

Translating and Publishing Nigerian Literature in France (1953-2017)  
A Study of Selected Writers

by

Sylvia Ijeoma C. Madueke

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

FRENCH LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND LINGUISTICS

Modern Languages and Cultural Studies

University of Alberta

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## Abstract

This project focuses on the history and process of translating and publishing selected Anglophone Nigerian novels into French, with a special focus on elements of hybridity. The corpus consists of novels written by canonical and non-canonical, male and female Nigerian authors in the years after the country's independence in 1960. The thesis draws on multiple yet complementary translation methodologies. The polysystem theory (PST) is used to characterize the source literary system and how certain home factors may reflect on the selection of works for translation. The polysystem is also useful to position Nigerian literature within the French literary system. André Lefevere's methodology is used to identify the agents involved in the translation of the novels and examine power relationships at play. Antoine Berman's approaches allow for a study of the French translators' roles and a microanalysis of hybridity. Interviews, questionnaires, email and oral exchanges provide first-hand information and complement previous approaches. A qualitative analysis of data gathered in this study was performed in order to illustrate the various trends within the corpus of Nigerian literary works translated in French. This corpus forms an online database, NILIFT, which will be useful for future research. While the field of Nigerian literature in French translation shows visible growth and progress, this study illustrates that internal ethnic divides within the source cultures, resulting in the predilection of certain types of literature, influence the visibility of certain works or authors in Nigeria and in French translation. The absence of agents, policies and subsidies for the promotion of translation in Nigeria reinforces the target-oriented nature of the process. French publishers decide which works are translated based on the author's international literary reputation. Even though some publishers have introduced more Nigerian literary works in the target culture through special collections devoted to African Anglophone literature, this research shows that Nigerian literature as part of the general Anglophone literature, continues to occupy a peripheral position in the French literary polysystem. The textual and paratextual analyses of the selected translated texts show that French translators strive to respect the hybrid elements in the original texts.

### **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Sylvia Madueke. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “NIGERIAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH TRANSLATION”, No. 68967, 26<sup>TH</sup> Oct. 2017.

**Dedication**

For my parents Gilbert and Fidelia Madueke, my husband Yves and my daughter, Chizitel.

“Being deeply loved gives you strength, while loving deeply gives you courage” - Lao Tzu

Your love in my life gave me all the strength that I ever needed.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is possible thanks to the invaluable contributions of many people.

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor Dr. Sathya Rao. His kindness, patience, instruction and encouragement are unmeasurable. For those times when I doubted, you were there to give me a steady hand. I will miss our numerous unscheduled meetings. I also wish to thank the external reader, Dr. Natasa Raschi and the committee members, Dr. Onokome Okome and Dr. Chris Reynolds Chikuma for their insights.

I am forever indebted to my parents, the uncrowned royalties. You gave me love, nurtured me, inspired me to dream and helped me to create myself. You taught me to work hard and believe in myself. Thank you to all my siblings and especially to Ogee, for always trusting me to be my best.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my husband, Yves Mugisha. I can never express well enough what you have done for me. You received all my frustrations and like Jim Morrison said, you gave me total freedom to be myself. For these past years that you have literally re-envisioned your life so that I could live mine, I am humbled. To my daughter Chizitel Cherylle, your smile was a light to my path. I thank you for your little and loving words of courage. You told me “Mummy you can do it”. You are right, I have done it.

I am grateful to Cindy Chopoidaló for her meticulous reading and correction of this thesis. Thank you to everyone whose formal and informal contributions made this thesis a reality: Mona de Pracontal, Bernard Magnier, Pierre Girard, Anne Damour, Chigozie Obioma, Adoabi Tricia Nwaubani, Professor Akachi Adimorah Ezeigbo, Professor Hagher Iyorwuese and Stella Omonigho. I am also grateful to Dr. Heather Young Leslie, Uche Peter Umez, Shahnaz Shatoosi, Florence Elomba, Claret Ogbuehi, Dr. Marika-Marta Urbanik and Daria Polianski for their encouragements.

My gratitude goes to Social Sciences and Humanities Council (SSHRC) and to the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta for their respective funding.

Finally, I am grateful to God for His unending grace and love.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1. Context: Nigerian Literature

This thesis seeks to examine first the process of translating Nigerian literature written in English in France<sup>1</sup>, and second the French translation of the “acrobaties linguistiques” (Córdoba-Serrano, “Le Québec” xi) inherent in Nigerian writing. Though it is a peripheral literature, Nigerian literature is recognized as the leader in the field of Anglophone African literature (Ugochukwu, “Nigerian Literature in France” 760) as its notable authors, works, and literary criticism based on those works demonstrate. Many Nigerian authors have published both inside and outside their home country and have produced a significant body of work. Literary criticism of Chinua Achebe’s works, including evaluation, analysis, description, and interpretation, has appeared in more than 100 printed and online journals in Europe and in America, including a special issue of *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Onookome Okome and Lahoucine Ouzgane of the University of Alberta. Among the Nigerian authors who have earned international literary awards are Wole Soyinka, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986; Chinua Achebe, who is considered the father of modern African literature; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize in 2005 for *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the Orange Broadband Prize in 2007 for *Purple Hibiscus*; and Chigozie Obioma, who was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Today, Nigerian literature is studied in schools, colleges, and universities all over the world, including in France, in which they are read in translation, studied at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and inspire masters’ and doctoral dissertations. According to Françoise Ugochukwu, major publishers in France, such as Présence Africaine, publish at least one translated Nigerian text every year (“Nigerian Literature in

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<sup>1</sup> English is the official language of Nigeria.

France” 757), and Nigerian novels continue to be translated and published in French. These publishing ventures raise questions about the place of the French language in Nigeria, and of why French translations of Nigerian literature are mainly published in France rather than in other Francophone countries.

## **1.2. France and French in Nigeria**

According to Michael Akinpelu, the French language was introduced to Nigeria at the end of the eighteenth century, and French was one of the first subjects to be taught in secondary schools in Nigeria beginning in about 1859. It was not until 1956 that the teaching of French was formally introduced into Nigeria’s education system (132). French became a degree program in almost every university in Nigeria, and the first generation of Nigerian French professors were trained or educated within Nigeria and in France. In “Nigerian Literature in France,” Ugochukwu notes that Nigerian undergraduate and graduate students have been studying in France since the 1970s. Nigerian students who enrolled in French were given scholarships to spend their year abroad<sup>2</sup> in France.

This trickle would soon become a steady stream, with research students contributing significantly to the advancement of Nigerian studies in France in a variety of fields ranging from French studies and linguistics to literature. Sunday Anozie's book on the sociology of the African novel, published in Paris in 1970, projected eight hitherto unknown Nigerian writers unto the francophone scene: Timothy Aluko, Elechi Amadi, Obi Egbuna, John Munonye, Onuora Nzekwu, Nkem Nwankwo, Flora Nwapa, and Gabriel Okara, in addition to the already

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<sup>2</sup> In Nigeria, students are required to do their penultimate year of study outside Nigeria, in a Francophone country. “Year abroad” is the term used to refer to this year of study, which is essentially a linguistic immersion program.

well-publicized Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, and Amos Tutuola, who benefited from new translations, allowing readers to widen their knowledge and deepen their appreciation of their works. (759)

In the 1980s, the publication of Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song*<sup>3</sup> in Mongo Beti's journal, *Peuples noirs* marked the first serialized translation of a Nigerian literary work into French. According to Ugochukwu, this "is a proof of vitality of the French-speaking Nigerian community and the fruit of years of educational and research cooperation between Nigeria, [and] France" (760), which aimed to promote French in Nigeria.

Other literary initiatives advance the presence and promotion of French in Nigeria. Nigerian writers such as Ola Balogun, Anthony Biakolo, and Valentine Obinna, have produced original works in French that have been published in France, beginning in 1968 with the publication in Paris of Ola Balogun's *Shango*. These authors of *Nigerian Creative Writing of French Expression* are defined as "citizens of Nigeria domiciled in Nigeria or partly outside Nigeria, who use French as medium of expression in their creative writings (poems, dramas, novels, short stories etc.), about Nigerians' life and experiences, primarily for Nigerians and by extension, for others in the international community" (Onyemelukwe, "Nigerian Literature"). Some of these works include Anthony Biakolo's *L'étonnante enfance d'Inotan*, written and published in France in 1980, where he was completing his doctoral degree; Martin Bestman's *Une calebasse d'aubes* (1999); Vincent Okeke's *Le Syndrome 419* and *Le frère terrible* (2001); Unimna Angrey's *Sursauts* (2002); Ifeoma Onyemelukwe's *Uwaoma et le beau monde* (2003); Femi Ojo-Ade's *Les paradis terrestres* (2003); and Tony Ezike's *Difficile à survivre* (2006). Enoch Ajunwa's

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<sup>3</sup> Originally translated by Nicole Niquet Medjigbodo and published in four regular installments in *Peuples noirs*. Was republished in *Les tisserins*.

*Destined to survive/Destinée à survivre* (1996) was written in both English and French by the author, with the objective of facilitating comprehension for the readers.

Associations such as the Nigerian Association of French Teachers (NAFT), the National Association of French Language Students (NAFLANS), the Inter-College Association for French Teachers (Inter-CAFT) and the University French Teachers' Association of Nigeria (UFTAN) also promote French education in Nigeria, as does the Nigerian French Language Project, a collaboration between the French government and the Nigerian Ministry of Education. Akinpelu notes that this project resulted in the creation of 179 secondary schools and 24 higher institutions (18 college of education and 6 universities) where French is a popular subject (154). French centres exist throughout Nigeria, including Badagry's French Village, at which students in French programs can study as part of their Year Abroad programs if they cannot afford to travel outside of Nigeria, and which also serves as an in-house resource for Nigerian and other Francophone teachers of French. The French embassy also supported the creation of a translation and interpretive centre in Uturu, Abia State, in eastern Nigeria, as well as other institutions such as the IFRA (Institut français de recherche en Afrique), which supports bilateral research between France and Nigeria including joint projects, field work, and translations such as that of the Igbo classic *Omenuko*<sup>4</sup> by Ernest Emenyonu in 2014. Ugochukwu points out that under its auspices, three bilingual dictionaries were commissioned in the early nineties: a Yoruba-French dictionary and a French-Hausa dictionary, both published in Paris in 1997, and an Igbo-French dictionary, published in 2004. These and other initiatives and exchanges between France and Nigeria may be part of the reason why Nigerian literature is translated more frequently in France than in other Francophone countries. Most of these initiatives are meant to promote the teaching

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<sup>4</sup> This is the first Igbo language novel. It was translated into English by Emenyonu.

of French, but the visibility of the French government and its initiatives in Nigeria also positions France as a viable hub for translation. France is also an important literary space, possessing legitimizing power (demographic, economic, cultural/soft power) especially when compared to small Belgium or Québec or to poorer Francophone countries surrounding Nigeria, which makes France a more suitable location for the translation of Nigerian literature and the publication of those translations.

### **1.3. Nigerian Literature in French Translation as a Cultural Product: History, Process and Reception**

Nigerian literature, like other postcolonial African literatures, has become a tool for the expression of indigenous identities, experiences, history, ethnic and regional issues. Literature plays a primary and indispensable role in the promotion of image-building of a nation, even though “the export of literature in translation as a cultural product and [...] cultural diplomacy, have not been studied extensively” (Von Flotow, “Revealing the Soul” 188) in translation studies. Since its inception, thanks to the work of Achebe and others, Nigerian literature creates an awareness of African cultures in general as authentic and human, as exemplified in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. It mirrors the various aspects of Nigerian culture and identity through its engagements with various themes, and as such, it calls for the examination of its translation as a means and product of cultural transfer. Therefore, this study takes the approach—that translation is a product of cultural transfer—outlined by Luise von Flotow, and which can be traced to other translation-studies perspectives, including the cultural turn.

The cultural turn in translation studies highlights the study of a translated text as part of culture rather than in isolation. When examined from the perspective of culture, literature becomes a cultural product and its translation plays a pivotal role as a link or connection to distant cultures



and languages. This concept has been discussed by scholars such as Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, whose 1990 work on the “cultural turn” marked a shift from the formalist approach to translation toward issues pertaining to history and context. According to Bassnett and Lefevere, the object of study in translation studies has been redefined: “what is studied is the text embedded within its network of both source and target cultural signs and in this way translation studies has been able to move out beyond the linguistic approach” (*Translation* 11). Harish Trivedi characterizes the cultural turn as the idea that literary texts are composed not only of language, but also of culture; the translation unit is not merely a word or sentence but the entire language and culture in which the text is embedded (280). As a result, the translation of a literary text becomes a complex negotiation between the source culture and the target culture, in this case Nigeria and France, respectively.

It is important to consider both the source and target cultures with the purpose to understand the history, development, and publication of Nigerian literature in France. The translation of Nigerian literature is a production that takes place between two cultural and social spaces with unequal power relations, with various agents, institutions, and other factors determining its continued translation, publication, and circulation in France. André Lefevere calls for a focus on the concrete factors that determine the production and reception of literary texts in translation, including translators, publishers, institutions, and ideologies (*Translation, Rewriting* 25-35). This study considers the translation of Nigerian literature as a “socially regulated activity” (Hermans 7) by investigating the agents and the macro-sociocultural contexts that influence the translation and reception process. For Lefevere, it is not only the translator who translates; the individual social impact and relations can also influence the final translation. Therefore, there is a need to investigate not only the translators, but also the institutions, the publishing houses, or other

individuals involved in the social activity of translation, as they are the ones who determine or influence the production and reception of translated literary texts. Nigerian literature, like any postcolonial literature, should be studied with particular attention given to the agents and factors that define and influence the politics of its translation.

#### **1.4. Translating Hybridity in Nigerian Literature**

In consideration of the translated text as a product of culture, this study explores the translation into French of the “acrobaties linguistiques,” or linguistic features that stem from Nigerian cultural experiences. These textual elements of “hybridity” as they are called by Paul Bandia include contextual and culture-bound linguistic forms, cultural concepts, idioms, proverbs, and elements of multilingualism that characterize languages with oral traditions and which make up a hybrid text. Nigerian literature is a particularly salient example of the challenges raised by the translation of hybrid elements in postcolonial African texts (Bandia, “Translation as Reparation”).

Nigerian authors are known for their use of cultural terms, allusions, expressions, idioms and proverbs. Oral literary forms such as proverbs and idioms “are devices through which the authors can accommodate Nigerian speech and thought pattern, thereby enabling the nativizing of English in Nigerian prose. The writers weave proverbs and idioms into their narratives as important tradition speech habits to reflect Nigerian environment and culture” (Ibhawagbele and Edokpayi 204). Elements of oral tradition, such as songs, tales, folklore, myths, and legends, frequently appear in Nigerian fiction. According to Chantal Zabus, this use of oral elements is a means of indigenizing European language (4) and of preserving Nigerian cultural identity in hybrid formations. Because Nigerian texts include examples of multilingualism, with pidgin, Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa often occurring in the same work, a translator must be able to

reproduce the linguistic and cultural hybridity of these texts. As Lefevere points out, it is important to understand the extent to which a translator “manipulates” (*Translation, Rewriting* vii) the text in order to produce the translation. It is possible that the cultural reality of the texts could be weakened in a translation; however, it is also possible that the intended meanings of the source text may be clearly expressed in the target text.

### **1.5. Scope of Study**

In view of the above, this project examines the Nigerian literary system and its literary production in French translation from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. The first section, the “Macro Study,” discusses the history, development, and evolution of French translations of Nigerian texts between 1953 and 2016. The second part, the “Micro Study” or case study, concentrates on selected Igbo authors and their novels.

#### **1.5.1. Macro Study**

This section situates the study of Nigerian literature in French in both France and Nigeria. The study of Nigerian literature in its source literary universe means a “double contextualization since the text has a place in two cultures - a context in which the translation takes place and a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed” (Bassnett and Lefevere, *Translation* 11). It analyzes Nigerian literature as a system composed of many subsystems in order to highlight the characteristics or behaviors that may reflect on the translations.

Considering the source culture also allows for an exploration of the factors and agents, if any, that determine or influence the selection of novels to be translated within Nigeria. This part of the study also examines the translation of Nigerian literature as a cultural product to promote the Nigerian image abroad, or simply as an initiative of cultural diplomacy.

### 1.5.2. Micro Study

The case study is limited to novels by Igbo writers<sup>5</sup>, such as Achebe and Adichie, who are considered among the most prominent Nigerian authors. According to Ernest Emenyonu, as early as the end of 1970, when roughly eighty West African novels were published in English, approximately fifty of those were Nigerian novels, and about thirty of those Nigerian novels were written by Igbo authors (*Rise of the Igbo Novel* x). Of the eighty titles compiled in this study, about thirty-five are written by Igbo writers. James Booth has noted that Igbo authors are among those of national significance in Nigeria (28), while Obi Nwakanma acknowledges the overwhelming prominence of Igbo novelists writing in English, and argues that their works currently define the canon of contemporary Nigerian national literature (1). Although Nwakanma argues that Nigerian literature written by Igbo authors expresses “a unified response to the Nigerian experience [...] in a common search for stable and authentic self within a nation space” (13), Igbo literature may not categorically be said to offer a unified experience of the Nigerian situation. I do concur, however, that Igbo writers have made a significant mark in the history of Nigerian literature, and that Nigerian literary history has come to be recognized thanks to important texts by Igbo writers. This statement is not meant to undermine works by authors from other ethnic groups;<sup>6</sup> however, Igbo literature forms a homogeneous and successful subsystem or domain of Nigerian literature that is characterized by its productivity, prolificity and wide translation into French. To paraphrase Ernest Emenyonu, Igbo writers have produced a relatively large number of novels to this day, so that a case study of the translation of literary works by

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<sup>5</sup> Nigerian population is about 196 million: Hausa and Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo (Ibo) 17%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%. Information also claims that these percentages are estimates and may be prone to inflation or underestimation since census figures are used to determine federal government allocations and funding.

<sup>6</sup> After all, the only Nigerian author to win the Nobel Prize, Wole Soyinka, is Yoruba.

Igbo authors will yield useful reflections on the translation of modern African novels as a whole. Such a study may eventually provide a useful approach to the study of Nigerian and African literature, characterized as it is now by hybridity. More so, the style used by the Igbo writers in this study is of interest with regard to the objectives of this project. I am aware of the questions that my choice may raise, and acknowledge that my selections are due to the limitations and objectives of this study. Although my familiarity with the Igbo language and culture is an important factor in the selection of texts to be discussed here, I am interested in studying other Nigerian authors in translation in future work.

My decision to focus only on novels stems from the important position the novel holds in Nigerian literature and in Anglophone literature in general as opposed to other genres like poetry, theatre and others. Wendy Grisworld claims that “Nigerians have written more novels in English than all other West Africans put together” (*Bearing Witness* 4-5). Allwell A. Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu assert that no other form of literature comprehensively captures the experience of people, in all their sociopolitical, historical, economic, and cultural ramifications, as the novel (108). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly for this thesis, the novels discussed here provide significant examples of hybridity.

This project studies French translations of both well-known and lesser-studied male and female authors in order to reflect the diversity of texts by Igbo authors in translation. Both male and female authors, two of each, are represented in this study, as a counterpoint to Mary Lewu’s characterization of Nigerian literature as male-dominated (1) and as an acknowledgement of the presence of women writers in contemporary Nigerian literature. Furthermore, the study of the translation of works by these Nigerian female authors may be fruitful for and inspire future research on translation of women writers. The four authors discussed in this project are Chinua

Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chigozie Obioma, and Adaobi Tricia Nwabuani. These four were chosen as representative Igbo authors whose works have been translated into French, and especially because of the availability of the authors, publishers, and/or translators for interviews.

### **1.6. General Research Questions**

The vast scope of this study invites many research questions on the postcolonial and cultural turns of translation, historical contexts, the selection of texts, producers and agents, the status of the translated texts in the target culture, translation strategies, and engagements with Nigerian literature. The main questions of this study border on the specific factors that determine which Nigerian authors are translated, the position of Nigerian literature in France, and the translators' strategies for representing hybridity in their translations

It is hypothesized that factors that influence the translation of a given work include the status of the author and/or publisher, patronage of companies, institutions, and/or individuals within Nigeria and France, and the influence of other Francophone countries. Also, Nigerian literature, like other literatures in translation as it is theorized in the polysystem, is believed to occupy a peripheral position within the French literary system. It is also assumed that the translation strategies applied to the translation of the texts may further risk distorting the original and possibly even erasing its linguistic and cultural identities. However, the evolving relationship between Nigeria and France may improve French translators' knowledge of Nigerian culture and reduce the potential domesticating effect of translation.

### 1.7. Objectives of Study

This study aims to account for the history and evolution of translation of Nigerian literature in France while highlighting the place of translation in Nigerian cultural initiatives. It also seeks to provide the factors or criteria considered for the selection of works to be translated, and identify the agents involved in the translation and the processes of selection, publication and reception of Nigerian literary texts through a case study of selected authors. It also provides an account of the translators' approaches to hybridity.

This project seeks to inform current and potential translation studies, as well as history and cultural studies, in Nigeria and beyond, of the processes of translation of postcolonial and peripheral literatures. It is meant to encourage future researchers, especially within postcolonial translation studies, to take into account the evolution, history, and status of translated texts within the source and target cultures, and to encourage the study of translation as a product of culture and as a means of intercultural communication. It provides statistical information about Nigerian literature in French translation, including a comprehensive list of Nigerian texts translated into French; an online database of Nigerian literature in French Translation (NILIFT). The database is available on Dataverse, a web-based tool supported by the University of Alberta Library that allows access, revisions, and updates. The DOI of this database is available as a reference in the bibliography section of this thesis. This study also serves as a model for future research on the translation of Nigerian literature into other languages such as German, which is the second most studied European language in Nigerian universities after French.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Although the translation of African indigenous texts into German has been studied by Adeaga, there is yet no equivalent study of the translation of Nigerian literature from English to German.

## **1.8. General Theoretical and Methodological Considerations**

This project draws upon postcolonial and contemporary translation theories, with each framework serving a specific purpose. Most of the frameworks and models referenced in this study are situated under the social and cultural turns in translation. The polysystem theory, which forms the general model for this study as well as other models are discussed briefly in the remainder of this chapter. When necessary, they are further discussed in “Methodological Consideration” section at the beginning of each chapter in this thesis.

### **1.8.1. Polysystem Theory**

The polysystem theory, also known as Descriptive Translation Studies, is a response to the relatively minor position of translated literatures within target cultures. Among the scholars who have taken this approach are Gideon Toury, André Lefevere, and Itamar Even-Zohar. This theory regards translated literature as an important and a dynamic system within the social, literary, and historical systems of the target culture, a part and parcel of the target culture (Munday 166). Toury notes that a translated work occupies a position in the social and literary system of the target culture, and this position conditions the strategies used for its translation (“Descriptive Translation” 13). He proposed the following three-phase framework to describe a translation:

- Situate the text within the target culture system;
- Perform a textual analysis of the source text (ST) and the target text (TT);
- Attempt generalizations based on the patterns identified in the two texts. (Munday 170)

This project adopts Toury’s three-phase model in order to situate Nigerian texts within the French literary and cultural systems. It seeks to identify the social and cultural networks of relations within the translation of Nigerian literature, which may seem arbitrary at first glance-



for example, in the case of texts selected for translation.<sup>8</sup> It seeks to examine what kinds of relations exist between translated works, and which are presented as completed facts, imported from other literatures, detached from their home contexts, and consequently neutralized in terms of the centre-periphery opposition (Even-Zohar, “Polysystem Studies” 45-46). Even-Zohar stresses that translated literature operates as a system in the target culture’s choice of texts for translation and the influence of other co-systems on the translators’ specific decisions. The polysystem theory enables an examination of Nigerian literature in translation with regard to other co-systems and peripheral literatures, such as African Francophone literature. This study seeks to find out how Nigerian literature is positioned in comparison to African literature in France, whether it retains its own identity amidst other Francophone texts, and how this identity is marketed within the French context. If the position occupied by translated literature in the polysystem conditions the translation strategy, then Nigerian literature, if found on the ‘central periphery,’<sup>9</sup> will experience fewer constraints from French systems, as the translators do not feel pressure to use the target culture’s literary models (foreignization). If it is found as a sub-periphery existing under the central periphery, then the trends or norms may be in accordance with the target culture (domestication).

For Toury, translation should be regarded as a target polysystem phenomenon:

such a translation is always a fact of a particular (target) culture.

After all, cultures resort to translating precisely as a way of filling

in gaps, whenever and wherever such gaps may manifest

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<sup>8</sup> Though all choices can be seen as arbitrary, the motives behind those choices are of interest.

<sup>9</sup> There may be different levels of peripheries; for example, Francophone literatures occupy the main or central periphery, because they are originally written in French and not translated, while other translated literatures occupy a sub-periphery. Nigerian literature, if assimilated into Francophone literature, would occupy the main or central periphery as well.

themselves: either in themselves, or (more often) in view of a corresponding non-gap in another culture that the target culture in question has reasons to look up to and try to exploit for its own needs. (“Descriptive Translation” 21-22)

The polysystem model assumes that foreign texts are selected for translation when they are needed. Hélène Buzelin argues that this perspective implies that there is an existing space for the reception of translated texts, which are satisfying a need (203). With this limitation of the polysystem model in mind, this study minimizes the target orientation of the polysystem theory, since this model is useful for the discussion of the Nigerian literary system as a whole and since the polysystem enables an examination of the different systems that make up a broader literary system. Moreover, and in line with the cultural approach prioritized in this thesis, the polysystem theory is

a theory of literature in which literature is analyzed as a cultural artefact. What constitutes the core of the polysystem inquiry into [the Nigerian literary field] is therefore the necessity of exploring the reasons why cultures privilege certain types of literature over others. Polysystem theory also engages in an analysis of relations between different types of literature. (Osadnik, unpublished lecture notes )

This project adopts the major question asked by the polysystem model and examines the types of literature that occupy the peripheral and central positions within the Nigerian system. The polysystem theory provides a valuable framework for the study of Nigerian literature as a system governed by different social factors predetermined by ethnicity and linguistic capital. The

polysystem raises questions about the different types of literatures existing in Nigeria, what type of literature is privileged, why it is favored and how it may be reflected on translation. Even though this study deals with the general history of publication of Nigerian literature in translation, but focuses on the Igbo writers as case study, the study of Nigerian literature as being composed of different systems, aims to portray the various other literatures circulating the country and therefore, highlights their presence and importance.

### **1.8.2. Postcolonial Translation Approaches: Power Relationship and Search for a Translator**

In order to consider the individuals involved in translation practice, this study uses postcolonial translation approaches, such as Lefevere's power relationship between agents and Berman's search for the translator. These approaches focus on the agents, such as publishers, translators, and any other institutions, that may be involved in translation. The power relationship is an important aspect of factors such as patronage<sup>10</sup> that exist between the central (target) and peripheral (Nigerian) cultures. According to Lefevere, "patronage can be exerted by persons [...], by groups of persons, a religious body, a political party, a social class, a royal court, publishers, and, last but not least, the media, both newspapers and magazines and larger television corporations" (*Translation, Rewriting* 25). This study examines the decisions, controls, and ideologies of publishers and media to determine how these actions influence the production and dissemination (for example visibility in literary magazines) of Nigerian literature in translation. Where Lefevere's theory enables an examination of the policies and ideologies that guide publishers, Berman's search for the translator is an essential methodological step in the study of the translator as mediator (*Translation Criticism* 57). Berman categorizes the

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<sup>10</sup> Patronage is understood here in terms of support and power control.

worldviews of translators as the “translating position,” the “translation project,” and the “horizon of the translator.” This model fulfills two functions: it complements Lefevere’s approach to the study of the agents involved in translation, and it accounts for the role of translators’ worldviews in the process of translation.

### **1.8.3. Textual and Paratextual Analysis: Berman’s Translation Criticism and Negative**

#### **Analytic**

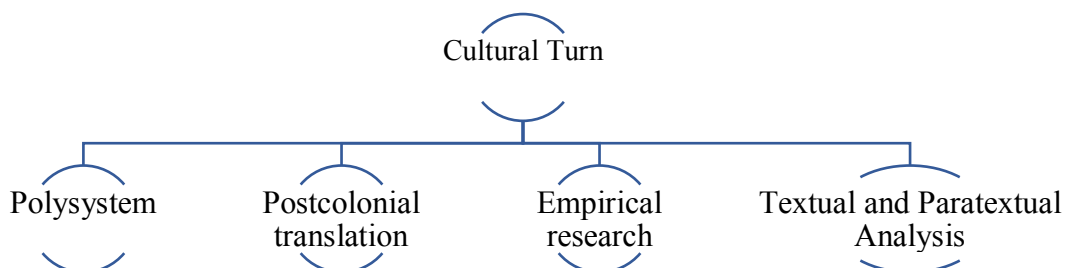
My study of hybridity in Nigerian novels in translation uses Berman’s *critique de traduction*, a method that begins with an initial reading of the target text and continues with an analysis of the source text in terms of stylistic regularities embedded in various forms of hybridity. This process also takes secondary materials written by the translator into account, and compares the original with the translation. The *critique de traduction* approach is useful for this study because it considers not only the elements of the texts themselves, but also elements ‘outside’ the text such as book covers or prefaces. Such a paratextual analysis helps to situate the translations and translators within their cultural and literary space and examine how these contexts reflect on the translation. Berman’s negative analytic, a system of textual deformation present in a translated text that is an impediment to seeing the foreign in the text (*Translation Criticism* 278), serves to categorize the distortions of certain aspects of hybridity, such as expansion of the target text, destruction of idioms, local expressions, and vernacular networks, the ennoblement that results from the weakening of the source text’s oral rhetoric, and the effacement of linguistic variety.

### **1.8.4. Empirical Research**

This project involves the use of primary and secondary sources and empirical methods such as the use of correspondence, reviews in online and literary journals, media interventions, reviews

of government documents and policies, and attitudes about translation and publishing expressed by the agents involved. I conducted interviews with 3 translators, 1 publisher, and 2 writers in Nigeria, the United States and in France in order to gain first-hand information that is not available in printed materials. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, online through Skype, and sent in form of questionnaires. I used *WorldCat* to compile a list of Nigerian novels translated and published in France, to gather consistent and current data on Nigerian authors whose works are translated, and to determine whether, and if so, when, a specific work was translated. Another source I consulted was *Index Translationum*, which does provide information on the authors whose works are translated in a given country, but which often provides limited or outdated information. For example, *Index Translationum* does not provide a significant list of Nigerian authors who have been translated into French. The BNF (Bibliothèque nationale de France) was also a useful source of information before and during fieldwork in France, as were the individual websites and catalogues of French publishers. My search concentrated on the catalogues of publishers that had previously produced translations of Nigerian texts, and on those that include collections of African literature in general, because French publishers who publish Francophone African literature tend to publish the translated works of Anglophone African writers as well. For example, Actes Sud has a special collection, “Lettres Africaines,” that hosts texts by many African writers including several from Nigeria. French literary and cultural magazines such as *Le Magazine littéraire*, *LiRe*, *Le Matricule des Anges*, *Transfuge* and *Les Inrockuptibles* which offer reviews of new translations were consulted. Casual discussions and email exchanges also provided information on new translations of Nigerian literature in France. Although I have taken broad measures to discover new translations, it is important to acknowledge that the list may not be exhaustive. This project includes a quantitative analysis of

the data on the publication of Nigerian literature in France, including numeric presentations, visual charts, and interpretations of the data. The table below summarizes the general theoretical framework of this study:



**Figure 1 : Visual summary of major theoretical framework**

### 1.9. Organization of Research

This project is divided into six chapters, including a conclusion. Chapter Two describes the Nigerian literary system, including the various ‘systems or subsystems’ that make up the broader field of Nigerian literature, while highlighting the linguistic and social factors that shape the evolution and circulation of literature in the country. The rationale for this chapter is linked to the contexts of this project. Since the study is anchored in both Nigerian and French cultures, it is important to examine the source culture, not only to provide background information, but also to point out the peculiarities of Nigerian literature that may or may not be reflected in translations. Chapter Three considers the translation of Nigerian literature as a cultural product, exploring Nigeria’s cultural diplomacy initiative in order to determine the positions of literature and translation within these endeavours. This chapter also includes an analysis of a list of translated texts while responding to the following questions: What kinds of novels are translated? On what criteria are the selection of novels to be translated based? Do the translated works display the characteristics of Nigerian literature identified in the previous chapter? The rationale for this chapter stems from the study of translation as a culture. In line with the cultural turn and recent

paradigms of translation, this perspective is indispensable because Nigerian literature mirrors the Nigerian people and describes their sensibility, history, and culture. Chapter Four focuses on the case studies – the authors, the texts, and the publishers – and examines the process of publishing these authors’ works in France. This chapter takes a historical approach in order to explore the ideologies and politics of publishing that may explain or influence the production of Nigerian literature in translation. Some of the questions asked in this chapter are: How are Nigerian novels published in France? What are the ideological or political stances of these publishers and how do these stances influence their production of Nigerian literature in French translation? What reasons motivated the individual publications of those texts? Who made the initial contact for translation and publication? What are the trajectories of these authors within the French system? The objective of Chapter Five is to analyze the reception of Nigerian novels in France by examining reviews and media and discussing the role of publishers in promoting Nigerian literature. The chapter specifically discusses two literary magazines, *Transfuge* and *Le Matricule des anges*, and how they review and/or incorporate Nigerian authors and their works. The final chapter of this thesis discusses the translations and their paratexts in terms of hybrid elements, such as multilingualism and local colour, used by the translators. The objective of this textual and paratextual analysis in this chapter is to determine the trends of translation, and how translators treat specific cases of hybridity in translation.

#### **1.10. Challenges, Adjustments, and Delimitations**

One of the main challenges of this project is the availability and willingness of the authors, translators, publishers, and other agents to grant interviews. For example, some of my discussions illuminate only the general operation of the field of translating Nigerian literature, leaving room for further specific case studies. Interviews could be arranged with literary

magazine editors in France in order to understand their stance regarding Nigerian literature and African literature in general, especially in consideration of the outcome of this study- that Nigerian literature, similar to African literature in general, is not very visible in these literary magazines. One of the methodological frameworks of this project was to interview editors and translators, as well as the authors whose works are part of the initial corpus of this study. I was unable to gain interviews with the living authors at first, and so I took a more pragmatic approach and used any author, translator, or publisher willing to grant an interview. In her PhD thesis, Claire Ducournau notes that the “édition parisienne constitue ainsi un terrain relativement fermé dont les archives et informations, notamment chiffrées sont protégées. Les grands éditeurs représentent ainsi des places fortes dont les personnels évitent de divulguer des renseignements d’ordre qualitatif et quantitatif (*Écrire, lire* 43). According to Ducournau, any work on African literature is delicate, even political, because of the suspicion of colonialism and the polemic issues associated with the publication of African literature. My experience was similar to Ducournau’s; despite emailing almost every publisher of Nigerian literature in France, I received very few responses, and had to update my corpus depending on the interviewees who were available.

In the earliest stage of this project, I designed specific questions for specific agents – writer, translator, editor – depending on their role(s) in the translation and publication of Nigerian literature. However, I modified my questions based on interviewee availability, by adding questions that may not necessarily relate to a given participant’s role. Sometimes the participants would provide partial answers to my questions, or direct me to further information or resources that would lead me to the answers I sought, or recommend people to contact for further



information. Among the four authors selected for this case study, I managed to obtain interviews from one of the participants for each category:

|          | Interview with Writer | Interview with translator | Interview with publisher |
|----------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Achebe   | No                    | Yes                       | Yes                      |
| Adichie  | No                    | Yes                       | No                       |
| Obioma   | Yes                   | No                        | No                       |
| Nwabuani | Yes                   | No                        | No                       |

**Figure 1: Showing interviews conducted**

Apart from Achebe, who is deceased (2013), Adichie is the only person with whom I was unable to establish an initial positive contact. Other participants, such as the publisher at Gallimard, initially accepted my request for interviews, but did not proceed; only one publisher granted me an interview. This affected the weight of the responses and information obtained. To fill in that gap, I relied on Marie Cachin’s and Joachim Schnerf’s studies of the publication of translations in France. The details of the publication process outlined in these works were invaluable, since obtaining those details from the publishers themselves proved unrealistic and virtually impossible. Most importantly, Schnerf’s book is a first-hand experience from a writer who had been involved in the publishing of translations in France, and both include interviews with some of the publishers themselves.

In order to avoid redundancy resulting from overlapping information, I would discuss certain subjects only where most appropriate, as in the case of Adichie and Gallimard. Since I could not obtain interviews directly from either Adichie or Gallimard, I used the information provided by Adichie’s editor to celebrate her receiving an award. This presentation is not discussed in Chapter Four, which focuses on publishers, but in Chapter Five, which examines the status of the work in France. At the beginning of this study, I intentionally avoided questions dealing with

numbers, costs, profits, losses, and payments, since my experience and Ducournau's study demonstrated the difficulties of obtaining such data.

In my discussions of Nigerian literature in French, especially in Chapters Four and Five, I refer to Anglophone literature in general, because Nigerian literature is a significant part of the greater body of African Anglophone literature. Furthermore, the development of Francophone and Anglophone African literatures do have elements in common (see Asobebe, *La traduction*): colonialism, legitimizing power of Europe, control of African literary values, and publication and literary awards. In addition, as it will be seen in this thesis, Nigerian literature in French translation is characterized in France according to the broader category of African Anglophone literature.

**Part 1: Macro Study**

## Chapter 2: Nigerian Literary Polysystem

### 2.1. Methodological Considerations

Nigerian literature is a complex system. Scholars such as Harry Garuba have noted that the many perspectives, histories, and tropes present in Nigerian literature mean that any attempt to provide an all-encompassing description would be foolhardy (51). According to Hamish Dalley, critical discourses on Nigerian literature adopt different historicizing techniques that bring together writers and works that share similar elements and political ideologies (15). Most accounts of Nigerian literature classify it according to generations, as Sule Egeya notes, but even this categorization, as outlined in Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton's special issues of *English in Africa* and *Research in African Literatures*, has its shortfalls ("Art Outrage" 50). Adesanmi and Dunton have acknowledged the arbitrariness of this framework, while Egeya points out that the fluidity of Nigerian literature thwarts any attempts at temporal categorization ("Art Outrage" 50). For these writers, describing the transitions and transformations of Nigerian writing remains an incomplete venture.

In acknowledgement of the above, and to offer a succinct yet pertinent discussion of the study of Nigerian literature in translation, this chapter provides a polysystemic description of the behaviours, characteristics, and complex structures of Nigerian literature. Such a description recognizes the presence of various ethnic literatures that exist in the Nigerian polysystem. Like the scholars referenced above,<sup>11</sup> this chapter does not claim to offer a detailed and extensive view of the systems that make up the Nigerian polysystem. As a case in point, Nigeria has about 300

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<sup>11</sup> Although these scholars are concerned with making interconnections or demarcations between the body of Nigerian literary works, historic perspectives and accounts of development are unavoidable even within their discussions. If the discussion in this chapter references them, it is because they recognize accordingly the internal complexities of these accounts of Nigerian literature.

ethnic groups (Nixon 39) and about 500 living languages, with three of these, Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, constituting the major groups and languages in the country.

