-Atlantic creoles formed in slaving stations on the West African coast, most of which were controlled by the Portuguese," which would explain both the

scantiness of Afro-Hispanic creoles and the abundance of Afro-Lusitanian ones (quoted in Lipski 2005, 7). Another determining factor may have been the relatively high proportion of white native Spanish speakers vis-a-vis black slaves in Spanish American colonies, in contrast with what happened in French and English territories, where creole languages did evolve (ibid.). Whatever the underlying reasons, the fact remains that by and large there are only two widely-recognized (for instance, in *The Survey of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Michaelis et al. 2013)) Spanish-based creoles born from the contact of black African slaves and native Spanish speakers, both very localized: Papiamentu and Palenquero.

Papiamentu (or Papiamento) is spoken by approximately 300,000 people in the Antillean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, where it is one of the official languages since 2007 (Maurer 2013). Its origins are "highly controversial" (165), and Spanish shares the role of major lexifier with Afro-Portuguese and Dutch. Currently English is also influencing Papiamentu since many of its speakers have a good command of both languages, as well as Dutch and Spanish (166).

Even though the exact origins of Palenquero are similarly obscure, its main constitutive components are more straightforward than in the case of Papiamentu: Spanish as major lexifier, and Kikongo and possibly other Bantu languages as a substrate (Schwegler 2013). It is spoken exclusively in the valley of El Palenque (or San Basilio del Palenque), in Colombia, by approximately 2,000 people, although up to 4,000 have a passive knowledge of the language. It coexists bilingually with Spanish, on which it bases almost all of its lexicon, and yet it is "essentially unintelligible to native speakers of Spanish" (182).

Both Palenquero and Papiamentu share some features between them *and* with Nigerian Pidgin that make them interesting for our purposes. Thus, if López Guix mentions the Chabacano preverbal particle *ya* to indicate past, perfective action, we find *don* and *a* in Nigerian Pidgin, and

Palenquero and Papiamentu, respectively, with the same function. These are not the only aspectual particles found in the three pidgin languages: since there is no verbal inflection, tense, mood, and aspect (TMA) tend to be signaled by such markers, accompanying an invariant verb, sometimes in the infinitive (lacking final /r/ in Spanish), sometimes in the third person singular form.

Papiamentu

Mi **ta** come	"I eat"
Lo mi come	"I shall eat"
Mi **a** come	"I ate/have eaten"

(Goilo 2000)

Palenquero

Bo **ta** kaminá	"You are walking"
Bo **tan** kaminá	"You will walk"
Bo **a** kaminá	"You (have) walked"

(Schwegler 2013)

Nigerian Pidgin

A **dè** chop nyam "I am eating yams"

A **don** chop "I have eaten"

A **gò** chop nyam "I will eat yams"

(Faraclas 1996)

The similarities do not end here. Other common features that can be of use for the translator include generally invariable nouns, the lack of gender also in personal pronouns (as a subject, both *he* and *she* or *it* would be translated as "e/el", "ele," or "im," in the above order), the strict SVO syntactic order, with no inversion in interrogations, and many more.

With this arsenal of "contaminants" at our disposal, it could seem that the next reasonable question would be whether there is reason to choose one source over the other or to eclectically pick from either according to the particular needs of the translator, but there is yet one more Caribbean Afro-Hispanic variant to be considered, even though it is no longer spoken today.

4.6.4.3. Afro-Cuban Bozal

We have just seen that, outside the very specific exceptions of the Palenquero and Papiamentu creoles, "there is in general no ethnically unique 'Black Spanish' comparable to vernacular African-American English in the United States" (Lipski 2007a, 1). However, there is evidence that such linguistic variants existed in the past, although they have not been researched as thoroughly as they merit, often because of the "high level of prejudice, exaggeration and stereotyping which has always surrounded the description of non-white speakers of Spanish;" just

as we saw when discussing the *habla de negros* in the Spanish Golden Age literature, *bozal* speech was commonly reduced to an unrealistic range of stereotyped defects and shortcomings (2). John Lipski has been an indefatigable student of Afro-Hispanic language and from his work we highlight two examples of such dialects: the Afro-Yungueño speech, and the Afro-Caribbean (especially Cuban) bozal Spanish, which will be our main focus here.