As a linguistically diverse society, and as in most other countries of sub-Saharan Africa in which English is the official language, such as Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and others, Nigeria tends to prioritize the use of English as a literary language. Thus, Nigerian literature came to be recognized internationally through the works of writers from the main ethnic groups, including Yoruba writers such as Soyinka and Tutuola, and Igbo writers such as Achebe and Adichie. Logically, discussions of Nigerian literature may seem to be dominated by the examples of these writers. However, other writers from Nigerian ethnic minority groups, often called the “micro-minorities” to borrow from Rob Nixon (39), write in English and have earned international recognition; some of these include Ken Saro-Wiwa, J.P. Clark, Festus Iyayi, and Odia Ofeimun. These writers may seem to be relegated to the background in discussions of Nigerian literature in which the presence of Igbo writers has been highlighted:

Igbo writers have so far dominated the prose literature, in Nigeria, probably as a result of the early presence and influence of the printing presses at Onitsha, the motivating influence of the successes attained by the pioneer Igbo writers of English, and more importantly, the rich linguistic and cultural resources which derive from the creative use of English by incorporating Igbo speech habits. Igbo writers are, today, some of the most prolific writers in Africa in terms of output and attention given to their novels. (Igboanusi 53)

This chapter, therefore, calls attention to minority writers in order to acknowledge their contributions to the history and development of Nigerian literature, here defined as the collective body of works produced by all Nigerians whether at home or abroad and irrespective of their

ethnic group of origin. For the purposes of this research, Nigerian novel according to Awoyemi-Arayela is defined as “any Nigerian literary work of imagination which is written by Nigerians for Nigerians; it discusses issues that are Nigerian and shares the same sensibilities, consciousness, worldview and other aspects of the Nigerian cultural experience” (29). Since this thesis does not claim to offer an all-encompassing description of Nigerian literary subsystems, it chooses to place the three major languages and their literatures in one category, and other minority language literatures in another. My proposed map of the Nigerian literary polysystem is based on this linguistic categorization. This perspective offers a less complex approach to the discussion of the Nigerian literary system and reiterates the observations of scholars who have noted the difficulty of discussing Nigerian literature in all its complexities. The approach I adopt here is intended to distance this discussion from the problem of competitive ethnicity, which Nixon and others have acknowledged as a factor in any discussion of the Nigerian social, cultural and political systems. Any weaknesses in my references to and discussions of writers from the so-called micro-minorities are not meant as reductions or as attempts to undermine the importance of those writers, but is rather a delimited approach, with regard to the objectives of this thesis, to Nigerian literature as a cultural system.

The notion of literature as a system, for the purposes of this study, is based on the polysystem theory, which defines a literary system as a “network of relations that is hypothesized to be obtained between a number of activities called “literary” and consequently, these activities themselves observed via that network or the complex of activities (*The Literary System* 28). This definition calls into consideration not one unified activity, but various activities that may differ in their operations and may equally be studied through various lenses, and yet can be connected to a given network or system. Although a cursory definition of a system suggests

interconnections and affinities of various parts or factors, working together in a straightforward and harmonized manner, this is not necessarily the case for Nigerian literature due to ethnic and regional configurations. Consequently, the use of ‘system’ or the study of Nigerian literature as a ‘system’ with respect to the polysystem demands a functional and dynamic understanding of the term. Since its introduction by Itamar Even-Zohar, polysystem theory has been seen as functional and dynamic, and is according to Phillippe Codde, otherwise known as a “theory of dynamic systems” (92). This perspective, which has been supported in previous studies by Even-Zohar, allows for an account or an examination of the various conditions of production that shaped the evolution, diffusion, and consumption of Nigerian literature. It enables the study of the various ‘systems or subsystems’ that make up the broader category of Nigerian literature. Most importantly, polysystem theory accounts for the effects, if any, that these conditions might have on the translation of Nigerian literary texts into various languages, or how these conditions reflect on the development of translations. In search of a framework capable of describing this body of literature, I underscore the complexity of the object of study and prioritize a framework that can highlight the various components, the irregularity and nonconformity that make the Nigerian literary universe a complex system. This is because Nigerian literature, is in itself, an intricate cultural system composed of multiple systems that are not entirely independent of various social, political, and economic mutations in the country. Besides, “literature – a literature – can be analyzed in systemic terms [...] because it consists both of texts (objects) and human agents” (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 25).

Hence, the perspective of polysystemic literature adopted in this thesis is a paradigm for the study of various cultural phenomena, such as Nigerian literature, its various subsystems,<sup>12</sup> and other factors that influence it, both human and non-human, from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives.<sup>13</sup> Codde has argued that the polysystem approach originated as “an alternative to the then ahistorical, static, and text oriented approaches to literature” [ and it] “offers students of literature a framework for a wide-ranging and still topical study of a variety of cultural phenomena (that are not restricted to literature)” (91). Additionally, it is also a theory of literature that aims to give “a comprehensive model to explain the relationships among various cultural systems as well as among the different subsystems of any particular cultural system” (92). The theory of dynamic systems as it called by Even-Zohar (“Polysystem Studies” 10) examines “the diachronic and the synchronic relations within [a] system (i.e, it allows for the systems evolution in time)” (Codde 92). According to Even Zohar, the polysystem is “a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options” (“Polysystem Studies” 11). The polysystemic view of literature “is an integrative approach that aims to be fairly comprehensive in its discussion of the different subsystems that make up the cultural polysystem [...] with a view of cultural system as heterogeneous, dynamic entity to be studied in its synchronic and diachronic dimensions” (Codde 93). Therefore, the polysystem theory is useful to examine Nigerian literary production as a cultural artefact, a dynamic human production with substantial cultural and historical aspects. If the different forms of cultural artefacts offer insights about the culture and various

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<sup>12</sup> It has been argued that the *poly* in polysystems is redundant because a polysystem introduces the notion of systems.

<sup>13</sup> One of the misconceptions of the polysystem, according to Codde, is that it is a static system, because the idea of the polysystem as equally functionalist in nature has been associated with Structuralism or static thinking.



social structures, the importance of Nigerian literature as a cultural system cannot be overemphasized, as it is an embodiment of various social, economic, and cultural aspects of the country. The body of literatures that make up the subsystems must be discussed in the context of the factors that shape their production and circulation, both in original language and in translation.

On that premise, the Nigerian literary system is theorized as a zone of differences combining visions and tensions, a mine of struggles in which different visions and voices, especially of literatures found in the periphery, contest for survival and visibility. The polysystem theory offers useful terms for the understanding of Nigerian literature. For example, the idea of center-peripheral struggles theorized in the polysystem explains the dependent relationship between Nigerian literature and Western legitimization. It describes the inequalities and struggles for existence for marginal literatures as Pascale Casanova points out in her remapping of the global literary space.

In accordance with the polysystem conception of the literary system as heterogeneous, the Nigerian literary field is probably best defined as a heterogeneous system<sup>14</sup>. Such a definition allows for a discussion of the postcolonial development of literary production in Nigeria and the inherent transnational cultural relations that heralded, determined and influenced its production and circulation. As Willfried Feuser observes, Nigerian literature cannot be completely abstracted from the economic, social, and political conditions that gave rise to it and the summation of which forms the framework of Nigerian history. It is “an epitome of post-independence cum postcolonial African history. It is a history of grand designs, evanescent

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<sup>14</sup> In consideration of its diverse nature, different components, history, evolution and parts

hopes and tragic conflicts both **within** and **across**<sup>15</sup> the borders of the continent's emergent NationStates” (113). Its early production of literary works is dependent on politics and economy and heavily influenced by Western ideas of the form and functions of literature. For example, publishers and literary magazines, especially those in colonial schools in which students could publish short works, were overseen by the administrators while publishing was heavily controlled by the British administration.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the common realities of the large national literary space of France in the nineteenth century, the art of writing and publishing literature in former colonies in Africa is heavily subject to external or foreign influences which in turn, are not entirely separated from the overall political, economic, and social situations in those countries. The polysystem allows for an account of multiethnic, multicultural and linguistic struggles of postcolonial African nations, or the complexity of writing literature amongst these factors that influence its production, circulation, and consumption, especially in a multilingual country such as Nigeria. The polysystem, as it is adapted from María Serrano-Córdoba, is important to

rendre compte de la diversité linguistique et culturelle de certaines configurations et [...] pour étudier les contacts ou les “interférences” (comme les appelle Even-Zohar) entre les champs ou au sein d’un même champ (des interférences intra et intersystémiques, en termes polysystémiques). (*Le Québec* 23-24)

give account of the linguistic and cultural diversity of some systems, and designed to study the interactions and “interferences (as they are called by Even -Zohar)

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<sup>15</sup> Emphasis mine, in order to demonstrate the external forces that determine what literature is and should be.

<sup>16</sup> The various attempts to boost indigenous publishing were marred by Nigeria’s uncertain economy.

between fields or systems within same field (intra and inter-systemic interactions, in terms of the polysystem). (My translation)

Therefore, the one of the purposes of this chapter are to account for the complexity of the Nigerian literary polysystem and to examine how this complexity may be transposed in or applied to the context of translation in French. I seek to examine the different types of literature circulating in Nigeria and their various non-linear developments. As part of its social, cultural, and historical framework, the perspective of Nigerian literature as a ‘system’ prioritizes its relationship with history, hence the importance of describing its “evolution in time” (Codde 92) within a specific context, and this is one of the objectives of the polysystem approach. The following section discusses the historical background of the field of inquiry (Nigerian literature) while concentrating on the certain strategic moments of its evolution. Within the polysystem model, I discuss the system with reference to other subsystems or other literatures that exist within this broad system. Some of the questions asked in this study involve the different types of literatures existing in Nigeria, any possible interactions between them, what types of literature and privileged, and why those types may be favoured in original and in French translation. Answers to these questions will provide information on which literatures are selected for translation and why they are selected. Apart from these objectives, I reemphasize with Didier Coste that “the poetics of literary translation does not only concern the production of the translated but also the production of the ‘original,’” (2) thus the consideration of the system of literature in Nigeria.

## **2.2. Nigerian Literature: A Brief Historical Background**

The origins of Nigerian Literature can be traced to Government College Umuahia and University College Ibadan. Studies such as Robert Wren’s *Those Magical Years; The Making of Nigerian*

*Literature at Ibadan*, Terri Ochiagha's *Achebe and Friends at Umuahia: The Making of a Literary Elite*, and Femi Osofisan's *The Muse of Anomy*, account for the birth of Nigerian literature and the roles played by the two institutions during these early years. Government College Umuahia (GCU), which heralded the development of the Mbari Club,<sup>17</sup> was initially established by the British Colonial Administration in Nigeria as a Teacher Training College (TTC) and promoted to the status of a secondary school in 1930. Ochiagha described Umuahia as the "enabling environment that sparked off the literary careers of Modern Nigerian authors" (13). In *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, Achebe noted that "Perhaps, it was a mere coincidence but Government College Umuahia alumni played a conspicuous role in the development of Modern African Literature" (21). He further observed that William Simpson, the principal of the school at the time, "would have been greatly surprised if anyone had said to him in the 1940s that he was preparing the ground for the beginnings of African Literature" (23). GCU was thus a nurturing ground for early contributors to the history of Nigerian literature and African literature in general. Some of the students at the college who later became prominent writers include Elechi Amadi, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, Chukwuemeka Ike, and Chinua Achebe. Even though he died at the early age of 36, Okigbo was hailed by Ochiagha as one of Africa's most accomplished and influential modernist poet, and was credited with helping to shape African Poetry and influencing the works of Caribbean and African-American poets such as Derek Walcott and Jay Wright. At the GCU, these young writers in the making were introduced to literary culture in the course of their education through the creation of distinct literary initiatives that encouraged both literary and non-literary student writing.

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<sup>17</sup> The Mbari Club is one of the early initiatives of literary publishing in Nigeria.

One such initiative was *The Eastern Star*, a literary journal that served as a means of exchange and unity among colleges in Eastern Nigeria at the time. Ochiagha praised the journal for having “made a mark in the foundational text of a Nigerian first-generation writing, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” (39).<sup>18</sup> Another was *Government College Umuahia Magazine*, published annually and reserved for the “best writers.”<sup>19</sup> Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike, Chike Momah, and other Nigerian literary pioneers were part of the editorial team at the college. The poems, stories, and other articles in these magazines and journals were written by the students, and also managed by them under the supervision and editorial skills of their British English teachers. GCU provided these first-generation writers with an avenue to nurture and hone their literary skills, as evidenced in Chike Momah’s letter:

Government College Umuahia was where I had the principal foundation for whatever merit there might be in my literary endeavours. It was there that I received my first real exposure to the world of literature. GCU was where my writing skills were developed and molded perhaps close to its most refined quality.

(Ochiagha 109)

The University College Ibadan (UCI), which would later become the University of Ibadan, was also a breeding ground for a generation of Nigerian writers, including but not limited to Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, and J.P. Clark, who is one of the micro-minority writers. According to Wren,

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<sup>18</sup> She explained that a piece originally written by a student named N.O. Ejiogu, *Christianity and Native Customs*, featuring a discussion between a pagan and his son, would influence the conversations between Akunna and Mr. Brown in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

<sup>19</sup> Ochiagha noted that the editorial team was made up of students, but was meticulously supervised by the teachers. Therefore, the selection was rigorous and the articles that were published in the annual magazine were deemed the best among what was obtained by the team.

Ibadan produced at least four writers who were recognized everywhere in the world, two of them candidates for Nobel, and one a laureate” (17).<sup>20</sup> Wren pointed out that it was not essentially UCI that determined the contributions of the writers, but ‘primarily’ the writers who found their niche and voice in such a conducive environment.

Advancing the tradition that existed at the GCU, the University of Ibadan established a literary magazine, *The Horn*, with the poet J.P. Clark as its first editor. *The Horn* became a site in which young poets commented on pre- and postcolonial development in Nigeria. Ibadan was also important in the history of Nigerian literature because of the establishment of the Mbari Artists and Writers Club, which eventually gave way to Mbari Publications. The name “Mbari,” chosen by Chinua Achebe, means “creation” and referred to the works of the artists and poets who were part of the club. Founded in 1961 by the German academic Ulli Beier, the Mbari Club was a literary and cultural hub for poets, novelists, dramaturge and artists such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark, and Christopher Okigbo. Mbari Publications became a publishing house for works not only by Nigerian writers but by African writers in general. In the early days of Nigerian literature, writers would publish outside the country, a tradition that has continued even in the modern era. This external influence provided a ‘model,’ in polysystem terms, for the publication of literary works. The first two Nigerian novels in English, Amos Tutuola’s *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1952) and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), were published by British companies, Faber and Faber and Heinemann, respectively. Although Mbari had not been conceived as a publisher, but simply as a place in which authors could gather to discuss their works, it did publish the first books by J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, and Wole Soyinka, as well as translations of Francophone African works by South African writers. Like the Salons of

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<sup>20</sup> Wren was most likely referring to Achebe and Soyinka.

nineteenth-century Paris, in which men and women of letters would gather for intellectual discussions, the Mbari club provided an environment of literary power and free expression.

Although these two institutions are important to the development of Nigerian literature, other authors studied at other schools in Nigeria, such as the Government College Kastina, which was established as a training institution in Northern Nigeria. The absence of discussion on these colleges or the literary activities that took place there does not in any way suggest that their importance and contributions to Nigerian Literature are being ignored or understated, but they are at least acknowledged in this thesis.

The British administration also had its part to play in establishing a fertile ground for the creation of Nigerian literature. Ochiagha pointed out that although there have been general historical references to these authors and their years of formation at these institutions, their works and the ideologies they communicate cannot be generalized because they represent “different approaches to the representations of African (Nigerian) realities” (179).<sup>21</sup> They should rather be understood in relation to their contributions to the foundation of modern Nigerian literature. These institutions were separate entities, but they intersect in many ways, and the history of Nigerian literature is incomplete without reference to both of them. Despite their geographical and linguistic differences from each other, they did work toward the common goals of expressing the “African Past” (Wren 74) and “an authentic African identity within the colonist’s language and literary conventions” (Booth 6). In this regard, for many writers in the eastern axis of Umuahia, joining the Ibadan league was a significant achievement. Without undermining the role played by the British administrators of these institutions, we can infer that Nigerian literature was

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<sup>21</sup> This will be explained later in this chapter in relation to the notion of national literature in Nigeria.

significantly shaped and influenced by the actions of these writers. The students were independent, despite being under the supervision of their teachers; they chose what they wanted to say and what needed to be said. Other factors of the time included the European tradition of bringing various initiatives to Africa, and the question of language(s) for literary writing; however, as Wren noted, in order to understand “the discoverable pattern underlying the creation of art” in Nigeria, “the Nigerian writers themselves were primary” (17). The writers found their voices in a supportive and nurturing environment; though the British administration and institutions provided the groundwork, it was the energy and dedication of the writers toward the production of a literature that they could call their own, and the urge to retell their pasts and presents, that culminated in what we recognize today as modern Nigerian literature.

### **2.3. Modern Nigerian Literature**

Like most of its counterparts in other African cultures, Nigerian literature began as an oral art form performed by elders, storytellers, and griots, in African festivals, and in the forms of fables, legends and folktales. These oral narratives were important influences on the development of Nigerian literature in English. The most common oral narrative in traditional Nigerian society is the proverb, a form that is commonly used by Nigerian writers in English, especially Igbo writers.<sup>22</sup> It was not until 1952 that the first Nigerian novel in English, *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, was published. A year after its publication, the French novelist and Oulipo co-founder, Raymond Queneau, translated it into French on 1953. As the first Nigerian novel in English, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* is considered a transition from oral literature in vernacular languages to written

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<sup>22</sup> This is why the discourse of orality has constituted studies in translation studies and will be part of the textual analysis of this thesis.



Nigerian literature in English, written in the “interlanguage” of colonial English that does not necessarily comply with rules of English grammar but is closer to the oral tales of the author’s first language, Yoruba. It relies much on traditional folktales, myths, and legends of the Yoruba people, and its distinctive prose style inspired debate on the existence of what could be uniquely termed “African literature.” The plot of the novel, which centers on the narrator’s visit to the land of the dead to bring back his palm wine tapster, received some criticism for its depiction of Western stereotypes of Africa. Even so, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* marked the beginning of Nigerian Literature in English (NLE), paving the way for other important works and being almost immediately translated into French. The translation would have significant effects of its own, as NLE gradually and increasingly made its way into the rest of Africa and the greater world. The 1950s saw the emergence of two other well-known writers: Cyprian Ekwensi, who was considered as the one of the most prolific Nigerian writer; and Chinua Achebe, who is deemed the father of African literature. These two were the forerunners of a generation of writers whose discourses would be influenced by the various Nigerian oral literatures and literary traditions.

#### **2.4. Themes and Generational Classification in Modern Nigerian Literature**

To understand which works are selected for translation into French, it is important to keep in mind the themes and generational categories of modern Nigerian literature. Doing so allows us to determine whether there is any relationship between the classification of a work and its selection for translation, or whether any given generation of Nigerian writers are more frequently translated than others. Scholars have noted that thematic and temporal descriptions do not offer clear demarcations, because of the overlaps and differences and the difficulties of categorizing Nigerian literature into specific periods. Garuba confirms that “even at the most propitious of

times, when a convergence of historical events and a creative ferment of the imagination appear to announce their evidence, literary periodization remains a messy business” (51). Egea echoes Garuba by drawing attention to the problem and suggests that such a categorization is for convenience, since any attempt would oversimplify the authors’ “strong connection to boundless extra-literary context [...] and a continuum” (“Nation” 14). This implies that some writers considered to be part of the first generation may still be very much active in the third generation because of their symbolic capital within and especially outside the country. Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to identify the historic and thematic issues that have marked the evolution of Nigerian literature, rather than to prove the relevance of a classification based on any such criteria and thus verify if the corresponding body of works has been translated. Garuba claims that with the complexity of the term in mind, scholars have generally agreed on the use of “generation’ as a term to “describe” rather than to “demarcate” (52). In their classification of Nigerian authors, Adesanmi and Dunton maintained that the issue of generational classification of literature is an

exercise of system description [...] that demarcates a literary field and the markers of generation of writings are temporal coevality and thematic/ideological preferences [in which] the writers, artists and intellectuals who are categorized as belonging to a particular generation either fall within a loosely determined age bracket, or are published within a loosely defined timeframe on the one hand, and their themes/tropes are shaped by identifiable events or experiences commonly shared. (“Nigeria Third” 13)

The first generation of Nigerian writers includes authors whose texts are heavily influenced by the experiences of colonialism and whose writings can be characterized as finding a niche within colonial discourses including that of traditionalism in opposition to modernity. Most of these authors were born in the first several decades of the twentieth century. Some of them include Chinua Achebe, T.M. Aluko, Wole Soyinka,<sup>23</sup> Cyprian Ekwensi, and a few female authors such as Flora Nwapa and Adaora Ulasi. The second generation includes writers born within the first five decades of the twentieth century and mostly published during the 1970s and 1980s.

According to Ochiagha, these writers do not focus on colonial contestation as much as on other topics such as disillusionment with Nigerian independence (6). Some of these authors include Chukwuemeka Ike, Elechi Amadi, Buchi Emecheta, Helen Obviagele, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Festus Iyayi, Abubakar Gimba, Zaynab Alkali, Odia Ofeimum, Tunde Fatunde, Bode Sowande, Tanure Ojaide, and Wale Okediran. Studies observed that the subject matter about which they wrote exhibits several slight differences; where some discussed the troubles of independence, others were already examining the Nigeria-Biafra war. The differences in narratives could be explained in part by differences in the writers' lived experiences. For instance, the theme of war has inspired and continued to inspire many Nigerian authors whose generation have been affected by the civil war, as works such as Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, Mbachu's *War Game*, and Adimorah Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* demonstrate. The so-called third-generation Nigerian authors, meanwhile, have addressed themes such as social anomie and disenchantment, female and male sexuality, gay relationships, violence, Islamist extremism, infertility, and infidelity.

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<sup>23</sup> Adesanmi and Dunton noted that sometimes the works of Achebe and Soyinka were not included in the first generation on certain Marxist Reformist grounds (15). However, this is outside the scope of this discussion.

## 2.5. Third Generation Writers and The Rise of the Afropolitans

The third-generation writers are those who were born after Nigeria achieved independence in 1960. The first decade of the third generation of Nigerian literature was dominated by poetry, but this is not due to any abandonment of prose fiction during this period. Adesanmi and Dunton have noted that manuscripts such as Adesokan's *Roots in the Sky*<sup>24</sup> and Omowummi's *Third Dimple* were praised for their originality, but had difficulty finding publishers, as is common in the struggle for domination between the centre and the periphery. *Roots in the Sky* was not published until 2004 after having experienced multiple submissions and rejections. Similarly, Biyi Bandele did not publish his novels *The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams*, *The Man Who Came In From the Back of Beyond* and *The Street* until after his relocation to England, whereupon they made their way into academic reading lists in South Africa, Canada, and the United States. Heinemann published Ike Oguine's *The Squatter's Tale* and Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* under the African Writers Series, while other authors of this generation who have achieved success include Helon Habila, Chris Abani, and Chimamanda Adichie. Adesanmi and Dunton have claimed that the works of these writers not only affected the visibility of third generation writing, but entered the literary canon almost as soon as they were published.<sup>25</sup> They fall into the description below:

They are Afropolitans. [...] there is at least one place on the African continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then

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<sup>24</sup> *Roots* was published by Festac Books while *Third Dimple* was published by Heinemann Nigeria

<sup>25</sup> It would be interesting to study why these works achieved recognition in the West so quickly. The focus in this thesis will be on their places of publication, except for the case studies.

there's the g8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.

(Selasi)

The above quotation from Taye Selasi's article *Bye-Bye Babar (or: What is an Afropolitan)?* is useful descriptor for the most visible modern Nigerian writers.<sup>26</sup> It describes those who were born in Nigeria but were privileged with western education and enjoy western recognition and international mobility. Casanova characterizes the world literary space as "organized in terms of the opposition between, on one hand, an autonomous pole composed of those spaces that are most endowed in literary resources, which serves as a model and a recourse for writers claiming a position of independence in newly formed spaces" (108). Though not in direct opposition, and not necessarily reflecting external characteristics, the success of the "Afropolitans" is significantly dependent upon Western recognition, or what Casanova describes as a "certificate of literariness" (136) from the West. In the absence of geographical proximity between Nigeria and the Anglo-Saxon Republic of Letters (in this case, New York, America in general, or London), the most reasonable step towards international recognition is to bridge the spatial gap by moving to or closer to the center. Although this step does not ensure immediate recognition, it does provide writers a place on the international scene:

The immense profit that writers from literarily impoverished spaces have obtained in the past and still obtain today, from being published and recognized in the major centers- through translation and the prestige conferred by imprints that symbolize literary

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<sup>26</sup> I recognize that afropolitanism and its discourse has been a controversial topic and has been refuted by many scholars and writers such as Adichie. The use of this definition here is literal and ignores all political or apolitical references or any further ideological connotations.

excellence, the distinction that accompanies a formal introduction of an unknown writer by an internationally renowned author, even the award of literary prizes-supplies evidence of the real effects of literary belief. (Casanova 17)

The culture of awarding literary prizes has become a matter of tradition. In the Anglophone African literary universe, as well in other literary worlds, literary prizes are heavily relied upon by authors not just for the status and recognition, the wider readership it brings, the prospective international publishing, its monetary reward and the prospects for translation. In Nigeria, for example, there are only a few prizes for which many writers who publish both at home and abroad compete. The most prestigious prize is the Nigerian LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) Prize for Literature which has now been changed to Nigerian Prize for Literature worth 100,000 US dollars. Because writers have difficulty being published and are yet to benefit from any foreseeable government subsidies for publication, the prize is very competitive. Although there are other local literary prizes in Nigeria, these do not guarantee literary prestige or financial reward, and some of these prizes have been reduced or terminated as private stakeholders withdraw sponsorships and subsidies. For example, the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), which awards various prizes including the ANA/NDDC Ken Saro Wiwa Prize for prose, the J.P. Clark Prize for Drama, the Gabriel Okara Prize for poetry, and the Flora Nwapa Prize for Women Writing, experienced setbacks due to economic difficulties and to the withdrawal of sponsors, including Chevron Limited, Cadbury Limited, and the Nigeria-Delta Development Commission. According to Lidudumalingani, the South African winner of the 2016 Caine Prize for African Writing, in an interview with *The Guardian*: “Writers in Africa work hard to cover stories with very little resources. There is no money in it, because no one pays you until you win

some kind of prize.”<sup>27</sup> In the absence of resources and international recognition, many Nigerian writers remained in their relatively marginal space without the international attention that provides the chance for translation. Even in the case of Québec, Córdoba-Serrano explains that the legitimization of Quebecois literature and the rejection of French principles did not completely eliminate the power of the French center over certain Quebecois writers, both for international acclaim and for translation (“Translation and Domination” 254). The question remains as to whether Nigerian writers whose works have been published in France had first been published in the US or the UK before their works were translated, as well as whether literary prizes have any effect on the selection of Nigerian writers to be translated.

## **2.6. Nigerian Feminist Writing**

Feminist writing is another important aspect of Nigerian literature worth discussing in the greater context of translation into French. The Nigerian literary scene, particularly in the 1980s, was male-dominated; however, since that time, feminist writing has become a subsystem of its own in Nigerian literature due to its distinctiveness from works by male authors.<sup>28</sup> Some early and contemporary Nigerian women writers include Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mabel Segun, Adaora Lily Ulasi, Zaynab Alkali, Tess Onwueme, Helen Ofurum, and Mabel Segun. The themes they explore in their work, according to studies by Egya (“Infraction and Change”) and Byrce, range from the creation of feminist awareness, through resistance to empowerment and attribution of new sociopolitical roles to women.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with the *Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/10/prize-winning-caine-prize-african-author-writers-must-diversify-to-survive](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/10/prize-winning-caine-prize-african-author-writers-must-diversify-to-survive). 10 July 2016.

<sup>28</sup> A more detailed discussion of this topic could provide material for a future study. Other studies have already identified three phases of development in feminism in Nigeria.

The 1960s saw an outpouring of feminist literature in Nigeria with the emergence of writers such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, who broke away from traditional gender roles with their respective breakout novels, *Efuru* and *Second-Class Citizen*. Their works inspired other female authors to challenge the image of the submissive housewife and raise awareness of the imbalances of patriarchy. As Egey has observed, modern Nigerian feminist literature has progressed past the image of the virtuous housewife to that of the economically and politically engaged woman: “The African feminist discourse, written by women, has moved beyond the phase of lamented self-portrait, beyond mere portrayal of the oppressive patriarchy, to a broadly political engagement” (“Infraction and Change” 110). This evolution of identity reflects the movement of Nigerian women from the consciousness of a male-authored identity to an almost sudden self-realization and affirmation of a new reality with women at the centre. Many of these writers, such as Adichie, Sefi Attah, Helen Oyeyemi, Chika Unigwe, Unomah Azuah, Akachi Adimorah Ezeigbo, and Chinelo Okparanta, have earned international acclaim. It is left to find out if they also found their place when it comes to the translation of their works in French.

## **2.7. Charting the Nigerian Literary Polysystem**

### **2.7.1. The Question of National Literature**

In Nigeria, literature is part of a ‘national consciousness’ debated among academics and politicians and unavoidably present in the works of writers themselves. As pointed out by most scholars, it is difficult to explicitly and accurately refer to the body of works produced in Nigeria as truly a national literature, in part due to historical, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences. As Sullivan has observed, these differences resulted in little or no national loyalty (73). To understand the backdrop from which the question of Nigerian literature and national literature is



construed, the ethnic differences and why the notion of a national literature remains a mirage, it is important to refer to history as detailed by Sullivan (72-73). Before amalgamation by Lord Lugard in 1914, Nigeria operated under three separate colonial territories: Lagos, the North, and the South. The amalgamation, however, did not dissolve the different administrations, so that by 1945, regionalism had set in, with the northern Hausa, the southwest Yoruba, and the southeast Ibo each maintaining its own capital and parliament. In addition to these three major groups, there were also various minority groups such as the aforementioned “micro-minorities” whose histories complicate the question of regionalism. In the 1950s, the northernization policy<sup>29</sup>, with its motto “One North, One People,” ignited fury between the north and south. A civil war resulted in part from the reaction of the southeast to the northernization policy, a mass concentration of human and economic resources on the north. After an unfavorable outcome of the civil war,<sup>30</sup> the Easterners still hoped for the exit of the Biafrans (Igbo) from the country. Various religious conflicts<sup>31</sup> in all parts of Nigeria have further indicated a rejection of the peaceful coexistence of the different ethnic groups. Sullivan explained that “Since 1914, the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs, and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite. [Nationalism in Nigeria becomes] a mere geographical expression” (72), since the country itself is “a hybrid state; a nation of multiple nations coalescing to form the basis of nationness and national belonging” (Nwakanma 2). Onookome explains that “ethnic debates make it obvious that there is hardly a common center” (“Before” xv). Such an absence of a centre further complicates the attempt at describing

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<sup>29</sup> The northerners were given most of the positions in the federal government

<sup>30</sup> The Igbos hoped that the war would lead to separation.

<sup>31</sup> Some of these include the Fulani killings, the Boko Haram kidnappings, the arrest of the Nnamdi Kanu, and the protests in the Eastern States.

the Nigerian literary polysystem<sup>32</sup>, especially as the lack of belief in the idea of a nation is nurtured not only by politicians, but also by the general population and by writers. In this regard, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka affirmed that Nigeria may well be categorized as a ‘non-nation’ if what constitutes a nation is the will of the people. Consequently, such a lack of will for nationhood impinges on the institutionalization of a national literature written by regionally, linguistically and even politically divided people with different experiences and concerns.

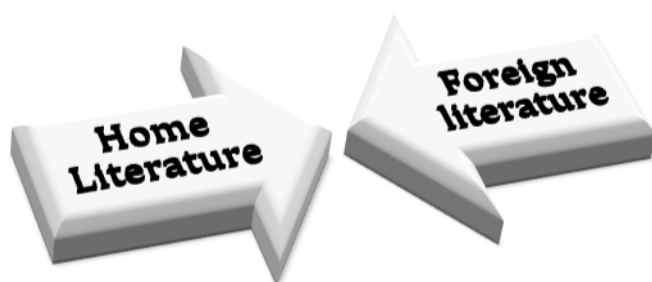
On the contrary, National literature is understood as motivated by the uniqueness of experiences and by an expression of uniform identity. In his discussion of national literature in Nigeria, Sullivan noted that the question of national character or identity collapses when one considers the body of Nigerian literature, which is an aggregate of languages, themes, consciousness and stylistics (74). The unresolved question of national literature complicates the categorizing of such a literary system. However, since the issue of national literature is delineated by the notions of language and ethnicity, it is important to chart the Nigerian literary system based on its linguistic importance. In the chart, some subsystems occupy a proposed ‘center’<sup>33</sup> of the system, and others the periphery. Nigerian literature, as seen here, consists of two main categories: “home literature” and “foreign literature.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I am using center in this chapter to identify the most visible type of literature

<sup>33</sup> The center and periphery are here tailored according to the realities inherent in the Nigerian literature system. Although the proposal of a center can be challenged, the idea of a center is informed by the linguistic choices that the writers favour.

<sup>34</sup> Since the focus of this project is the translation of Nigerian literature, and only those elements that may inform the selection of translations are being prioritized here, I will make only brief references to the position of other translated literatures in Nigeria.



**Figure 2: Nigerian literary polysystem based on home and foreign literatures**

Contrary to certain descriptions of cultural polysystems, this categorization does not include other subsystems such as artistic creations.<sup>35</sup> As polysystem theory accounts for the behaviour and evolution of a literary system, what constitutes the core of this inquiry into

the Nigerian literary polysystem is the necessity of exploring reasons why Nigerian culture privileges certain types of literature over others. It is important to underscore that Nigerian literature as a system is governed by colonialism and the colonial legacy, and by different social factors predetermined by ethnicity and linguistic differences.

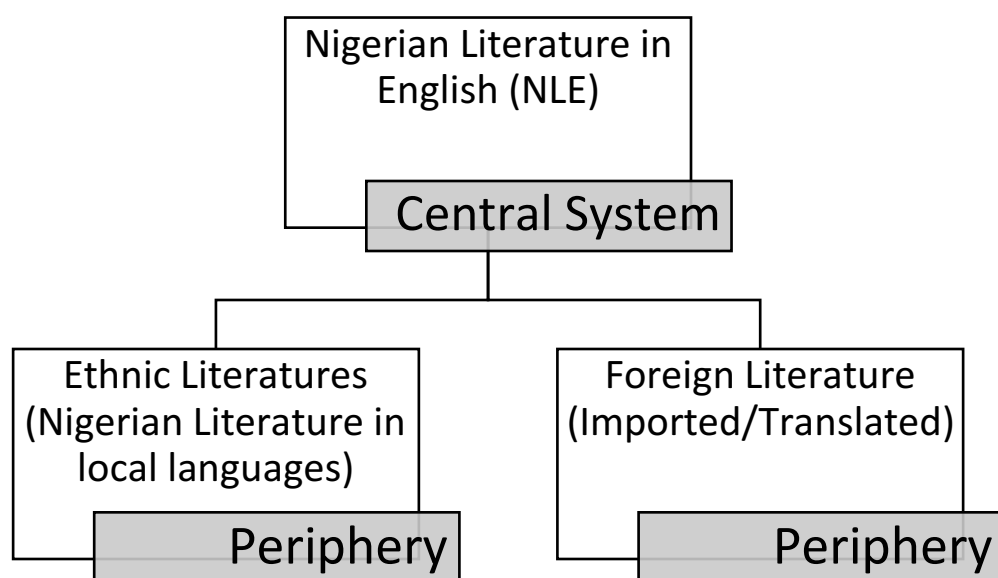
### **2.7.2. The Question of Language and Ethnicity**

Nigeria boasts approximately 500 languages, with Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa as the major ones. Like many other sub-Saharan African countries with many languages, such as Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, or Sierra Leone, Nigeria experiences struggles over the “prioritization” of indigenous languages as official languages. In such a multilingual society, many writers advocate the use of

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<sup>35</sup> The elements described here may account in part for some of the other elements making up the larger sociocultural system of the country, the charting here cannot be considered as a description of all the elements existing under the national cultural systems.

English with unique characteristics.<sup>36</sup> English is considered important because of its cultural value and its lack of favoritism of one indigenous language over others: “Authors choose to write in English not only to secure publication, but to further their literary and social prestige through international recognition, to obtain a wider reading audience and a release from the perceived social stigma of ethnic or regional provincialism” (Sullivan 75). Literature written in English dominates Nigeria’s literary system, a position that is, according to Casanova, ensured by the “literariness” (17) of the language: the power, prestige, and volume of literary capital associated with the use of English. Such social capital is further reinforced by the number of publishers, editors, critics, and especially translators who ensure the circulation of texts into the language and out of it (21).



**Figure 3: The Nigerian Literary System, showing the center and periphery**

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<sup>36</sup> Achebe refers to this as the use of alien English for unifying purposes. Debates about language and African writers have dominated literary discourses on the development of African literatures.

As a heterogeneous society, Nigeria has faced numerous conflicts stemming from ethnicity and linguistic diversity. Even though English has served in part as a ‘unifying’ tool chosen and privileged not only by the majority of writers but also by much of the population, writers still face what Obododimma Oha calls the problem of being accepted as “authentic voices” (137). A writer’s ethnic positioning could potentially cost him/her audiences, school reading lists, or critical acclaim, as is frequently the case for authors from what are considered micro-minority groups.

### **2.7.3. The Question of Indigenous Languages**

Though many writers agree with Achebe on the “the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in (Nigerian) literature” (“Morning Yet” xiii), other writers and scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o regard such a stance as a risk to works written in local languages that are thus obscured and relegated to the background. These writers maintain that choosing English over local languages is, as nineteenth-century philosopher and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher notes, “an act that runs counter to both nature and morality to become a deserter to one’s own mother tongue” (Lefevere, *Translation History* 5). The Nigerian language planning consensus, in line with the objectives of protecting regional and ethnic languages from extinction, mandates that indigenous languages be taught in schools in Nigeria. For example, the 2004 National Policy on Education highlights the importance of using indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in maternal education and the importance of learning languages other than one’s native language. Despite these recommendations, scholars such as Ruth Adebile have criticized these policies as mere stipulations “lacking resources for implementation” (119). Since indigenous languages in Nigeria face a struggle for survival, the position of Nigerian literature written in English and especially in local languages cannot be entirely separated from this

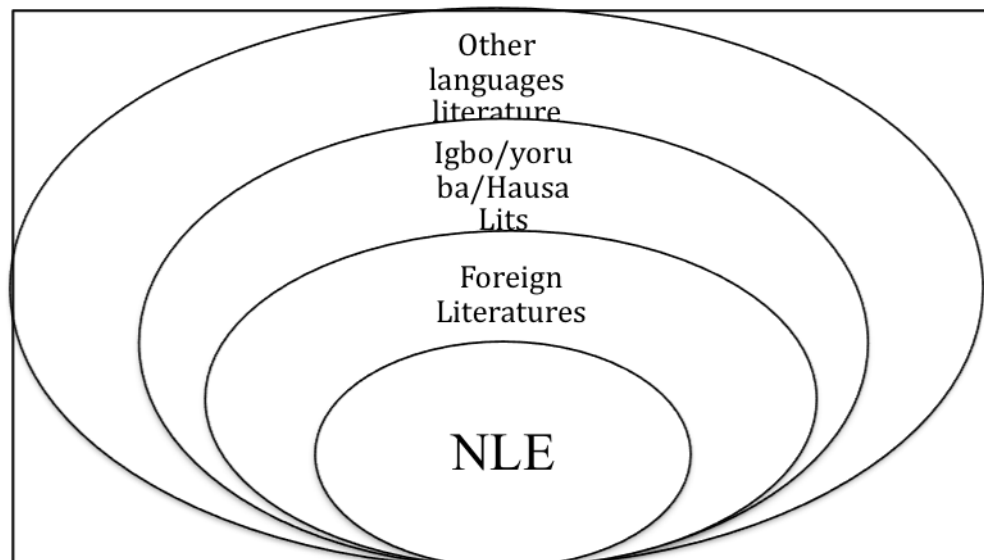
concern. On that account, political factors and changes play important roles in the evolution of the literary system. Without the implementation of indigenous language policies, the production, circulation, and consumption of literature in these languages continue to decline in comparison to NLE. During the 1975 International Conference on “Publishing and Book Development” held at the University of Ife, writers, especially successful writers, were admonished to ensure that their “most important work is made available in at least one indigenous language” (Oluwasanmi et al. 8). Even with this in mind and not delving into the logistics of making that advice a reality, the possibility still exists that these works would be limited to Nigeria’s three main languages: Yoruba, Hausa, or Igbo, and may lack potentials for translation.

#### **2.7.4. Literary System Based on Languages**

While Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba literatures are prioritized, this does, however, overlook literatures in ‘minority’ languages such as Tiv, Ijaw, or Urhobo, to name a few. Despite the long history of Nigerian indigenous literatures<sup>37</sup>, there is a significant gap in development and growth between those literatures and NLE, especially in the cases of local languages that are not privileged in the same way as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Giving particular importance to only three of these languages leads to the marginalization of others, placing them at greater risk for extinction.

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<sup>37</sup> Igbo literature can be traced to the nineteenth century, when missionaries attempted to formally develop the Igbo alphabet, and in 1933, the first Igbo novel, Pita Nwana’s *Omenuko*, was published and later translated into French in 2011 by Françoise Ugochukwu. Hausa literature is older than that, dating back to the fifteenth century with the emergence of written folktales and Arabian tales.



**Figure 4: Literary System based on languages**

Under the literary system, literature written in the major indigenous languages<sup>38</sup> of Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba literatures exist on the periphery while NLE continues to occupy the central position in the Nigerian literary system. Literatures in other languages such as Urhobo, Ijaw, and others, are further relegated to the sub-periphery. Emerging and contemporary Nigerian writers follow the examples of earlier generations of writers and western recognition standards by preferring English over indigenous languages for the simple reason that there are not enough opportunities to promote indigenous-language literature in Nigeria. Moreover, like other African postcolonial nations, Nigerian literature seeks acclaim in the West, which does not necessarily prioritize works in local languages.

Foreign works, both in English and in translation, are better known than those in local languages, as demonstrated by the lack of functional policies to promote writing in indigenous languages. Discussions with teachers in Nigeria demonstrated that most schools do not teach literature in

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<sup>38</sup> Here, “Igbo literature” or “Igbo novels” are differentiated from Nigerian literature written in English by Igbo authors (Emenyonu, *Rise of the Igbo Novel*).

indigenous languages. Nonyelum Obi confirms that that it is difficult for the teachers to divide the short period allocated to Igbo language classes in primary schools between the various parts of the course, such as Igbo grammar (Utoasusu), customs and institutions (Omenala), and Igbo literature (Agumagu) (256-257). The implication is that most teachers focus on grammar at the expense of literature. In her study of Nigerian novels, Wendy Griswold claimed that the readers she surveyed did not indicate strong preferences for African or Nigerian writers. As a more viable indication of reading preferences, Griswold (112-114) compared the number of times Nigerian and non-Nigerian novels were checked out at the British Council Library in Lagos. Her results show that Nigerian novels were borrowed an average of 3.491 times between 1993 and 1995, while non-Nigerian novels were borrowed 3.344 times. Griswold argued that though these data show a preference for NLE, the average number of times that foreign novels were checked out cannot be compared to those for indigenous-language books because the number of foreign books in circulation is not equal to the number of non-Nigerian books, and the number of readers who can read in a specific language is limited. Internal power control within a given system further complicates the emergence and promotion of new writers in indigenous languages. Alain Ricard explains that the Igbo literary system or field, for example, is controlled by a few linguists who, to their individual gains and at the expense of literature texts and literary experience of literature lovers, only write and publish texts that they make part of school programs. In this way, the experience of readers is limited to school texts and the overall literary capital of these indigenous literatures continue to be weak. J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada echoes previous observations by pointing out that the progress of indigenous literature was hindered by specific indigenous “politics of orthography,<sup>39</sup> colonial language policies, and the status and influence of

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<sup>39</sup> One such example can be seen with Igbo, as it moved from the pictographic and ideographic



English language” (124) in Nigeria. Jerry Adesowo claims that because of the limited market, publishers are no longer interested in indigenous-language writers except for scholarly purposes, and the few indigenous-language works that have been published are no longer in circulation. Some of the factors influencing this trend include the literacy and alphabetization of Nigerian readers, the quest for a wider readership, and the availability of resources for publication.

### **2.7.5. The Question of Home and Foreign Publishing of Nigerian Literature**

In the 1960s, literary publishing flourished in Nigeria thanks in part to the publishing activities of the Mbari Club. One of the objectives of the early Nigerian writers at Ibadan was to protect their literary and cultural productions by publishing locally. According to James Currey, the young writers of the Mbari Club sought to “have their work controlled by publishers within Nigeria rather than international companies with headquarters in Europe and the U.S.” (“Literary Publishing” 8). The club flourished and expectations were raised, as the Mbari Club was seen as a centre for African publishing that would serve the needs of both eastern and western African readers. However, as Currey pointed out, Mbari lacked sales expertise to reach wider English-speaking Africa and the Commonwealth. The Biafran war caused the dispersion of its members to their respective states of origin. This was but one example of the political, logistical and financial problems that bedeviled not only the production of literature but also indigenous-language publishers in Nigeria.

During military rule in the early 1990s, the Nigerian publishing industry saw a major decline, particularly in 1993, at the annulment of the election meant to herald democracy. Many writers,

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Nsibidi orthography to the syllabic script of Nwagu Aneke, and to Roman orthography introduced by Christian missionaries. The search for a universal standard literary language in view of many Igbo dialects resulted in different periods. See Azuonye

[https://works.bepress.com/chukwuma\\_azuonye/75/](https://works.bepress.com/chukwuma_azuonye/75/)

activists, and journalists became enemies of the state, and with the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, many of them fled the country. Currey also attributes the migration of writers to the constant decline in publishing literature at home. Garuba further explained:

There were the World Bank/IMF-induced structural adjustment policies of the 1980s which dramatically affected the infrastructure of literary production in Nigeria; the waning of metropolitan publishing houses as active agents within' the Nigerian publishing scene; or the new military dictatorships that installed a culture of corruption and mismanagement and consolidated an economic and social regime of primitive accumulation and chaotic individualism. When these historical factors together with the dearth of books, the collapse of libraries, the rise of cable television and the internet are placed beside the proliferation of new universities, we have a situation in which everyday life is no longer defined by coherence and consistency but by the contradictions, banalities and multiple appropriations that Achilles Mbembe theorizes as characteristic of the African postcolony. (66)

Only a few publishing houses, such as Onibonoje Publishing, remained in Nigeria, and those that did were faced with a lack of basic infrastructures and resources. Literary piracy and other examples of copyright breaches further impeded the progress of both authors and publishers. In *Pambazuka News*, Ana Zoria discusses a post created by a writer who was searching for a publishing outlet in Nigeria. The writer not only attributed the absence of literary agents and publishers to online downloads of pirated novels, but also provided links to websites on which such material could be found. Self-publishing and substandard production became, more often than not, a sort of recourse. In addition, poor book reading culture was a deterrent to investing huge resources in publishing. The report published by the IPA (International Publishers

Association) stated that Nigerian creative growth is mostly affected by piracy and that illegal sales account for an estimated 75% of the book market.

The experiences, visions, and decisions of agents in the field of Nigerian literature, were influenced not only by their traditional worldview but also by external or foreign interactions such as foreign missionaries, colonial administrators, and British and German professors in schools, for example, the subsequent domination of literary publishing by British commercial publishers such as Faber and Faber and Heinemann, as well as the decision of many Nigerian authors, especially the Afropolitans, to publish outside the country. While the history of publishing in Nigeria is an interesting subject on its own, for the purpose of this study the dominance of western publishers significantly influenced the consumption and circulation of literature both inside and outside of Nigeria. Most importantly for this project, this lack of local publishers affects the choices of books translated.

## **2.8. Translation Practices in Nigeria**

The history of professional translation in Nigeria began with missionaries translating between indigenous languages and English. The first pioneering works include the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages as well as the translation of laws and decrees of the colonial administration. The translation of the bible was instrumental in the development of literacy in indigenous languages and especially in English. For example, most of the Igbo population, as Dmitri van den Bersselaar claims, was more interested<sup>40</sup> in being educated in English language

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<sup>40</sup> This was not without controversies. For example, the Bible was translated into Igbo in 1913 by a team of Igbo translators and the British Thomas John Dennis, while Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian, translated it into Yoruba in 1880. The controversial Igbo translation of the Bible was criticized as written in an invented language, sometimes called “an Igbo Esperanto” (Fulford

(274). Their literacy could explain in part the significant presence of Igbo writers of English language in the Nigerian literary field and potentially in translation. The history of translation exchanges in Nigeria, as Francis Ajayi recounts (4-6), was further influenced by the membership of Nigeria in the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), whose objective for the its 15 member countries is to promote economic integration and collective self-sufficiency in all fields of activity. With the establishment of the ECOWAS headquarters in Nigeria, there was a need for translation services, with a majority of translations in French<sup>41</sup> (Ajayi 4) because Nigeria is surrounded by French-speaking ECOWAS member countries. Furthermore, Nigeria's major role in the creation of ECOWAS entailed increased transnational interactions between these Francophone countries.

As it concerns the study of translation at institutions, many universities in Nigeria offer translation studies courses at both the undergraduate and master's levels. However, there is no vocational school to train translators, in Nigeria specifically or in Africa in general, as Ekundayo Simpson notes:

Strictly speaking, apart from Ghana, there are no facilities for training of translators and interpreters in West Africa, as far as the European official languages are concerned. The only few trained translators and interpreters are the few successfully trained in France, Britain, Russia, Germany, Ghana, Arab-speaking countries and especially Canada. (257)

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458), a language spoken by no one even though the translators had used "union Igbo" as a unification tool for all the different dialects of the Igbo language.

<sup>41</sup> Apart from English, which is the official language.

The Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI), founded in 1996 by Ekundayo Simpson, is made up of linguists and professionals, professors, and language students trained in Nigeria and elsewhere. Although the name of the organization suggests otherwise, it is not a training institution, and indeed, the members do not have to be practicing translators or interpreters, or even have an undergraduate degree in these fields, to become members. NITI claims to work in different languages such as Arabic, English, French, German, Hausa, Igbo, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Yoruba, and other Nigerian and African languages. Among all these languages listed, the only functioning language is French. While other languages have one or two members listed under them as translators, French has 31 members who offer translation services to the public. Languages such as German have no affiliated members, while Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba have about one or two members each. This raises the question of the representativeness of this body with regard to translation services in other languages. Although there are other associations for other languages, French seems to be the most sought-after language. Some of the members of the association, mainly those trained outside the country, have produced a few literary translations; for example, Olaoye Abioye translated five Yoruba novels written by Fagunwa into French, and also translated Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* and Sembene Ousmane's *Le Mandat* into Yoruba. Some other literary translation activities by NITI members include Modupe Thomas' translation of Mariama Ba's *Une si longue lettre* into English.

Scholars such as Ozidi Bariki, Amosu Tundonu, and Segun Afolabi have decried the decline of translation and interpretation activities in Nigeria. According to Tundonu, translation activity is on the decline in part due to the aging population of translators: "We are presently facing a crisis of succession, because a large majority of those who are actively engaged in translation and

interpretation are well over 50 years old” (37). Other reasons for the decline in translation include the prioritization of literature, applied linguistics, or pedagogy programs over translation studies by students; the lack of adequate or appropriate professional training for the few students interested in translation or interpreting, especially at the graduate level, in the majority of French departments in Nigerian universities; and the lack of interest of students and scholars in translation due to the misconception that translation has no future in Nigeria. Afolabi (11-21) claims that very few universities offer master’s programs in translation; only five of the 16 departments consulted for this study offer one. No university offers a Masters in interpreting, except the French village Badagry, which runs a Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Translating and Interpreting. Only two of the 16 universities examined here offer a PhD in translation. Afolabi’s study omits several prominent universities, such as the University of Nigeria Nsukka, which has long had a French department. There have been several students at the University of Nigeria Nsukka who have graduated from the MA program in translation, and at least two students have earned PhDs in translation. In fact, an unpublished study I conducted in several universities in Nigeria shows that as of 2011, there were more students enrolled in the MA in Translation than students in the MA in Literature in the French departments of these universities.<sup>42</sup> This may be the case for other departments in universities that were not included in Afolabi’s studies. Nevertheless, the enrollment of students in Translation Studies does not refute the obvious need to create and develop translation and interpretation programs in Nigeria. The lack of specialists makes it difficult to train students adequately. Afolabi found that among the 173 professors in the 16 universities studied, only 30 have an MA in Translation, while the

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<sup>42</sup> I refer to this project due to the lack of more recent statistics on this subject.

others held PhDs in Literature, Language, or Linguistics.<sup>43</sup> Although Nigeria does engage in multiple exchanges with regard to French, there is still a need for future work in translation and interpretation practices in French. Afolabi suggests that the task falls on NITI, the professional body that regulates translation activities in Nigeria, however, NITI does appear to have answered this challenge with its recent inception of courses, short training programs, and workshops for translation and interpretation.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

This chapter takes a historical approach to the Nigerian literary system in order to appreciate not only the context in which Nigerian literature functions, but also the various factors that have influenced the evolution of Nigerian literature. The field of Nigerian literature is an active and complex system composed of various subsystems. The chart below summarizes the various transformations and trends that are pertinent to the goals of this chapter. It is not an exhaustive catalogue of all the transformations of the Nigerian literary system, but highlights several phenomena and/or factors that may be considered in this study of French translations. Some of the questions addressed in this chapter include the exchanges and movements of literature from one subsystem to another, such as translations of practices in Nigeria, and themes addressed by writers, such as war, or other contemporary issues. It also touches on the weaknesses in literary capital, caused by the lack of financial support for writers and the resulting scramble for the few existing literary prizes such as the NLNG and ANA Prizes, linguistic and ethnic conflicts, the dearth of publishing local houses, the inherent underrepresentation of indigenous literatures such as Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, and especially, the invisibility of other ethnic literatures found on the

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<sup>43</sup> This may be the case in other translation programs across the world due to the relatively recent implementation of graduate translation programs.

outer-periphery of the Nigerian polysystem. However, the influence of external Western factors on Nigerian literature is perhaps the most crucial topics for this study. Kenneth Harrow observes that at the heart of all African areas of cultural production lies the problem of decisions about important cultural works and control over their production, and “these decisions are inseparable from the cultures and intellectual industries of the West” (151).



**Figure 5: Diachronic chart showing some trends in the Nigerian polysystem**

<sup>44</sup> All inset images are referenced from: <https://guardian.ng/art/nigerian-written-literature-since-1914-part-1/>; <https://hubpages.com/entertainment/the-wisdom-of-african-proverbs>; [https://archive.org/stream/rosettaproject\\_ibo\\_gen-3#page/n0/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/rosettaproject_ibo_gen-3#page/n0/mode/2up)



Other important topics covered in this chapter include the regional and ethnic politics that make the question of national literature problematic and utopic, the struggle for survival of indigenous-language literatures, the designation of Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba as “major languages” and by extension, “major indigenous language literatures” at the expense of others, and the domination of Nigerian literature by English-language works. Although the prioritization of literature written in English poses a risk to those in indigenous languages, it does encourage competition within the field of literature as a whole and the development of initiatives to promote and preserve indigenous literatures. The interaction between English and indigenous-language literatures can be inspiring for both, as many indigenous-language initiatives could be inspired by those that already exist within the English literary system. Despite warnings about the potential extinction of indigenous languages, language, such as Yoruba, do enjoy vibrant literary cultures.

Departments of local languages and ethnic associations have been formed for the purposes of promoting local languages and their literatures. Some of such organizations include the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture, non-governmental groups such as the Pinnacle Association (Igbo Language), and the Yoruba Studies Association, among others. The Egbe Odo Onkowe Ede Yoruba (Association of Young Yoruba Writers) and Center for Yoruba Literature Research, Development and Documentation host annual Yoruba Literature Awards in different categories such as fiction, playwriting, essay writing and poems. The vibrant and diverse literatures of Nigeria should be approached from a multiplicity of perspectives and viewed through different lenses in order to account for specific operations within different cultural configurations. Emma Shercliff, the Nigerian based publisher claimed that despite the strong tradition of Hausa literature, few of these works are circulated outside the region. She characterizes the emergence of novelists from the North such as Elnathan John and Abubakar

Adam Ibrahim who are writing in English about aspects of Nigeria that are unknown to their fellow countrymen in Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu as they are to readers in the West as one of the most exciting literary developments in the field of Nigerian literature. Hausa literature has been classified into generations, such as the fourth generation of Soyayya authors,<sup>45</sup> with Ismaila Tsiga and M.O. Bhadmus' collection of papers on Hausa literature, *Literature, History and Identity in Northern Nigeria* a representative work in this field. According to Booth, "one inevitable result of the regional diversity of Nigeria has been that literature [...] has developed at different rates in different areas" (28). The pertinent question that finally emerges is the influence of ethnic and linguistic differences and Western standards on the translation of its literature into French. The choice of literature to be translated may be influenced by the complex network of different factors within the Nigerian literary field, which may in turn shape the body of translated literature.

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<sup>45</sup> Romance pulp fiction (*books of love*). For more information, see Whitsitt and Faul.

### **Chapter 3: Facts and Figures: Towards an Examination of the Body of Nigerian Literature in French as Part of Cultural Exchange**

#### **3.1. Methodological Considerations**

What is the position of translation and literature in Nigeria? What kinds of books are translated? Who are the publishers of these books in France? Do the translated works reflect the same dynamism and operations observed in the field of Nigerian literature as discussed in the previous chapter? These are some of the questions to which this chapter seeks to respond.

Among the significant number of previous studies of translation of European and North American literatures into other languages and cultures, are von Flotow's *Revealing the Soul of Which Nation: Translated Literature as Cultural Diplomacy* and Córdoba-Serrano's *Le Québec traduit en Espagne. Le Québec traduit en Espagne* focuses specifically on Quebecois feminist literature, which the author recognizes as "peripheral." This dissertation can be seen as an analogue to Córdoba-Serrano's study in that Nigerian literature is not currently part of the mainstream global literary canon. Even though Nigerian literature is perceived as more mainstream than Quebecois feminist literature, there are as of yet no studies that focus on the Nigerian context. Córdoba-Serrano reasoned that examination of Quebecois feminist literature translated into English brings into consideration a different perspective, given the geographical proximity of Quebec's two major linguistic spaces, English and French, and the familiarity of English translators and publishers with Quebecois literature. For example, French writers from Quebec are more likely to be better known to English readers, thanks to the bilingual nature of Canada and the geographical proximity of Quebec to English literary centres such as Toronto or New York. She argues that such a question of proximity and background knowledge is not as

significant in the case of Quebecois feminist literature in Spain because of the distance and lesser cultural interactions between Quebec and Spain. Similarly, substantial geographical interactions between Nigeria and France are not particularly significant for translation even though such interactions would improve and diversify French editors' and translators' knowledge of Nigerian novels. Exchanges between Nigeria and France do occur, as will be seen later in this chapter, but the marginal position of Nigerian literature vis-à-vis the French cultural system cannot be overlooked. In addition, the visibility or image promotion of Nigeria in France, in other words Nigerian cultural diplomacy, has yet to bridge the cultural gap between these two countries. Francis Aubert posited that "When the translational operation is performed between language/culture complexes with an intense and lasting reciprocal interaction, fragments more or less extensive of the source literary polysystem (or cultural polysystem in the broad sense) are already in motion in the target polysystem" (178). However, cultural proximity and interactions are virtually inconsequential in the case of translation from a peripheral cultural space such as Nigeria into a world literary space such as France. On that account, cultural transfer, as Stefan Ferguson explains, is not easily achieved "since the medium, the genre, and its standardizations and cultural implications" (107) are not familiar to the target audience.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, this chapter takes as its point of departure the premise that Nigerian literature, as an example of what is called minor literature, is being inserted into a foreign and major literary space in which not only does the target literature dominate and establish the norms of production and consumption, but other semi-peripheral and even other major foreign literatures compete for spatial and symbolic recognition.

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<sup>46</sup> It can be argued, however, that in the case of Nigeria, specific standards considered by the French may be solely European or American.

Another interesting insight in von Flotow's and Córdoba-Serrano's works is the perception of translation of literature as a means of cultural transfer. In the article "Revealing the Soul of Which Nation: Translated Literature as Cultural Diplomacy," von Flotow examines the role of translated literature, in this case Canadian literature translated into German, in the exportation of cultural products for the purposes of image strengthening and soft power. She points out that the relative dearth of studies of translation as a cultural product is due to government policy that funds more significant and visible cultural activities, such as literature chairs at foreign universities, tours of orchestras or ballet companies and art exhibitions. According to von Flotow:

the connections between the production of literary translations, the export of literature in translation as a cultural product, and so-called cultural diplomacy, have not been studied extensively, although literary histories do sometimes take account of the effects of translations as literary imports – the reception and translation of Shakespeare in early nineteenth century Germany is one example.

(188)

Reaffirming such a stance and the importance of approaching translation from this perspective invited other studies that von Flotow and Reingard Nischik compiled in *Translating Canada* that conceive translation of literature as cultural export. Similarly to von Flotow, Córdoba-Serrano pointed out that culture encompasses traits that form a ready-made (prêt-à-porter) identity, which is "ensuite intégrée dans un récit, avec lequel les gens du pays s'identifient et qui est susceptible de captiver les étrangers. Cette construction narrative de l'image de marque associée à un pays donné deviendra dès lors un mythe [...] efficace pour rendre un pays concurrentiel sur le plan

politique et économique sur la scène internationale” (44). Nigerian writers perceive their literature as an embodiment of identity and history, which are in turn communicated to other distant cultures and languages through translation. Von Flotow’s and Serrano’s examinations of translations as part of various cultural diplomacy initiatives invites a similar discussion of the perception of the ‘national’ image of Nigeria as communicated through its literature by the key players, policy makers, and other decision makers of foreign affairs. ‘Nigerian Studies’ have generally overlooked these questions and the overall premise of translation as such a cultural diplomacy initiative.

This chapter, therefore, seeks to examine the translation of Nigerian literature as a cultural transfer and as a means of developing international awareness of Nigerian cultures and identity. Apart from the endorsement of such a perspective in previous studies, von Flotow acknowledges that translation is one of the largest and most effective means of reaching the reading public in another country. As a cultural product, Nigerian literature in French translation sensitizes the target audience to the lived experiences of Nigerian people, thus potentially changing established worldviews and existing perceptions. With the significant number of works translated into French, investigating the cultural policies that guide and facilitate such initiatives of translations (if any), and reviewing Nigerian foreign policy and cultural diplomacy for evidence of highlighting translation as a cultural export and a promotion of Nigerian image and culture, become more pertinent. In addition, this perspective is relevant for this study because of its discussion of the position of literary translation in Nigerian cultural diplomacy, thus expounding an approach that has been hitherto unexplored.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines Nigerian foreign policy, under which its cultural diplomacy operates, in order to present a logical explanation of the existence or

non-existence and functionality or non-functionality of translation policies. It reviews the composition of Nigerian cultural diplomacy post-independence, specifically the various initiatives and institutions of cultural transfer, with a focus on transfer of literature. It also discusses the various exchanges between French and Nigerian governments, assesses the influence of Nigerian cultural diplomacy on the perception of Nigerian literature, and examines the place of translation within these exchanges.

Despite the relatively lesser importance of translation in cultural policies, a compiled list of novels translated into French proves that Nigerian literature still finds its minimal space in French translation. The second part of this chapter deals with the analysis of data from this list of translated Nigerian novels, discussing the evolution of Nigerian literature translated into French while highlighting the various trends that characterized the development of translations and their publications.

### **3.2. Cultural Diplomacy in Nigeria and Transfer of Literature as Cultural Product**

Public diplomacy is sometimes regarded as a super-category under which cultural diplomacy falls. According to Sinisa Rodin and Martina Topic, public diplomacy “encompasses a wide and shifting terrain of processes and activities which can range from government actors speaking by way of the media to the people, or in people-to-people exchanges, such as an academic exchange between professors from different countries” (10). Hurn Brian defines cultural diplomacy as the “exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster cultural understanding. Cultural diplomacy creates awareness abroad of the cultural attributes of the home culture by developing interaction through cultural activities with which the projecting culture wants to be identified” (81). As soft power, cultural/public diplomacy, or even

cultural relation,<sup>47</sup> it is a substitute for forceful communication of a country's culture, ideologies, and institutions, and a subtle and peaceful means of intercultural communication. Iyorwuese Hagher, the former Nigerian ambassador to Canada, a prolific writer and professor of Drama and Theatre, points out that the concept of 'culture' in Nigerian cultural policy relates to the art of winning the hearts and minds of others by attracting them through cultural activities and exchanges that include arts, beliefs, ways of life, and customs (67). He stated that it encompasses all forms of cultural and artistic expressions in Nigeria, especially literature, films, painting, and sculpture. It is comprised of all the traditions, history, values, beliefs, attitudes, and consciousness of the people; in short, the identity of a group of people. As part of literature, this identity or culture goes through a temporal or permanent process of uprooting in order to be translated into another language and culture. "Cultural diplomacy," as it will be called here (see Serrano; von Flotow),<sup>48</sup> in accordance with previous studies of this same nature, encompasses many subcategories such as language and arts. Brian notes that it also includes high-profile national heroes and icons such as independence fighters and literary icons (81), while Nawotka adds high-profile authors and their works, both originals and translations, to that list. If, according to Heilbron, book translation constitutes a particular category of cultural goods and a cultural world-system (431), translation of Nigerian literature falls within the scopes of cultural diplomacy. Recognizing that the reputation of a state is an indispensable factor that determines its diplomatic relationship with other countries, Nigeria strives to maintain its identity and reputation through various means of cultural diplomacy.

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<sup>47</sup> Although attempts have been made to differentiate the terms, scholars have recognized points of convergence and collaboration, including the wielding of soft power, which has been defined as "the possibility of communicating, via the conduit of culture, of values and ideas" (Nye 40).

<sup>48</sup> Von Flotow also observes that terms such as *public diplomacy* and *cultural diplomacy* have been used interchangeably.



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with external High Commissions or Foreign Missions, are *supposed* to be responsible for the decision-making and implementation processes of Nigerian cultural policy. The term ‘supposed’ is used here because the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to the foreign policy-making process has been questioned by scholars and foreign policy analysts such as Sharkdam and Mimiko and Mbada. The Nigerian foreign policy, as agreed upon by these scholars, is heavily influenced by domestic [and international] variables and by non-state-actors (NSAs) such as the desires and the decisions of the president and the foreign policy elite, the composition and the “degree of professionalism and the competence of the Foreign Service personnel; the quality of expertise in the broad field of international relations commanded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the composition and orientation of the legislature; and the weakness of public opinion and most importantly the religious and ethnic configuration (Sharkdam 143). Sharkdam also identifies a wide range of NSAs whose participation is essential to a particular area of concern (9), including trade unions, NGOs, religious organizations, universities, research institutes, human rights associations, or community-based organizations. In a country such as Nigeria with many checkered legacies, national foreign policy is controlled by many determinants. According to Iyorwuegse Hagher, the Nigerian Foreign Policy was not formulated with the greatest national objectives, but represents specific ones. The 1960 Foreign Policy, which remained unchanged for fifty years, states:

It is the desire of Nigeria to remain on friendly terms with all nations and to participate actively in the work of the United Nations organizations. Nigeria, a large and populous nation has absolutely no territorial or expansionist ambitions. We are

committed to uphold the principles upon which the United Nations is founded. Nigeria hopes to work with other African states for the progress of Africa and assist in bringing all African countries to a state of independence. (Hagher 66)

Focusing on the economy and security of other African nations, Nigeria's foreign policy is formulated on the grounds of the development of the country and its position with regard to other African nations. This view is acknowledged at both domestic and international levels, as German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed in an interview during his visit to Nigeria in October 2014. He explained that bilaterally, internationally and regionally, Nigeria is the most important country in Africa, and what happens in Nigeria is very important for the rest of Africa. With such objectives and its concentration on political relations with other nations, cultural diplomacy became *A Neglected Aspect of Nigeria's Foreign Policy*, to quote the title of G.O. Olusanya's article. As of the early 1970s, there was no distinct cultural policy in Nigeria, with the relevant ministries creating their own policies regarding arts and culture. Even if some responsibilities were assigned to different ministries, the main preoccupation of these ministries was more political than relating to cultural transfer and exchange. Hagher further explains that Nigeria was so obsessed with its quest to be the frontline nation that its "diplomacy became overreaching and lofty, and successive governments proclaimed that no Nigerian was free until the last man on African soil was freed from political, economic, and cultural enslavement" (68). The oil boom of the 1950s and the anticipated GDP<sup>49</sup> growth inspired Nigeria to perceive itself as a guardian angel to other African nations, and so Africa became the centrepiece of its foreign

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<sup>49</sup> The discovery of oil in 1956 made Nigeria into the tenth largest oil-producing country in the world and the third largest in Africa. Due to the rich oil resources and the revenue they produced, Nigeria experienced economic growth, but this growth was marred by many internal and external factors such as corruption and the recessions of the 1980s.

policy. Demands for changes to Nigeria's foreign policy led to exploration in the 1990s of other aspects of foreign relations, including economic and cultural objectives. This shift in emphasis brought about not only deeper discussions on cultural diplomacy in Nigeria, but also an articulation of a cultural policy<sup>50</sup> aimed at showcasing Nigeria's cultural heritage to other parts of the world. The question that must be asked, however, is whether transfer of literature is part of these cultural initiatives.

### **3.3. The Position of Literature and Translation in Nigerian Cultural Diplomacy**

Evaluations of the various cultural initiatives organized by the government and by individual organizations demonstrate Nigeria's efforts in the establishment of local institutions, with a focus on the growth of Nigerian culture and cultural relations. Such institutions include the National Councils for Arts and Culture (in different states of the country), the National Gallery of Art, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, the National Theatre and the National Museum, Ministries of Culture and Tourism; Nigerian Television International and the external broadcast of Voice of Nigeria, the National Troupe, the Copyright Commission, the Universities, the Film Institute, the Nigerian Film Corporation, the National Institute for Cultural Orientation and the National Film and Videos Censor's Board. As Luise von Flotow points out, Canada seizes upon national culture as an instrument of national foreign policy, but in contrast to the explicit initiatives of Canada and the United States to promote cultural diplomacy, Nigeria has

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<sup>50</sup> For details on Nigeria's cultural policy, see <http://www.wwcd.org/policy/clink/Nigeria.html#GEN>

yet to articulate such novelties.<sup>51</sup> Nigerian cultural policy is defined on Culturelink, the website of the Documentation Centre for Cultural Development and Cooperation, as follows:

Artistic and literary creation depends mostly on the individual initiatives or on the local support. The Federal Fund for the Assistance to Arts and Drama offers assistance to artists in the provision of fellowships, study grants for travels and purchase of the needed materials. Other types of support available to artists or writers depend on cultural industries that are directly involved or influence artistic and literary creation.

This statement by Nigeria's federal government suggests a withdrawal from the financial and logistic responsibility of promoting and supporting various elements of culture, perhaps due to the challenges of offering support and promotion to *all* components of Nigerian culture.<sup>52</sup> The Director General of National Council for Arts and Culture, Mr Segun Runsewe, seems to confirm this interpretation in an interview with *Premium Times*, when he identifies the need to develop 'cultural content' but emphasizes that "cultural contents are in different spells" and that Nigeria is "of the very strong eco-tourism cultural base" (Alabi). In other words, the Director General claimed that Nigeria prioritizes the aspect of culture that promotes exotic, natural environments and its accompanying cultural features that are in need of conservation and protection. He also suggested that cultural products are disseminated and promoted depending on its considered importance. Obviously, in the case of literature and especially translation, the

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<sup>51</sup> Since the idea of strategically exporting culture for these purposes is quite recent in Canada (Von Flowtow and Nischik, *Translating Canada* 3), it is not surprising that this concept has yet to take root in Nigeria.

<sup>52</sup> This is in consideration of the multiplicity of 'cultures' in Nigeria and the problem of representation and nationalism already discussed.

cultural content does not emerge as an area of predilection, as it does not offer broad attractions and economic enticements, thus, confirming von Flotow's observation earlier cited in this article. In Nigeria, early post-independent initiatives of cultural diplomacy rarely highlighted literature, let alone its translation into other languages. According to Ola Balogun:

When it became fashionable (soon after independence) to conceive of culture as a means of promoting national awareness and projecting the pride and dignity of black and African culture, some of those who were entrusted with the responsibility of bringing these concepts to life made nonsense of the whole idea by substituting a large-scale involvement in traditional dance as a substitute for valid cultural policies. The culmination of this absurd process was the humiliating experience by which the World Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which Nigeria hosted in 1977, was virtually converted into a mere display of traditional dancing on our side. Sad to say, this pernicious and thoroughly ridiculous fixation on traditional dances as our only form of cultural policy has continued virtually unabated until the present era. (88)

Individual initiatives in the areas of culture and minimal federal support of translation and other literary activities indicate that these activities are not highly valued as cultural content. The case of Bernth Lindfors and the archive of Nigerian literature<sup>53</sup> is a representative example of the position given to literature. In the 1970s, Lindfors, well known for his works on Anglophone

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<sup>53</sup> For details, see Harrow.

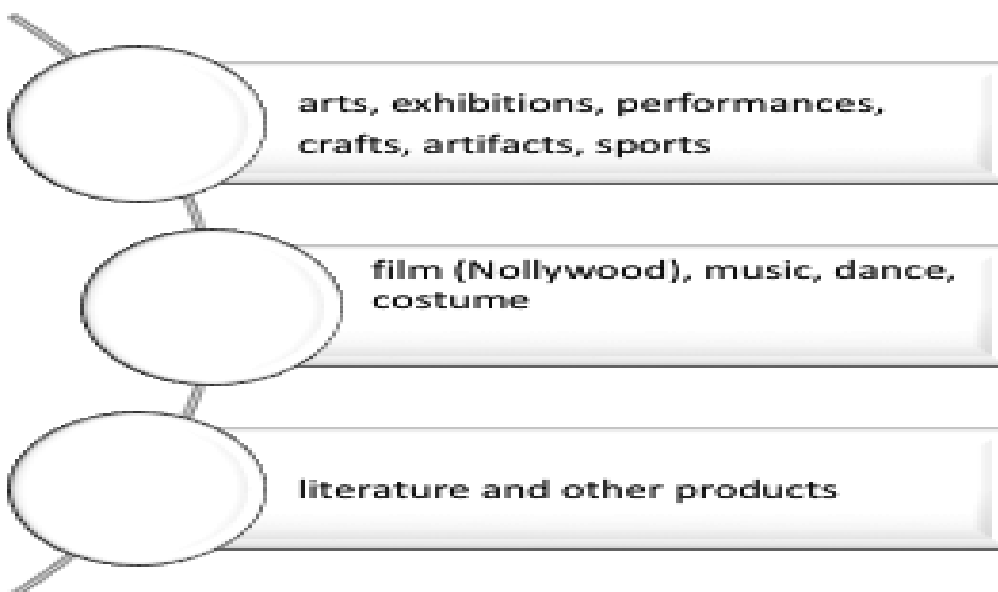
literature in general and Nigerian literature in particular, recounted his attempts to acquire Amos Tutuola's manuscripts for the archive at the University of Texas Humanities Research Center. According to him, this project received opposition in Nigeria, on the grounds that the archive should be established in Nigeria as the material was Nigerian intellectual property. Nigerian intellectuals informed Lindfors of plans to establish the archive at the University of Ife, and that he should purchase the manuscripts from Tutuola himself. Lindfors finally gave in to the pressure and instead advocated for the creation of an archive in Nigeria. However, this project never saw the light of day, as the university never came up with the needed funds. In fact, after many years which was not specified in the paper, Tutuola and his family sold the manuscripts and other personal belongings to the University of Texas. Similarly, the Nigerian government opposed the purchase of Wole Soyinka's manuscripts by an American university, claiming that they would themselves acquire the manuscript for the substantial price of 2 million naira<sup>54</sup>. This plan did not come to fruition, and Soyinka later sold his manuscripts to the Harvard University Library. As Lindfors observed, the failure of those projects was due in part to the government showing "no interest in putting money into anything as arcane as literary manuscripts" (Harrow 153). These instances in the field of literary writing prove that literature has yet to find its place on the national echelon of culture.

As various cultural diplomatic initiatives demonstrate, Nigeria highlights the exportation of its 'cultural products' in order to promote its image and culture. However, the system of import and export of cultural products assumes a hierarchical categorization that favours other artistic exhibitions and sports over literary works as evidenced in the chart below. Hagher attests that

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<sup>54</sup> Approximately 7 000 Canadian dollar

“Apart from the arts [and traditional dances] sport has been a major cultural diplomacy tool”  
(73).



**Figure 6: Hierarchization of cultural products**

The cultural policy states that cultural cooperation with “western countries is mostly based on the presentation of Nigerian arts and crafts, or Nigerian music to the western audiences, and on the transfer of knowledge on cultural institutions and activities from the West. [...]. The Nigerian government backs this cultural exchange through exchange of artists, exhibitions, information materials, *etc...*” This statement is revealing as it is cautionary. Such a confirmation of the precedence of one cultural product over all others reveals a stratified appreciation based on a gamut of unsubstantiated preferences. It is also cautionary, as all parts of the culture should be promoted, even if not at the same level, provided none is neglected, as could be said of translation and literature. The existence of a significant number of cultural programs to promote the arts, not only in France but around the world, further proves that this prerogative does not include literature and translation. It is worth mentioning that some of these programs are

sponsored by the Nigerian government. Although the involvement or support the federal government of Nigeria offers through NICO (National Institute for Cultural Orientation), a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, has not been precisely stated, NICO claims to be actively involved in some listed cultural events. However, the events NICO lists do not include literary events. The inset that is included as an index at the end of this document is the art village in Nigeria where various artworks and sculptures are sold on a daily basis, especially to foreign tourists in order to advertise the many facets of Nigerian culture. Although it was not originally affiliated with the government initiative, in 2014 the government took interest in developing the infrastructure and regulating the art and craft market. The Nigerian government advertises the market on its website as a cultural centre and tourist attraction. No program is observed for literature and translation. That said, it is important to note that the categorization in the chart above does not convey a clear-cut and incontestable demarcation between different categories, since music, for example, can become part of various artistic exhibitions and has, in the words of Hagher, become a global phenomenon (74). The chart is meant as a broad depiction of the appreciation of several cultural products in order to understand the position of literature and translation. Unfortunately, even though the Nigerian government describes writers as “cultural engineers” (Hagher 92), there is yet no initiative or program for the support or dissemination of Nigerian literature and its translation. The reason, as Hagher expresses, is that the supposed key players for the promotion of such programs, the intellectuals, are “not given a primary place in national life [and their] ideas do not matter very much” (92). Notwithstanding the current situation and the absence of any formulated official policy on translation, especially into French, cultural, scientific, educational and technical



exchanges between Nigeria and France have been articulated in the cultural agreement between these two countries.

### **3.4. Diplomatic Relations between Nigeria and France: The Place of Translation and Literature**

Immediate post-independence (after 1960) relations between Nigeria and France were so strained that the Nigerian government, under its first Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, did not prioritize foreign relations such as opening a Nigerian embassy in Paris. This discord stemmed from the perception in France under Charles de Gaulle that Nigeria was a hegemonic rival and political threat to the preservation of relations between France and its former colonies in Francophone West Africa.<sup>55</sup> It was further complicated by Nigeria's strong protest and opposition to France's three atomic bomb tests in the Sahara in 1960, its subsequent expulsion of the French ambassador to Nigeria in January 1961, and a boycott of French goods. During the 1960s, according to Daniel Bach, trade links with France represented less than 3% of Nigeria's overall trade (15). It was only after the installation of a democratic government in 1999 that diplomatic relations between Nigeria and France blossomed. The two countries have since maintained a history of cordial relationships. In 1996, the Nigerian government, under the regime of the former president, General Sani Abacha, declared French the second official language of the country. This decision triggered various projects in the education sector, especially concerning French education in Nigerian schools. Apart from the French language village in Badagry and the three major Centers of French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) and other projects exemplified in the introductory part of this thesis, there are six French language clinics

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<sup>55</sup> Nigeria had formulated policies to target the freedom of other African nations. These policies were not mere formulations, as Nigeria had been involved in various peace missions in other African countries. See Hagher.

across colleges in Nigeria concerned with the training of French language teachers. These centres are sponsored by the Nigerian and French governments to train French teachers in both Nigeria and France.