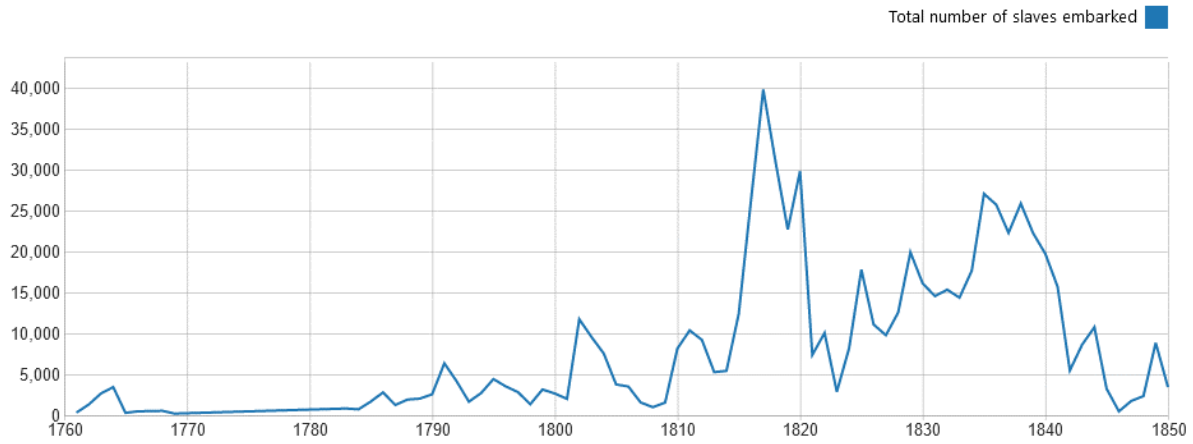
As the largest recipient of slave labor in the Spanish colonies, by a long margin, Cuba was also the meeting point of many Afro-European creoles. Since Curaçao was involved in the trade operations, Papiamentu, which was already established, made an appearance on the island, where it was known as *español arañado* (Lipski 2005, 107), a pejorative term on a par with "broken" English or, why not, "rotten" English. Órtiz López (1998), in turn, collects (in his "Conclusiones" [3404/4425) the following adjectives used to describe old Afro-Cuban speech: *enredao, tragiversao, extraño, distinto, feo, mal hablao, extranjero, bozalón, cruzado, al revés* (and how tempting it would be to title the translation *Sozaboy. Una novela en español tragiversado*?). Foreign is different, which is strange, which is ugly, wrong, tangled and distorted. This equation survives in today's Spanish dictionaries, where *bozal*, as far as speech is concerned, retains an unequivocal association with flawed usage. Thus, for the Real Academia de la Lengua, *bozal* is, first, used to describe first-generation slaves, those who were also known as "esclavos de nación": "Dicho de un esclavo negro: Que estaba recién sacado de su país." If we scroll down to the tenth entry, though, we can see that the term also describes a "Persona que pronuncia *mal* la lengua española, a semejanza del antiguo negro bozal" (emphasis added; this meaning is marked as dialectically Cuban and in disuse). In the María Moliner dictionary, the connection is even more straightforward in the fifth and sixth meanings of the entry: "**5 adj. y n.** *Se aplicaba a los esclavos negros recién sacados de su país.* -> Muleque." "**6 adj.** *Se aplicaba a los negros de Cuba y Puerto*

Rico procedentes de África que hablaban mal *el español, y a su habla*." (Emphasis added; the italics in the original denote an unusual meaning with no geographic or chronological marking).

Interestingly for our purposes, among the Afro-European creoles that came to mingle in Cuba, on top of Papiamentu we find "[a] number of pidgin or creole English elements" which "may have come directly from West Africa," among which we find reduplications such as *tifi-tifi* for stealing, *chapi-chapi* for chopping weeds, *luku-luku* for looking, and *ñami-ñami* for *eating* (Lipski 2005, 109). These can be particularly useful for the translator of *Sozaboy* since they offer a satisfactory way to preserve some of the "*English-languageness"* of the source text, the trace of British domination in Nigeria.

That being said, a noteworthy fact about the slave trade in Cuba is not just the number of Africans that were forcefully brought there, but how concentrated in time was the arrival of a large proportion of those. The vast majority of slaves were brought to Cuba during the late eighteenth century and, especially, the first half of the nineteenth century. The main cause for this was the late, but enthusiastic, incorporation of Cuba into the intensive plantation economy (Cuban sugar cane plantations were called *ingenios*) starting in the second half of the eighteenth century. This dramatic increase in the need for slave labor came almost at the same time when the abolitionist movement was starting to prevail among other European powers. Denmark issued its first anti-slaving laws in 1805, and Britain would follow suit three years later (they would even go on to actively persecute slaving activities). The void left by the disappearance of other slaver powers created an opportunity for Spanish *negreros*, supported by the liberalizing measures passed by the Spanish metropolis and the Cuban white oligarchy. This boom was to be short-lived, since international pressure for Spain to abolish slavery kept mounting until it was forbidden for Spanish subjects over the Equator by a treaty with Great Britain in 1817, with 1820 as a deadline for the

slave markets below the Equator. However, there is evidence that illegal slave trading continued for some decades.



Transatlantic slave trade to Cuba[25]

These specific historical circumstances had several consequences that are relevant to our study. While there existed a previous tradition of buying slaves from diverse ethnic groups so that the lack of a common language helped forestall insurrection, during the "frenzied peak" of the Cuban slave trade "all caution was thrown to the winds, and entire shiploads of slaves from a single ethnic group were disembarked in the Caribbean" (Lipski 2005, 44–45). With slavery retreating at a worldwide scale, "few large slave traders remained in business, and had established themselves in ethnically homogeneous African ports." In the case of Cuba, that meant the arrival of large numbers of "Yoruba speakers from southwestern Nigeria (known as *lucumíes*)" and "Igbo- and Efik-speaking *carabalíes* (from southeastern Nigeria)" (11). These *carabalíes*, incidentally, were named after Calabar, the Southeastern region of Nigeria comprising the Bight of Biafra where the

[25] Source: https://www.slavevoyages.org, accessed on 12/27/2020

main port of embarkation of slaves at the peak of Cuban importation was Bonny — the same island where Ken Saro-Wiwa would serve as federal Administrator in 1968 (Lovejoy and Richardson 2004).