The Nigerian cultural policy states that cultural cooperation is carried on the basis of signed agreements, either bilateral or multilateral, such as the 2016 cultural agreement with France. The Nigerian foreign mission in France produces online and printed materials such as an annual diary, newsletter/guide, and other publications in *La Lettre Diplomatique* to promote Nigeria's image. According to the mission statement, the guidelines for cultural, educational, scientific and technical exchanges between Nigeria and France focus on teaching French language, cultural diversity, higher education, and research, as well as strengthening governance and the rule of law:

Nigeria hosts two (2) French Cultural Centres; nine (9) French Alliances (L'Alliance Française); a French High School in Lagos; a French School in Abuja; and Business Schools in Port Harcourt and Kaduna. In France, France is the fifth country to host students from Nigeria (135 students over the period 2007-2008, including 35 French Government grants. A lot of French language students from Nigeria come to France, notably to the University of Besançon, for the one year abroad programme, although many of them are privately sponsored. Other Nigerian students studying in France are mostly private sponsored and are at the graduate levels in schools outside Paris like INSEAD. The Mission collaborates with the French Ministry of Education to take advantage of

educational awards, scholarships and grants to African countries.

The University of Nancy II has ongoing exchange programme with four Nigerian universities in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) area, notably Ibadan, Ife, Lagos and Lagos State University (LASU).<sup>56</sup>

This statement and the operation of the cultural agreement leave room for questions. The statistics are not current, which raises the question of why the Nigerian Embassy has yet to make a statement on the current situation.<sup>57</sup> Prior to the early 1960s, students of French language and literatures would study abroad for a year in France or in other Francophone countries to engage in intensive acculturation. This exchange was initially sponsored and funded jointly by the Nigerian and French government. As Michael Akinpelu observed:

l'adoption d'une politique culturelle ou diplomatie culturelle par la France dans les années 1960 en faveur des pays anglophones africains va être responsable de l'envol du français au Nigéria. Cette nouvelle politique eut d'énormes répercussions sur l'expansion du français au Nigéria. Tout d'abord, elle a donné lieu à de considérables soutiens administratifs, matériels et techniques pour la promotion de l'enseignement du français. Elle a aussi facilité plusieurs accords bilatéraux au niveau de la culture et de

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<sup>56</sup> Published on the website of the Embassy of Federal Republic of Nigeria in Paris, <http://www.nigeriafrance.com/page17.html>

<sup>57</sup> There has not been an updated study on this. The above statement suggests Nigeria has not been successful at promoting its public image.

l'éducation entre la France et le Nigéria, dont le programme d'immersion linguistique (Year Abroad Programme) qui permettait aux étudiants en études françaises de passer une année obligatoire en France, pour un bain linguistique. (136)

Today, students do not receive grants from the Nigerian government for this year abroad<sup>58</sup>, however, the French government has continued to promote the teaching of French language in Nigeria through the awarding of grants and the provision of cultural centers. Initiatives such as the Institut Français in Nigeria, The Poets Stream, Dancing City, Win Environment, and New Horizons, which promote concert series to celebrate cultural and creative musical and artistic exchanges between Nigerian and French artists, are funded by the French government.

Sur le plan culturel, le gouvernement français s'applique à faire valoir sa culture et celle du Nigéria en organisant des programmes d'échanges entre les artistes français et les artistes nigériens, à travers la musique, le cinéma, la télévision, la radio, le théâtre et les arts plastiques. (Akinpelu 157)

The above statement confirms the absence of literature and translation. In 2012, the French Embassy in Nigeria launched a bilingual magazine, *Le Clezio*, named after a prolific French writer, Jean Marie Gustave Le Clezio. The magazine, written in English and French, was ambitiously described as one of the means by which language barriers between Nigeria and other French speaking countries would be eliminated. The Ake Arts and Book Festival, a literary, cultural and art festival in Nigeria named after the hometown of Wole Soyinka, was organized by

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<sup>58</sup> This statement is based on my personal experience as a student and on discussions with French professors in Nigeria.

the Nigerian writer Lola Shoneyin, whose debut novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, was translated and published in French by Actes Sud. This five-day event brought together writers from all over Africa and the world, such as Florent Couao-Zotti, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Binyavanga Wainana, Mona Elthahawy, Marguerite Abouet, Alain Mabanckou and Veronique Tadjo. The event included book and panel discussions, concert and art exhibitions, film screenings and performances, which were attended by over 23 000 people. The Francophone writers Marguerite Abouet<sup>59</sup> and Alain Mabanckou were sponsored by the French Embassy to participate in this event, and other sponsors included RFI, France 24, and various French private companies such as Peugeot, Air France and Lafarge. While the statement published by the French embassy in Nigeria points out that the Ake festival gives visibility to the French culture through media houses and writers, Shoneyin stated in an interview that the goal of the event is to develop, promote and celebrate creativity on the African continent, while showcasing the best of contemporary African literature, music, art, film and theatre.<sup>60</sup> The festival exemplifies Nigeria's literary and cultural exchanges with the Francophone world, even if those exchanges are overly one-sided.

Although Nigeria's cultural exportation for trade initiatives may be thriving, it has yet to appreciate and invest in translation as a means of cultural transfer. French has been an official language of Nigeria since 1996 and there are numerous cultural exchanges between Nigeria and France, but there is still room for increased awareness and practical work in order to address the

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<sup>59</sup> Marguerite Abouet is mostly known for her comics

<sup>60</sup> Although the Ake Festival displayed no visible national involvement from the Nigerian government, it may constitute an avenue through which the French publishers are likely to become acquainted with Nigerian texts and authors.

lack of interest in literature and absence of policy on literary translation.<sup>61</sup> This lack of interest in the dissemination of literature is an example of the one-sided history of the French translation of Nigerian literature. The following section discusses this history based on representative cases of Nigerian novels translated into French. Although the analysis in this thesis focuses on the translation of novels, other genres such as plays are occasionally exemplified and discussed in this part.

### **3.5. Evolution of French Translation of Nigerian Novels (1953-2017)**

#### **3.5.1. Nigerian Novels in French Translation**

The analysis that follows is based on my list of Nigerian novels and their translations into French. The first translation of a Nigerian novel into French occurred in 1953, marking the beginning of the list. Given that it is a lengthy document, the full list is not included in this article. Instead, this compilation is made available online as an editable database. As of the time of writing this thesis, the list contains 80 novels originally written in English by Nigerian writers who live and publish within and outside Nigeria. While this study is concentrated on novels, this research shows that 16 plays, three poems and four memoirs written in English have also been translated. It was also discovered that three indigenous Yoruba language novels as well as one Igbo language novel, *Omenuko*<sup>62</sup> have been translated into France. Featuring 37 authors, the list also contains detailed information on the source language such as author's name, title of original version, publisher, and publication year, and place. For translated works, the name of the

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<sup>61</sup> Due to the multiethnic nature and limited financial means of Nigeria, promoting its “national” literature is not as “easy” as it is for Quebec.

<sup>62</sup> This novel was translated into English before the French translation. It is not clear if the translator, who is French but who also has worked with the Igbo language, translated from the Igbo or from the English version.

translator, the French title, publisher, year, and place of publication are given. The list will be accessible through a chronological listing, starting from the first translation of a Nigerian novel in France in 1953. The list further engenders discussion of various trends observed within the collection, and is useful for tracing the history of publication of Nigerian novels in French. Extracts of the table and graphs are included here based on discussion of a given phenomenon.

### **3.5.2. Development of Nigerian Translations**

The first translation of Nigerian literature into French was Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, published in 1953 by Gallimard a year after its original publication. The publication and translation of this novel marked an important step in the history of Nigerian literature. Thirteen years later, in 1966, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, originally published in 1956, was translated into French, raising the question of why such a gap exists between French translations of Nigerian works.<sup>63</sup> Although there may be more than one explanation for this gap, including a general lack of interest in African works in Europe in the 1960s, the next section outlines the events surrounding the original publication and translation of Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*. These events may be insightful for the early history of Nigerian literature in French and may eventually explain the gap.

### **3.5.3. Progress and Interruptions in Translation**

A break in translation of Nigerian literature in France does not mean a break in writing and publishing by Nigerian writers. In addition to *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe published other works during the 1950s and 1960s, including *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*. Wole Soyinka published *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Road*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *The*

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<sup>63</sup>When the terms "works" or "texts" are used in this chapter, they refer to all genres, whether novels, poems, plays or memoirs.

*Trials of Brother Jero, Strong Breed and A Danse of the Forests* during this time as well.

Cyprian Ekwensi, one of the most prolific Nigerian writers, wrote *Burning Grass* and *Jagua Nana* during the same period, while Amos Tutuola published his second novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, in 1954. In 1966, the first Nigerian female author, Flora Nwapa, published *Efuru*. It is acknowledged that Nigerian literature developed at a fast pace following the publication of Tutuola's book:

Depuis Amos Tutuola, plus de deux cents écrivains ont produit près de cinq cent cinquante romans, pièces de théâtre, recueils de nouvelles et de poèmes et durant ce quart de siècle, seuls quatre d'entre eux – appartenant tous à la première génération d'auteurs nigériens – purent sauter par-dessus la barrière linguistique qui les séparait encore du monde francophone. (Vignal 50)

Daniel Vignal further argues that after 1970, many Nigerian writers published works in Nigeria, Britain and the United States that deserved the attention of translators and publishers in France. Some of these authors, whom Vignal describes as 'les grands oubliés' because their works were not translated and published in French, include Obi Egbuna, Eddie Iroh, Isidore Okpewho, Adaora Lily Ulasi, Onuora Nzekwu, John Munonye, Christopher Okigbo (poet), Pol Ndu (poet), John Pepper Clark (poet and playwright), Kole Omotoso, Okechukwu Mezu, Ola Rotimi (theatre), Dilibe Onyeama and Zulu Sofola (playwright). None of these authors' works were translated or published in France after 1966. Their works do not differ from the works of other Nigerian authors who were translated, especially in terms of thematic preoccupations and styles. Some of these authors, such as Onuora Nzekwu, John Munonye, and Isidore Okpewho, were household literary names, with themes ranging from colonial discourse, the human condition, the



struggle between tradition and Western modernity, identity, oral aesthetics and intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, some were honoured with literary awards, such as Dilibé Onyeama receiving the Niger Award for Literary Merit for his ‘occult mystery’ novels, which were the best sellers of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>64</sup> However, it is premature at this point to explain why these authors’ works were not translated, since the criteria for selecting works for translation are dependent on many factors that are yet to be clearly determined in the case of Nigerian literature. In addition, it is not a simple matter of declaring that an author’s works should be translated if one is not in a position to make such a decision.<sup>65</sup> The Nigerian government’s lack of interest or involvement in translation is a further obstacle to international recognition for many writers in Nigeria.

An attempt to expound on this gap in translation demands further understanding of the role of Tutuola and his writing in the history of Nigerian literature. Tutuola, who was not fully educated, having only a standard 6,<sup>66</sup> wrote his novel in a ‘substandard’ dialect of English. At this time, African writers in general were in the process of identifying a language for their writing, and many Western critics believed that Africans were incapable of producing their own literature, especially in a colonial language. African critics of Tutuola’s book regarded its ‘bad English’ as a reaffirmation of western stereotypical portrayals of Africa. Critics and scholars such as Ruth Bush (“Translating Anglophone”), and Mukoma Ngugi have pointed out that the Western elite’s response to Tutuola’s novel was heavily influenced by his poor education and his writing style.

The decision not to alter or correct the language in his novel could be understood as a bid to

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<sup>64</sup> See <https://guardian.ng/art/dilibé-onyeama-revives-occult-novels-of-the-80s/>

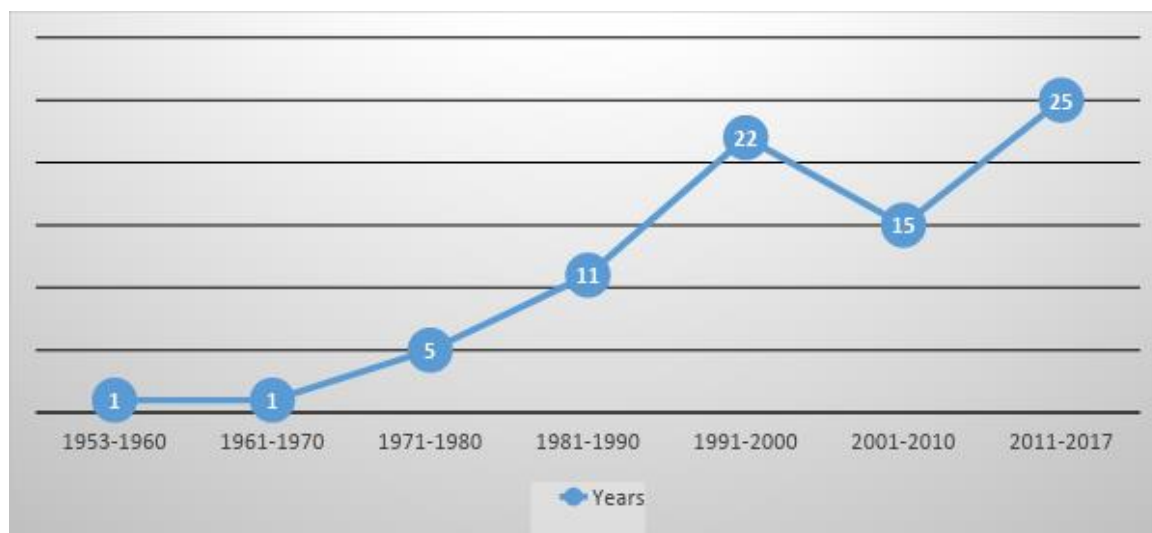
<sup>65</sup> This could relate to many examples of unfruitful discussions and critical articles meant to justify why Chinua Achebe deserves a Nobel prize. See Lindfors’s article on Nigeria and the Nobel Prize.

<sup>66</sup> This is the Nigerian equivalent to grade 6.

publish a book that met Western expectations of Africa and the sort of literature that it could produce. Western acceptance and celebration of Tutuola's work was based more on exoticism than on its literary value. This success could partly explain its immediate translation into French by Raymond Queneau, and its inclusion in Gallimard's prestigious collection "Du Monde Entier." Bush notes that *The Palmwine Drinkard*, translated as *L'ivrogne dans la brousse*, was the first work by an African writer to be published by Gallimard, and that the fame of its translator played an important role in its success in France. Queneau was a writer, editor and translator best known as the co-founder of Oulipo (Ouvroir de la littérature potentielle), an international group of writers and mathematicians who sought a new type of constrained writing with the objective of encouraging literary creation. According to Bush, Queneau's translation was an exploration of his own style of poetic writing, a personal "aesthetic project" ("Translating Anglophone" 517), that sought to retain Tutuola's faulty English and especially his Yoruba oral stylistics but sometimes ended up neglecting them (Jullien 272-273). Bush cites Vialette, one of Kafka's translators, who described Queneau's translation as follows: "Queneau translated him like a god, with an unparalleled fruitfulness. He doesn't translate, he reinvents, revels, and prophesies as if speaking in his mother tongue in the language of a country which never exists" ("Translating Anglophone" 517). Although this description seems exaggerated, Bush argued that it was Queneau's novel project of translating Tutuola according to his style and Gallimard's characterization of the translation as a representation of an Africa unknown to the Europeans that made the novel successful in the French literary field.

This type of Africa, defined by Western conceptions and controversially depicted in Tutuola's work was absent in subsequent works originating from Nigeria, especially Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Wole Soyinka's books. For example, although Achebe's novel is written in

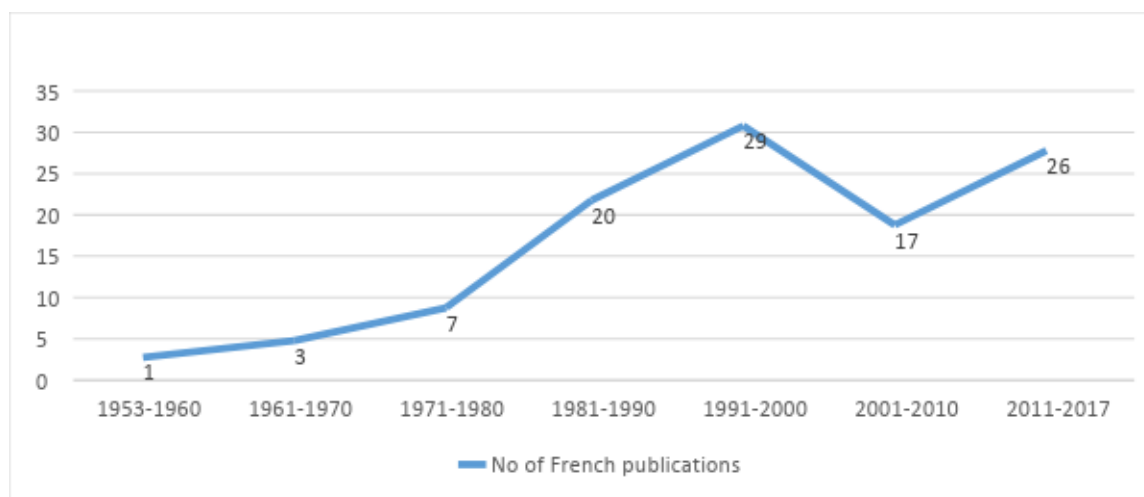
‘Africanized English,’ it is quite different from Tutuola’s ‘rotten’ English. As Timothy Asobele observes, Achebe used standard English in comparison to Tutuola’s poor grasp of the language (“Le monde s’effondre” 34). Wole Soyinka, on his part, was known for his classic use of English. These writers distinguished themselves from Tutuola not only stylistically, but also thematically, with their discussions of the struggle between modernity and tradition, their anti-negritude, and their criticisms of the post-independence government of Nigeria, in contrast to Tutuola’s depictions of the magical African bush and of ghosts. Keeping in mind that the French publishing market “remained insular and would only gradually open up to African writers as the independences of 1960 approached” (Bush, *Publishing Africa* 516), it is not out of place to posit that these aspects of nonconformist styles and preoccupations could partly explain the years of silence that followed the publication of Tutuola’s translation in 1953. It was not until 1966 that another Nigerian text would be published in France.



**Figure 7: Number of translated novels (excluding plays, poems and memoirs)**

As the chart in Figure 7 shows, only one Nigerian novel was published in France in the 1960s. After 1966, the rate of publication indicated a fluctuating frequency, and the average interval of

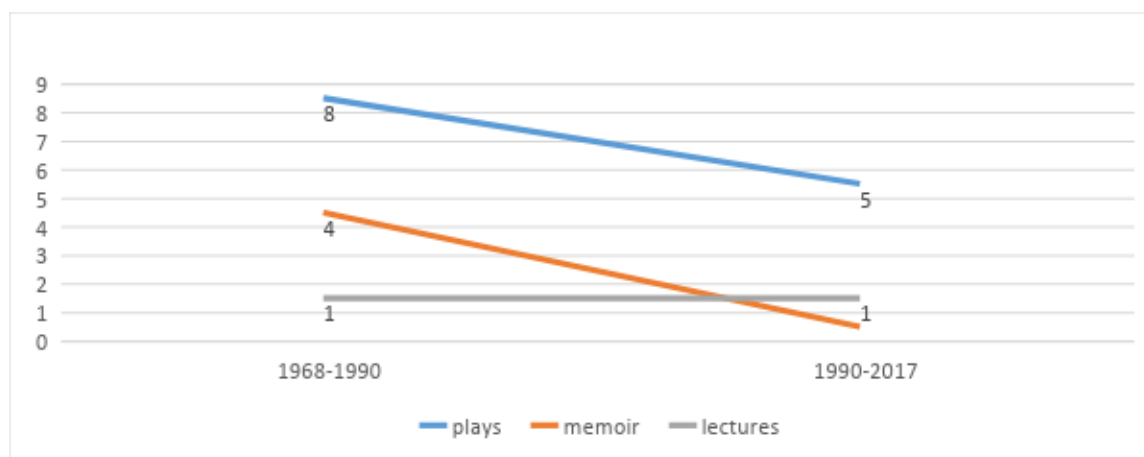
publication of the first ten books translated in French in the 1960s and 1970s was around ten years.



**Figure 8: Number of all translations, including plays, memoirs and poems**

The slower but progressive publication rate is also visible in the chart above, which shows the number of all translations whether plays, memoirs and poems. This slower rate could suggest a lesser interest in Nigerian or African Anglophone literature at the time, but other factors could be responsible. Publication of Nigerian texts in France increased in the 1980s, with an average interval of 15 years between original publications and French translations. 1980 was the most productive year for Nigerian translations into French, with a total of 20 works (all works included); 1986 was also a remarkable year because of the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Wole Soyinka, thus, prompting a renewed interest in the translation and publication of his books. Many of Soyinka's works from the 1960s, for example, were not translated until the 1980s: as the charts depicting translations of novels and translations of other works indicate, of the 20 books translated during the 1980s, nine of these were by Soyinka. It should be noted here, however, that Soyinka is best known for his plays, though he has also written novels. In the 1990s, 29 books were translated, seven of which were Soyinka's works. These trends

demonstrate the influence of Soyinka's Nobel Prize on the translation of Nigerian literature in general.



**Figure 9: Translation of plays and other works by Wole Soyinka**

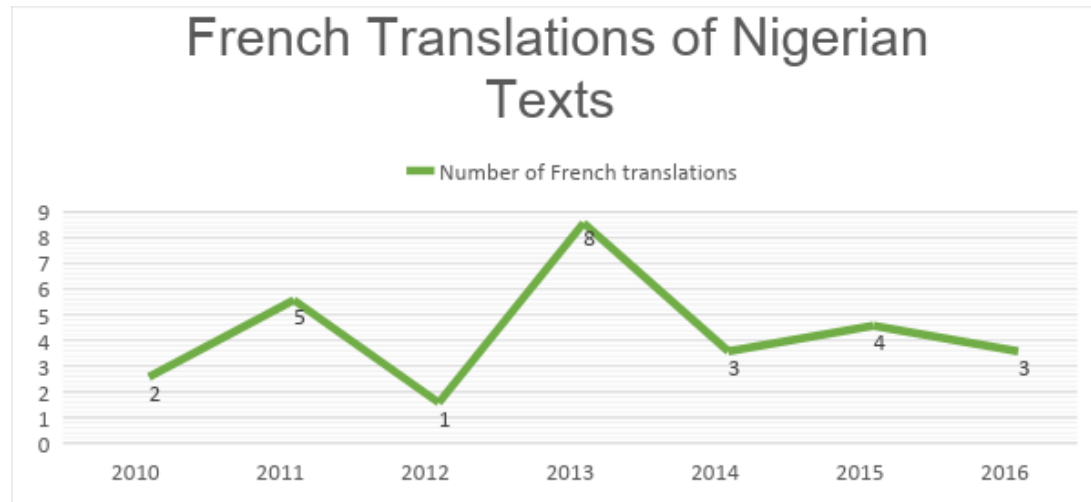
The 1980s also saw interest in Tutuola with the translation of his 1954 work *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. It is noteworthy, however, that this work was not translated by Queneau or published by Gallimard; it was translated by Michèle Laforest and published by Belfond.<sup>67</sup> During this period, L'Harmattan was credited with the first French translation of a work by a female Nigerian author: Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, 22 years after its original publication in 1966. French translations of Nigerian literature show a similar trend to publications of Nigerian literature in English; though Soyinka had been a published author since 1954, his works were only translated because of his recognition in the Anglophone world, which led to the selection, translation, and publication of other Nigerian works by French publishers. While Wole Soyinka's works continued to be translated in this decade, other authors, such as Ben Okri and Ken Saro-Wiwa, had their works introduced to the French literary market, and the publication of *Efuru* in the early

<sup>67</sup> Bush (*Publishing Africa*) explains that Tutuola's agent made several futile attempts to get this work published by Gallimard.

1980s led to translations of works by other Nigerian female authors, including Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali.

### 3.5.4. Annual Publications and Publishers of Nigerian Literature in France

Francoise Ugochukwu has pointed out that major publishers in France, such as Présence Africaine Editions, publish at least one translated Nigerian text every year (“Nigerian Literature in France” 757). Although Ugochukwu did not specify the year on which she based her statement nor explicitly show the analysis that led to that conclusion, an examination of the works published between 2010 and 2016 demonstrates that there has been a significant number of texts translated into French.<sup>68</sup> Based on the chart below, in 2011, five novels were translated and published while 2016 saw the publication of three novels. 2012 stands out as the year with the lowest number of translations, with only the publication of Sefi Atta’s *News from Home*.



**Figure 10: Novels in translation from 2010-2016**

<sup>68</sup> The table that includes the titles of the works published between 2010-2016 is included as an appendix.

Even though the norm for translation and publication of novels into French by all publishers appears to be one per year, the frequency outlined above may be understood as random, based on the interests of individual publishers and on the number of novels circulating at a given time. The time constraints of this project do not allow for a more detailed examination of the reasons for the lower or higher numbers of translations in each year or the conditions of translating and publishing each work. However, these fluctuations could also result from various factors such as the number of publications by Nigerian writers, the place of original publication (Nigeria or abroad), the continued willingness of French publishers to engage in the discovery of Nigerian authors, the literary weight of original novels published in a given year by Nigerians and the availability of resources for translation and publication.

On the other hand, following Ugochukwu's statement that major publishers publish at least one translated text every year, it is worth noting that many publishers are involved in the publication of Nigerian literature, though not necessarily 'major' publishers. Some of the publishers who are not necessarily very famous publishers in France include Editions Silex/Nouvelles du Sud, L'Harmattan, Dapper, C. Bourgois, Karthala, Les Escales, Galaade, Zulma, Titanic, and Hoëbeke. Some major ones with almost consistent financial growth and who are among the top 15 French publishers as listed by Livres Hebdo include Gallimard, Albin Michel, Panini Books and Actes Sud.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the so-called major publishers like Gallimard or Présence Africaine rarely publish Nigerian works in the recent years. As will be further discussed later in this project, some of these lesser or major publishers produce more Nigerian books than others in specialized collections. For example, Présence Africaine published one Nigerian novel in 1988 and another one in 2004. Publishers such as Editions de Olivier and Presses de la Cité only

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<sup>69</sup> Livres Hebdo publishes information on French publishing market annually

published one Nigerian novel each. Gallimard is yet to publish Nigerian novels after those of Adichie and Tutuola.

### **3.5.5. Literary Prizes, Status of Authors, and Genres Selected for Translations**

Literary prizes are important means by which Nigerian authors become recognized within and outside their home country. Depending on the nature of the prize, the author could garner both local and international attention. Nigerian authors, especially the Afropolitans, have the opportunity to compete against writers from all over the world for various international prizes. Many of the award-winning Nigerian authors translated into French are internationally recognized, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, Chris Abani, Gabriel Okara, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ben Okri, Femi Osofisan, Elechi Amadi, Ken Saro Wiwa, and Helon Habila. Others who are not as prominent but are equally recognized literary figures include Uzodinma Iweala, Ike Oguine, Sefi Atta, Helen Oyeyemi, Igoni Barrett, Nnedi Okoroafor, Lola Shoneyin, Leye Adenle, Simi Bedford, and Biyi Bandele Thomas. All of them have received at least one literary award, which, apart from Soyinka's Nobel Prize, are listed in the tables below:

| <b>Major International Literary Awards</b> | <b>Writers and years earned</b>         |
|--|---|
| Margaret Wong Prize                        | Achebe, 1959                            |
| Nobel Prize for literature                 | Soyinka, 1986                           |
| Booker and Man Booker Prizes               | Achebe, 1975 & 2007; Okri, 1991         |
| Orange Broadband Prize                     | Adichie, 2007                           |
| Dorothy and Lilian Gish Prize              | Achebe, 2010                            |
| Dayton Literary Peace Prize                | Achebe, 2010                            |
| Commonwealth Writers Prize                 | Okri, 1987; Habila, 2003; Adichie, 2005 |
| Caine Prize                                | Habila, 2015                            |
| Windham Campbell Literature Prize          | Habila, 2015                            |
| Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award             | Abani, 2005                             |
| David T. Wong Prize                        | Atta, 2005                              |



**Figure 11:Major Literary awards of translated authors**

| <b>Other Literary Awards</b>                      | <b>Writers and years earned</b>                |
|---|--|
| PEN America Open Books Award                      | Adichie, 2007; Abani, 2008; Oyeyemi, 2017      |
| Dag Hammarskjold Prize in Literature              | Cyprian Ekwensi, 1968                          |
| Thalia Award                                      | Osofisan, 2016                                 |
| University of Ife Merit Award                     | Nwapa, 1985                                    |
| Jock Campbell Award                               | Emecheta, 1978                                 |
| Peggy Ramsay Award                                | Bande Thomas, 1998                             |
| Fonlon-Nichols Award                              | Chukwuemeka Ike, 2008                          |
| Sommerset Maugham Award                           | Helen Oyeyemi 2010                             |
| Hurston-Wright Legacy Award                       | Nnedi Okorafor, 2001; Abani 2005               |
| New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award | Uzodinma Iweala, 2006; Chinelo Okparanta, 2014 |
| Wole Soyinka Prize for literature                 | Nnedi Okaorafor, 2005; Sefi Atta, 2006;        |
| World Fantasy Award                               | Nnedi Okaroafor, 2011                          |
| O. Henry Award                                    | Okparanta, 2014                                |

**Figure 12: Other literary awards of translated authors**

Some of these awards are local, while others are international and prestigious. For example, when Chinua Achebe won the Man Booker Prize in 2007, his fellow nominees were Margaret Atwood of Canada, Carlos Fuentes of Mexico, Ian McEwan of the United States, Alice Munro of Canada (who later won the prize in 2009), and Salman Rushdie of India. Chibundu Onuzo, born in 1991 and the youngest Nigerian writer to be translated into French, received the Betty Trask Award and was also shortlisted and longlisted for other international awards such as the Dylan Thomas Prize and the Commonwealth Book Prize. What this demonstrates is that the status of an author and the quality and reception of a work are taken into consideration when deciding what will be translated, and authors are selected for translation based on their literary reputation. It

shows that the French publishers prioritize international prizes, and may not necessarily put into perspective the Nigerian literary recognition standards when considering a work to be translated. Although authors who have won international prizes such as Lesley Nneka Arimah (*What It Means When a Man Falls From the Sky*) who won the Kirkus Prize worth 50 000 US dollars in 2017 and Irenosen Okojie (*Butterfly Fish*) who won the Betty Trask Award worth €5 000 in 2015 are yet to be translated, it is indisputable that Nigerian authors are selected for translation based on their literary fame and especially their international reputation and recognition in the Anglophone literary world. These writers were first recognized with different literary awards in the Anglophone literary system before their various translations in French. More so, the translation of writers who have received international prizes proves the continued domination of the minor literatures by the so-called centers. Some notable novels that are yet to be translated into French like A H. Mohammed's *The Last Days at Forcados High*, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*, Jowhor Ile's *And After Many Days* and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me* may not have received international awards but they remain well known and read in Nigeria. This study did not necessarily carry out the thematic study of each translated novel, but a cursory look shows that different novels with different themes are studied. Similarly, different genres, such as novels, plays and even poems, are translated; however, novels of different kinds dominate the list. There are many possible reasons for this, including the international recognition of Nigerian literature through novels, the number of novels and plays or poems circulating at a given time, the willingness of French publishers to publish other genres and the sale of plays or poems, which may not be as lucrative as the novel.

### 3.5.6. Translation of Western Published Books

Compared to the phenomena discussed in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that books published outside Nigeria, in the US or UK, dominate the lists of translations. Harrow observed that at the heart of all African areas of cultural production lies the problem of decisions about important cultural works and control over their production, and “these decisions are inseparable from the cultures and intellectual industries of the West” ( 151). Lindfors’ researches on African writers and their reception in the wider Anglophone literary criticism corroborates Harrow’s observation. Lindfors documented the number of times a writer appeared in detailed discussions of literary criticisms in print by literary scholars and critics using a corpus of 40 African authors. The result as explained by Lindfors revealed that “all the titles on the list have been published by multinational publishers.” (“Desert Gold” 130). Likewise, Ede Amatoritsero identified factors such as the place of publication, institutional position of a publisher in the metropolis and effectiveness of its protocol of illumination (183) as players of a major role in the literary trajectory, recognition or global canonical inclusion and exclusion of Nigerian texts, while further explaining that “the local Nigerian literary prize does not fulfill usual goals of global visibility through active media promotions of winner and remains a local phenomenon” (164). Since Western literary reception and recognition are indispensable to the general perception of Nigerian literature in general, and French publishers consider the opinions of Western readers and critics when deciding on works to be translated, novels produced by Western publishers find their places more easily in translations than those produced by local Nigerian publishers. To illustrate with concrete examples, in 2015, Parrésia, a Nigerian-based publishing founded in 2012 by Azafi Omoluabi Ogoji and Richard Ali, published Abubakar Adam Ibrahim’s *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. The mission of the publisher to promote Nigerian books by publishing them

at home and making them available to readers in Nigeria was manifested through the fame garnered by the novel in Nigeria. *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, already compared to the works of Zola and John Lanchester, the British novelist and whose innovative theme of an unholy affair between a devout Muslim and a gang leader won the local Nigerian Prize for Literature, but remains yet one of the novels to be translated and published in French. Another example is Teju Cole's<sup>70</sup> *Every Day is for the Thief* published locally in 2015 by another vibrant publisher Cassava Republic who opened its door to Nigerian writers in 2006. Although it captured the attention of the western audience and has been translated into German (2016), Spanish (2016), and Swedish (2015), the novel is not yet translated into French. Sometimes, the visibility that accompanies Western publishers and their transnational connections are more often than not, absent for local publishers in Nigeria<sup>71</sup>. Loretta Stec buttressed this statement with the example of the British Heinemann's African Writers' Series who published leading names in African literature such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong O and Alex la Guma to mention but a few. Stec reasoned that since the edition and control of the African Writers' Series took place in England, these writers were recognized by Western audience "largely because [they] were chosen to be published and reviewed and acclaimed by compan[y] with the capital and [international] prestige to do so" (142). Local publishers such as Parrésia and Cassava Republic are some of the best-known Nigerian publishers, however, there are smaller houses whose publications are bound to face more problems of credibility and fame.

The table below shows a selection of translated novels originally published locally in Nigeria:

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<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that Teju Cole's *Open City* published in 2011 by Penguin Random House UK was published in French by Denoël. This confirms why an inquiry into the individual processes of translation and publication of these Nigerian texts is important.

<sup>71</sup> This statement does not solely refer to the two Nigerian publishers mentioned here since these two are among the most notable ones in Nigeria.

| Author             | Novel  | Translation information   |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Chimamanda Adichie | <i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i> . Lagos, Farafina, 2009.   | Translated by Mona de Practontal as <i>Autour de ton cou: nouvelles</i> ; published by Gallimard.   |
| Zaynab Alkali      | <i>The Stillborn</i> . Lagos, Longmans, 1984.  | Translated by Etienne Galle as <i>Jusqu'au bout de ses rêves</i> ; published by Dapper.   |
| Chukwuemeka Ike    | <i>The Bottled Leopard</i> . Ibadan, University Press, 1995.   | Translated by Etienne Galle as <i>Fils de panthère</i> ; published by Dapper.   |
| Niyi Osundare      | <i>Waiting Laughters</i> . Lagos, Malthouse Press, 1990.   | Translated by Christiane Fioupou as <i>Rires en attente: long chant polyphonique</i> ; published by Présence Africaine.   |
| Ken Saro-Wiwa      | <i>Sozaboy, A Novel in Rotten English</i> . Port-Harcourt, Saros International, 1985.<br><i>Basi and Company</i> , Port-Harcourt, Saros International, 1987. | Translated by Samuel Millogo and Amadou Bissiri as <i>Sozaboy petit minitaire</i> ; published by Actes Sud.<br>Translated by Kagni Alem and J. Ferrandez as <i>Mr B. millionaire</i> ; published by Dapper. |

**Figure 13: Novels originally published in Nigeria**

Having said the above, the fact that novels originally published within Nigeria have been translated discredits the claim that French publishers only translate novels that were first published outside of Nigeria. Though individual French publishers may employ their own criteria for the selection of works to be translated, Bernard Magnier, editor of Actes Sud, confirmed in an interview for this study that being published within Nigeria does not lessen the chance of a novel being translated. Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that a book published abroad has a greater possibility of being translated than one published within Nigeria. Local publishers in Nigeria often do not enjoy the visibility and transnational connections of Western publishers, and may struggle with issues of credibility and fame. For example, a French publisher would more easily translate a book that was published by Simon and Schuster, Penguin Random House, or Hachette than one released by an unknown publisher in Nigeria. Some of the

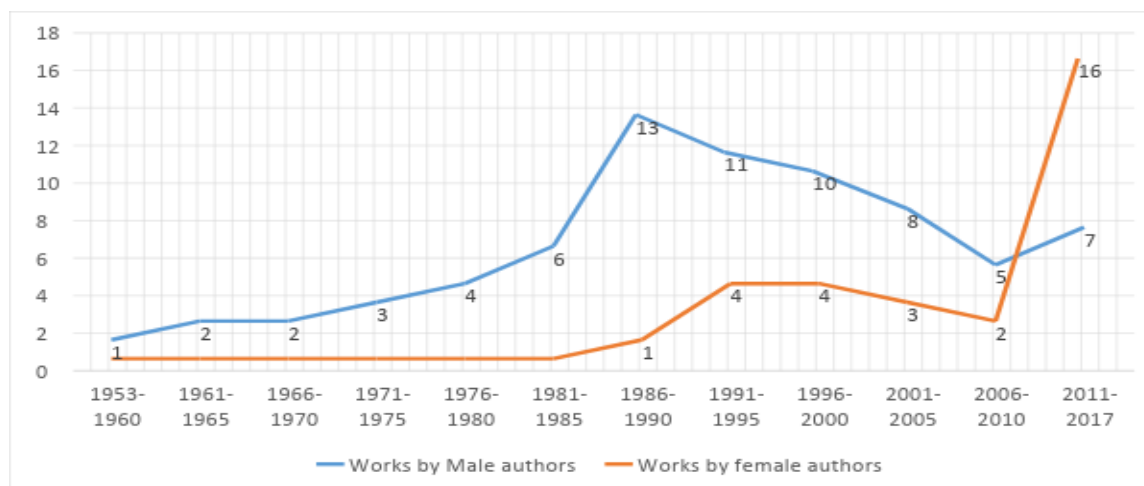
aforementioned French publishers, such as Gallimard, that are considered ‘major’ publishers in France would automatically seek internationally acclaimed works or writers to be translated. A discussion of the works in the above table illustrates this statement. Although Chimamanda Adichie and Ken Saro-Wiwa were published in Nigeria, their cases can be considered peculiar: Adichie is a critically acclaimed author,<sup>72</sup> while Ken Saro Wiwa, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a writer and activist who was executed for his astute condemnation of Nigeria’s political operations, thus attracting international attention. His works were attractive for translation so that readers could hear this voice that had been silenced. More so, *Sozaboy* was initially published in Nigeria in 1985 and republished in 1994 in England by Longman, four years before its translation into French. This suggests that the rights of translation and publication were held by the English publisher and not by its Nigerian counterpart. Apart from the already established fact that books originally published in the West are more likely to be translated and to be recognized internationally, other factors that affect the possibility of translation include a lack of agents or contacts in Nigeria, availability of book promotions, distance, and the difficulty of obtaining copyrights from Nigerian publishers.

### **3.5.7. Male and Female Authors in Translation**

This analysis examined the frequency of translation as it concerns men and women writers. The chart below shows that in general, novels by male authors are more likely to be translated than novels by female authors.

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<sup>72</sup> Since she is part of the corpus of this study, she will be discussed further in the next chapter.



**Figure 14: Translations of Novels by Male and Female Authors**

This is because Nigerian literature has historically been dominated by male writers; however, as female authors have gained numbers and popularity, they have also been increasingly translated into French. Between 2011 and 2017, 16 novels written by female writers were translated and published in France while only seven novels by male authors were translated. Some of the Nigerian women authors whose novels have been translated into French are listed in the table below:

| Female Writer            | Works translated and published  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie | <i>L'autre moitié du soleil (Half of a Yellow Sun)</i> , <i>Americanah</i> , <i>L'hibiscus pourpre (Purple Hibiscus)</i> , <i>Nous sommes tous des féministes suivi de Les marieuses (We Should All Be Feminists)</i> , and <i>Chère Ijeawele: ou un manifeste pour une éducation féministe (Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions)</i> |
| Sefi Atta                | <i>Le meilleur reste à venir (Everything Good Will Come)</i> , <i>Avale (Swallow)</i> , <i>Nouvelles du pays (News From Home)</i> and <i>L'ombre d'une différence (A Bit of a Difference)</i>   |
| Adobi Tricia Nwabuani    | <i>Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard (I Do Not Come to You by Chance)</i>   |
| Helen Oyeyemi            | <i>Le Blanc va aux sorcières (White is for Witching)</i> , <i>Mister Fox</i> (same title in   |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
|                   | both languages), and <i>Boy Snow Bird</i>   |
| Noo Saro Wiwa     | <i>Transwonderland. Retour au Nigeria (Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria)</i> |
| Nnedi Okoroafor   | <i>Qui a peur de la mort (Who is Afraid of Death)</i>                                       |
| Chibundu Onuzo    | <i>La fille du roi araignée (The Spider King's Daughter)</i>                                |
| Chinelo Okparanta | <i>Le Bonheur comme l'eau (Happiness like Water)</i>  |
| Lola Shoneyin     | <i>Baba Segi, ses épouses, leurs secrets (The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives)</i>        |

**Figure 15: Works of Female Writers Translated into French**

These books have all been released by French publishers such as Gallimard, Actes Sud, Panini Books (collection Eclipse), Les Escales, Galaade Editions, Hoëbeke, and Presses de la Cité. However, these translations are not accurate representations of literature by Nigerian women, since there are Nigerian female writers published in their own country, such as Adimorah Ezeigbo, whose works have been translated into other languages but not into French. When asked about the translation of women writers, Bernard Magnier pointed out that translators and publishers are willing to produce works by women as well as by men, and neither is prioritized for any reason.

### 3.5.8. Dominance of Literature Written in English and by Afropolitains

Apart from a few indigenous-language novels, most Nigerian texts published in French were originally written in English. Although this study focuses on the translation of Nigerian literature in English, references to the few indigenous language texts translated directly into French confirm the trends observed in the previous chapters. Some examples of indigenous Nigerian literature translated into French include Olaoye Abioye's translation of Fagunwa's *Ogboju ode*



*ninu igbo irunmale* and *Ireke Onibudo* translated as *Le preux chasseur dans la forêt infestée de démons* and *La fortune sourit aux audacieux*. Olaoye is a Nigerian professor of French, trained in France, and his translations, even though they may have been a product of the Olaoye's training in France, were published in Lagos.<sup>73</sup> Another example is Francoise Ugochukwu's translation of Pita Nwana's *Omenuko*, published by Karthala. Ugochukwu, who is originally French, was once a Professor of French in Nigeria. It could be argued that Olaoye's and Ugochukwu's translations were only possible because the translators are associated with the cultures and languages of the original authors and their works. As Lindfors has pointed out, the relative underrepresentation of indigenous-language literatures on the international scene could be explained in part by the insufficiencies of institutions promoting international awareness of local literatures or the availability of financial and logistic resources for promotion ("Africa and Nobel Prize" 222). This is to confirm same trend observed in the previous chapter, that the invisibility of these indigenous literature even in Nigeria is reflected in translation.

Works by Hausa writers also receive lesser representation than those in other languages such as Yoruba or Igbo. Hausa writers, whether writing in English or Hausa, do not appear in the list of translated works, except for Zainab Alkali, even though writers such as Elnathan John, Abubakar Gimba, and Labo Yari have all written notable works in English, while others such as Balaraba Ramat Yakubu have had their works translated into English. The examples of these Hausa writers, whose relative lack of recognition in mainstream Nigerian literature as compared to writers in English or other Nigerian languages may explain in part why their works have yet to be translated into French.

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<sup>73</sup> Technically, this translation is not included in the list of works published in France.

### 3.6. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the translation of Nigerian literature as a cultural product has yet to be fully recognized and given status at the national level. As a result, translation of literature occupies a relatively low position in Nigeria's cultural hierarchy. Despite the rich interaction between Nigeria and France, translation does not feature in the national discussions and federal policies, and key players who determine the products at the heart of Nigerian cultural diplomacy instead prioritize other elements of culture and trade. Questions of national commitment and conflicts form obstacles to the translation of Nigerian literature as a form of cultural diplomacy. However, the data on Nigerian literature translated in French illustrate that the terrain of French translation of Nigerian texts is far from arid. Which works are translated and when depend on many factors, including explicable and inexplicable gaps in translation, translation of male and female authors, recent progress in translation of female writers, involvement of major and minor publishers in translation and publication, the virtual absence of indigenous-language literatures, and especially the predominance of works in English that were originally published outside of Nigeria. These observations are not significantly different from what is known of the behaviours and characteristics of Nigerian literature in English. Accordingly, when Nigerian works in English are published abroad, they are made available to French literary agents and publishers. This is a phenomenon that spreads to other Anglophone African literatures. For instance, South African literature in French translation is dominated by who Jean-Pierre Richard called "the white quartet" ("L'autre source" 14) or white authors in general. Though Nigerian literature does not have a "white quartet," translators do tend to focus on authors whose works are published in the West.

The relative invisibility of domestically published authors in the French literary market raises the question of whether African Anglophone literature is actively promoted in the French literary world. Interviews carried out for this project confirmed the lack of significant interventions from Nigerian actors, especially at the national level. In *Translation of African Literature*, Jean-Pierre Richard discusses the formation of *Société pour la promotion des littératures d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique latine*, which promotes writers and literatures from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in German translation and suggests books for translation into German. More African books, for example, are translated and published depending on their recommendations. According to Richard, such an organization does not exist in the Francophone world, and it would be beneficial for a better representation of Nigerian literature in French. As it concerns Nigeria, many factors mitigate against the completion of such objectives of cultural diplomacy. Apart from the obvious position of the country as the 'dominated' in relation to imperial France, various internal problems such as multiethnic upheavals and poor management of funds impede potential measures aimed at promoting its "national" literature. This might be one of the limitations of using von Flotow's concept of "cultural diplomacy" in this paper, since not all nations can afford to subsidize cultural products like Quebec, and countries like Nigeria are not built on a strong national identity model. Besides, the concept of cultural diplomacy and translation according to von Flotow, is a relatively new development in the case of US and UK. On the one hand, it could not be expected that cultural diplomacy or the exporting of culture for the purposes of image promotion would have taken root in Nigeria. On the other hand, the above statements and observations neither validate nor rationalize the fact that the supposed Nigerian cultural diplomacy has neither articulated policies nor well-established and functional programs for exporting not only literature as a cultural product but all elements of culture as tools for

image strengthening. Recent developments, according to Hagher, indicated that a dynamic form of Nigeria's cultural diplomacy is emerging from the private sector, as banks, oil companies and other private institutions are beginning to sponsor cultural and artistic programs (74). Whether the translation of literature (into French) will be potentially prioritized as a cultural product by these institutions remains an open question and perhaps far-fetched, given that this research and discussions with Nigerian intellectuals and writers confirmed the absence of such bodies. Like any country with many checkered legacies, a broken national identity, divided by different linguistic and ethnic conflicts, a developing nation with a weak legitimizing power for its cultural productions, the translation of Nigerian literature will continue to be controlled by Western definitions, if it does not develop structured and functional programs specifically created for the promotion of literature.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> That said, it should be recognized that even in the case of countries with more functional cultural programs, the processes of exporting literature to other countries depend more “on the participation” and “vagaries of public taste” of the target culture, as demonstrated in the case study of Canadian literature translated into German (von Flotow, “Revealing the Soul” 187).

**Part 2: Micro Study**

## Chapter 4: Publishing Nigerian Literature in France: A Case Study

### 4.1. Methodological Considerations

Who are the French publishers of the authors discussed in this study? What are their criteria or policies of publishing a given author? How are the novels published in French? How does the ideological or political stance of these publishers influence their production of Nigerian literature in French translation? What reasons have motivated the publication of these works in the French literary system? These are some of the questions to which this chapter seeks to respond.

In *Publishing Africa in French*, Bush discusses Paul Flamand, director of Éditions du Seuil, and his controversial request to the French colonial government to supply paper for the publication of Leopold Sedar Senghor's *Hosties noires*. The request illustrates the nature, politics, and implications of publication of early African works in France:

Il ne vous échapperait pas, Monsieur le gouverneur général, quel intérêt s'attacherait à ce que soit largement diffusé, tant dans la métropole que dans la France d'Outre-Mer, cet ouvrage d'un auteur dont le rayonnement croit rapidement et qui peut porter au-delà des mers le témoignage des résultats de la culture française diffusée parmi les indigènes. (1)

Bush points out the highly dependent nature of colonial (francophone) Africa on European centers, the appeal of African representations to colonial inclinations as well as the civilizing mission aimed at the natives, as in the case of Senghor. The reasons for the reliance on and

consideration of France as the foyer of Francophone creativity<sup>75</sup> are similar to their counterparts for Anglophone writers, as discussed in the previous chapter. The development and publication of Francophone African literature are almost identical to those of Anglophone literature, especially since in both cases, the publishing industries were established in their respective colonial administrations. Bush notes that a similar lack of structure and financial experience affected the development and production of local literatures. With ideological and literary allegiances pledged to European centres, as Flamand's request demonstrates, European publishers regarded this loyalty as the sole reason to produce and disseminate African literary works.<sup>76</sup> Although the case of Flamand's request for the publication of Senghor<sup>77</sup> deals specifically with publishing an original African text rather than a translation, it highlights the ideologies and ambivalences of the French literary and cultural space in which the publication of African literature in general is situated.

The publication of Anglophone literature in France involves similar implications of imperialistic disassociations and divisions of loyalty. The absence of a proximate relationship between France and an Anglophone country such as Nigeria, in terms of colonial power control, ultimately created a distance between them. Anglophone writers do not regard France as a literary centre; thus, such distance plays a relatively minor role in the visibility of Anglophone African literature in France, especially with regard to translation. Even though the world is becoming more globalized, it is still reasonable that Anglophone writers would find allies within the English-

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<sup>75</sup> In *The Troubling Popularity of West African Romance Novels*, Moudileno argued that the popularity of a collection of African Francophone novels published in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire is questioned in a context where France is still considered as the sole foyer of Francophone creativity.

<sup>76</sup> See below.

<sup>77</sup> Senghor was a Francophone author who wrote in French.

speaking world. The loyalty divide, considered from a polysystemic definition of translation,<sup>78</sup> implies that French publishers would only publish Anglophone African texts in French for significant reasons, whether commercial or otherwise. In turn, this stance suggests that any financial gains should be considerable, unless the venture is seen as humanitarian or purely cultural. The translation and publication of South African authors in France provides such a case in point. According to Jean-Pierre Richard, the translation of South African literature represents more than two-thirds of African literary works published in French (“L’autre source” 13), the majority of which were written by the “white quartet”: Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink, John Maxwell Coetzee, and Breyten Breytenbach. The domination of works by these authors emphasizes the point that translation is a target-culture-oriented commercial activity. Richard argues a correlation between the authors’ European ancestry and the French translations of their works, and that these works are far from representing the body of literature in South Africa. The focus of French publishers on these authors further shows that French publishers, as pointed out above, would be involved in the translation and publication of certain Anglophone authors for specific and substantial reasons. If the white quartet is favored in translation because of their European origin, their lasting relationship with France<sup>79</sup> and the potential commercial gains of their works, this reinforces the point regarding the cultural, linguistic, and political reasons for the publication of Nigerian literature in France. Suffice it to mention that South Africa, unlike Nigeria, is one of the few Anglophone African countries with a sizeable white population.<sup>80</sup> In the absence of such racial relations, imperialistic associations, colonial ties, loyalties, or substantial allegiances, Nigerian literature has maintained only a minimal presence in French

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<sup>78</sup> The assumption that translation is oriented toward the target culture.

<sup>79</sup> According to Richard, these authors’ works were always translated in French as soon as they were published in English.

<sup>80</sup> Whites make up 8.9% of South African population according to the 2011 Census



culture. According to Richard, three-quarters of the translations published in France are shared between Nigeria and other African countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Ghana, with Nigeria holding a majority of these (“Translation of African Literature” 40). As seen in the previous chapter, although the development of Nigerian literature was slow, it has been translated in France on an ongoing basis. It is important to keep in mind the roles and motivations of agents in the production of Nigerian literary translations in France.

Agents, according to John Milton and Paul Bandia, are text producers and mediators who produce the target text, such as editors, reviewers, translators, commissioners, and publishers (2). Milton and Bandia explain that these individuals devote time, energy, and even their own lives to the cause of a foreign literature in order to introduce other cultures and literatures to the source culture. As a result, some of them in their cultural and political roles “have effected changes in styles of translation, have broadened the range of translations available,<sup>81</sup> or have helped or attempted to innovate by selecting new works to be translated and by introducing new styles of translation for works entering their own society” (2). Although Nigerian literature cannot be compared in terms of weight and size to some of the literatures, such as Canadian, Australian, and British literatures, that are discussed in Milton and Bandia’s collection, this study shows that the course of Nigerian literature in translation, especially in French translation, is similarly determined by the activities of agents, whether cultural or political. These agents, as publishers, are important not only to the introduction of Nigerian writers and their works into France, but also for the diffusion of Anglophone literatures in translation. This chapter takes a historical approach to the study of how the sociocultural and political ideologies of publishers may influence their roles in the translation and publication of Nigerian literature in French.

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<sup>81</sup> This is the case of one of the agents interviewed for this project.

This chapter first examines the publication of selected Nigerian writers in France as a commercial enterprise with expected gains. It considers how power relations and ideologies may shape the production of translations (Lefevere, *Translation History*) and explores possible reasons for the continued survival of these translations in France. This study identifies the publishers as one of the agents involved in the translation process and examines how they “further or hinder” (Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* 15) the translation of Nigerian literature. The publishers are hereby considered as vehicles of dissemination of Nigerian literature and culture<sup>82</sup> in France. This perspective of study has been endorsed by scholars such as Bush (“Publishing Africa”), Kathryn Batchelor and Claire Bisdorff, as it addresses the link between translation and publishing. Consistent with the wide range of perspectives employed by previous studies, and in order to address the various questions of this project, this study will make use of written documents and interviews. The selected authors and their novels within the French target culture will be studied, with the aim of understanding how, when, and why they were translated, the factors motivating their commercialization, and the financial constraints that may encourage or discourage their translations.

#### **4.2. Publishing Chinua Achebe in French**

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born in Ogidi, in the eastern part of Nigeria, in 1930 and was a graduate of University College Ibadan. After his career in radio and publishing, he became the Charles P. Stevenson Jr. Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College, and later the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor and Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University. His first book, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), published by Faber and Faber in English

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<sup>82</sup> In the case of literary publishing and translation, it is assumed that communication may take on a more cultural tone as a result of the transcultural voices of the original texts.

and as *Le monde s'effondre* (1966) in French, brought him literary fame for its chronicling of traditional Igbo society, previously often dismissed by the West as savage, in the face of Western colonialism. *Things Fall Apart* won the Margaret Wong Prize and sold more than 10 million copies worldwide. Lindfors has said of Achebe that “no one else, not even Soyinka, has made so profound a contribution to the enrichment of a whole continent’s literature” (“Africa and Nobel Prize” 223). Lindfors also described *Things Fall Apart* as the “first novel with unquestionable literary merit from English speaking West Africa” (“Africa and the Nobel Prize” 224). In 1960, Achebe’s second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, was published by Heinemann and won the Nigerian National Trophy Award. This was followed by *Arrow of God* in 1964, which won the Jock Campbell Award. *A Man of People* was published in 1966 by the same publisher, followed by *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987. Achebe also wrote collections of short stories and poems, such as *Chike and the River* (1966), *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (1972), *The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories* (1962), and *Girls at War* (1972), which was published in French in 1982 and is in the process of being retranslated.<sup>83</sup> Some of his collections of poems include *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems* (1973) and *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems* (1971). He has also written several critical essays, such as *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975) and *The Education of a British Protected Child* (2009). Achebe has received many awards,<sup>84</sup> such as the Dayton Literary Peace Prize (2010), the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize (2007), the Man Booker International Prize (2007), the German Booksellers Peace Prize (2002), the St. Louis Literary Award (1999), the Booker Prize for Fiction (1987), the Champion Award (1974), the Lotus Award for Afro-Asian Writers (1975), the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1964), and the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize (1959). He has also received many honours including an Honorary Fellowship of

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<sup>83</sup> Achebe is thus the only African author with two books retranslated into French.

<sup>84</sup> Awards are listed chronologically, beginning with the most recent.

the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and honorary doctorates from more than 30 colleges and universities from all around the world.

In 2008, the Library of Congress in Washington DC, in partnership with the African Society of the National Summit on Africa, the Ralph Bunche International Affairs Centre, and the Department of African Studies at Harvard University organized “The Chinua Achebe Symposium” to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of *Things Fall Apart*. In her opening remarks, Bernadette Paolo, President and CEO of African Society of the National Summit on Africa, stated:

Today is one of those days when Africa triumphs... we come together to celebrate one of her sons who has through his works illuminated the minds of millions of people around the globe about the depth of intellectual creativity as well as the mastery of the written word inherent among the continents of diverse citizenries.

(The Library of Congress)

Paolo’s summary of what Achebe represents for Africa and for world cultures that have been classified as “marginal” does not adequately capture the full impact of his literary accomplishments. His influence on the development and publication of African literature remains indelible, but he has had less of a presence in French translations.

#### **4.2.1. Achebe in France: Présence Africaine as a Conflicted Agency?**

After the publication of *Le monde s’effondre* (1966), translated by Michel Ligny and published by Présence Africaine, it would take another eight years for his next work, *No longer at Ease* (1960), to be translated as *Le malaise* (1974), by Jocelyn Robert Duclos and published by the

same publisher. Following the publication of *Le malaise*, *Le démagogue* was published in 1977, not by Présence Africaine but by NEA (Nouvelles Éditions Africaines) in Dakar, Senegal. The following year, Présence Africaine published *La Flèche de Dieu* (1978) translated by D'Almeida and Olga Adande Simpson. In 1981, Hatier published *Femmes en guerre et autres nouvelles*, which was translated by J. de Grandsaigne.

Unlike Adichie, who will be discussed later in this chapter, and despite his immense literary weight in the Anglophone world, Achebe has not enjoyed the same prestige and has been published by different publishers in France. Even though financial considerations may be a factor, it is not wrong to believe that Présence Africaine would continue publishing his works in France, keeping in mind its objective of discovering African voices and also considering Achebe's importance in the reception history of African literature. Bush has pointed out that Achebe's *Le monde s'effondre* received a "subdued reception" ("Translating Anglophone" 512) in France and this suggests that Présence Africaine appeared to lose interest in publishing his works. Achebe's passage from Présence Africaine to NEA could be explained in part by the early relationship between the two publishing houses at the time.

NEA was formed in 1972 by the Senegalese government and Ivory Coast authorities in association with French publishers such as Présence Africaine. Albert Gerard explains that in the 1970s, publishers in Paris no longer showed interest in the publication of African literature in general, which propelled local firms to produce publications in French within Africa (581). NEA was one such indigenous publishing house, which was created in order to promote African

writing. *A Man of the People*, translated by A. Diop<sup>85</sup> as *La démagogue*, was the first translation commissioned by NEA. *Présence Africaine* was associated with Senegal<sup>86</sup> and NEA, since its founder, Alioune Diop, was from Senegal. Moreover, Leopold Sedar Senghor's government was credited with providing financial support to the publishing house (Bush, *Publishing Africa* 64-82). Even though this relationship may explain the trajectory of Achebe's works in France, it is important to consider further the eight-year gap between the publication of *Things Fall Apart* and of *Arrow of God* by *Présence Africaine*. Without denying the fact that other factors may be involved, what is known of Alioune Diop and *Présence Africaine* can account for several potential reasons for such a gap.

Alioune Diop is a controversial figure, especially among African critics.<sup>87</sup> Diop and the journal *Présence Africaine* were criticized for using only articles written by French authors in its first issue in 1947. This decision did not reflect the Pan-Africanist struggles—to strengthen and encourage solidarity between people of African descent/ and vision for a unified African nation— and ideals that the journal was supposed to promote at the time, as reflected in its subtitle *Revue culturelle du monde noir*. Irene d'Almeida says of Alioune Diop, “Tel était le caractère dichotomique d'Alioune Diop. D'un côté, le champion de l'Afrique, de ses cultures, de ses civilisations, de l'autre, l'homme qui demeurait fort attaché à la langue française, à la culture française, en un mot à la France qu'il posait comme modèle de réussite intellectuelle et technologique” (“Le Festac” 192). Diop was simultaneously criticized for not being African

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<sup>85</sup> Despite my efforts, I was unable to find any information on this translator. There are several possible candidates for the identity of “A. Diop,” including Alioune Diop of *Présence Africaine*, or Amet Diop, a journalist and writer with NEA.

<sup>86</sup> *Présence Africaine* is a collaborative venture whose participants have included the Ivorian novelist, poet and playwright, Bernard Dadie and others, but the group was formed around Alioune Diop.

<sup>87</sup> This refers specifically to critics from Africa.

enough and for being too closely attached to France and its values. Diop, more or less corroborated these opinions during his work in Nigeria as the Secretary General of Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC)<sup>88</sup> in Lagos, when he was criticized for positioning France as a privileged place for knowledge. After Diop hired her as a translator for FESTAC, D'Almeida claimed that he made a French translator, M. Lefevre, the supervisor of translations without considering the specific requirements for translations from African languages and cultures. For example, D'Almeida disputed the proper translation of the phrase “West Africa” with Lefevre: he wanted her to translate it as “L’Afrique occidentale,” while she preferred “L’Afrique de l’ouest.”<sup>89</sup> She further said of Diop:

Ce qui était perçu par certains comme une « non-africanité » était aussi ce qui le sépara des représentants du pays hôte, le Nigeria. Alors que ceux-ci s'ancraient davantage dans l'aspect culturel du festival, Alioune Diop privilégiait fermement la partie intellectuelle qui devait s'articuler autour d'un colloque qui, pour lui, devait être au cœur, sinon le cœur même du Festival. (“Le Festac” 191)

It is also important to mention that during this position in Nigeria, Diop may have also been conflicted by the Afrocentric framework debate that placed Anglophone and Francophone African intellectuals in opposition. Negritude, with which Diop strongly identified, was criticized by the Anglophone intellectuals, particularly the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, who said of Negritude that “A tiger does not go about proclaiming its tigritude” (Ndu 117). Besides, the

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<sup>88</sup> The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) was co-organized by the Government of Nigeria and UNESCO.

<sup>89</sup> D'Almeida further noted that she did lose the argument.

derogatory nature of word “nègre” in its English counterpart “negro” from which the word was formed should be noted. Negritude was considered a colonial ideology that would place any African idea on the defensive. Furthermore, Alioune Diop’s relationship with Nigeria and his position as the Secretary General of FESTAC were severed by the Nigerian government under Obasanjo’s regime due to the conflict over the inclusion of the Arab world<sup>90</sup> in FESTAC, the opposition to the idea by the Senegalese government under Senghor and the subsequent boycott of FESTAC by Senegal:

The Secretary-General, in the person of Alioune Diop, had to be relieved of his duties following the confirmation that the Senegalese Government had taken the definitive decision to boycott the Festival [...]. That decision of the Senegalese Government did consequently compromise the position of Dr. Alioune Diop, who is a Senegalese citizen, as well as the Secretary General of the International Festival Committee. It must be emphasized that the move to relieve Dr. Alioune Diop of his responsibility as the Secretary General of the IFC was in no way a direct personal affront to him. It was a decision that had to be made purely on issues of principles as well as pragmatic realities. (Apter, 4)

Although these instances carry different political weights, they are not entirely inseparable from the sociohistorical interventions that took place between the 1960s and the late 1970s, during

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<sup>90</sup> Nigeria wanted North African countries or the Maghreb to be part of the FESTAC, but Senegal opposed this proposal.



which Achebe's works were published in English and French. It should be noted that Nigeria did claim that the removal of Alioune Diop was not a personal decision, however, it was an unjustified and unnecessary action which could have possibly impacted Présence Africaine's decision to translate and publish Achebe.

The material or ideological content of Achebe's *A Man of the People*, published by NEA, may also have influenced the irregularity of the translation of his works. Bush noted that Présence Africaine was criticized for its conservatism and nonconformity to various political changes in Africa to which African writers bear witness in their works. One such example is Présence Africaine's failure to acknowledge the shift in African writing from colonial issues to a self-questioning that included satire and condemnation of the government and politics of various African nations after independence (*Publishing Africa* 82-83). Bush confirms that Présence Africaine benefitted financially from various African countries, a position that left the publisher vulnerable to political control and godfatherism at the expense of freedom of expression. The consequences of this position were exemplified in the case of Aimé Césaire's *Une saison au Congo*, which was denied publication by Présence Africaine because of its harsh criticism of Mobutu, the acting president of Congo at the time. As a result, *Une saison au Congo* was published by Le Seuil. Likewise, Achebe's *Le demagogue* or *A Man of the People* was a satire of politics and politicians of the 1960s,<sup>91</sup> and was most likely not published by Présence Africaine for much the same reasons as *Une Saison au Congo*. The political undertones of *A Man of the People* have inspired studies by many authors including Lindfors, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Morrison. Set in an unidentified African country, unlike Achebe's other novels which are explicitly set in Nigeria, it is a bitter attack on the lack of ethics and abuse of power by African

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<sup>91</sup> Although Achebe situated the novel in a fictitious country, its criticism of the Nigerian government was still obvious.

politicians. This novel has been simply described as a prophecy of the political situations in Nigeria<sup>92</sup> since some of the events described in the novel actually did occur after its publication. After the military coup in Nigeria, which was also described in the novel, Achebe was accused of treason, and he had to flee from his place of work in the Western part of Nigeria back to his hometown in the Igbo Eastern region. During the Nigeria-Biafra war, he and his family would narrowly escape death when his home was bombed. His political commitment and his unabashed criticism of the Nigerian government's ineptitude in *A Man of the People* allied him intellectually with Aimé Césaire (*Une saison au Congo*), and this could partly account for why Présence Africaine did not immediately publish this novel.<sup>93</sup>

There are notable differences between his literary and political concerns in *A Man of the People* and *Arrow of God*,<sup>94</sup> which was published unceremoniously by Présence Africaine. It was Christiane Diop, the wife of Alioune Diop, who suggested Olga Simpson Adande and Irene D'Almeida Assiba as translators for *Arrow of God*. According to D'Almeida:

Je compris que Mme Diop était l'âme de Présence Africaine lorsqu'elle nous proposa à Olga et à moi un contrat pour que nous traduisions en français, *Arrow of God* de Chinua Achebe (194) [...]. Je ne me souviens pas qu'Alioune Diop eut quelque rôle dans l'octroi de ce contrat. Certes, il s'intéressait à la traduction, et

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<sup>92</sup> This is from the testimony of John Pepper Clark, the Nigerian poet and playwright, who claimed that everything in the novel had come to pass except for a military coup; it is useful to note here that a coup attempt did occur in the years preceding the Nigerian civil war.

<sup>93</sup> This subject is worthy of further study on its own, in light of Achebe's status within African and world literature.

<sup>94</sup> Unlike *A Man of the People*, *Arrow of God* deals with traditional Igbo culture. It is similar to *Things Fall Apart* in its treatment of colonial power and African culture.

voulait ajouter à la liste des publications de Présence Africaine ce roman d'Achebe. Mais c'était Mme Diop qui s'occupait de l'intendance et qui faisait avancer, dans le quotidien, les causes qu'ils avaient tous deux épousées. (195)

It is worth noting that D'Almeida did not state the reasons why she thought that Christiane Diop was in charge of Présence Africaine, why only Christiane Diop worked towards the promotion of the ideologies of African presence, nor why Alioune Diop would not be personally and overtly interested in the translation of Achebe. All of this suggests that Achebe's publication in French may have been influenced by deeper unexplored political factors. As seen in the table below, *La flèche de Dieu* was the last time Présence Africaine published a translation of Achebe's works:

| Year | Book  | Publisher                                  |
|------|---|--|
| 1966 | <i>Le monde s'effondre</i>  | Présence Africaine                         |
| 1974 | <i>Le malaise</i>   | Présence Africaine                         |
| 1977 | <i>Le démagogue</i>   | NEA  |
| 1978 | <i>La Flèche de Dieu</i>  | Présence Africaine                         |
| 1981 | <i>Femmes en guerre et autres nouvelles</i>                         | Hatier                                     |
| 1990 | <i>Les termitières de la savane</i>                                 | Belfond                                    |
| 2013 | <i>Tout s'effondre</i> (retranslation of <i>Things Fall Apart</i> ) | Actes Sud, collection "Lettres Africaines" |
| 2013 | <i>Éducation d'un enfant protégé par la couronne</i>                | Actes Sud, collection "Lettres Africaines" |

**Figure 16:Achebe's novels in French**

Regardless of Achebe's eclectic and uncertain literary course in France, interviews with his most recent translator and publisher have indicated a genuine interest in making his works more accessible and reintroduce him to French readers. According to editor Bernard Magnier, this was why Actes Sud produced a new translation of *Things Fall Apart*.

#### 4.2.2. Actes Sud: The Politics of Publishing Foreign Literature

Actes Sud was created in 1978 by Hubert Nyssen and Jean-Phillipe Gautier, the founders of L'Atelier de cartographie thématique et statistique (Actes). An important independent publisher in France, Actes Sud is credited with more than 6 000 titles and seven associated publishing houses. Some of them include Éditions Thierry Magnier, Picard, Éditions Payot et Rivages, and Gaia, which has also published the works of the Nigerian female writer Buchi Emecheta.

Actes Sud distinguishes itself from other publishers examined in this thesis because of its core interest in translation and publication of foreign literature. According to its founder, Nyssen:

Tout est advenu par ma grand-mère tourangelle<sup>95</sup>, qui avait épousé un professeur belge. Dans mon enfance bruxelloise, elle m'a persuadé que j'étais belge par accident et m'a conseillé de partir pour la France, pour le Comtat Venaissin. C'est elle aussi qui m'a initié à la lecture, m'a fait comprendre ce qu'était la traduction, en me lisant et commentant Cervantès, et m'a donné ce goût charnel des livres. (Savigneau)

Nyssen recognized that in order to make a mark on the world republic of letters, he had to be different by following an uncommon path: « Je savais qu'il était difficile pour une petite maison installée loin de Paris d'attirer des auteurs français de renom. Je me suis donc attaché d'abord à constituer un catalogue de littérature étrangère ». The search for foreign cultures echoes the objectives of the publisher, but does not suggest a distancing from the French cultural and literary scene, as Actes Sud does publish many works by French writers. Other foreign writers whose works have been published in translation by Actes Sud include Indo-British Salman

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<sup>95</sup> Resident of French town of Tours

Rushdie, Turkish Asli Erdogan, Algerian Kamel Daoud (who won the Prix Goncourt in 2015), Belarusian Svetlana Alexievich (Nobel prize in literature 2015), and American Kathryn Stockett.

#### **4.2.3. Actes Sud and the Politics of Publishing African Literatures**

Bernard Magnier founded the collection “Lettres Africaines” with Actes Sud in 1998. This collection has received critical attention because of its publication of works by African authors. Among all the publishers solicited, Bernard Magnier was the only one who granted me an interview. Bernard Magnier is an editor, journalist, organizer of “Les festivals des littératures métisses d’Angoulême,” and literary advisor for various organizations such as Tarmac de la Villette (francophone theatre), le Centre National du livre (CNL), and Bibliothèque Publique d’Information (BPI) in Paris. Magnier’s commitment to the translation and publication of African authors is a case of entrepreneurship that goes against the norms. His objective, as stated in his interviews, is to introduce to “large public curieux et heureux [...] de nouveaux horizons de lecture” (Chanda). Actes Sud, according to Magnier, is a publishing house that is extremely open to the world, so that Africa was able to find its place within “Lettres Africaines.”

The objectives of “Lettres Africaines” are neither linguistic nor racial, but specifically geographic, which accounts for concentration on all African literatures whether anglophone, francophone, lusophone, or even those written in indigenous languages. He says of its, and his, interest in Nigerian literature:

It is important to know that there is no specific interest or will to publish Nigerians; it is just that I am interested in publishing Africans, and in Africa, Nigeria is a very important place, so

naturally, Nigerian books are present in the collection. This is how things happen here. (Magnier, personal interview)<sup>96</sup>

“Lettres Africaines” has published more than 45 works from different parts of Africa, of which twelve are written by Nigerian authors. Notable authors from other African countries include Emmanuel Dongala (Congo), Chenjerai Hove (Zimbabwe), Jamal Mahjoub (Sudan), Lucy Mushita (Zimbabwe), and Lewis Nkosi (South African). The Nigerian works in the collection include *Baba Segi*, *Ses épouses leurs secret*, by Lola Shoneyin; *L’ombre d’une différence*, *Nouvelles du Pays*, *Avale*, and *Le meilleur reste à venir*, by Sefi Atta; *Du pétrole sur l’eau*, *La mesure du temps*, and *En attendant un ange*, by Helon Habila; *Education d’un enfant protégé par la couronne* and *Tout s’effondre*, by Chinua Achebe; *Il te faut partir à l’aube*, by Wole Soyinka; and *Le conte du squatter*, by Ike Oguine.<sup>97</sup> Of the Nigerian novels published in French and listed in the compiled database, Actes Sud has published sixteen. Compared to the total number of Nigerian books in French translation as well as the total number of publishers of Nigerian books in France, it is clear that Actes Sud published more translations than any other publisher.

According to Magnier, his preliminary interest in Nigerian literature uncovered prominent authors like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. Discussions within literary gatherings led to the publication of works by Ken Saro Wiwa, who had gained worldwide fame as a political martyr. In order to do justice to the particular features of Wiwa’s linguistic style, such as the use of pidgin and “broken” English, in *Sozaboy*, Magnier asked African translators to translate this work. One could agree with Magnier that his choice of Samuel Millogo and Amadou Bissiri,

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<sup>96</sup> My translation.

<sup>97</sup> The above list does not include other Nigerian books published before the creation of “Lettres Africaines.”

both from Burkina Faso, as the African translators was a step above the normal practice in France of using French translators for African novels. It should be noted that this is not the first time an African has translated a Nigerian novel. However, such an attempt is noteworthy. Magnier's continued interest in Nigerian literature led to the discovery of other authors such as Helon Habila, Sefi Atta, and Lola Shoneyin, which raises the question of whether Actes Sud considers the literary status of the writers before publishing their works. In response, Magnier explained that Actes Sud is interested in what has been published and that its mission to discover foreign authors does not necessarily mean they must be well-known. It can be an author's breakthrough work, as for Lola Shoneyin or Ike Oguine, or an author who is already established, such as Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Ike Oguine, for example, is an engineer by profession and not a prolific writer, but the publication of his works in French has given him more recognition as a writer. Magnier also pointed out that one of the major criteria for selecting a work to be translated and published is its content. As a result, the editor avows that he had never heard of Nigerian authors such as Sefi Atta, Lola Shoneyin, Ike Oguine and Helon Habila before deciding to publish their work in French. However, they were all translated because of the appeal of their works. The editor explained that the process of selection is rigorous and each work is evaluated by a reading committee, which allows the publisher to choose works that best align with its objectives; yet, no Nigerian book submitted has been denied publication by Actes Sud. In terms of cultural innovation, Magnier's contribution to the publication of Nigerian literature in general could be described, in Milton and Bandia's words, as going against the grain, challenging common places and contemporary assumptions, all in a bid to pursue the goal of bringing new talents and voices to the existing French literary system (3).

#### 4.2.4. Renaissance of Achebe in “Lettres Africaines”: Actes Sud as “Passeur”

Achebe’s place within the French polysystem is a reminder of the importance of understanding the translation and publication history of *Things Fall Apart* in French. The information from the editor proves that publishing Chinua Achebe in Actes Sud was born out of a ‘need’ to retranslate him, to reintroduce him to the French market, and to make the book, which had been otherwise out of print, available to French audiences. *Things Fall Apart* had been retranslated into other languages, such as German, and its retranslation into French was historically important as it marked one of the first retranslation of an African novel into French:

tout d’abord la volonté de faire (re)connaître dans le monde francophone cet écrivain majeur et ce livre capital dans l’histoire littéraire africaine, ensuite parce que son agent nous a proposé de rééditer son œuvre, enfin parce qu’il nous a paru important de retraduire ce titre, c’est-à-dire de faire avec une œuvre africaine ce qui se fait couramment avec d’autres œuvres du monde. C’est, je crois, la première fois qu’un roman africain est retraduit! (Chanda)

The retranslation of Achebe was timely, as the previous translation, *Le monde s’effondre* has been criticized.<sup>98</sup> The simultaneous publication of *Tout s’effondre* and *Education d’un enfant protégé par la couronne* (*The Education of a British-Protected Child*) reinforces the choice to make Achebe better known in France as explained by Magnier in an interview:

La double publication simultanée marque l’importance accordée à cet auteur et permet de faire découvrir le romancier et l’essayiste.  
C’est aussi un moyen de mettre à disposition du public

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<sup>98</sup> See Rao and Madueke for a comparative analysis of *Le monde s’effondre* and *Tout s’effondre*.



francophone son premier roman retraduit et l'un de ses derniers livres, inédit en français.

Just as *Things Fall Apart* marked an important stage in African literature in English, *Tout s'effondre* also marked a significant advancement in the history of Anglophone literature in French as a result of its retranslation. Achebe's status and the need to reintroduce him to French audiences are some of the reasons for the newer translation. Actes Sud can be considered a 'passeur culturel'<sup>99</sup> by virtue of its contribution to the reconstruction of Achebe's identity and thematic preoccupations, not only in the French literary system but in the Francophone world in which the new translations are disseminated. The retranslation of *Tout s'effondre* as well as the essay *L'éducation d'un enfant protégé par la couronne* are initial steps toward a potential renewed dialogue, critical reflections, and discussions of the various postcolonial issues that characterize Achebe's works.

#### **4.3. Publishing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in French**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a self-proclaimed Nigerian feminist writer and one of the new voices of Nigerian literature. Following her first publications, a play and a collection of poetry, she has received many awards and was nominated for various others. Some of her major awards include the Commonwealth Writers prize (2005), Best First Book (Africa and overall) for *Purple Hibiscus* (2005), the Orange Broadband Prize for *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize (fiction category) for *Americanah* (2013), and the PEN Beyond Margins Award (2007). Others include the 2002 Caine Prize for African Writing, the Booker Prize in 2004, a British Book Award in 2007 in the category 'Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year,' and Forbes Africa's Person of the Year Award in 2014. Adichie has been counted among the fifty

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<sup>99</sup> Conveyor of culture or cultural relay

most influential African women by *Jeune Afrique* and has received critical acclaim worldwide, with her books translated into more than 25 languages.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published by Algonquin Books in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 2003. *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* were published in 2006 and 2013, respectively, by Knopf/Anchor. *Half of a Yellow Sun* was later republished in 2007 by Vintage Canada. *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *We Should All Be Feminists*, and *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* were published in 2009, 2014, and 2017, respectively, in the UK by Fourth Estate.