Although estimations oscillate, it seems undeniable that the *bozal* speech of the nineteenth century was heavily influenced by this last wave of slaves, who predominantly spoke languages from the Benue-Kwa sub-branch of the Niger-Congo family of languages. These are also the main contributors (other than English) to Nigerian Pidgin (Faraclas 2013), and Kana, Saro-Wiwa's mother tongue, is one of them, as part of the Cross-River genus (Ikoro 1996). The question of whether the *bozal* Spanish spoken in the Caribbean evolved into a true creole at some point is still under debate, but it seems undeniable that, if it ever existed, Caribbean or Cuban Afro-Hispanic creole does not persist at present. However, whether the contact variant of Spanish that was used for instance in Cuba in the early nineteenth century deserves the name of creole or pidgin, or was just in a "pidginizing moment" of sorts, "etapa 'pidginizante' o 'semicriolla,'" according to Ortiz López (1998, Conclusión), though undoubtedly interesting, is to some extent immaterial for our discussion. If what we are after is a way to reproduce the major formal features in *Sozaboy*, to decompose the source text to create our own "rotten" Spanish, what better place to look for inspiration than a speech where many of the substrate African languages that informed Nigerian Pidgin served also as a substrate, with Spanish as a lexifier instead of English? Creole or not, Cuban *bozal* Spanish has the advantage — for the translator — of a substantial corpus of texts where the authors tried to reflect the particular way of speaking of the *bozales*. Not only that but, because of the time period and the socio-political circumstances, many of those authors were abolitionists, who would be averse to perpetuating stereotypes or employing *bozal* speech just to ridicule it (Lipski 2005). Interestingly, these written sources for Cuban Afro-Hispanic language

can be supplemented with spoken testimonies of elderly Cubans who knew it first-hand, collected for instance by Ortiz López (1998). All these sources confirm phenomena similar to what we saw above in Nigerian Pidgin, Papiamentu, and Palenquero. For instance, the presence of preverbal TMA (tense-mood-aspect) particles, especially *ta* for progressive and habitual actions, but also possibly *va* for the future and *ya* for the past.

Afro-Caribbean bozal Spanish

Primero **ta** llorá na má	"He's just crying, that's all"
Así yo no **va** murí	"I'm not going to die like that"
Señó acade, **ya** yo ve poquito menos	"Mister mayor, I saw a little bit less"

(Lipski 2008)

The rest of the features we mentioned when discussing Papiamentu, Palenquero, and Nigerian Pidgin can also be observed in *bozal* Spanish, at least to a certain extent, as we soon will see. In short, despite the scarcity of Afro-Hispanic creoles, there *are* sources out of which to take inspiration when the time comes to reproduce the deviations from the Standard of Afro-English pidginized dialects (whenever we feel that this must be a part of our translation strategy). Now we can retake the question: are there reasons to prioritize one of the aforementioned Afro-Hispanic creoles (or semi-creoles) over the others? But perhaps the first question should be: do we need to? After all, we must never lose sight that *Sozaboy* is not written in pure Pidgin by any stretch of the imagination, but in "rotten English", as Saro-Wiwa himself stated in the title, or pseudo-pidgin

(Zabus 2007, 46), “un style hybride, confus, métis” (Utudjian Saint André 2002). A certain amount of mixing and matching on the part of the translator would therefore seem to be justified as well — as a matter of fact, one could almost say that it is inevitable at least to a certain point. However, one cannot but worry as well about the coherence of the result. It seems ill-advised to switch between systems of particles or syntactic order, for instance. It has been already pointed out that, because of the proximity of the “African” component (as regards both substrate Kwa-Benue African languages and previous influence of West African Pidgin), Afro-Caribbean *bozal* Spanish is our best candidate. The fact that it no longer exists today, and in fact may have never existed at all as a fully-fledged creole, is in this case not a detriment, but an additional strength, since it combines authenticity with the avoidance of existing, identifiable local variants which could break the suspension of disbelief. A corollary of the heavier influence of standard Spanish over *bozal*, since the latter did not fully creolize, is that the fragments left to us in Caribbean Afro-Hispanic language show a lesser degree of miscegenation with Portuguese (although this must perforce be a somewhat subjective impression). It is a fact that Portuguese has a heavy presence in all Afro-Hispanic creoles, to the extent that some scholars claim that both Papiamentu and Palenquero, as well as *bozal* Spanish, are ultimately based on that language (that is especially the case with Papiamentu). Part of the debate has to do with the controversy about the place where pidgins originated — in particular, the advocates of the “Portuguese” hypothesis tend to support the idea that pidgins formed in West African slaving stations and then traveled to America, thus opposing the idea that some of them were born in plantations.

In our last section, we will try to map the specific deviations from the Standard present in the text and the possible solutions for translating them into Spanish, using Afro-Caribbean *bozal* preferably whenever the narrator gets closer to Pidgin, in the understanding that, as we have

repeatedly pointed out, that is not the only element in the mix. The application of these transformations is not the master key to the translation of *Sozaboy*, just a very useful tactic, among others that have been hinted at so far; the proposed solutions are not meant to be applied systematically. Saro-Wiwa himself did not do so, and allowances must be made for other stylistic considerations. For this final analysis, we will follow the list of pidgin syntactical and morphological features identified on pages 195-200.

1. Nouns

In most bozal documents there is "great instability in plural marking," with a "preference for singular forms, especially when a plural reference can be obtained from the surrounding context" (Lipski 2005, 265–66). There is great instability in adjective-noun and article-noun concordance, as well: "la tinajero," "la martillo," "La abuela taba muelta aco(s)tao," "todo esa gente vieja vieja" (Ortiz López 1998).[26]

2. Pronouns

In Afro-Cuban texts, there is a preference for overt subjects, something which is usually discouraged in translations from English since it is far less common in standard Spanish (Lipski 2005, 252). It is not uncommon to find even redundancy of subject pronouns: "Ahí ta André Cottina que me conoció chiquito **él** a mí," "Nino, ¿cómo **tú** no va a vel mejoría con eso?" (Ortiz López 1998). As far as pronoun invariability is concerned, the most widely observed phenomenon, and one that ties directly with Nigerian Pidgin

[26] Ortiz López, who collected a corpus of "Testimonios en torno al lenguaje afrocubano," reflects the phonological alterations observed in the speakers he researched. However, we have seen that Saro-Wiwa seldom deviates from English standards of spelling, and it would seem prudent to do the same with standard Spanish.

usage because of the common African roots, is the existence of an undifferentiated third-person singular (and sometimes plural) pronoun, *elle/nelle*, akin to the NP *im*: "Y le llevaban ropa a **elle**;" "eso mimo quiere yo, **nelle** lo mimo, vamo pa la engrasia" (ibid). Lipski documents the use of *mí* as a subject pronoun in Palenquero and Papiamento, but he declares it to be "vanishingly rare" in late *bozal* texts, and Ortiz López includes no mention or examples of it, so the translator would probably do well to steer clear of it. The *mí* pronoun is, on the other hand, common in object position, as part of a general preference for disjunctive postverbal object pronouns instead of clitics: "da **eye** tambo" for "give them drums" (Lipski 2005, 149). As for possessives, again we find that the use of subject pronouns occurs regularly in Palenquero and Papiamento, but not in any variant, temporal or geographical, of *bozal* Spanish (296). Ortiz, on the other hand, identifies a trend to postpone possessives and demonstratives: "Le dijo al hermano **mío**," "La madre **mía**, hija de congo."

3. Aadjectives

The trace of stative verbs in *bozal* Spanish is perhaps found in the common omission of the copula (see below). The frequent lack of noun-adjective concordance has already been discussed.

4. Prepositions

By and large, Afro-Iberian *bozal* does not deviate from Spanish practice as far as prepositions are concerned. There is, however, a tendency to eliminate *de* and *a*: "Y se

llevaron Amalia," "Atrás hasta que llegué el llano," "¡Ay pero la suña lo pie!," "Yo nací la eclavitú" (Ortiz López 1998).

5. Articles

African learners of Spanish tended to omit *both* definite and indefinite articles: "Y yo nací en eclavitú." Even when the articles were used, many speakers failed to make them agree in number or gender with the corresponding noun. There is a discrepancy here in the literature, since Lipski points out that Cuban *bozal* favored *la* before masculine nouns more than the opposite with *el* (2005, 268), Ortiz López writes instead that masculine forms, both singular and plural, tended to monopolize use for both genders (1998, sec. 3.2.2.4). Fortunately, both the instability of these practices and the flexibility with which Saro-Wiwa deploys pidgin features allow for considerable wiggle room at the time of translating.

6. Verbs

Afro-cuban bozal also uses an invariant verb form, be it the infinitive, usually dropping the final -r ("Yo **hacel** mucho trabajal; **coltal**, **coltal** caña balato; **recogel** café a sei kilo") or the (more common) third personal singular: "Yo no te **lleva** a casa de nadie;" "Digo si **muere** [muero] sola e mi de(s)tino." This last option seems more advisable for the translator, not only because it was apparently more common, but also because it avoids the overused and stereotypical use of infinitives to reflect the speech of "backward" peoples, a staple of old dubbed Western movies, for instance.

As far as TMA particles are concerned, there are indications that Afro-Cuban *bozal* used particles for tense, mood, and aspect. *Ta* + infinitive (often with no -r) for the imperfective/durative aspect is well documented, but there is evidence suggesting the use of *ya* and *va* as preverbal particles as well, roughly equivalent to *dey*, *don*, and *go*, respectively, in Nigerian Pidgin: "yo **ta** mirá gente mucho;" "**ya** yo cuchá;" "tú **tá** mirando que nelle **va** llorá toavía." In this last example, we can see that mixed forms (ta + gerund) are also a possibility, indicating that *ta* is probably a reflex of *estar*, which is routinely reduced in Afrocuban Spanish. The rest of the particles and modals are not so well documented for *bozal* varieties, but examples can be found if needs must in Papiamentu, for instance. Thus, *por* as "be able to": "Unda nos **por** cumpra flor?;" *sabi* (or *sa*) for "knowing": "Mi **sa** baila;" *ke* for "want": "Mi **ke** bai kas awor" [I want to go home now], etc. (Goilo 2000).