#### **4.3.1. Beginning of French Translations**

All of her books, except for *Purple Hibiscus* which was published by Anne Carrière, were translated into French and published by Gallimard. Stephen Carrière first discovered and introduced Adichie in France, publishing *Purple Hibiscus - L'Hibiscus Pourpre*, at éditions Anne Carrière in 2004. The novel met a great success in France, with 12 000 copies sold the first year, quite an achievement in France for a first novel, from a young writer, from Western Africa, and at that time, when African literature, whether from the west or any other country in the continent, was not half as popular in France as it is today. Adichie's subsequent novels have been published by Gallimard.

#### **4.3.2. Gallimard and The Politics of "Long Term" Publishing**

Gallimard, Adichie's French publisher and one of the most prestigious publishers in France, was founded in 1911 by Gaston Gallimard, Andre Gide, and Jean Schlumberger. It boasts around 40 000 titles, 9000 authors, 240 collections of essays, 15 associated publishing houses, nine bookstores, and numerous distribution and dissemination channels for books. Adichie's *L'autre moitié du soleil* (2008) was initially published in "Du Monde Entier," a collection created in

1931 which publishes works from various foreign literatures, and was reprinted in the collection “Folio” in 2017. Created in 1972, “Folio” publishes authors of contemporary world literature as well as travel literature. *Americanah* (2015) was also published in “Du Monde Entier” and republished in “Folio” in 2016. Adichie’s other works, except for *Chère Ijeawele*, have all been published in the “Folio” collection, which has helped her become an established author in France and the French-speaking literary world.

In 2007, Gallimard created the “Continents noirs” collection, which Cachin notes is specifically dedicated to publishing works by African authors. Tutuola’s *L’ivrogne dans la brousse* was one of its first five publications. The goal of “Continents noirs,” according to Gallimard’s website, is to publish works by Francophone African authors; though this does explain why Adichie’s works are not included in the collection, it raises the question of why Tutuola is. “Du Monde Entier” displays a predominance of American authors (about a quarter of the catalogue) and British authors (11%). Unlike “Continents noirs,” “Folio” and “Du Monde Entier” are not entirely devoted to the publication or dissemination of African literature, either in French or in English; “Du Monde Entier” publishes mostly European authors. Its catalogue shows authors of 55 nationalities, including 24 from Europe. Even though Marie-Francoise Cachin’s incorporation of “Continents noirs” in her discussion of publishers of African translated texts in France contradicts the information on Gallimard’s website, it could be supposed that Tutuola’s book has been known for so long that it has been “accepted” and assimilated into the corpus of Francophone literature. Moreover, as already noted in the previous chapter, Tutuola’s publication

in France was marked by the desire to publish the first African writer as well as the controversy over his use of ‘poor’ English.<sup>100</sup>

Apart from Tutuola and Adichie, Gallimard has not published any other works of Nigerian fiction. As one of the most prestigious publishers in France, Gallimard is known for its impenetrability. Andrew Wylie, Adichie’s literary agent, has described Gallimard as “la plus belle maison d’édition au monde” (Didier). Among the world renowned authors whose works Gallimard has published are Franz Kafka, Erskine Caldwell, Jorge Amado, Ernest Hemmingway, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Vladimir Nabokov, and James Joyce. It has also published works by well-known French authors such as Paul Morand, Jean Cocteau, Jean Paul Sartre, Antoine de Saint Exupéry, André Gide, Albert Camus, Louis Aragon, and Paul Éluard. Cachin and Joachim Schnerf observe that an editor may decide to publish translations in order to satisfy the tastes of the audience and introduce them to foreign cultures. Cachin explained that Gallimard developed an openness to translation of well-known authors, particularly those from Britain and the United States, and only later opened up to authors and works from other countries.

Even though it was not possible for me to obtain first-hand information on how Adichie came to be part of Anne Carrière catalogue in the first place, Cachin explained that there are many ways in which a publisher acquires a work for translation, including contacts made through established networks, authors’ agents, scouts,<sup>101</sup> or even from the author herself, although this last case is considered very unlikely in the case of Adichie. Publishers may also read reviews and literary

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<sup>100</sup> This leaves one to conclude that Tutuola may remain a unique case in the field of Nigerian literature in French translation.

<sup>101</sup> A person or persons who ‘scouts’ for local titles or publications in foreign countries according to the politics of a publisher for whom he works (Cachin 74).

journals, contact consulates of foreign countries, visit the source countries, or consult libraries for published works. Editors also read the bibliographies of authors who are already published in translation in search of a work that is yet to be translated. In view of Gallimard's catalogue of well-known and prestigious authors and the fact Adichie was only published by Gallimard after the success of her novel with Anne Carrière, Adichie's reputation in both the Anglophone world and France becomes the major deciding factor in her publication. Furthermore, Antoine Gallimard is known to have had a cordial relationship with Andrew Wylie, Adichie's agent, whom Gallimard described as "mon ami" (13). Although this relationship has been tumultuous,<sup>102</sup> Gallimard has claimed that the situation did not interrupt the continued publication of authors in Wylie's agency. This confirms Gallimard's enunciated politics of publishing "à long terme" : "nous, avons des politiques à long terme pour accueillir aussi bien un livre qui marche qu'un livre qui ne marche pas. [...] c'est de prendre des risques, d'accompagner un auteur sur le long terme." Accordingly, Gallimard has continued to publish Adichie's work in France. The relationship between the author and the publisher has, from all indications, been fervent, not only because they published most of her books, but also as evidenced by the timeline of publication. Unlike Tutuola, whose first novel was the only one to be published despite further solicitations from his agent, Adichie has been supported by Gallimard throughout her literary career and her works have been promptly, almost urgently, translated. This could be explained in part by the continued acclaim her books have received in the English-speaking world. Her books

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<sup>102</sup>According to Olvia, Andrew Wylie has had concerns not only with Gallimard, but with French publishers in general, due to his decision to set up a digital publishing company. He created Odyssey Editions, a digital publisher that would release e-books and sell them exclusively on Amazon. Not only did the French Publishers Association (SNE) petition against this initiative, but Gallimard stopped working with the Wylie agency. See <http://publishingperspectives.com/2010/10/french-agents-take-on-andrew-wylie/>.

have become classics as soon as they are published. The table that follows shows the original and translation publication dates of her books:

| Original title                    | Year | Translation Title                      | Year |
|-----------------------------------|------|--|------|
| <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>       | 2006 | <i>L'autre moitié du soleil</i>        | 2008 |
| <i>Purple Hibiscus</i>            | 2003 | <i>L'hibiscus pourpre</i>              | 2004 |
| <i>Americanah</i>                 | 2013 | <i>Americanah</i>                      | 2015 |
| <i>The Thing Around your Neck</i> | 2009 | <i>Autour de ton cou</i>               | 2009 |
| <i>Dear Ijeawele</i>              | 2017 | <i>Chère Ijeawele</i>                  | 2017 |
| <i>We Should All Be Feminists</i> | 2015 | <i>Nous sommes tous des féministes</i> | 2015 |

**Figure 17: Adichie's works in French**

Two of Adichie's works, *We Should All be Feminists* and *Dear Ijeawele: or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, were translated and published in French in the same years as their publication in English. *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* were respectively translated and published two years and a year after their original publications. In the case of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a collection of short stories originally published in April 2009 by Fourth Estate, it took four years for the French translation to appear. The overall interval of publication ranges between two years to the same year as the initial publication. This publication pattern makes Adichie unparalleled in the history of publication of Nigerian books in French. Anne Damour, the translator of *Americanah*, attested to such promptness by affirming that as the reason she was invited to translate *Americanah*. In Africa, many well-known authors who write in English have yet to see one of their works translated and published in French. Richard demonstrates that in the history of global translation of works of fiction into French, African literature remains undertranslated and underpublished in general ("Translation of African Literature" 40). Interestingly, it is within this context that Adichie's work has been urgently

commercialized, thus, reinforcing the argument that the publication of Adichie is exceptional. Since Gallimard did not express reasons for such urgency, one can link it to the ‘long-term’ politics of the publisher, but most especially to the status of the author and the financial profit of her works. While I agree with scholars like John Dessaeur that publishing is a cultural activity and that Adichie’s works help to introduce the history and culture of Nigeria to French readers, I also agree with John Feather that publishing is primarily “a commercial transaction [...] a business activity; and a publisher is concerned with making a profit” (3). In other words, the material or marketable value<sup>103</sup> of Adichie’s works in terms of the interests of the reading audience cannot be separated from Gallimard’s politics of long-term publishing.

#### **4.4. Publishing Chigozie Obioma in French: “*Publier c’est traduire*”: Editions de l’Olivier and the Translation of *Les Pêcheurs***

An Assistant Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Chigozie Obioma is one of the youngest commercially successful Nigerian writers. His debut novel, *The Fishermen* (2015), won him critical acclaim and international recognition. The novel was a finalist for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2015 and was awarded other literary prizes such as the FT/Oppenheimer Emerging voices prize for fiction, the 2016 NAACP Image Award for outstanding Debut Literary Work, and the 2016 Nebraska Book Award for fiction. *The Fishermen* was noted as the Best Book of the Year in *The UK Observer*, *The Economist*, the *Financial Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Fiametta Rocco’s review in *The New York Times* is an example of how the reviewers recognized Obioma’s literary merit:

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<sup>103</sup> I acknowledge that an assessment of the number of books sold is essential to better assess their market value. This information was impossible to obtain during my field work.

In his exploration of the mysterious and the murderous, of the terrors that can take hold of the human mind, of the colors of life in Africa, with its vibrant fabrics and its trees laden with fruit, and most of all in his ability to create dramatic tension in this most human of African stories, Chigozie Obioma truly is the heir to Chinua Achebe.

Obioma's works have also received commendable reviews from Nigerian and non-Nigerian writers such as Helon Habila, Claire Cameron, Alexander Fuller, Harold Bloom, and others. Although *The Fishermen* is Obioma's only novel, he has written short stories such as *The Road to the Country*, *The Great Convert*, and *Midnight Un*. Some of his essays include *The Audacity of Prose*, and *Teeth Marks: The Translator's Dilemma*.

Obioma's *The Fishermen* was translated in French as *Les pêcheurs* (2015) and published by Les Éditions de l'Olivier. Created in 1991 by Olivier Cohen with more than 700 titles, Éditions de l'Olivier is an example of French publishers who, according to Cachin, chose from the start to be open to foreign authors in translation given that : "La traduction est la raison d'être de l'Édition de l'Olivier (61)." The publisher's catalogue includes separate sections for French literature and foreign literature. The 2017 catalogue for French literature includes nine books in total, as of 24 August 2017, while the foreign literature catalogue features fifteen. Cohen explained that he would discover new authors by visiting foreign countries, going to libraries, reading new works, and arranging meetings with the authors' agents (Dupuis). He also confirmed that he publishes first novels of writers and that networking with friends, agents, critics, libraries, and authors allows him to identify emerging writers. In the case of *The Fishermen*, Obioma confirmed that his literary agent, Jessica Craig, approached Oliver Cohen at the London Book Fair in 2014 and



asked about publishing the novel in French. Cohen read the book overnight and did not hesitate to preempt the rights of the book soon afterwards. Two interpretations emerge here: the appeal of content and the status of the book. It should be noted that without the international connection of this literary agents, translation of the novel could probably take more time. It is a reminder of the invisibility of works that are published and disseminated in Nigeria.

Chigozie Obioma brings an interesting dimension to this study and opens up useful questions for future research, as his interview offers a unique insight into French publication rights. According to Obioma, *The Fishermen* was sold for “about 25 000 euros,” which is a very significant amount for not only a relatively new and unknown writer, but also for an African author from an Anglophone country. This revelation raises the question of whether translations of African Anglophone writers, or marginal writers in general, involve different arrangements for translation and publication rights than would new authors from Europe or the Americas. It should be noted that the same publisher has published another Nigerian text in 2008, Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of no Nation* under the title *Bêtes sans patrie*. It is also interesting to reflect on why Éditions de l’Olivier bought the publication rights of *The Fishermen* for a significant amount, even though foreign literature as defined by the publisher does not necessarily include African literature and the publication catalogue is dominated by American literature. To offer a temporary possible answer, the reputation and reception of the novel must have played an important role in this decision. Unlike Gallimard and Actes Sud, Éditions de l’Olivier does not include a collection of African literature, either Francophone or anglophone. In interviews, Olivier Cohen discussed publishing writers from various countries such as Mexico or Russia, but

expressed no particular interest in publishing Anglophone African literature. Consequently, Obioma's work is interesting and unique in the catalogue of Éditions de l'Olivier.<sup>104</sup>

#### **4.5. Publishing Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani in French by Les Presses de la Cité: An Unusual Case?**

Nwaubani's first novel was *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009); she co-published another book *Ragazze rubate*, with the Italian writer and journalist Viviana Mazza in 2016. Her novel received the 2010 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Africa) and the 2010 Betty Trask Book Award, and was also a finalist for the 2010 Wole Soyinka Prize for literature.

Nwabuani has no formal literary training, having studied psychology at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. In an interview published in *African Writing*, she stated that she started writing before the age of 10 and earned her first income from a writing competition at the age of 13. She has written many articles and essays for *The BBC*, *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *The Guardian* and Reuters Foundations, and also wrote a short story, *Coming to the UK*, in 2005.

Nwaubani is the only author discussed in this study who resides in Nigeria; she was the first African writer to receive an international publishing deal while living in Africa. Nwaubani's *unusual* entrance onto the English and French literary scene may be attributed to her London publisher Weidenfeld and Nicolson or to her New York agents and also to the 'unbecoming' theme of her novel, which is based on 419 scams.

*I Do Not Come to You by Chance* was translated into French as *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard* and published by Les Presses de la Cité. The publishing house was established in 1944 by Sven Nielsen, who moved to France from Denmark in 1924, and went through many changes,

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<sup>104</sup> It could be more interesting to know if the publisher paid same amount or equivalent for *Beasts of no Nation*.

acquisitions, and mergers. In 1988, the Société des Presses de la Cité changed its name to Groupe de la Cité, a holding that included other publishers in France, such as Larousse, Bordas, Nathan, France Loisirs, Dalloz, and Laffont. In 2002, Les Presses de la Cité was integrated into the Hachette group.

Initially, like most publishers of translations in France, Les Presses de la Cité specialized in the translation of American novels, but its catalogue has since grown to include novels from various countries as well as books on humanities and youth. Les Presses de la Cité have launched many collections such as “Omnibus” (613 titles), “Sang d’encre,” and “Romans Terres de France,” among others. Like Éditions de l’Olivier, it has no collection specifically dedicated to the publication of African literature, whether in original language or in translation. Publishing approximately 100 books a year, it is known as one of the world leaders in multimedia publication.

I have relatively little information on Nwaubani’s publication experience, as the publishers did not return the questionnaire I sent them;<sup>105</sup> however, Nwaubani did complete my questionnaire. According to the information I have collected, there is not much interaction between the author and the French publisher. The author did claim that she did not receive royalties for the publication of her book in French. Unlike Obioma, Nwaubani seems to be unaware of and uninterested in the translation of her work. She has said of the translation and publication rights to her work:

My literary agents in New York sold my book to different publishers around the world, including those in Nigeria. Those

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<sup>105</sup> I was in touch with two individuals. The last correspondence I received from either one stated that my questionnaire had been transferred to the person in charge of the publication of Nwabuani, but I had not received a reply at the time of this writing.

publishers who needed to then selected translators. I was neither involved in nor particularly interested in the translation process. My literary agents handle everything about the contracts, payments, etc., and alert me whenever there are any issues requiring my attention. (Interview with Nwaubani)

Nwaubani's statement confirms another information given by another Nigerian writer who claimed that she has no information about the translation of her works in other languages. This raises questions concerning the involvement of these Nigerian authors in the translation and publication of their works. One would conclude that Nwaubani's presence in translation is partially due to the international book deal that she received, a theory that further confirms the invisibility of writers who reside in Nigeria.

#### **4.6. Other Agencies and Institutions Involved in the Publication of Nigerian Literature in French**

So far, information gathered in this project indicate that Nigeria is not overtly involved in the translation and publication of its literature, and there are no known Nigerian agents who may be involved in the translation and publication of Nigerian literature in France. The interaction mostly takes place between the French editor and the English language publisher, but not necessarily the author (in the case of Nwaubani), while the marketing department of the French publisher is in charge of copyright issues. Although the Nigerian government does not provide funding for publication, the Centre National du livre (CNL), a public institution of the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, offers funding in the form of subsidies or grants to editors and translators. Bernard Magnier confirmed that Nigerian books have benefitted from this funding. While it is confirmed that Obioma's *Les pêcheurs* did not, it is unknown whether

Adichie's or Nwabuani's books have received similar funding. Because the CNL website's *Ouvrages aidés* does not list their works, it can be assumed that they did not benefit from CNL funding.

Like most government applications for funding, the process of applying for translation grants requires time and attention. The publishing house, the translator, and the book to be translated must meet certain criteria before being considered eligible for CNL funding. These include copyright licenses, an appropriate distribution network in the form of bookshops in France, an independent professional translator, a translation contract, submission of a sample translation, presentation of a copy of the publisher-translator contract, and other stringent requirements. Some of the assessment criteria on which CNL bases its decisions include the literary, scientific, or artistic quality of the original work, its originality as an editorial project, reasons for translation, quality of the translation submitted, competence of the translator, specific difficulties of translating the original work, commercial risks undertaken by the publisher, and the economic and commercial viability of the project, such as prices, target readership, and distribution. In 2012, CNL received 438 applications and provided grants to 279 of these. In light of this rigorous process, and since Nigerian novels published by Actes Sud<sup>106</sup> benefit from CNL funding, it is likely that the quality of the originals, the translations, and the translators are considerable. With the specific CNL requirements in mind, these grants also suggest established channels of distribution, and existing markets, for Nigerian novels in France. There are other grants for translation in France, some of which come in the form of awards offered to translators for residency in various institutions such as Collège des traducteurs d'Arles. However, the translators I interviewed did not acknowledge that they had received such financial support.

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<sup>106</sup> Magnier stated that they received funding, though it is not clear whether all of them benefited from funding.

#### 4.7. Promotion, Distribution, and Sales in Bookshops

In *Publier la littérature française et étrangère*, Joachim Schnerf, who has been the assistant editor for Gallimard's "Du Monde Entier" collection since 2010, provided information on promotion, dissemination and circulation of translated literature in France. Schnerf explained that French publishers use different agencies to disseminate and circulate translations. The main agencies belong to major publishing houses who offer personalized service with an interest in sales. Distribution is overseen by representatives responsible for promoting and distributing the works in bookstores, cultural centers, and fairs (63). Cachin pointed out that in France, the promotion of translations is difficult to measure, except for promotions of well-known authors such as Umberto Eco or Salman Rushdie (124). This is due to the small number of advertisements for translations. Magnier acknowledged that the promotion, distribution, and sales of Nigerian books do not require any particular process. The target audience is identified, information sessions are held prior to publication and sales, and the books are officially presented to the sales team and then promoted in bookstores. Information on Achebe's *L'éducation d'un enfant protégé par la couronne* confirms this process. This collection of essays did not meet the same sales expectations as *Tout s'effondre* not only because of the preferences of French readers, but also because of the lack of specific promotion. This may contradict what seems to be Adichie's special promotion in France, as it will be seen in the next chapter.

Online websites of notable bookstores in Paris, such as Gilbert Jeune, Librairie Delamain, and Librairie de Paris had Nigerian books displayed in their catalogues. Some of the online catalogue of these bookstores differentiate between foreign and French literatures, while others focus on

genre, rather than country of origin, in their classifications.<sup>107</sup> Librairie Tropiques, for example, displayed Nigerian novels in the “francophone literature” section, while others have classified such works under “littératures étrangères” or even “littérature Anglo-saxonne,” as was the case for some of Adichie’s books sold in Librairie de Paris. One bookseller with whom I chatted during my field work in France justified such categorizations by pointing out that Nigerian novels “are not French literature”; since they are not written by French authors, thus, it seems logical to classify them as Francophone novels. Magnier, in our interview, explained this as a case of

méconnaissance - une mauvaise connaissance de l’Afrique chez les libraires [...] parce que la librairie ne sait pas que le Nigéria est anglophone ou n’as pas fait attention ou n’as pas vu que c’est traduit...Ou [il] a confondu Nigérian et nigérien. En France, c’est très très souvent la confusion, on a souvent l’adjectif nigérian à la place de nigérien, en France. Nigérien, c’est pour le Niger et nigérian est pour le Nigéria.

Whether the categorization is due to the specific policies of a given bookstore, lack of space, an error as supposed by Magnier, or a conscious act not to demarcate between Francophone and Anglophone literatures, it suggests a universalization of Africa as a single entity. In his discussion of the print run<sup>108</sup> and cataloguing of foreign literatures in France, Schnerf states that distribution representatives of the editor and bookstores should determine the categories in which

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<sup>107</sup> Unlike bookstores such as Librairie L’Harmattan, Librairie Présence Africaine, Librairie Anibwe, Librairie Tamery, and Librairie du musée Dapper, the bookstores mentioned here do not specialize in African content. The purpose of adopting this wider perspective is to observe how Nigerian books are categorized in non-specialized bookstores.

<sup>108</sup> The number of copies of a book, magazine, etc., printed at one time.

the books should be catalogued and displayed (65). Although it can be assumed that such discussions do occur during the publication process, it is important to note that the implementation of categorization poses the question of, for example, whether translated Nigerian novels should be classified as Francophone literature for linguistic reasons, or as foreign literature for geographical reasons, or as African literature for cultural reasons irrespective of original language.

#### **4.8. Interviews with and Perspectives from Nigerian Authors**

As pointed out above, the relationship between authors and French publishers of Nigerian novels has so far been proved to be minimal, in part because the communication occurs largely between the French publisher and the publisher of the original work, and/or the author's agent. Although this is true for many Nigerian writers published by Actes Sud, and especially in the case of Nwabuani and Les Presses de la Cité, it is contradicted by the example of Adichie, who has a literary agent but still has a relationship with Gallimard. These examples demonstrate that the presence of a literary agent should not and cannot render the author invisible. In order to refrain from taking a one-sided perspective in which writers are ignored, I prepared questions for Nigerian authors. The purpose of this decision is not only to give the authors visibility, but also to examine the place they occupy and the roles they play within the translation process and publication of their works. Of the four authors studied in this project, I received responses from Nwabuani and Obioma. Chinua Achebe is no longer alive, and Adichie sent, via her agent, regrets that she could not respond to my queries.

In order to make up for the gaps in information, I sent these questions to other Nigerian authors who had been published in translation. Only one writer, Akachi Adimorah replied. Adimorah has been translated into other languages such as German, Turkish, Swahili, and Xhosa, a South



African language. The responses confirmed that, apart from Adichie and Obioma, the writers were not very involved during or following the translation process. Nwabuani and Akachi claimed that they received neither follow-ups nor remuneration after the translations of their works were completed. Tomi Adeaga's study of translation of African literature in Germany similarly noted that some authors were involved in the process while others were not. Actes Sud prioritizes the book and its literary content, and may not necessarily highlight a relationship with the author. Adichie and Obioma have met their publishers on several occasions,<sup>109</sup> raising the question that will be discussed in the next chapter, of whether it is important for publishers to maintain communication and/or relationships with authors and how this impacts their reception in the target culture.

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

The level of commitment by French publishers of Nigerian literature differs depending on the objectives of the publisher and the literary status of the author and/or the work. Where publishers like Actes Sud are much involved with the publication of Nigerian literature, others such as Éditions de Olivier may publish only one Nigerian work. Publishers such as Actes Sud seek to bring diversity to French readers through translation, while others such as Gallimard show specific interest in established authors. Politics and ideologies also determine the flow of publication as seen in the case of Achebe and *Présence Africaine*. This chapter also shows that the publishing process of Nigerian literature in French does not differ much from the publication processes of other national literatures. It thus confirms, the polysystem theory that states that translated literature as a system interacts with its target system in various ways, including the manner in which the source texts are selected for translation and publication, and the manner in

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<sup>109</sup> The reasons for these meetings will be discussed in the next chapter.

which translated literature adopts the norms, behaviours, and policies of the target literary systems.

## **Chapter 5: Reception of Nigerian Literature in France and its Position within the French Polysystem**

### **5.1. Methodological Considerations**

How is Nigerian literature received in France? What image of Nigerian literature is visible in reviews, media, articles, magazines, and newspapers published in France? What position does Nigerian literature occupy in the French polysystem and with regard to other foreign literatures published in France? These questions and others are the focus of this chapter.

Like the previous chapters, the theoretical framing of this chapter is rooted in the polysystem theory which situates translation in the target culture. The polysystem theory supposes that translations are carried out based on the target culture needs. For Gideon Toury, translation is always a fact of a particular target culture: “Cultures resort to translating precisely as a way of filling in gaps, whenever and wherever such gaps may manifest themselves: either in themselves, or (more often) in view of a corresponding non-gap in another culture that the target culture in question has reasons to look up to and try to exploit for its own needs” (*Descriptive Translation* 21-22). The polysystem model assumes that foreign texts are selected for translation to fulfil the needs and a given space in the target cultural system. Considering that Nigeria is hardly involved in translation initiatives, and to examine the supposed space for reception of translations in France, Nigerian literature is examined both as a system of its own and as part of the greater system of Anglophone literature translated within French polysystem. This approach allows for a broader understanding of Nigerian literature as a part of a more significant system in France. Although Nigerian literature is only a tiny fraction of the translated literature published in France, it is a significant portion of translated Anglophone African literature. Richard has

pointed out the tangential position occupied by African Anglophone literature in France, which represents only 0.5% of works of fiction translated and published every year (“Translation of African Literature” 39-44). According to his study, between 1945 and 2004, 121 African books were translated and published in French in contrast with the 292 titles translated in German for the same period. Interestingly, more than 55 of these 121 translated works were written by Nigerians, which testifies to the significant position that Nigerian literature occupies within the wider realm of Anglophone African literature translated into French. Other studies on the translation of Anglophone literature have pointed out the change in dynamics of publishing in France. Ruth Bush echoes Gisele Sapiro in affirming that “the internationalization of the post-war literary field reflected France’s changing position in the global literary field as publishers gradually sought new voices” (“Translating Anglophone” 514) as exemplified with *Actes Sud* in the previous chapter.

Therefore, this chapter examines first and foremost, various channels through which these new Nigerian voices are received or even recognized in the French system. According to Jeremy Munday, one of the methods of studying receptions is to look at the reviews and literary magazines (232). Past studies have made magazines and reviews one of the tools for studying the reception of works. They include Venuti who used literary reviews as a means of assessing the reception of the Italian author Ugo Tarchetti, Brown in her study of the reception of Latin American novels and Maier who studied the reception of Latin American literature in general. On the importance of assessing reception through secondary materials written on a translation, it is confirmed that they represent a body of reactions to the author and the text (Munday 232). In order to portray the overall reception and perception of Nigerian literature in France, this chapter begins with an examination of two literary magazines, *Transfuge* and *Le Matricule des*

*anges*, before concentrating on the four authors selected for this study. The case study focuses on the reception of the Nigerian authors in France, as seen in media and scholarly reviews, journals, and online platforms. Since selected texts according the polysystem notion, fulfil the requirements that are within the ideologies of the target publishers, the chapter discusses various strategies used by publishers and bookstores to introduce unknown authors and their works to French readers. Through these studies, this chapter will attempt to theorize the position of the translations within the French literary system.

## **5.2. Medium of Reception of Nigerian Literature in France: Contemporary Perspectives from *Transfuge* and *Le Matricule des anges***

Literary magazines have long played a pivotal role in the publicizing, reception and legitimization of literary works. Through reviews, they introduce new publications and offer avenues for readers to appreciate a work of literature. Magazines also popularize particular authors or works and, according to Claire Ducournau, they provide “une légitimité décisive aux textes qu’elle[s] sélectionne[nt].” (*La fabrique* 216). *Transfuge* and *Le Matricule des anges* were selected as important contemporary literary channels for the dissemination of translations of foreign works, in order to find out how they perceive or incorporate the works of Nigerian authors in their publications, with a timeframe between 1992, when *Le Matricule des anges* was established, and 2017. Because these magazines are mainstream publications that do not specialize in African content, exploring their presentations of Nigerian literature situates this project amidst other discussions of the universality of African literature and the question of minoritizing African literature in general. These two magazines are further examples of this study’s central purpose of examining the translation and reception of Nigerian texts within the French literary system. Priority is not given to the study of this literature within African contexts

in France nor within the subsystem of Francophone literature in France. Ducournau's similar approach to and study of the reception of Francophone African writers in France is also discussed below.

### 5.2.1. *Transfuge*

*Transfuge* is a monthly magazine that was created for the purpose of bridging cultural gaps by introducing literary works from other cultures. It has been recognized for its cultural and literary roles within and outside France<sup>110</sup> and is considered one of the major literary magazines in the field of French translation. This section discusses the presence of Nigerian literature in *Transfuge* from its founding in 2004 to 2017, also taking into consideration other Anglophone texts in French translation, in order to appreciate more generally the extent to which the magazine fulfills its goals of presenting foreign cultures and literatures in translation to French readers. Here, I examine the cover pages and tables of contents of each issue of *Transfuge* since its inception: even though the magazine itself may provide additional information, the table of contents typically provides a guideline to that information. Furthermore, the cover page and table of contents are the first pages that a potential reader consults in order to decide whether to purchase the magazine or not. At the time of this writing, *Transfuge* has published 110 issues, covering both literature and cinema, which are differentiated from each other by the colour of the pages of each section, with the literature section in purple and the cinema section in red.

Over time, the amount of space devoted to literature has changed in each issue of *Transfuge*. Some issues have devoted more space to cinema, while others have placed more emphasis on literature. Section titles and rubrics have also changed over time, with some earlier issues

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<sup>110</sup> See Cachin and Ducournau.

containing rubrics titled “Critiques, Portraits, Entretiens,” and more recent issues featuring one section simply titled “Littérature,” in which authors from different countries, including Nigeria, are reviewed. Each front page features a sketch of a film director or writer.

In each issue, the “Critiques, Portraits, Entretiens” section lists the countries of origin of the authors of works discussed and presented in that issue, once again highlighting the magazine’s cultural objectives. In the fourth issue, published in 2004, for example, Nigeria and Ethiopia are both listed in this section, with Helon Habila’s works being reviewed.

Examination of each issue of *Transfuge* shows that in France, foreign literature in translation refers almost exclusively to American literature. Since the early years of the magazine’s publication, the majority of its content has focused on American literature. The cover pages are dominated by American and French writers, with reviews, interviews, and critical discussions of French writers such as Christophe Ono-dit Biot, Alain Finkielkraut, and Olivier Assayas. None of the cover pages has featured an African Anglophone writer, except for the “white quartet” referred to in the previous chapter of this study. Some of the issues are titled *Rentrée littéraire étrangère*, which lists foreign authors and works; however, no Nigerian authors have been listed in these. The authors and areas of interest covered by *Transfuge* did not support the magazine’s claim to diversity, as African literature, whether in French or English, was not necessarily highlighted. Apart from Alain Mabanckou<sup>111</sup> and a few other Francophone writers such as Corinne d’Almeida and Leonora Miano, Africa is underrepresented in *Transfuge*. With regard to Nigerian writers in particular, the magazine presented critiques of Gabriel Gbadamosi’s *Vauxhall*, Adichie’s *L’autre moitié du soleil* and Sefi Atta’s *Le meilleur reste à venir*. Even

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<sup>111</sup> One should recognize the recent position of Alain Mabanckou in France and how this position as visiting professor and Chair of Artistic Creation in Collège de France has earned him more visibility.

though *Transfuge* has been hailed as one of the best cultural and literary magazines in France, it does not clearly outline the countries or regions covered in its mandate. Without this distinction, Africa in general seems yet to be canonized and accepted into the realm of ‘foreign literature’ as presented in *Transfuge*.

The observation that African literature has been underrepresented in French literary magazines is not new. Ducournau studied the reception of African writers in France, focusing on the magazines *Le magazine littéraire* and *La Quinzaine littéraire*, particularly on the number of pages each devoted to authors born and raised in Africa including Anglophone writers. Of the 453 issues of *Le magazine littéraire* published in the 40 years since its inception, only one was devoted to African writers. It was only in 1983, 17 years after its first issue, that an issue titled ‘*L’Afrique Noire d’expression française*’ was published. Ducournau also observed that skin color seems to be one of the factors that excludes some African authors from being visible in France. As with *Transfuge*, which has never featured a black African Anglophone author on the first page, or ‘à la une,’ neither *Le magazine littéraire* nor *La Quinzaine littéraire* has ever highlighted an African writer. In *Transfuge*, the issues titled “Les meilleurs livres étrangers” or “Best of foreign books” have not mentioned African books in their tables of contents. Even if such a mention does occur within the magazine itself, it still remains inarguable that the place given to African literature in general, and black Anglophone writers in particular, is very limited.

### **5.2.2. Le Matricule des Anges**

*Le matricule des anges* is an independent monthly literary magazine created in 1992 that specializes in promoting translations in France. The magazine is sold in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec, by newsagents and in various bookstores. With more than 2500 daily visits to its online website, *Le matricule des anges* boasts of the versatility of its content. Thierry



Guichard, one of its founder and journalist claims that the magazine does not focus on any particular geographical zone.<sup>112</sup> This means that its interest is literature, or the literary quality of a work, whether it originates in France or elsewhere.

Achebe is mentioned in the magazine's online catalogue, but only *Le monde s'effondre* was listed. Neither Obioma nor Nwabuani were present in the online catalogue, though another Nigerian author, Ike Oguine, was mentioned. Published on a monthly basis, its issues consist of book reviews, interviews with editors and authors, feature articles, and sometimes portraits of writers. The presence of Nigerian literary texts may be partly explained by the magazine's goal of introducing its readers to new voices. Although it is interesting to note that *Le matricule des anges* does consider Nigerian writers suitable for inclusion, one may also wonder why only Achebe, and no other Nigerian writers, is listed.

### **5.3. The Reception of Chinua Achebe in France**

#### **5.3.1. Strategic Appeal: Politics and Ideologies of Achebe**

In France, Achebe does not enjoy the same critical acclaim as he does in the Anglophone literary realm. Scholars have pointed out the invisibility of Achebe in France, stemming in part from his poor reception after the publication of *Le monde s'effondre*. Ruth Bush ("Translating Anglophone") examined the reception of *Things Fall Apart* in France, concluding that the poor symbolic capital of the translator and the publisher of Achebe determined the reception of his work to a great extent. While Queneau's visibility and Gallimard's prestige secured long-term

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<sup>112</sup> Africa is a geographical zone. If I do not expect Africa to be included in this magazine, that would be, in the words of Adichie, "to cater to a willfully retrograde idea – that Africa is so apart, so pathologically 'different.'" This raises the question of why Africa is not included in a publication meant to promote foreign literatures in translation.

success for Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* did not see the same success due to the weak legitimating power of Achebe's translator, Michel Ligny, and publisher, Présence Africaine, within the literary field at the time. This statement reflects the importance of agents, without whom Tutuola and Adichie in the case of my corpus might not have been as successful in the French market. Bush posited that the subdued reception of Achebe's novel in France in the late 1960s is different from its hypercanonical status in the English-speaking world, which serves as a reminder that the world literary canon is relative (*Publishing Africa* 184). In addition, one should more specifically consider the strategic appeal that gave rise to the aforementioned relativism of the literary canon, value, and status in the case of Achebe. Hence, this section addresses the influence of Achebe's political and ideological views on his reception among French readers. If Adichie's feminist views as will be seen shortly were instrumental in her success in France, it is also likely that Achebe's political inclination contributed to the interpretations and reception of his work in France, especially at the time of the publication of *Le monde s'effondre*.

In the academic world, Achebe is recognized as the founder of African literature and a politically engaged writer, but he remains relatively little-known among French readers, according to Patryck Froissart's commentaries on two French translations: *Education d'un enfant protégé par la couronne*, a collection of Achebe's essays from 1980 to 2000, and on *Tout s'effondre*:

Chinua Achebe est un immense romancier. On le sait, bien qu'on ne le sache pas encore assez. Mais Chinua Achebe est aussi un écrivain engagé, un homme politique, un militant des droits de l'homme en général, un défenseur des droits de l'homme africain en particulier, un défenseur farouche et éclairé de cette histoire de

l’Afrique et de ses peuples qu’ont si régulièrement occultée, voire niée, les personnalités politiques et les historiens « occidentaux » jusque dans certaines phrases prononcées encore en 2007 par un président de la République des Droits de l’Homme dans le tristement célébré discours de Dakar.

Avant même de s’introduire en ce roman, il est recommandé au lecteur de se défaire de ses œillères ethnocentriques d’Européen, d’oublier la vision déformée qu’il se fait de l’Afrique et des Africains au travers du prisme de ses repères usuels, de s’extraire de ses propres critères culturels, de ne pas se conduire, surtout, en touriste textuel. (Froissart)

The first paragraph quoted above is from Froissart’s review of *The Education of a British Protected Child*, in which Achebe tackles various themes, such as colonialism, the birth of African literature, writing in indigenous or colonial languages, and politics in Nigeria. In the Anglophone world, Achebe was known for championing the cause of African literature and personality through the medium of the Mbari Club, and for promoting their goals in journals such as *Black Orpheus*. In support of the same African cause, Froissart refers to the controversial speech by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy during his first visit to Senegal in 2007 after winning the election, in which he suggested that Africa had failed to embrace progress. African critics, intellectuals, and politicians regarded Sarkozy’s speech as insulting to Africans, especially with its references to the “positive aspects” of colonialism, though many French intellectuals greeted this speech with relative silence and indifference (Thiam 882; Diop and Marcoux 1384). Even though he was fully aware of the controversy, Froissart introduced his

review of Achebe's translations with a condemnation of this speech, with the intent of attracting the interest of readers. In the case of Froissart's reviews, one could wonder about the extent to which such politicization of Achebe's books, by placing his reviews in the context of the Dakar speech, would raise the attention of some French readers who, like Sarkozy, do not recognize the negative aspects of colonialism. Pierre Girard, the translator of Achebe's work, confirmed in our interview that "les Français ont une réticence à l'égard de tout ce qui rappelle la colonisation" (Interview with Pierre Girard).

Like *Éducation d'un enfant protégé par la couronne*, Froissart's presentation of *Tout s'effondre* is candid and undiplomatic, inviting the reader to approach the book free of any preconceptions about Africa. Froissart invites the potential reader "d'oublier la vision déformée qu'il se fait de l'Afrique et des Africains au travers du prisme de ses repères usuels." It should be noted that *Présence Africaine* had already published what was at the time Achebe's only essay that had been translated into French until the publication of *Education d'un enfant protégé par la couronne*, *Le Fardeau de l'écrivain noir*, in which he summarized his stance as follows:

It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate, or be indifferent to this argument which calls his full humanity into question. For me, at any rate, there is a clear duty to make a statement. This is my answer to those who say that a writer should be writing about contemporary issues--about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last coup d'état. Of course, these are legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme—put quite simply--is that African peoples did not hear of

culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this dignity that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. After all the novelist's duty is not to beat this morning's headline in topicality, it is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa, he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history. ("The Role of the Writer in a New Nation")

In light of the general attitudes of French readers toward the issues of colonialism, Achebe's politics and ideology would exert a strong influence on French interest in his works and did not necessarily adhere to tastes of the larger French audience. Albert Gerard confirms this by stating that Achebe's literary and political language and style "do ... not meet the exacting standards of the French readership," especially because the novel *Things Fall Apart* dealt in an unbecoming way with "specific African problems to which the average European audience was quite indifferent" (575). Bush further attests that the independence of former colonies brought to France a "structuring tension between works which align themselves with the colonial status quo

in terms of their content, form, style, and/or language and those who occupy a position of opposition, either via explicitly anti-colonial themes or by challenging the literary criteria according to which they were evaluated” (*Publishing Africa* 21). In the light of Gerard and Bush statements, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* stands in opposition to colonial themes, mentality and preconceptions, which Froissart decried in his reviews of the novel, particularly in its humanizing of indigenous African people, and the subject matter of his novels lacked a specific strategic appeal to French culture. Achebe is a pioneer in African literature who sought recognition for African literature in the rest of the world at a time when Africa had been described solely through the eyes of the West. Unlike the more universal themes, such as feminism, in the works of Adichie, Achebe’s works dealt with highly political and specific themes. Apart from the weak legitimizing power of the French translator and publisher as observed by Bush, this lack of strategic appeal to the target audience contributed to the subdued reception of the author and *Le monde s’effondre* in France.