7. The copula

The use of the invariant copula *son* is well attested, though "alternating with correctly and incorrectly conjugated forms of *ser* and *estar*" (Lipski 2005, 276): "Tú **son** bueno y callao, yo va a contá a ti una cosa" (170). Omission of copulative *ser* is also very common, especially in the third person singular: "Eso (era) lo único que yo sabía" (Ortiz López 1998).

8. Word order

Afro-Hispanic language follows the SVO word order as well. This includes a preference for object pronouns in postverbal positions. Incidentally, most Benue-

Congo languages (such as Saro-Wiwa's Kana) which generated *bozal* pidgins or creoles observe the noun + adjective order, so that there is no strong reason for the translator not to follow the standard procedure of inverting the English adjective + noun order in most cases. *No* is used for negation, which does not differ from standard Spanish usage, but double negation is common: "**No** sé **no**," "**Ni** conocí **tampoco** los padres de mi hermana **tampoco**" (Ortiz López 1998).

9. The passive voice

Either of the procedures observed in Pidgin and rotten English to avoid passive sentences (using a third-person plural pronoun as impersonal and interchanging subject and object) are standard procedure when translating from English anyway. Palenquero, for instance, has no morphological passive voice (Schwegler 2013, 189)

10. Questions

The lack of order inversion in all questions is common in *bozal*: "Niño, ¿cómo tú no va a ver mejoría en eso?" "¿Qué tú quería?" (Ortiz López 1998).

11. Subordination

Afro-Spanish creoles seem to use *que* for relative clauses and object clauses (*ku* in Papiamentu, *lo ke* or *i* and *ke* in Palenquero). The use of "lo que" for relative clauses might offer an occasional interesting alternative to the domesticated *que* and the overly strange *wey* (eg. "Oh my father **wey** don die" as "Oh padre mío **lo que** ya morí"). Other

than that, Lipski notes the use of preposition + subject + infinitive constructions instead of subordinate clauses in some cases: “pa tú tener = para que tú tengas” (2005, 298).

Other features of rotten English, such as the abundant and not-standard use of progressive forms and the overall simplification of the tense system, are more likely traces of Nigerian and African English (Tunca 2014, 157). The latter is compatible as well with the general primary-school feel of the language, and features prominently in other child-soldier narratives such as Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (ibid.) To reflect this, Spanish translator Ramón de España systematically avoids the use, for instance, of the subjunctive:

> Todo el rato entrena que entrena. Nos dicen que corremos arriba y abajo como en una carrera de cuando yo voy a la escuela. Nos dicen que nos arrastramos por la hierba y que corremos en zigzag para hacer como que esquivamos las balas. (Iweala 2009, 39)

Conditionals are sometimes simplified into the present tense, too: “Yo abro los ojos y veo que aún estoy en la guerra, y pienso, si no llega a haber guerra, ahora ya soy un hombre” (61). A strategic use of this simplified, erroneous sentence construction seems a good choice for the eventual translator of *Sozaboy* as well, since it offers an avenue for syntactic experimentation that does not completely impede understanding.

The use of all these procedures, and others of the kind, can help preserve the hybridity and even the dislocated feel of the original. Attention must be paid, nevertheless, not to fixate on any

single aspect of the language (be it the Pidgin component, the orality, the uneducated feel, or any of the remaining elements we have mentioned) to the exclusion of all others. With that caveat, it is our conviction that a responsible translator can adopt a strategy that combines creativity with a deep knowledge of both Nigerian culture and literature and Afro-Hispanic linguistic and cultural traces to productively echo the original and "contaminate" Spanish, following the "politics of cultural impurity" proposed by Judith Butler (2000b, 276) and espoused, with different formulations, by the rest of the thinkers discussed in our theoretical introduction (see pp. 17-40). This contamination will hopefully work as a literary "defamiliarization" (Boase-Beier 2014, 25) and provide a way for the reader to be acquainted with "thoughts or feelings … [they] had not experienced, or reflected on, or known to exist" (78), while retaining the trace of the postcolonial other as a substrate in the passage from one language into another (Bandia 2008).

5. CONCLUSION

We set out with a dual purpose: to carry out an in-depth translation-oriented source-text analysis of the kind that translators rarely — if ever — have the time to execute as part of their professional activity, and to do so with a postcolonial literary work which offered, from the point of view of its translation, two additional points of interest that set it somewhat apart from most other texts of its kind: chief among them is the fact that the book in question, *Sozaboy* by Nigerian author Ken Saro-Wiwa, is written in "rotten English" — basically a variant of Nigerian Pidgin domesticated to make it more accessible to the metropolitan reader. This turns it into a singular, pioneering work presenting unique problems for the translator. Which leads to the second point of interest we alluded to: to study a postcolonial work written in a hybrid language not (only) as a translation itself, but from the point of view of its eventual translation into a "third" language: Spanish, in this case.

Our top-to-bottom approach to the endeavor entailed starting with a definition of the general strategy to be adopted for the translation of such a text. Translation strategies, in turn, are not decided in a vacuum, and much recent research has been devoted to studying how cultural, social, and political factors influence the translation process. The translator's ideological position and the target culture conventions all play a role in determining the final outcome of the translation, whose function does not have to necessarily coincide with that of the original, one of the main tenets of Skopos Theory.

These "external" conditioning factors become essentially important in the case of postcolonial texts, where asymmetries of power clash with the standard theories of translation based on transparency and pure equivalence. We have discussed how early studies dealing with translation and postcolonialism carried out a necessary revisionist analysis of how translation had

collaborated with the colonial enterprise, through both Spanish (Rafael 1993; Valdeón 2019) and English (Niranjana 1994; Cheyfitz 1991). We suggested that this monocultural expansionist approach has ultimately more to do with naming than with translation, and proceeded to study other scholars who have seen in translation a unique way to overcome particularism and chauvinistic nationalism while simultaneously avoiding monocultural universalism of the kind we just alluded to (Butler 2000a, 2012; Balibar 2004, 2010; Santos 2004, 2014; Ngugi 1987, 2009). We suggested that the theories of these scholars could be broadly characterized as the search for a new understanding of universalism, one which does not suppress alternative worldviews, in what could almost be understood as an extension of Roman Jakobson's definition of translation, as the art of finding (creating?) "equivalence in difference" (1959/2004, 139). This is all the more necessary in a capitalist-colonial (and patriarchal) world-system where some sort of global resistance becomes imperative.

Thus, we have tried to create a dialogue between several authors espousing these views on translation, both from outside and inside the discipline of Translation Studies. In fact, one could say there has been a convergence in the last decades: the by now famous cultural turn in Translation Studies has coexisted with a language turn and, indeed, a "translation turn" effected by some philosophers and political thinkers. In our own modest way, we have tried to follow their lead and "translate" different traditions, both geographical and ideological, into one another through our analysis. Therefore, we have endeavored to put in common the European, Marxist outlook of Etienne Balibar with the post-structuralist, third-wave feminist, critically Jewish thinking of Judith Butler, the pan-African, anticolonial ideas of Ngugi wa'Thiongo and the Latin American school of decolonial thought as embodied by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Of course, these scholars, chosen because they explicitly broach the topic of translation, are but the central nodes in a larger

mesh of thinkers whose connecting lines crisscross the entire network. For instance, the Latin American school of decolonial thought is represented not only by Santos, but also by Enrique Dussel who, in turn, owns much to Marx (like Balibar) but also to Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher who is crucially important in much of Butler's thought and to whom the dissertation refers more than once (Levinas 2011, 2007, 1987). Enormously important for any study of translation and postcolonialism is also Gayatri Spivak (Spivak 1993, 2008), often quoted by Butler. And the list goes on, with Franz Fanon (Fanon 2004, 2008), Homi Bhabha (Bhabha 1994), and many more.

It is our contention that a common thread can be found in these thinkers, that we have chosen to express as the proposal of a de-centered universality (alternatively known as negative, critical, or contingent universalism) to be achieved by a politically-aware practice of translation, for which the common term seems to be "cultural translation." In a schematic fashion, this "cultural translation" could be characterized by three main interconnected features: it goes beyond the merely interlingual understanding of the term, it requires an involved, counter-hegemonic attitude and it is aware of its "sitedness." Cultural translation as a tool for emancipation involves much more than what is commonly understood under that term. In their search for a cross-cultural articulation of emancipatory movements, some thinkers may talk about the translation of struggles or practices, for instance. While this expansion of the term is far from uncontroversial, it aligns at least partly with the ideas of established translation scholars such as Sherry Simon (Buden et al. 2009, 210) and Douglas Robinson (2019). This broadening of the scope is not, however, the defining characteristic of cultural translation: that would be, above all, its counter-hegemonic commitment, its deployment as a vehicle for resistance and global emancipation understood as an impossible, but necessary task. Impossible — and this is the third defining feature — in the sense

that to embrace this conception of cultural translation is to be aware that there can be no universality which is transcendent of cultural norms. And yet, to accept that this lack of a center, this necessary partiality of translation is not a shortfall, but a constituent characteristic which nevertheless allows for a multiplication of the positions of enunciation with the potential to create a whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

How to implement such a strategy is not a simple question, not least because it would seem contradictory to postulate a good-for-all method when the guiding principle is to avoid squashing diversity. That is why "no single translation strategy can be associated with the exercise of oppression or the struggle for resistance" (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002, xx). The overall priority is to make sure that the Other shines through the translated text, that the non-convergence of discourses is perceivable. In other words, to embrace an ethics of contamination (Butler 2000b, 276). And embrace it is, since the cultural translator's commitment requires a certain attitude, empathy and passion. Translation should aspire in as much as possible to provide a voice for the voiceless, which in turn, in the case of literary translation, for instance, requires attention (often not granted) to the material aspects of translation and those that usually fall beyond the professional translator's reach: choosing which books to translate, how and where to market them, etc. Also important is to raise awareness about the realities of translation, through education and promoting translation visibility.