### **5.3.2. Online Platforms: An Overview of Reactions to Retranslation of *Things Fall Apart*.**

Since the retranslation of *Things Fall Apart*, reviews of Achebe’s works in general have appeared in various online platforms such as *Jeune Afrique*, *Babelio*, *Africultures*, *Soumbala* and *Chez Gangeous*. *Chez Gangeous*, for instance, is a literary blog whose founder has contributed to other literary events in France. Even though it cannot be compared to *Babelio*, *Chez Gangeous* is popular, having recorded a total of 18,893 visits between October 2007 and February 2009. *Tout s’effondre* was listed on the blog as the second most consulted novel; it is the only Nigerian novel on this list, most likely owing to its being a retranslation and the book’s status as a classic.

*Chez Gangeous* has collaborated with “La Cene littéraire”<sup>113</sup> to organize “Palabre autour des arts,” a literary event created by Congolese writer Joss Doszen that involves readings and discussions of African literary works. Its objective is to support, promote, and initiate exchanges and events to promote Africa in France, and several Nigerian authors have either been discussed or invited to this festival. Achebe’s *Tout s’effondre* was read and discussed during one of the events.

Even though Achebe’s reception in France is minimal compared to its influence in the English literary world, his retranslation and republication in France have helped to reintroduce him to the reading public. *Tout s’effondre* “sold well”<sup>114</sup> according to Magnier. The retranslation, which is available in both print and electronic formats, provides a much-needed avenue for a potential renewal of interest in Achebe, especially in the academic world. For example, Achebe’s novels have been the object of many dissertations in France, with the earliest appearing in 1983, and as early as 1980, Achebe’s novel *Arrow of God* was included on the syllabus for the “agrégation d’anglais”<sup>115</sup> in France. This is a significant step for an African literature. Reviews of the retranslation of *Things Fall Apart* have praised Actes Sud for “avoir redonné au public français une œuvre qu’il ne pouvait hélas plus juger depuis bien longtemps” (Brume). This confirms Magnier’s statement that there is a need to retranslate and make this novel available to the French audience. Academic full length works in French based on Achebe include Coussy’s *L’œuvre de Chinua Achebe* and Gresillon’s *Le monde s’effondre de Chinua Achebe: étude*. The

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<sup>113</sup> A literary event that promotes the works of African writers.

<sup>114</sup> My translation. I was unable to obtain exact sales figures, but the translator and publisher mentioned that it sold well, even though there is still room for further sales.

<sup>115</sup> *Agrégation* is a *concours* (competition) that students have to pass to be able to teach at the higher level (including at the University, although a PhD is also required) topics such as English, French, law, Maths, history, and so on. It is very specific to France. The number of admissions is limited and it is highly competitive.

latter, for example, has become a reference book for students as well as scholars, offering a critical approach to the reading and study of *Le monde s'effondre*. Virtually every academic study of Anglophone African literature in French and in Francophone universities has mentioned Achebe and his novels, especially *Things Fall Apart*. Denise Coussy's *La littérature Africaine moderne au Sud du Sahara*, for instance, takes Achebe's concept of "un monde qui s'effondre" as a point of reference in her discussion of the developments of African literature. Achebe offers the English-speaking and French-speaking worlds the universal message of "questioning prejudices and reaffirming identities," which according to Camara Salihou and Natalia Naydenova's *Littérature Africaine et identité: Un hommage à Chinua Achebe*, is still a global reality. This collection of essays, which was published after the retranslation and Achebe's death as a tribute to him, includes contributions from scholars all over the Francophone and Anglophone worlds, illustrating Michel Naumann's claim that despite their immediate context of the Igbo culture, Achebe's fictional worlds remain pertinent globally because of their emphasis on "la nécessité d'écouter humblement la voix des subalternes, ces hommes vaincus mais [toujours] en lutte" (24). Achebe may not have same visibility and status in French literary system as in the Anglophone system, but his works would remain a classic and indispensably valuable in the hands of those who find predilection in his thematic preoccupations and ideologies.

## **5.4. The Reception of Adichie in France**

### **5.4.1. The Role of Gallimard in Adichie's Visibility**

The relationship between an author and a publisher can play an important role in the dissemination and promotion of the author's visibility in the target culture. Apart from the



literary value of her works, Adichie's recognition in the French literary system can be partially attributed to the prestige of her publisher Gallimard. Adichie's relationship with Gallimard is the strongest author/publisher relationship examined in this project; she has been invited to France to promote her work, including an event hosted by Gallimard and the online platform *Babelio*,<sup>116</sup> at which thirty readers were given the chance to meet her, receive signed copies of her novel *Americanah*, and ask her questions about Nigerian culture. Adichie's visit to France and her one-on-one interaction with readers positively influenced her reception in France, as a user of *Babelio* known as "Epictete" has noted:

Autant dire tout de suite qu'avant cette opération entre Babelio et les éditions Gallimard, je n'avais jamais entendu parler d'elle. Découverte donc ! D'autant que cette lecture était accompagnée d'une rencontre avec l'auteur qui a permis d'éclairer bien des points de ce récit.

Gallimard understands the importance and indispensability of readers, thus accounting for the collaboration with *Babelio* on the conference, a threefold venture for the benefit of author, readers, and publishers. The readers have the opportunity to meet and interact with Adichie; the sale of her books increases; and she becomes more visible among the French reading public.

#### **5.4.2. Literary Prizes and Recognition**

Three of Adichie's works won literary awards in French. Mona de Pracontal's translation of *Half of a Yellow Sun* (*L'autre moitié du soleil*) won the Prix Baudelaire de la traduction in 2009, while *Americanah* was one of the finalists for the Prix des librairies du Québec in 2016. The Prix

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<sup>116</sup> *Babelio* is discussed further in this chapter.

Baudelaire de la traduction, worth 2000 euros, is awarded to the best French translation of a work originally in English whose author is from United Kingdom or one of the Commonwealth countries. *L'autre moitié du soleil* is one of a few African works to have won this award, the others being from South Africa and another from Nigeria: Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*, translated by Elise Argaud as *La mesure du temps* and published by Actes Sud, won the 2008 Prix Baudelaire. *Chère Ijeawele, ou un manifeste pour une éducation féministe*, translated by Marguerite Capelle, who was Adichie's interpreter during media interviews in France, won Le Grand Prix de l'héroïne, given by the magazine *Madame Figaro* in honour of heroines in French and foreign literatures, in 2017. Adichie's *Chère Ijeawele* was selected as a winner under the category of "biography/document", making her the first African to win under that category. These awards make Adichie's position in French literary system unrivaled in this project.

#### 5.4.3. Visibility and Feminist Appeal

During the award ceremony for Le Grand Prix de l'héroïne, Marie-Pierre Gracedieu, Adichie's editor and a representative of Anglo-American publications for Gallimard, made a statement that is important for this project:<sup>117</sup>

When I read *Dear Ijeawele*, I felt an urge to share it with many friends, women and men, who had become parents of a girl in the recent years. Then I started to feel it had to be read by parents of boys too. And thereafter by everyone of us to investigate our own education, and try to overcome a few inherited clichés. Therefore,

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<sup>117</sup> This was the only information on the publication of Adichie's works that was available from Gallimard. Gallimard had agreed to an interview in the early part of this study, but was finally unable to do so for unforeseen reasons.

to publish it at Gallimard has meant a lot to me, and it is a very rewarding experience to see it awarded the Grand Prix de l'heroine *Madame Figaro*, a prize that celebrates the power of literature and of characters as role models. The fact that such an established and popular weekly has understood the importance of spreading the content of this letter-manifesto, even in the Western world, and especially in the political context we are now, brings me joy and hope. (Chela)

*Dear Ijeawele* was Adichie's reply to her friend Ijeawele, who wrote her a letter asking about how to raise her toddler as a feminist. She directly confronts the sexual politics of both the African and Western worlds, which earned her essay international acclaim. Its bold, funny, and compelling treatment of gender issues has received praise from reviewers in English, and the theoretical and practical suggestions in the book appeal to French readers as well. French reviewers have described Adichie as an author who is not only skilled in storytelling but also engages her readers with her unabashedly feminist proclamations. Though her universal themes have made her well known in the Anglophone world, they are particularly positioned in a culturally and politically engaged France, in which debates over the French identity crisis, triggered by immigration and racism, have been traced to gender parity debates and in which multiculturalism has given rise to what has been described as a reinvention of the French gendered mosaic as women question the notion of a unified Frenchness (Roger et al. 98).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> This is understood here as the lack of appreciation for differences and otherness; and the idea that inassimilable difference is inferior.

Another feminist work by Adichie, *Nous sommes tous des féministes*, a modified version of a TEDxEuston talk that attracted more than 2 million views, became popular in France, notably at the Maison de la poésie in Paris:

Le petit livre rouge *Nous sommes tous des féministes* aura une très belle réception, notamment lors d'une soirée à la Maison de la poésie à Paris. Jamais de mémoire d'abonné, on n'y avait vu une ambiance aussi électrique, avec un public rajeuni qui interpellait la romancière, élevée ce soir-là au rang de gourou ou de star du rock.

(Marivat)

Such positive responses by readers and critics—being called a guru and rock star—demonstrate her appeal to French readers. *Nous sommes tous des féministes* has been praised as “engaged and determined, funny but serious” (Afférez). According to Marivat, Adichie’s agent Charles Buchan was overwhelmed by the immediate demand for translation rights by publishers around the world; it has since been translated into more than 17 languages. The Swedish Women’s Lobby Association collaborated with Albert Bonniers Forlang Publishing to produce and distribute the book freely to students in order to “open discussions on the question of sex equality and feminism”. Marie Savoie, a collaborator with Sisyphe, a Montreal-based online platform for sharing information, analysis, and opinions on feminism, expressed similar feelings while hoping that Quebec may someday distribute it similarly to the Swedish model. The book has also become a bestseller in France, at a price of two euros, so that it would remain accessible and affordable: “Le moins cher possible pour qu’il passe entre toutes les mains” (Daumas). During the Journée internationale des droits des femmes in France, Stéphane Pallez, president of La

Française des jeux, offered autographed free copies of *Nous sommes tous des féministes* to all collaborators and partners involved in the fight for women's rights and equality.

Adichie's critical discussions of feminist issues appeal to a wider audience, critics, and various readers of different backgrounds and all genders, as the following excerpt from *We Should all be Feminists* illustrates:

We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage. We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability. We teach them to mask their true selves because they have to be, in Nigerian-speaking, a hard man.

Such critical and wider engagement demonstrates a heightened interest in what some have seen as a broad and inclusive approach, even within the feminist debate:

Le féminisme empirique et pratique de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, à qui les ouvrages académiques sur le sujet tombent des mains, a un pouvoir de conviction indéniable et universel. Présentés comme les victimes collatérales d'une éducation sexiste qui, au final, les dessert énormément, les hommes qui liront ce livre ne pourront plus renvoyer le féminisme au rang des préoccupations de bonnes femmes. L'écrivaine les invite à construire avec les femmes un monde plus équitable. (Marivat)

The recognition of the universality of the Adichie's themes here highlights the success of the author in France. Marie Bodet, in *Le marketing du Féminisme* notes that feminism tends to

attract attention, and it is hereby argued that it has undeniably played a role in Adichie's recognition in France.

#### 5.4.4. Adichie's Media Presence in France

Adichie has been part of various literary events in France. She participated in the second forum of Monde Afrique organized by *Le monde*, "Les femmes, avenir du continent Africaine," which took place at Musée du Quai Branly in 2015. She was a guest at the forum "Littérature Sans Frontières," at which she was interviewed by Catherine Fruchon-Toussaint, a special correspondent with RFI (Radio France International) as part of the promotion of *Americanah*. She was also one of the authors invited to the "Festival des Écrivains du Monde" in 2013 organized by Columbia University and Bibliothèque nationale de France at Lyon. Her essay *The Danger of a Single Story* was translated and broadcast by *French 24*,<sup>119</sup> at which she was also a guest. Adichie was also invited to the 2018 edition of "Nuit des idées" at Quai d'Orsay, where she was interviewed by Caroline Broue, journalist with France Culture.<sup>120</sup> She discussed various subjects such as feminism, racism, and Nigerian culture, including the following retort to Broue's question as to whether there are bookstores in Nigeria:

You know I think it reflects very poorly on French people that you've had to ask me that question. I really do. Because I think, surely it's 2018. I mean, come on. My books are read in Nigeria. They're studied in schools, not just in Nigeria but across Africa and it means a lot to me. Because obviously I'm very grateful to be read everywhere in the world but there's something about being read by the people about whom you write.

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<sup>119</sup> France 24 is an international news and television network based in Paris.

<sup>120</sup> Adichie's responses during this interview raised controversies that are outside the immediate subject matter of this thesis.

She further explained her reaction to that question as follows:

I do not expect a French person to know almost everything about Nigeria. I don't know almost everything about France. But to be asked to "tell French people that you have bookshops in Nigeria because they don't know" is to cater to a willfully retrograde idea – that Africa is so apart, so pathologically "different," that a non-African cannot make reasonable assumptions about life there... "Are there bookshops in Nigeria?" was not about that. It was about giving legitimacy to a deliberate, entitled, tiresome, sweeping, base ignorance about Africa. And I do not have the patience for that. Perhaps French people cannot indeed conceive of Nigeria as a place that might have bookshops. And this, in 2018, in our age of interconnectedness and the internet, is a shame. (Flood)

Despite her visibility in France, Adichie remains candid with the ideologies and polemic racial issues that she derides in her novels. It is obvious that her media presence is not only a venue to promote her books but also a platform from which she raises awareness of those issues.

#### **5.4.5. Online Reviews of Adichie: *Babelio***

*Babelio* allows readers to create an account, organize their books online, search and obtain information on any work, write a critique, and exchange opinions on any book of their choice. To better understand the reading of Adichie's works in French, I chose to examine *Babelio* because of its importance in French literary culture. It has more than 480 000 members/readers and is visited by more than 3 million people on a monthly basis. The creators work with libraries, publishers, French teachers, and bookstores. *Babelio* offers many reviews of Nigerian novels, but Adichie yielded the highest number of reviews, citations, and readers.

Although Adichie's other books such as *L'autre moitié du soleil* and *L'hibiscus pourpre* are not as popular as her writings that more directly refer to feminist issues, they appeal to readers in different ways. To understand the perception and choices of French readers, I examined entries and data posted about her and her work on *Babelio*, though it is important to note that this information may change over time.<sup>121</sup> To do so, I used the search terms "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" or simply "Adichie." Each book is listed by title, author's name, number of readers, critics, and citations.

*Americanah* is the most popular of Adichie's works on *Babelio*, with a total of 1271 readers, 195 critics, and 200 citations. Interestingly, even though it was not Adichie's first novel to be published in France, *Americanah*, which deals with racism against Africans in the United States, emerged as the most read and cited. *Americanah* is followed by *L'autre moitié du soleil*, with 383 readers, 34 critics, and 35 citations. *L'hibiscus pourpre* has 356 readers. *Autour de ton cou* has a total of 129 readers. *Nous sommes tous des féministes* appeared twice on the result list, with both entries totalling 231 readers. *Chère Ijeawele* is the least read, with 91 readers. Although the year of publication in France is a variable that makes the data gathered here disproportionate, the purpose of this analysis is to show interest in Adichie's works other than her feminist publications. For example, Gregory Mann and Jean-Paul Lallemand describe *L'hibiscus pourpre* as follows: "*Hibiscus pourpre* faisait entendre une voix puissante et consciente d'elle-même: une voix pleine d'assurance et de lucidité" (547). *L'autre moitié du soleil* was praised for its perspective on the history of Nigeria, particularly the history of the Biafran war. Readers have generally characterized her work as giving the desire to follow her characters to the end of their stories (*Babelio*).

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<sup>121</sup> The information used for analysis here was sourced on 2 September 2017.



The reviews and invitations demonstrate Adichie's significant reputation in the French literary world. Her translation and publication history are distinct among Nigerian authors, with the possible exception of Achebe. Although Gallimard played an important role in her visibility in France, the extent to which Gallimard has influenced her reception in France is impossible to specify. Having said that, the translation and publication of her work has involved a balance of strategic preoccupations and legitimations of power with regard to her publishers, her writing skills, and her subject matter. Her talent as a writer, her focus on universal and controversial topics, and her prestigious publishers have all contributed to her high status in French culture.

### **5.5. The Reception of Chigozie Obioma in France: Literary Reviews : « Coup d'essai coup de maître »<sup>122</sup>**

Obioma's *Les pêcheurs* has been described as a 'smash hit' or a first attempt that proved a great success. His book was translated one year after its publication in English in 2016. His success in France can be traced back to his almost immediate canonization in the Anglophone literary system. He has been invited to France to read and promote his book during literary events such as "Marathon des mots" in 2015. He was also invited to "L'Humeur Vagabonde," a radio program that has aired in France-inter since 2001, to discuss his work. His novel was featured at "Palabre autour des arts" in 2016 and during the Festival "Afrique en Cene" in January 2017.

The novel has also received minor local awards, earning third place in the 18e Prix du Roman of Bibliothèque Rochefort en Yvelines and winning the Prix La Passerelle in 2017. These prizes are not international, but are awarded by local libraries. For example, Prix La Passerelle promotes novels selected by the librarians; readers are asked to read them between January and May and

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<sup>122</sup> Adapted from a review of Obioma's novel by Crom.

then vote for their favourite. In the 2017 edition, six writers were selected, and Obioma's novel was the most popular.

While Obioma's novel has not yet been the subject of many academic works in France,<sup>123</sup> many literary blogs, journals, and magazines, such as *Le Monde*, *Librebelgique*, *La Presse*, *Babelio*, *Le blog de Krol*, *Radio France Internationale*, *Africultures*, *Jeunes Afriques* and *Les Inrockuptibles*, have featured summaries or reviews. The novel has been described as the renaissance of African Anglophone literature, and compared to *Tout s'effondre* (Diacritik) both as a reference book and a classic (JeuneAfrique) and in terms of style. More so, in *The Fishermen*, Obioma recontextualizes Achebe's notion of "things falling apart" in a family saga in which traditions are abandoned. Obioma and Achebe trace similar patterns of the collapse of "the thing that holds us together," and the tragedy of Okonkwo is doubly re-enacted in *The Fishermen*. *Le Monde des livres* recommends four novels per week to its readers, and *Les pêcheurs* was one of the works to be recommended. *Le Monde* also selected it as a summer reading. As part of the reading initiative "Le tour du monde en romans," 130 students of Lycée Déodat de Séverac in Toulouse took up a challenge of reading ten novels from all over the world in three months and then selecting three preferred novels to be presented for a final deliberation, in view of "Prix du laureate." *Les pêcheurs* was one of the selected novels for the 2016-17 edition.

In the academic world, the department of Littérature et littérature comparée at the Université Paris VII-Denis Diderot has included *Les pêcheurs* as a required text for the course "Sorcellerie et politique: penser les désordres contemporains," which focuses on the theme of sorcery and highlights the social and political realities of Nigeria as depicted in Obioma's novel. As a course text, the novel serves as a cultural product that bridges cultural information gaps between

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<sup>123</sup> These.fr did not show any results for Obioma.

students and illuminates the sociocultural and political realities of Nigeria. In addition, French translations of African Anglophone novels are not commonly included in required reading lists for French students. Although Obioma's status cannot yet be compared with Adichie's or Achebe's in France, it is remarkable that his first novel has made a significant enough impression to have won various local awards and to have been placed on school reading lists.

### **5.6. The Reception of Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani in France: A Suggestive Absence**

There is little information available on *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard*. It has received several online reviews, but has had fewer readers than the other writers discussed in this project.

Searches of online literary platforms revealed a modest appreciation of the humour in her novel and its introduction of 419 syndromes to French readers, as echoed by a reviewer known as "Jean Marc": "Sans être extraordinaire, le livre est sympathique et nous fait découvrir un aspect d'un pays de l'Afrique Anglophone dont l'univers est peu connu en France." It has received only three reviews on *Babelio*, including the following comment by a user known as "rekha": "Je pense en effet que certaines traductions de livres anglophones font perdre aux livres tout leur intérêt. Certaines subtilités sont délibérément écartées. Ce doit être le cas de ce roman que j'ai trouvé très intéressant." This comment illustrates a controversial phenomenon in the translation of African literature and confirms an observation made during a preliminary reading of the translation.<sup>124</sup> In comparison to the other three authors discussed here, Nwaubani is the least recognized in France. Nwabani's relative lack of visibility is indicative of the role played by international literary status and the lesser attention given authors who reside and/or publish in Nigeria. Nwaubani is not as popular among critics as the other three Nigerian authors discussed in this study, and her work has also received less attention in France than theirs. It is suggestive

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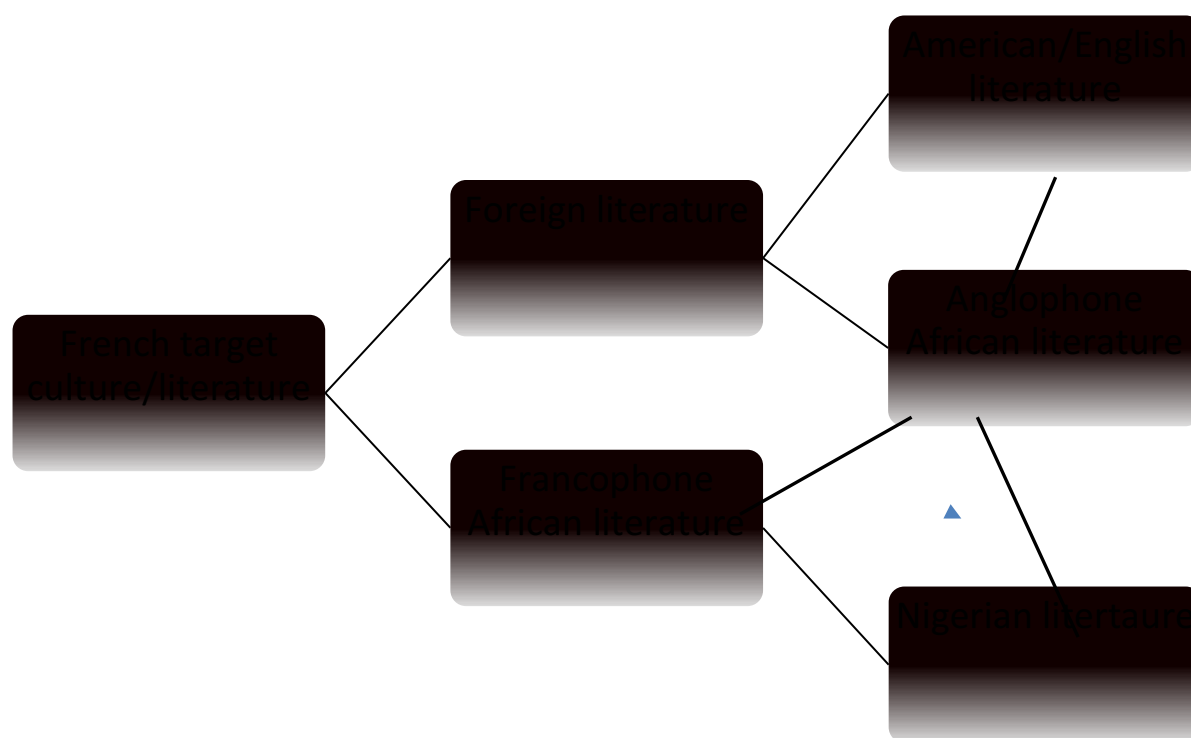
<sup>124</sup> This will be discussed further in the textual analysis.

that her humble recognition in the Anglophone world has equally influenced her modest reception in France.

### **5.7. Conclusion: Charting the Position of Nigerian Literature in France**

The previous two chapters discuss the production and place of Nigerian literature in France and also explore several avenues for its reception. Although Nigerian literature continues to be translated and published at an increasing rate, its representation within the French literary system does not assume any particular or distinct position from Anglophone and Francophone literatures in general. There is no indication that Nigerian literature constitutes a system of its own with significant influences on or from the target culture. In the catalogues of publishers, bookstores, and literary magazines, Nigerian texts are categorized as either foreign literatures, Anglophone literature more specifically, or in rare cases, Francophone literature. The autonomy of the collections or catalogues in which they are classified is not based on the presence of Nigerian literature. Even though Nigerian literature has made a modest impression on French culture, its place or autonomy is yet to be distinctively and characteristically defined in the French polysystem. Even so, a significant number of novels have been and continue to be translated in France; Chinua Achebe's work has been included in "agrégation d'anglais" and retranslated. It was according to Georgette Versigner the first time a book written by an African author was included in the list (188); Adichie's work was distributed freely as part of the International Day of Women in France; books by Nigerian writers have won and been shortlisted for French literary prizes; Nigerian authors often visit France to promote their works; and literary magazines, blogs, and media reviews attest to the presence and growing popularity of Nigerian novels.

Peculiarities observed in this project and by previous studies<sup>125</sup> within broader literary systems such as those of Anglophone literature or Francophone literature are present in the case of Nigerian literature in French. Some of these include underrepresentation, the visibility of particular writers such as Adichie, the problem of categorization, the lack of specialized collections or series for dissemination within publishing houses, and the relegation of authors who publish within Nigeria to background positions.<sup>126</sup>



**Figure 18: Translated Nigerian Literature in French polysystem: Interactions**

Nigerian literature interacts with other literary systems, as shown in the figure above, which in turn interacts with the French literary system. These interactions determine partly the way they

<sup>125</sup> See Ducournau; Bush and Asobele.

<sup>126</sup> This thesis and previous studies recognize that although progress has been made, there is still room for improvement.

are selected, published, and disseminated. As the confusion between Francophone and Anglophone literatures suggests, Nigerian literature is regarded as part of the subsystem of Francophone literature. For example, could the republication of Tutuola's *L'ivrogne dans la brousse* under the collection "Continents noirs," which specializes in Francophone African writing, be a sign of assimilation and normalization into Francophone literature? Gallimard has published Adichie's books in the "Du Monde Entier" collection but did not include Tutuola's. As part of the larger body of foreign literature in France, the position of Nigerian literature is peripheral. Nigerian literature has yet to be significantly featured in discussions and magazines of translated literatures in France. When foreign literatures in English are discussed, Nigerian literature falls into this category, even though more central British, American, and Australian literatures are included in the same category. This would not have been the case if, for example, Nigerian authors had written in a specific 'Nigerian' language. This statement does not necessarily mean that Nigerian literature if written in a specific language would be more visible in the French polysystem, rather, it will eliminate the case of categorizing the literature under the same umbrella as those major English language literatures.

The essays in *Translatio, Le marché de la traduction en France à l'heure de la mondialisation* edited by Sapiro focus on the translation of different languages, such as Italian and Spanish, without any study on African Anglophone literature. Sapiro's article proved that linguistically, Nigerian literature is in competition with well-established hegemonic literatures in English. She presented a table listing the number of works translated in collections of foreign literatures. The category under which Nigerian literature, like any other African literature written in English, would be listed was "anglais/Américain" or English/American. While it can be argued that the English/American category covers all literatures in English, it may also refer specifically to

British and American literatures. Since the categorization is based on languages, the table did not include “Nigerian,” “African,” or even “Anglophone” since these categories, except perhaps for the last, do not refer to specific languages. The salient point remains that Anglophone African literatures in French translation are still located on the periphery in France, to the extent that the literary magazines are yet to distinctively show their presence in their publications.

## Chapter 6: Translating Hybridity in Nigerian Literature: A Microanalysis

### 6.1. Methodological Considerations

Like most Anglophone African writers, Nigerian authors work from the traditions of oral discourse, writing from oral-based realities and narratives while transferring the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of their indigenous “metatext”<sup>127</sup> or “ethno-text” into a central colonial language and culture (Bandia, *Translation Reparation*; Tymockzo 24; Suchet 66). This chapter discusses these peculiarities associated with postcolonial African texts, subsumed under the concept of “hybridity” (Bandia, *Translation Reparation* 9).

Hybridity manifests in postcolonial African texts through various media and on various levels, which, according to Chantal Zabus, can be either visible traces in the text or traces within traces (49). A commonly cited example of “visible traces” of hybridity in Nigerian literature is its heterolingualism, or incorporation of words and sentences in different languages into a text written in the dominant colonial language. Regarded as a strategic form of subversion (Batchelor 32), the use of various linguistic forms or “textual code-switching” (Zabus 85) allows authors to indigenize or appropriate the colonial language so that it can express the “burden” of the authors’ own language and cultural experiences (Ashcroft et al. 38). With regard to the manifestation of hybridity as “traces within traces” or “quasi-invisible” traces, the most common examples,

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<sup>127</sup> Like Bandia, Maria Tymockzo is of the opinion that postcolonial writers are involved in a process of translating because they are carrying across, transporting and relocating their cultures from a given position to another. Culture is therefore regarded as a “metatext” (Bandia, *Translation as Reparation* 147) or “ethno-text” (Suchet 66), which may be understood as a unique kind of source text from which the writers translate. Tymockzo explained that “the culture of a postcolonial writer acts as a metatext which is rewritten – explicitly and implicitly, as both background and foreground – in the act of literary creation” (24).



according to Zabus, involve “relexification” or transliteration, a process in which the colonial language is manipulated such that it “conveys an unfamiliar message” and constantly suggests the underlying presence of another language. This process occurs when the “African writer attempts to simulate the character of African speech using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms in a Europhone text” (101). This chapter explores the linguistic and cultural dimensions of hybridity (Bandia, *Translation Reparation*). This division is in line with the initial theoretical basis of this thesis that perceives a translated work not only as a translation of the language used in a text, but also as a translation of culture. Bandia defines hybridity as the “creation of an in-between *language culture*<sup>128</sup> which indeed reflects the real condition of African postcolonial discourse” (*Translation Reparation* 9). Bandia’s “language culture” can be explained in two ways in the context of postcolonial African writing. On the one hand, hybridity is understood as a “linguistic culture,” that is, the in-between manner or language used by postcolonial writers to subvert colonial centers in order to attain textual linguistic emancipation. On the other, hybridity can also be understood as a *cultural language* because of its roots in the postcolonial society’s culture and identity. Ashcroft and his co-authors characterize this phenomenon as “re-placing language” (38), the repositioning of what was once the dominant language into the dominated discursive space and culture, which then becomes a distinct cultural form of the colonial language. Understanding hybridity as a linguistic manipulation of colonial texts, and situating hybridity in the cultural universe of African postcolonial writing enables an understanding of the motivations behind its manifestation in texts and its cultural meanings. Consequently, various elements of hybridity are otherwise known as local colour, or “culturally bound objects or occurrences” (Zabus 175), which may include examples of heterolingualism,

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<sup>128</sup> Emphasis mine.

such as vernacularization or pidgins, as well as direct translations, relexifications, or proverbs. Most such cases are anchored in the traditions of African societies and are discussed here with references to the source culture of the texts. However, not all cases denote cultural occurrences. An example can be seen in Batchelor's discussion of Sow Fall's *La Grève des batu*, which demonstrates that visible traces of hybridity may be as simple as the use of local languages for words and expressions such as "madam," "thank you," or "what happened" (52). For the purposes of this project, when such examples are discussed here, they "represent more generally the [...] language that lie[s] behind the French text" (53) or the *language culture* rather than items that are peculiar to a culture. These examples demonstrate how the linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies of particular writers and of local languages are communicated in French.

Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi and Tymockzo have studied linguistic and cultural hybridity in the context of postcolonial translation theory, reading hybridity as a form of diversity and creativity that establishes a unique safe space for the literatures of colonized peoples. To identify and analyze hybridity as a form of linguistic style and creativity of Nigerian authors, this chapter uses Antoine Berman's model of translation as presented in *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*. Berman's method involves four steps: an initial autonomous reading of the target text; an analysis of the source text in terms of stylistic regularities, rhythms, and semantic and metaphorical networks; a consideration of secondary materials written by the translator; and a comparison between the original and the translation, from which the critic attempts generalizations. According to Berman the study of the source text's means of expression should serve as the basis for the translation, and the critic should select the signifying zones or specific passages in the text in which the singularity of the work is concentrated (ix). For this study,

hybridity is the signifying zone, as each novel's stylistic regularities and networks of meaning are embedded in various forms of hybridity which each author expresses in his/her own distinctive style. This is why Bandia stated that the difficulty of translating elements of hybridity lies in "the specific challenges [they present] as their occurrences in the European language are often the result of [each] author's creative endeavor to capture them as they exist in African languages" (*Translation Reparation* 187).

Rather than criticize, the aim of this chapter is to illuminate the strategies of translation and to reflect on the translation experience itself.<sup>129</sup> Instead of a comparative analysis of the original and target text that only reflects the shortcomings or defects of translation, this chapter attempts an analysis of the reasons behind the choices of the translator by focusing not only on the literariness of the translated work, but also on the translator as creator of the work and on the worldviews and sociocultural conditions that influence the translator's decisions. According to Berman:

to analyze a translation is no longer to judge it and is no longer only to study the system of transformations it constitutes. Rather this study, done with rigor, with all the resources of linguistics and textual analysis must proceed to an examination of the sociohistorical, cultural and ideological conditions that made a translation what it is. (*Translation Criticism* 37)

Berman's method calls for examination of secondary materials, such as prefaces, afterwords, or notes, that are or can be associated with the translator and the translation. Berman's translator-centered perspective, or the search for the translator, complements the sociological approaches I

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<sup>129</sup> This is in reference to the study of the translators; see below.

take here, which allow for an examination of Nigerian literature in French as an “international cultural exchange [...] organized by [means of] institutions and individual agents, each arising from different political, economic and cultural dynamics” (Heilbron and Sapiro, “Pour une sociologie” 99). The study of translation examines not only the translation itself but also the actors who produce the work of translation. Therefore, this chapter discusses the materials that situate the translators in their cultural and literary space, and how those materials influence or are reflected in the translation. Such a discussion is known as paratextual analysis, or paratranslation.

The term “paratext,” originally coined by Gérard Genette, refers to “those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader: titles, and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, prefaces, intertitles, epilogues and afterwords” (xviii). A paratext “surrounds, wraps, accompanies, extends, introduces and presents the translated text” (Yuste Frias 118). In their introduction to *Translation Peripheries*, Anna Gil-Bajardi et al. note that paratext includes a long list of peritexts, such as the front and back covers, introduction, endnotes, glossaries, typography, illustrations, and captions. Paratext also includes epitexts such as reviews, interviews with authors or translators, and literary criticisms (7). The study of these elements takes the translators and material written by and about them into consideration as part of the related circumstances and peripheries that “accompany and define” (7) a translation. Like writers, translators are vehicles through which the ‘other’ voice is brought to life. They are mediators in that they transfer to another language and culture a given text that belongs to a different sociocultural environment. The pivotal role of translators has been discussed by scholars such as Berman (*Translation Criticism*), Venuti, and Simeoni, and this

chapter similarly explores the positions, projects, and horizons of translators. According to Berman, the translating position is the

compromise between the way in which the translator, as a subject caught by the translation drive perceives the task of translation, and the way in which he has internalized the surrounding discourse on translation (the norms). The translation project defines the way in which the translator is going to realize the literary transfer and take charge of the translation itself, to choose a mode of translation, a translation style. The horizon of the translator can be defined as the set of linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical parameters that determine the ways of feeling, acting and thinking of the translator. It is the translator's position and project that inform his horizon. (*Translation Criticism* 58-63).

This study explores the professional activities of translators, the kind of works that they translate, and the authors and genres with which they generally work. It also takes into account the translators' linguistic and literary backgrounds, publications about their translation process, such as articles or monographs, and interviews. Berman's model for studying translators provides information on the translators of the selected Nigerian novels that have hitherto been unknown, and it also demonstrates how the translator's subjectivity is reflected in the activity of translation. For example, a translation produced by a translator who is very familiar with African literature and culture may be different from one produced by a translator who is not. The study of translators along these lines may also reveal how a translator's individual choices conform to or

contradict other sociocultural norms of the target culture, whether ideological, political, or ethical.

## 6.2. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Analysis

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was an instrumental text in the canonization of African literature within the greater body of world literature. It was the first Nigerian work, if not the first Anglophone African work, to be retranslated in France. Pierre Girard's newer translation, *Tout s'effondre*, has not yet received as much attention as its predecessor, Michel Ligny's *Le monde s'effondre*. Apart from Françoise Ugochukwu's short review in 2014, the only major study of the two translations of Achebe's novel is the 2016 article on which I collaborated with Sathya Rao. This study seeks to identify the distinctive features of these two translations based on paratextual and textual materials and on the sociocultural factors that influenced the production of the newer translation. It takes as its point of departure the retranslation hypothesis<sup>130</sup>, which posits that first translations are usually more target-language-oriented than later ones. Berman, for example, regards translation as “an incomplete act” which can only be completed “through retranslations” (“La retraduction” 1). For Paul Bensimon, first translations are examples of “naturalization of foreign works” and integration of the “source culture into target culture” in order to “ensure positive reception of the work in the target culture” (ix). Yves Gambier similarly posits that “first translations always tends to be more assimilating, tends to reduce the otherness in the name of cultural and editorial requirement” (414). Some factors on which the retranslation hypothesis focus include lack or absence of a ‘proper’ translation, correction of mistranslations, or improvement of an existing translation. The discussion that follows examines the stylistic

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<sup>130</sup> See Bensimon; Berman, “La retraduction”; Gambier.

features of Achebe's novel in translation and builds upon my previous work on the subject, including first-hand information gleaned from personal interviews I conducted in this project.

### **6.2.1. Paratextual Analysis : Translators**

Michel Ligny, translator of *Things Fall Apart* as *Le monde s'effondre*, has had extensive experience in African literature, having written reviews of books on Africa and colonization, African civil rights, European exploitation of Africa, and African literatures. Some of the works he has reviewed include Guy Bosschere's *Les deux versants de l'histoire: Autopsie de la colonisation*, Guy Menga's *L'Oracle*, and Thomas Merton's *La révolution noire: lettre à un Blanc libéral*, which he described as "un document important à verser au dossier de la question raciale" ("La révolution noire" 166). Before the translation of *Things Fall Apart*, Ligny had previously translated an essay by South African writer Peter Abrahams as "Le conflit de cultures en Afrique," a contribution to the 1er Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs in 1957. From an ethnographic perspective, Ligny's knowledge of African literature suited him for the translation of *Le monde s'effondre*. Although he was not familiar with the Igbo language, his knowledge of African history and culture did facilitate the process of "initial translation" (Bandia, *Translation Reparation* 175), the first stage of Bandia's tripartite translation approach to postcolonial literature, in which the translator impersonates the source author in order to grasp the source metatext and culture.