After setting the theoretical and ideological groundwork, the dissertation has moved on to its application to the specific circumstances of *Sozaboy*, following a descending route from the more general to the particular. Therefore, as a part of setting the cultural context of the novel it has seemed essential to introduce the postcolonial history and situation of English language and literature in Africa and, particularly, in Nigeria: how most writers have turned to European

languages in order to reach larger audiences and avoid ethnical divides, creating in the process a more or less hybrid English (in the case of Nigeria) that has been compared to a palimpsest over an underlying layer made of an African (oral) original (Zabus 2007). However, the adoption of the languages of the former colonizers has not been without opposition, and it is in this context where the option of using Pidgin may seem attractive, being a language that cuts through ethnic boundaries while at the same time espousing a unique (West) "Africanness."

Following a summary of the plot, the study has proceeded to analyze in depth all those cultural elements which have been felt to be particular to the "spatiotemporal horizon" of the novel, in Butler's terms, and which would thus require special attention from the translator, all the more in the application of a "cultural" approach to the translation of a postcolonial text, as we have stressed in our theoretical introduction. We have started by situating *Sozaboy* as the pioneering work in the genre of the war postcolonial Bildungsroman, and also part of a larger, particularly Nigerian repertoire of Biafran war novels. Then we have studied the different discourses to be found in the book, in connection with the most common attitudes towards the Biafran war (and war in general). Moving on to intertextuality, before examining textual allusions such as highlife songs and religious passages, much attention has been given to the crucial notion of propaganda, which according to Saro-Wiwa (and others) had a determining role in the escalation towards and the prolongation of the Nigerian Civil War. The references to actual speeches and slogans of the time are there for those knowledgeable in the Biafran War to identify, but they also work as examples of generic warlike rhetoric: allowing for several layers of reading has proven to be a constant in *Sozaboy*, which was mainly addressed to a Nigerian public, but with the obvious intention of attracting an international readership as well.

After these considerations, which more or less can be said to relate to *Sozaboy*'s discourse, we have delved into the actual manifestations of Ogoni/Nigerian culture in the book, loosely following Katan's stratification, starting with the physical and political environment, the temporal setting, dress, and food, which plays a very important role in the novel and thus has been awarded special attention (Katan and Taibi 2021). Moving up in the abstraction ladder we have studied behaviors and values such as the contrast between city and village, and the representation of women, and finally beliefs, with a special focus on Western religion and its relation both with the war and with African traditional religious practice.

At a more immediate level, but still roundly within the realm of source-text analysis (that is, pointing out stress areas for translation but still not offering, by and large, possible solutions), we have studied what some authors call the external context, and others the extratextual factors, of the novel. Our main concern here has been to look into Saro-Wiwa's biography and textual legacy, on the one hand, and into the different interpretations of his life and work that have been put forward, on the other, in search for both the intention behind and the function of the use of "rotten English" in the novel. We have studied Saro-Wiwa's political commitment, his action before, during and after the war and his passionate defense of the Ogoni cause. We have gone over his brief justification for the use of rotten English, his insistence on the importance of education and his manifestly admiring perception of metropolitan English language and culture, which might seem to clash with the recourse to a variant of Pidgin English. Then we have explored possible explanations, such as his desire to address the masses and avoid elitism, and the consideration that rotten English might have much to do with processing the trauma of war (Batchelor 2015). This is one of the readings that the non-insignificant literature about *Sozaboy* and Saro-Wiwa has put forward. We explore more readings of the book and the function of rotten English, such as its being

a representation of the chaos and confusion that marked the war (and, according to some, Nigerian society in general, both before and after the conflict). Others have made more sociopolitical readings, or have focused on the potential of rotten English as a voice for the voiceless. Finally, it would be remiss not to consider the comedic aspect of the dialect, which moreover connects with a well-established tradition of deprecating pidgin use that has been and still is an obstacle for its vindication as a "serious" vehicle for literature.

Finally moving on to intratextual factors, the dissertation has examined the condition of *Sozaboy* as a translated work on three separate levels: first, as the creation of a postcolonial writer using a European language which was not his mother tongue; second, as the rendering in one language (rotten English) of speeches originally spoken (in the fictional world of the novel) both in Kana, in Nigerian Pidgin and in standard English; third, as a book that has been actually translated (into Italian, German, French), and is prospectively to be translated into other languages: Spanish in our case. In the actuality of the text itself, it becomes obvious that rotten English is what some authors call a pseudo-pidgin. As such, the best way to preserve the postcolonial otherness of the text in translation would seem to be to follow Paul Bandia's model and identify which features of rotten English are clearly Pidgin in origin, in order to transfer them as unaltered as possible to the Spanish version, while treating more standard English in a "transparent" way and adopting a flexible position vis a vis the rest of stylistic features of the novel (2008). This is certainly easier said than done, since literary style does not usually follow a mathematical formula to be cracked, and *Sozaboy* is no exception. The book is rife with instances of code-switching, for example, which in turn do not follow a single motivating pattern. Thus, at times it will be difficult for the translator to differentiate between traces of "good" pidgin and traces of "bad" English. All

of this requires a thorough analysis to identify in as much as possible those pidgin traces in the book, and a creative strategy to transfer them into Spanish.

First, there are cases (few, but not insignificant) of phonological interference, even though Saro-Wiwa opted in general for English spelling. On a related note, the book contains a repertoire of onomatopoeias and interjections that both reinforce the oral flair of the text and are bound to sound foreign to the Western reader. The impoverished vocabulary of *Sozaboy* is one of those features that straddle the line between broken English and Pidgin, but the abundance of reduplications is a clear transfer from the latter. As far as vocabulary is concerned, there are many words (sometimes italicized, sometimes not) that come straight from Nigerian languages other than English, including characteristically Pidgin verbs such as *sabi, chop*, etc. While the treatment of these "loanwords" seems fairly straightforward for the translator (maintain them as direct traces of the underlying African text), complexity multiplies with the changes in grammar and syntax: what to do with the invariable third-person singular pronouns, with the equally invariable verbs where tense, aspect, and mode are expressed through preverbal particles? How to convey the frequent use of the single preposition *for* or the relative pronoun *wey*?

Fortunately, in addition to a body of scholarly literature on the translation of linguistic variation that the study has been able to mobilize, there is a unique resource which seems like an optimal first step at this juncture: the paratexts written by the translators of the German, French, and Italian editions of the novel. These are doubly interesting because the strategies they have followed seem to be very different, at least on paper. After examining them, some of the criticisms they have risen, and the degree to which they could be appliable to an eventual Spanish translation, we tentatively conclude that the most advisable approach for the translator would be to adopt a flexible, creative outlook, "una strategia da scrittore," in the Italian editor's words, to try and

replicate rotten English in Spanish. We have seen as well that this cannot, by any means, entail a suppression of the Ogoni/Nigerian/African nature of the novel. Fortunately, though few and little known, there are Afro-Spanish creoles that provide a window into how Spanish and some of the African languages underlying Nigerian Pidgin interact. The best candidate to trawl for inspiration is Afro-Cuban *bozal*, being the one with more points in common with its West African counterpart. This fascinating pidgin emerged from the slave trade and peaked briefly in the 19th century, and it is now virtually lost except in some testimonies. The fact that it no longer exists, however, that it is not in any way the same as present-day Cuban Spanish, is actually a positive for the responsible translator, who probably would not want the book to sound like an adaptation to an existing locale. At any rate, even if it were possible, which is not, given the relative scarcity of documentation available and the unstable hold of Afro-Cuban bozal even at its peak, the objective should never be to implement a wholesale transformation from Nigerian Pidgin or Rotten English into one of the existing pidgins. Therefore, in the last section of the dissertation, we have tried to map some of the clearly pidgin features of rotten English into Spanish through the filter of Afro-Cuban *bozal* (with occasional recourse to other Afro-Spanish creoles such as Papiamentu and Palenquero). With this largely hidden, but rich and documented tradition of Afro-Spanish language from which to draw ideas for syntax and grammar alterations, and the invaluable vocabulary to be gleaned from Guinean Spanish and other Afro-Spanish sources, plus the creativity and feel for literary style and the ethical commitment to be expected in a professional, experienced, and responsible translator, it should be possible to "rot" Spanish in a way that is true to the "ethics of contamination" that constitutes the centerpiece of this dissertation, to universalize *Sozaboy* by offering it a new place of enunciation, while hopefully bringing forward through the language a trace of the traumatic colonial history of contact between Spain and Africa. It is our belief that rotten languages, like

rotten organic matter, create the humus out of which new life can grow, yet another way in which translation is how newness enters the world.

On a more personal note, coming across this Afro-Spanish tradition in scholarship and literature, and having the chance to learn about an often-overlooked aspect of Spanish colonial history and the traces it left in the language, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the work behind this dissertation, perhaps all the more so because it has been an unexpected boon. More foreseeable but equally enriching has been the opportunity of furthering my knowledge of Nigerian literature both past and present, and very especially of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who perhaps was not a saint (as in the title of his son's book) but was without a doubt a highly courageous and talented author and activist, deeply committed to the defense of the most vulnerable against the most powerful of enemies, both inside and outside his country.

As someone who has been a professional literary translator for much more time than an aspiring scholar, the very experience of taking the time to carry out such an exhaustive research and mull over translation strategies, and potential problems and solutions, in a way that is usually impossible as part of regular commissions, when time is of the essence and procedures deviating from the norm are discouraged, has been highly rewarding as well. This was one of my avowed goals from the outset, and I can say that the research process has made me aware of many decisions and considerations that are all-too-often overlooked in the day-to-day practice of translation, especially as regards my own positioning as a translator. At the same time, I hope I have been able to endow the dissertation with a measure of whatever experience I have acquired during my years of professional practice. In particular, I have at all times endeavored to ground theories and conclusions by thinking of possible ways to implement them. On a related note, I have tried to make reference to the material conditions of translation and culture production in general, which I

feel are sometimes overlooked in studies centered around works and authors; much remains to be discussed in that connection. As long as book production, translation and discussion remain sited in the old metropolises, even the best-intentioned efforts at promoting hybridity can feel ultimately narcissistic at times. However, expanding the canon and exploring new ways of understanding language and the world is hopefully a step in the right direction. And this is the note I would like to end with. Whether it is by drawing from what I have written or not, it is high time for *Sozaboy* to be translated into Spanish. I cannot but entertain the hope that this dissertation, in some modest way, helps to raise awareness of this unforgivable omission. Believe me yours sincerely.

Palma, 25 January 2022.

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