Nevertheless, *Le monde s'effondre* has received mixed reactions from both African and non-African critics and scholars. Where some have praised Ligny's fidelity to Achebe's writing strategies such as repetition and cultural specificities (Moruwawon and Njosi), and his general adherence to the source culture, others have criticized the translation for its failure to capture certain connotations and vernacular networks, such as collocational, affective, and situational

meanings, in the original (Mbangwana). Despite these criticisms, the innovation of Ligny's translation was what I would call, for lack of a better term, its *unprecedented* translation of an experimental hybrid form of writing. Queneau's translation of *The Palmwine Drinkard* preceded Ligny's, but the form and content of Tutuola's novel make it an unlikely model for Ligny's. Indeed, as Ligny pointed out, "Présenter au public une œuvre encore inconnue de lui est une lourde responsabilité pour le traducteur. La solution adoptée ici a été d'être le plus littéral possible, car les formes du langage sont modelées sur des croyances qu'il importe de ne jamais perdre de vue" (Bush, "Le monde" 520). Dominique Chancé noted that Queneau's translation project was meant to be as literal as possible and that Tutuola's writing offered him an opportunity to create what he called a "néofrançais," (55) whose grammatical and syntactical oddities corresponded with those in Tutuola's English. Chancé further explained that néofrançais is a linguistic creation that is "fortement influence par l'oral et les usages contemporains, prétendument fautifs" (55-56) that are evocative of Tutuola's use of language. In the same manner as Chancé, Dominique Jullien confirms that Tutuola's non-standard English coincides with Queneau's linguistic approach of "néo-français": "...l'anglais bizarre de Tutuola va dans le sens de ce que Queneau essaie de créer en français" (273). Ligny did not take such an approach, however, because despite the presence of linguistic and cultural hybridity in Achebe's novel, it was never seen as grammatically or syntactically non-standard or incorrect in contrast to Tutuola's text. There was no need for any kind of linguistic invention. Ligny believed that he could do justice to Achebe's novel by making every effort to adhere to the original text's particularities. His effort to maintain the source text's foreignness, whether through explicit cultural references or through the style of writing, "semble ainsi se substituer à toute autre forme



de connaissance comme moyen d'accès privilégié aux croyances de l'Autre [...] c'est à l'évidence une exigence de fidélité qui guide la traduction de Ligny" (Rao and Madueke 537). Pierre Girard, translator of *Things Fall Apart* as *Tout s'effondre*, seems to be guided by a similar desire to preserve the source text's foreignness, remain faithful to the source text, and retain source elements in the intercultural transfer of the translation. In an interview, he acknowledged, "Je m'efforce de traduire fidèlement ce qui est écrit." Pierre Girard is an experienced translator who has translated more than 200 books, mostly novels but also including essays and biographies. More than 40 of his translations were prepared for Actes Sud, including Madison Smart Bell's Haitian trilogy on Toussaint Louverture. In the interview, he explained that he only discovered Nigerian literature and culture during his translations of Achebe and his reading of Chimamanda Adichie's books. Actes Sud, according to Magnier, chooses translators who are familiar with the culture of the source text. In the case of *Tout s'effondre*, Actes Sud appears to have prioritized reputation and experience of the translator over familiarity with African literature: "C'est donc à un traducteur expérimenté qui connaît bien le « style de la maison », à défaut d'avoir une connaissance poussée de la littérature africaine (ou même de l'anglais nigérian) comme son prédécesseur, qu'a été confiée la tâche de retraduire *Things Fall Apart*" (Rao and Madueke 534). Although the editor, Magnier, confirmed that Chinua Achebe's reputation is "obviously"<sup>131</sup> a major factor in the project of retranslation, Girard himself has said that he decided to translate Achebe's novel because he had "read the book and thought it was wonderful," not because of Achebe's reputation or his origin. His love for the book inarguably brings passion, dedication and motivation to communicate the text rightfully to the target audience but also to render a translation that is faithful to the original, as he had acknowledged.

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<sup>131</sup> My translation.

### 6.2.2. Titles

Both the editor and translator have regarded the title *Tout s'effondre* as more appropriate, especially in consideration of the original title *Things Fall Apart*. Girard's acknowledgement of this decision during his interview with me confirms the use of the retranslation hypothesis, the desire to improve or correct what was considered "inappropriate" in Ligny's earlier translation. Rao and Madueke pointed out that the phrase *uwa emebigo*, which means "the world falls apart" in English or "Le monde s'effondre" in French, suggests a more general notion of change or destruction, while *ife emebigo*, which means "things fall apart" in English or "tout s'effondre" in French, more specifically refers to the destruction of the traditions and norms of the precolonial society of Umuofia as well as the more personal tragedy of Okonkwo: "La tragédie du « tout » est d'abord celle du sujet qui se trouve pris dans le bruit et la fureur du monde, débordé, n'arrivant plus à faire la part des choses" (Rao and Madueke 536). The phrase "Ife emebigo" or *Tout s'effondre* characterizes the downfall of the novel's protagonist, Okonkwo, over the course of the story, including his murder of Ikemefuna,<sup>132</sup> his exile from his town, the conversion of his son to Christianity, and finally his suicide by hanging. The story in *La Pacification des tribus primitives du Bas-Niger* in the last sentence of the novel also emblematically signifies the same collapse of the structure of the precolonial society. The collapse of 'everything' captures the act of 'pacification' or 'suppression' that makes up the District Commissioner's adulterated story of "this man that killed the messenger and hanged himself" (*Things Fall Apart* 147), and the reduction of a man who was once the traditional pillar of his society, "the greatest man in

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<sup>132</sup> Ikemefuna was a lad who was given to Okonkwo's town by another village as a compensation for killing a woman. The gods decreed that he would die. Unfortunately, to live up to his traditional glories, Okonkwo struck the boy dead even though the boy had been living with him for a while and called him father. Okonkwo had also been warned by one of the eldest men in his village not to be involved in the death of the boy.

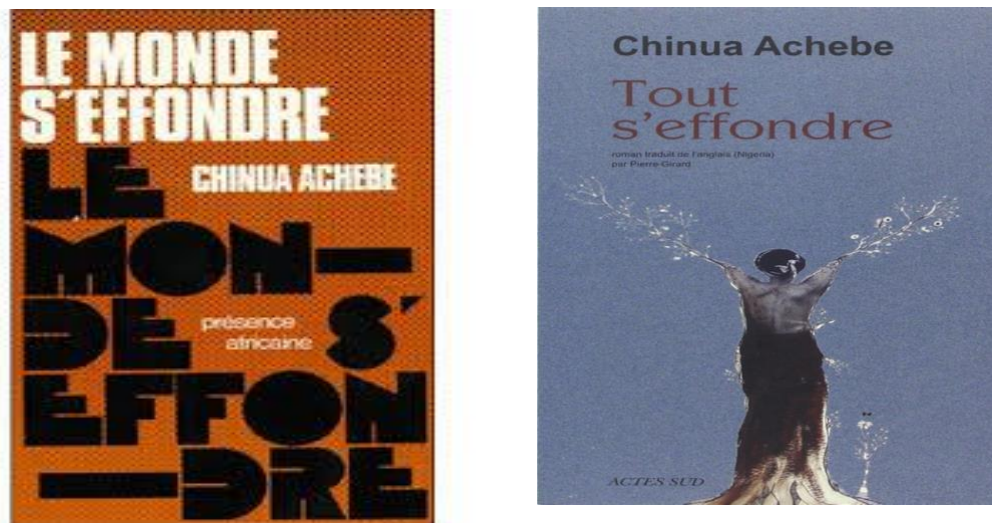
Umuofia” (*Things Fall Apart* 147), to a nonentity. The title *Tout s’effondre* ultimately relates to the “capacité de son auteur à transformer la tragédie africaine en une métaphore universelle du flux et du reflux de l’Histoire avec un grand « H ». (Chanda). Even though it tells the story of the precolonial Igbo society under the dehumanizing colonial rule, the meltdown of “Tout” resonates with every countries of the world or societies who have had to struggle to maintain their humanity, identity and culture, and this has been captured in Girard’s retranslation of the title.

### 6.2.3. The Front Cover

The cover of *Tout s’effondre* is a photocollage by Italian photographer Martina Bacigalupco and Mozambique artist Magule Wango of Francine, a Burundian war amputee. The cover image is an attempt “to move away from a certain kind of photography that depicts Africa always as a dark land of brutality and barbarism, war, and ignorance. I chose a story that was affirming that assumption and yet I was questioning it. In fact, at the end, it was the simple story of the relation between a mother and her child” (Rosenberg, qtd. in Rao and Madueke 537). This photocollage calls into consideration the choices or the motivations behind the superimposition. Bernard Magnier confirmed in an interview with me that Actes Sud is interested in the covers of its books and seeks to produce beautiful covers with beautiful images:

On essaie de faire quelque chose qui est un bel objet et de ne pas jouer la carte de l’ethnologie. On ne fait pas une couverture africaine parce que c’est un auteur africain [...]. On n’a pas envie de mettre un masque parce que c’est un livre africain. Ce serait une approche ethnologisante. Je n’ai pas envie de faire les trucs comme ça. Cela pourrait être une femme péruvienne qui a publié ce livre ou une femme française.

According to Mossop (1), covers may convey, or at least not contradict, the meaning of the text; however, the meaning may also be sidelined, suppressed, or even negated by the choice of cover imagery. In the case of *Tout s'effondre*, the choice of cover image was influenced first by the standards of the publisher.



**Figure 19: Front covers of *Tout s'effondre* and *Le monde s'effondre***

The decision not to paint Africa as dark, a point of view also highlighted by the objectives of the artists, corresponds to Achebe's mission of presenting Africa in a brighter light in *Things Fall Apart* and the publisher's choice of beautiful images. The cover of this edition can be compared to the 1968 cover of *Le monde s'effondre*, whose calligraphic letters do not necessarily provide any visual reference to Africa. As Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* sought to correct the impression that Africa is only a metaphor of gongs and drums and masks, so do the cover images of both of its French translations. However, it must be noted the choice of a photocollage of an African woman suggests that African elements are still present, even despite the publisher's decision not to play the "carte ethnologisante," according to Magnier. Without being excessive, the front cover image of *Tout s'effondre* gives some contextual or background information on the source culture, which in the case of *Le monde s'effondre* is completely absent. Bush confirms that the

front cover of the *Présence Africaine* edition presents “the translated text in isolation. The reading therefore relies on the reader’s existing knowledge, or ability to fill in gaps in that knowledge” (*Publishing Africa* 199). *Présence Africaine*’s choice of cover for *Le monde s’effondre* complements Ligny’s astute maintenance of foreignness earlier discussed by leaving no visual clues or information with which the target readers could identify the source culture of the text. The cover of *Tout s’effondre* typifies an approach that neither exoticizes nor displaces the culture of the novel. Since book covers serve as marketing tools, they must incorporate unique and beautiful elements that will gain readers’ attention. Genette describes the cover as a paratextual element that constitutes the “first manifestation of the book offered to the reader’s perception” (27). The objective of “creating something beautiful for all texts irrespective of source culture is considered as one of the Actes Sud’s open mindedness and strategies of being “extrêmement ouvert sur le monde” (Interview with the editor).

#### **6.2.4. Textual Analysis**

The linguistic innovation of Achebe’s narrative strategy lies in its use of written English to express African oral traditions and conversational expressions. African writers such as Achebe “draw upon vernacular speech patterns and exploit the rich rhetorical devices of the living oral tradition - proverbs, repetition, rural images, and metaphors - to embody and validate their specific experiences” (Watts 112). One of the most important literary and cultural elements present in Achebe’s work is the proverb; as markers of oral tradition, the “importance [of proverbs] lies in their double status as culture-and context-bound figures of speech” (Tunca 31). Proverbs in Igboland are symbols of maturity, responsibility and knowledge. Bernth Lindfors, for example, argues that proverbs “serve as keys to an understanding of [Achebe’s] novels

because he uses them [...] to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflict, and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying” (*Folklore* 3). Solomon Iyasere further notes that “these proverbs do not merely add 'local colour,' but are an integral part of the narrative design. They lend an air of historical authenticity, of 'Africanness,' to the language and ideas. They help make the dialogue of the characters reflect the everyday setting” (113), an example of hybridity as both a linguistic and a cultural phenomenon. Likewise, Michel Naumann points out that Achebe’s artistry is characterized by “ses alternances de discours célestes hiératiques, épiques, oratoires, emailés de proverbes” (14) as well as by

le balancement de ses répétitions, ses rythmes, l’équilibre  
déconcertant des discours dont les cordonnées sont branchés à  
gauche du principe, les passages de l’épopées au conte, de la  
sagesse au quotidien. Style admirable, faussement simple, en  
réalité complexe, chaloupé, contrasté, parfaitement consistant avec  
les propos, la culture décrite, ses valeurs, le devenir changeant des  
personnages. (Naumann 14)

Achebe’s innovative uses of proverbs, metaphors, speech rhythms, and figurative ideas create syntactical, lexical and contextual challenges for translators due to the linguistic and cultural chasms between the Igbo and French languages. The translator must understand and identify the aesthetics of these elements, or else they will be lost. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe underscored the importance of proverbs for the Igbo people:<sup>133</sup> “Among the Igbos, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (5).

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<sup>133</sup> The Igbos are known for their rich culture embedded in oral tradition.

### 6.2.5. Figurative Language and Vernacularizing

I will use the proverb “the palm oil with which words are eaten” to illustrate the common literal translation strategies of the translators of *Le monde s’effondre* and *Tout s’effondre*:

Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. (*Things Fall Apart* 7)

Les proverbes sont l’huile de palme qui fait passer les mots avec les idées. (*Le monde s’effondre* 13)

Les proverbes sont l’huile de palme avec laquelle on accommode les mots. (*Tout s’effondre* 17)

Meaning: Proverbs are words of wisdom that enrich conversations.

As the elders say, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others – (*Things Fall Apart* 87)

Comme disaient les anciens, si un seul doigt portait de l’huile, il souillait les autres. (*Le monde s’effondre* 153)

Comme le disaient les anciens, quand un doigt touchait l’huile, il salissait tous les autres (*Tout s’effondre* 138)

Meaning: Whatever one does affects the others.

Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wing break. (*Things Fall Apart* 14)

Que le milan fasse son nid et que l’aigrette fasse aussi le sien. Si l’un dit non à l’autre, que son aile se brise. (*Le monde s’effondre* 28)

Que le milan se perche et que l’aigle se perche aussi. Que son aile se brise si l’un dit non à l’autre (*Tout s’effondre* 30)

Meaning: Live and let live.

Most of the proverbs that appear in *Things Fall Apart* use figurative language such as metaphors: fingers for people, or perching of kites for coexistence, for example. The phrase “if one finger brought oil,” a common figure of speech in Igbo, uses synecdoche<sup>134</sup>, which the translators preserved. Similar uses of synecdoche recur throughout the novel. For example, “Uzowulu’s body I salute you” (*Things Fall Apart* 64) is translated into French as “Le corps d’Uzowulu, je te salue” (*Le monde s’effondre* 110; *Tout s’effondre* 103) while “The body of Odukwe I greet you” (*Things Fall Apart* 64) becomes “Le corps d’Odukwe, je te salue” (*Le monde s’effondre* 111; *Tout s’effondre* 103). Both translations of “Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too” attempted a literal rendering of the proverbs, to conserve its meaning and its use of animal imagery. Ligny’s use of “faire son nid” has the connotations of home, which is what the original proverb refers to. A back translation of Ligny’s translation would be “Let the kite make his nest and let the eagle make his.” The original proverb, *Egbe belu Ugo belu, Nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya*, makes no obvious reference to nests, though this could be an allusion, as the verb *belu* means *to perch*. Achebe translated the original Igbo proverbs into English, making every effort to preserve phrasing, word choice, vernacular, and oral networks. Though Girard’s translation may better convey the discursive elements of the original Igbo, Ligny’s enhances the proverb’s contextual meaning of peaceful coexistence, a choice which could be motivated by the translator’s desire to communicate faithfully the original message in the source text.

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<sup>134</sup> There is a blur of definitions between metonymy and synecdoche and these two terms are often used interchangeably: “The borderlines between metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy as three distinct tropes of metaphoricity are ‘fuzzy’” (Chrzanowska-Kluczewska 234). Synecdoche is used here, according to Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, for its reference to the use of body parts to represent a whole (233).



A similar comparison between the two translations can be made in the case of the following proverb, which also contains animal imagery:

“When mother cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth.” Maduka has been watching your mouth. (*Things Fall Apart* 49)

“Quand la mère vache rumine, ses petits observent sa bouche.” Maduka a observé ta bouche. (*Le monde s’effondre* 87)

Quand la vache rumine, son veau regarde sa bouche. Maduka a bien regardé ta bouche. (*Tout s’effondre* 82)

In the example above, the imagery of maternal nurturing uses the analogy of a calf watching its mother as she chews grass. The expression “mother-cow” represents parental instruction and diligence passed on from one generation to the next. The Igbo word for “cow,” *efi*, is neuter, unlike the feminine English word *cow*; the word for a female cow or mother cow is *nne-efi*, as in the proverb *Nne efi na-ata agba, nwa ya ana-ene ya anya*, which Achebe translated as “When mother cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth” (*Things Fall Apart* 49). Bandia observes that fictionalizing has sometimes involved direct translations of oral narratives into colonial language (*Writing and Translating* 14), and this was the strategy Achebe used in translating this and other proverbs. Where Ligny creates a calque or a literal or word-for-word translation from one language to another, Girard’s generalizes and corrects the Igbo oral reference by using standard linguistic forms, even though those forms do carry the conceptual meaning intended in the original. This can also be observed in the following example:

He was like a man in the song who had **ten and one** wives and not enough soup for his foo-foo. (*Things Fall Apart* 37)

Il était comme l'homme de la chanson qui avait **dix et une femmes** et pas assez de soupe pour son foo-foo. (*Le monde s'effondre* 68)

Il était comme celui de la chanson, qui avait **dix épouses plus une** et pas assez de soupe pour son fougou. (*Tout s'effondre* 65)

*Iri na otu*, literally “ten and one,” means “eleven” in Igbo. Achebe’s use of the phrase ‘ten and one wives’ rather than ‘eleven wives’ is a typical example of his indigenization of English by creating a direct translation in order to retain and preserve the African expression in a colonial language. Achebe knew the word “eleven,” but used the Igbo expression “ten and one” in order to express the semantic and cultural functions of the source language in the target language. In Igbo, *iri na otu* in the context in which Achebe uses it does not literally mean one man with eleven wives, but is a figurative expression indicating that the man has many wives, enough to cook plenty of meals for him, even if he does not have enough sauce for his food. Even though he may or may not have understood the cultural undertones of the phrase, Ligny preserved Achebe’s innovative use of language by translating the phrase as “dix et une femmes; Girard’s translation is similar, but uses a somewhat more formal tone.

#### **6.2.6. Modes of Address, Cultural References, and Repetitions**

The Igbo people use long and elegant speeches, including exchanges of praise names, when greeting each other or beginning a meeting. Some of these that occur in Achebe’s novel are as follows:

I am Evil-Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots. (*Things Fall Apart* 66)

Je suis Forêt-Maudite, je suis Viande-sèche-qui-emplit-la-bouche, Je suis Feu-qui-brûle-sans-fagots. (*Le monde s'effondre* 114)

Je suis Forêt-Maudite. Je suis Viande-séchée-qui-emplit-la-bouche. Je suis Feu qui-brûle-sans-fagots (*Tout s'effondre* 106)

Although Achebe translated these Igbo modes of address into English, the influence of the original Igbo is still present. To indicate that the phrase “Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth” is a proper name rather than a full sentence, he capitalizes the first letter and links the words with hyphens. Both Girard and Ligny preserved this Igbo discourse in their French translations, even if one may have substituted a noun for an adjective.

Previous studies of *Le monde s'effondre* and *Tout s'effondre* (see Ugochukwu, “Recension”; Rao and Madueke) have noted the eclectic choices of translations despite the translators’ claims to fidelity and “literalism.” Ligny’s translation, for example, includes several odd or incorrect cultural references, such as “bitterleaf soup” translated as “soupe de viande et de poisson,” and leaves out glossaries that were present in the original. Even though Girard corrected some of the mistranslations in *Le monde s'effondre*, several examples in *Tout s'effondre*<sup>135</sup> replace the rhythmic elements of the original text with a more ‘standard’ discourse, as seen in the following examples:

-As if he was going to pounce on somebody and he did pounce on people quite often.

(*Things Fall Apart* 3)

-Comme un qui s’apprête à boxer quelqu’un. Et il boxait effectivement les gens très souvent. (*Le monde s'effondre* 10)

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<sup>135</sup> These include words such as “cassave” in *Le monde s'effondre* replaced by “manioc,” or “cœur de palmier” replaced by “noix de palme.”

-Comme s'il s'apprêtait à bondir sur quelqu'un. Et de fait c'est quelque chose qu'il fait souvent. (*Tout s'effondre* 14)

The translator of *Tout s'effondre* avoided the repetition of the word "pounce." According to Eugene B. McCarthy, the patterns and repetitions in *Things Fall Apart* "are characteristics of the self-conscious artistry of oral narrative performance, where plot moves by repetition and predictability" (245). Even though the meaning is not obstructed, there are still differences between the translations; Girard's reworking of the original minimizes the repetition that originates in orally composed narratives.

Girard's translation also repeats several of the same errors and inconsistencies present in Ligny's translation. One such example is the translation of "soup" as "soupe," even though Igbo African soup is "a semi-liquid vegetable mix eaten with foo foo" rather than what Europeans would refer to as soup. On the other hand, Girard uses footnotes to explain Igbo concepts such as "ekwe" (16), "udala" (46), "uli" (83), "iba" (88), "oye" (90), "iyi uwa" (92), or "umunna" (123), where Ligny does not. According to Rao and Madueke:

À l'inverse de Ligny qui abandonne le texte au mystère des croyances qu'il véhicule, Girard n'hésite pas à apposer sa marque (c'est-à-dire dire à imposer un certain parcours herméneutique au lecteur) en choisissant d'éclairer certains référents culturels au détriment d'autres. Cet arbitraire est, semble-t-il, motivé par des impératifs pragmatiques, à savoir rendre la lecture plus fluide et éviter les redondances. Ce faisant, Girard fait montre d'un savoir dont on pourra questionner à la fois la rigueur et le systématisme. Pourquoi, par exemple, avoir annoté le terme « Udala tree » plutôt que « chi » et « egwugwu », qui en plus de figurer dans le glossaire d'Achebe, jouent un rôle central dans la trame narrative du roman ? (539)

Ligny's and Girard's translations seek to be as faithful to the original as possible, which they attempt to do in different ways: Ligny more literal and Girard more standard. Since several of their translation choices leave some room for doubt, they demonstrate that translation is an "incomplete act" (Berman, "La retraduction" 3) or a reiterative act (Deane-Cox 2), and exemplify the difficulty of producing an "accomplished translation," which, according to Berman, is a translation that is closer to the source text. On the other hand, despite their shortcomings, neither translation confirms the retranslation hypothesis. Ligny's translation, for example, does not match the retranslation assumption that first translations are more target-oriented with the intent of reducing otherness: "*Le monde s'effondre* qui, faute d'appareil paratextuel susceptible d'éclairer le lecteur, enferme le texte dans sa propre obscurité, rendant par là même les « croyances » et le « langage » de l'original bien plus mystérieux qu'ils ne le sont en réalité" (Rao and Madueke 539). Ligny's translation maintains the exotic and esoteric aspects of the original, determined by a language and culture that were not well known in France at the time, thus producing a text that is distant from the experience of the French reader. If the source orientation of *Le monde s'effondre* results in a mystifying experience for the reader, and the fidelity to the original of *Tout s'effondre* still exhibits the shortcomings noted above, there is still room for a third potential translation: Therefore, *Tout s'effondre* "ouvre la voie à une troisième traduction qui devra s'attacher à prendre compte [non seulement de] la rythmique du roman d'Achebe" (Rao and Madueke 2015) but a translation that would also pay more attention to the cultural specifics of the original.

### 6.3. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in French: Paratextual Analysis: Translator and Translator's Notes

Mona de Pracontal, the translator of Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* is an experienced translator, who has also translated another Nigerian text, Diana Evans' *26A*. She has had over fifteen years of experience translating American, British, Australian, and Nigerian works, and earned the Prix Baudelaire for her translation of *L'autre moitié du soleil*. Indeed, on the website of "VO-VF:<sup>136</sup> La parole des traducteurs," she included *L'autre moitié du soleil* among the ten books she would save from a fire in a library. In her interview with me, Mona de Pracontal explained that she usually would not translate a novel from a country that she did not know, but made an exception with *Purple Hibiscus*. Being unable to go to Nigeria – and wishing there would be translators residencies in Nigeria –, she made up for the lack of first-hand knowledge of contemporary daily life in Nigeria (food, dress, music, family, city and country life, etc.) by exchanges with Nigerians whom she met in Paris. She also studied the history and culture of Nigeria, and worked with French-speaking West Africans, especially for more colloquial dialogues. She has had the same approach with Adichie's subsequent works that she translated. Pracontal also asked Adichie some specific questions - usually more related to the writing itself than to Nigerian culture. In general, when translating contemporary writers, Pracontal finds the opportunity to communicate with the authors very helpful. Her eagerness to talk about her translations of Adichie's work indicates a degree of responsibility and pride in a work that has commonly come to be associated with her name in France. To further illustrate this, she wrote a two-page translator's note to provide what Antoine

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<sup>136</sup> This is the website for the *Festival Vo-VF le monde en livres*, an annual literary celebration of foreign literatures where translators are prioritized and given the opportunity to talk about their works as readers and author of translations.

Berman calls “an X-ray of the project” of translation (*Translation Criticism* 66), though a translator is not usually obliged to do so. In a research on translators’ notes, Ellen McRae notes that of 800 contemporary translations into English, only 20 percent included a translator’s preface,<sup>137</sup> which further illustrates de Pracontal’s accountability as a translator. Furthermore, of the 20 percent of prefaces in McRae’s study, only ten percent did actually discuss the translation or provide information on the source culture for the benefit of the reader, suggesting that translators do not necessarily consider prefaces important. In her preface, Pracontal discusses the unique style of Adichie’s novel, which she links to Igbo culture, and the method by which she sought to replicate Adichie’s style in her translation. As Lawrence Venuti posits, translators ought to devise ways to acknowledge their presence in a translation, and prefaces or notes in general are significant for promoting the visibility of the translator. Pracontal’s notes also address potential questions from readers and critics, such as her explanation of her choices regarding the multilingual elements present in the text, since the hybrid nature of Adichie’s original text would raise questions about the choices made in the translation process. The translator’s note bridges a communication and information gap and, as McRae points out, serves to promote “intercultural understanding” (40). Pracontal’s background information on the Nigerian literary system helps to familiarize readers in the target culture with the foreign elements of the source culture, and also allows her to share her interest in and fascination with Adichie, her novel, and her culture with readers, and reaffirms her visibility as the translator.

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<sup>137</sup> There are, however, various reasons why a translator may or may not choose to include explanatory notes.

### 6.3.1. Background, Front Cover, and Title

Set against the backdrop of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in 1967, *Half of a Yellow Sun* centers on five major characters: Olanna and her twin sister Kainene, Olanna's lover and professor Odenigbo, Odenigbo's village houseboy Ugwu, and Kainene's English boyfriend Richard, who decided to fight for the Biafran cause. Through the experiences of these characters, Adichie recounts the genocide of the Igbo, the "brutal bequests of colonialism, [and] the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children."<sup>138</sup> In an online interview, *Half of a Yellow Sun: The Story behind the Book*, Adichie discusses the inspiration for her novel:

I read books. I looked at photos. I talked to people. In the four years that it took to finish the book, I would often ask older people I met, "Where were you in 1967? and then take it from there. It was from stories of that sort that I found out tiny details that are important for fiction. My parents' stories formed the backbone of my research. Still, I have a lot of research notes that I did not end up using because I did not want to be stifled by fact, did not want the political events to overwhelm the human story.

Against the backdrop of the war, Adichie depicts the Igbo society of Nigeria emerging from colonialism: a society in a struggle to balance norms, ideological and political beliefs, conflicting religious practices, and an imposed sense of nation in its newfound independence. It is not surprising that *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been called both a historical and a political novel. In *Stylistic Approaches to Nigerian Fiction*, Daria Tunca explores the relationship between the

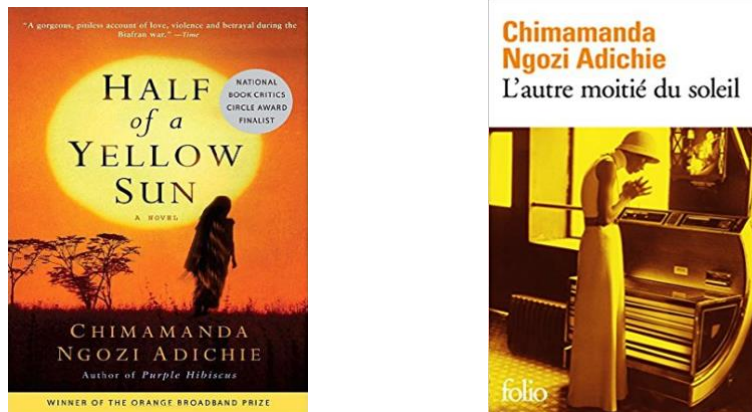
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<sup>138</sup> [chimamanda.com/books/half-of-a-yellow-sun/the-story-behind-the-book/](http://chimamanda.com/books/half-of-a-yellow-sun/the-story-behind-the-book/)



aesthetic and the political in this civil war novel and notes, “*Half of a Yellow Sun*, while ostensibly told from the alternating perspectives of three different characters, is in fact an orchestration of voices commanded by the third-person narrator, who deftly puts across political and social ideologies most likely aligned with the author’s own” (23). However, Adichie has opposed the idea that her novel is political and has even admitted to being “upset when people talk about [her] work and its political importance” (Tunca 65). Even though it is not only about war and does touch upon other themes, its political leanings are still obvious: “It would be just as absurd to regard as apolitical a novel whose title refers to the rising sun depicted on the Biafran flag (itself a political symbol) as it would be to read the book as a pro-Igbo or anti-colonial pamphlet. (Tunca 65). Tunca further argues that the problem with any political reading of Adichie’s text is not the legitimacy of such an attempt, but the methodology to be used. However, since this chapter is not concerned with methodologies of reading, it does acknowledge the political implications of the meaning present in the title. In following paragraph, I will compare the title and front cover of the translation with the source title and front cover.

Pracontal translated *Half of a Yellow Sun* as *L’autre moitié du soleil*, leaving out an important detail that was voluntarily made apparent with the novel’s plot in mind. The title *Half of a Yellow Sun* refers to the insignia on the flag of Biafra, a secessionist state in the southeast between 1967 and 1970, during the civil war. Readers who are familiar with the history of Biafra and the Nigerian civil war will recognize the meaning of the novel’s title, though the cover image does not make it obvious:



**Figure 20: Front covers of *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *L'autre moitié du soleil***

The image on the original cover depicts a yellow sun, if not a half sun, while the sun imagery is absent from the cover of the translation. To further justify the political and ideological implications of the title, Adichie includes a scene in which the protagonist, Olanna, teaches children about the symbols on the Biafran flag, in a passage replete with details that evoke a sense of imagery even in readers unfamiliar with the flag:

She taught them about the Biafran flag. They sat on wooden planks and the weak morning sun streamed into the roofless class as she unfurled Odenigbo's cloth flag and told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, **the half of the yellow sun** stood for the glorious future. (Adichie 352)

Elle leur fit un cours sur le drapeau biafrais. Ils étaient assis sur des planches et, dans la lumière pâle du soleil du matin qui inondait la salle sans toit, elle déroula le drapeau de toile d'Odenigbo et leur

expliqua les différents symboles. Le rouge représentait le sang des frères et sœurs massacrés dans le nord, le noir était signe de deuil, le vert représentait la prospérité que connaîtrait le Biafra, et enfin, **le demi-soleil jaune** symbolisait son avenir glorieux. (AMS 434).

Interestingly, Mona de Pracontal uses a different translation of the phrase “half of a yellow sun” within the text itself than for the title. It is important to remember that the Nigerian civil war has raised much controversy, especially about the roles played by the international community, such as the supply of ammunition to British-supported Nigeria, the search for oil, and the encouragement of division. According to Ogechukwu Ezekwem and Toyin Falola, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (hereafter referred to as *HYS*) has been recognized as a high-profile epitome of Nigerian civil war literature and one of the few narratives of war that serves simultaneously as a means of resistance, denunciation, and justification of the war. From its provocative title to the details of violence, from the narrative of a culturally and ideologically divided country to the fallacies of western nations who aided and abetted in the war, the novel establishes itself as contentious.

Accounts of the Biafra war are controversial and a brief overview is useful to understand the context of Adichie’s novel. There have been allegations and accounts of the Western nations sabotaging the Biafran nation, such as arms, ammunition, and currency supposedly being dumped into the sea in order to create scarcity and suffering and thus give the Nigerian government an opportunity to win over Biafra (see Symes). France was the only world power to support Biafra during the war, although there have been claims that it played a double role by providing Biafra with ammunition while still maintaining diplomatic relations with Nigeria in order to “retain a valuable degree of flexibility and protect its existing interests on both sides,

while standing to profit enormously if Biafra, through Nigeria's default should eventually emerge triumphant" (Akinbi 152). As noted above, Nigeria had severed diplomatic relations with France before 1965, leading to many questions about the military aid France provided to Biafra: "The question of French attitude and policy constitute one of the great enigmas of the Nigerian Civil War. Why did France support Biafra? Why did it choose the nadir of Biafra's fortunes as the moment to intervene? And, having intervened, why was it reluctant to complete the whole process by according recognition to Biafra?" (Akinbi 152). Many scholars have traced French involvement in the war to, among other things, Charles de Gaulle's philosophy of nationalism and self-assertion, as exemplified by his resistance to the American domination of Europe, his encouragement of the separatist movement in Quebec, which he compared to the Biafran cause, and his mistrust for the federation that the British imposed on Nigeria. France's last-minute decision to aid Biafra was also motivated by a desire to suppress the Nigerian government, which had frequently opposed and threatened French colonial hegemony in the Francophone African states, as well as by an economic interest in Biafra's oil. Indeed, the aid France offered Biafra was such that Biafra would not have enough arms or ammunition to win the war:

In this way, France also contributed to the prolongation of the Nigerian war as this limited move was sufficient to encourage the Biafrans to fight on and to ensure that thousands of them died needlessly. Hence, though French intervention saved the Biafrans from defeat, it seems to have prolonged the war. It almost seemed as if the French deliberately did not want Biafra to win the war since half-hearted assistance and semi-recognition hardly reflected total commitment. (Akinbi 15)

With these controversies in mind, there is reason to question the omission of the important word *yellow* in the title of her translation. In an interview with me, the translator explained the circumstances leading to the title under which the translation was published:

Vous savez, le choix du titre revient vraiment à l'éditeur, mais le traducteur fait des propositions. En l'occurrence, j'ai d'abord proposé une traduction littérale du titre, qui fait référence au drapeau du Biafra, à savoir : *La Moitié d'un soleil jaune*. Cependant, ce titre n'aurait guère eu de sens pour un lecteur français, qui ne connaît pas le drapeau du Biafra, aussi l'éditrice l'a-t-elle exclus. Pour rester proche de l'idée du nom de ce pays naissant, j'ai pensé me servir du surnom qu'il se donnait dans son hymne : « Land of the Rising Sun ». Impossible, malheureusement! En français, le Pays du soleil Levant, c'est le Japon... Dans la postface de *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie emploie l'expression « the other half of the sun », pour expliquer qu'elle a voulu explorer l'envers de la guerre. Je me suis alors fondée là-dessus pour proposer le titre *L'autre moitié du soleil* ; il me semblait assez fidèle à sa démarche et doté d'une grande force évocatrice en français, d'une belle sonorité.

Pracontal further explained:

Si le titre *Half of a Yellow Sun* n'a pas pu être traduit littéralement car la référence au drapeau biafrais aurait échappé au lecteur

français, en revanche, cette même expression à l'intérieur du roman, pour décrire le drapeau biafrais, a bien sûr été maintenue et traduite (*la moitié d'un soleil jaune*), car le contexte était suffisamment clair.

Although my efforts to contact Gallimard regarding this subject were unsuccessful and Pracontal confirmed that there was no deliberate reason for the change of title, the voluntary omission of the word “yellow” may be a deliberate attempt to minimize possible initial perceptions of the novel as political or ideological. Unlike the English version, whose title has been used as evidence that the novel is indeed political, the French version provides a broader avenue for reception, interpretation, and analysis. The change in title of the translation suggests that her work is indeed political.

### **6.3.2 Textual Analysis**

Chris Brazier has described Adichie as “the most identifiable face of ‘world writing’” because of her unique writing style that is “both oriented to Nigeria and yet also really interested in a generous, open-hearted way, in other cultures” (14). According to Faith Ibhawaegbele and J.N. Edokpayi (194), Adichie’s creative stylistic strategies are meant to adapt English to varying Nigerian local situations. Much as Achebe did, Adichie manipulates the language in such a way that it embodies the characteristics of oral tradition. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s famous notion of “making a written language ‘stammer, wail, stretch and drawing from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities’” (104) best explains Adichie’s narrative strategy, as she embellishes her writing with the specific linguistic and cultural aesthetics of the Igbo and Nigerian experiences, including vernaculars, pidgin, direct translations of oral culture, and codeswitching.

### 6.3.3. Vernaculars and Other Linguistic Codes

According to Ibhawaegele and Edokpayi, “Adichie employs different varieties of English and the Igbo language for different situations in her novel, thereby contextualizing English to suit local situations” (196). The use of codeswitching and codemixing in a postcolonial text is an aspect of the writing-as-translation approach, since “the interpolation of foreign words and expressions within the Euro-African text engages the postcolonial writer in an intext translation activity, which ultimately confirms the postcolonial writer’s role as a translator of minoritized language culture into majoritarian hegemonic language” (Bandia, *Translation Reparation* 113). In the case of *L’autre moitié du soleil* (henceforth referred to as *AMS*), vernaculars serve as “reminders” (Tymockzo 25) of an oral literature (orature) or a metatext existing in the local vernacular language, which forms the backbone of the writer’s story. Adichie uses words and expressions from her native Igbo culture, as well as from Pidgin and Hausa, in her works on both intersentential (between sentences) and intrasentential (within sentences) levels, with no set rules for her uses of these elements, as the following examples demonstrate:

*Ezi okwu?*<sup>139</sup> You’ve really moved in, haven’t you? Odenigbo was laughing. (*HYS* 60)

Yes, but these are better, *fa makali*, Olanna said. (*HYS* 59)

*Ezi okwu ?* – Tu as emménagé pour de bon, hein ? Odenigbo riait.

(*AMS* 85)

Oui mais celles-ci sont mieux, *fa makali* dit Olanna. (*AMS* 83)

These examples show deliberate linguistic border crossings, as does the novel’s dedication page, which similarly uses Igbo alongside of English:

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<sup>139</sup> Really?

My grandfathers, whom I never knew, Nwoye David Adichie and Aro-Nweke Felix Odigwe, did not survive the war.

My grandmothers, Nwabuodu Regina Odigwe and Nwamgbafor Agnes Adichie, remarkable women both, did.

This book is dedicated to their memories: *Ka fa nodu na ndokwa*,<sup>140</sup>

And to Mellitus, wherever he may be. (*HYS*)

The French version reads as follows:

*Mes grands-pères que je n'ai jamais connus, Nwoye David Adichie, et Aro-Nweke Felix Odigwe, n'ont pas survécu la guerre.*

*Mes grand-mères, Nwabuodu Regina Odigwe et Nwamgbafor Agnes Adichie, toutes deux des femmes remarquables, y ont survécu.*

*Ce livre est dédié à leur mémoire: Ka fa nodu na ndokwa Et à Mellitus, où qu'il puisse être. (AMS)*

The second and third pages of the main text feature seven instances of codeswitching, the majority of which are the pidgin<sup>141</sup> word “sah”<sup>142</sup> (*HYS* 6-7). These examples demonstrate the fluctuations in language inherent in the text, which the translator strives either to preserve or make less visible. In general, Pracontal preserved the use of the vernacular by not translating these instances, instead using italics to demarcate them; the exception is in the dedication, in which she italicized the French words. She confirmed in an interview that when she translates a

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<sup>140</sup> May they rest in peace.

<sup>141</sup> Nigerian pidgin is the non-standard form of English spoken by most of the Nigerian population, irrespective of status. It should also be noted that there are many forms of this pidgin (Faraclas 27).

<sup>142</sup> “Sah” could be understood as an indigenization of the English word “sir.”



novel from English into French, she does not translate quotes or phrases that appear in another language:

“Parfois, Adichie fait parler ses personnages igbo dans un anglais visiblement calqué sur l'igbo, ce qui donne à goûter la langue igbo au lecteur, signale qu'il y a là quelqu'un qui parle igbo, en fait.

Dans la traduction, il est assez simple de rendre le même effet, en employant la même méthode : je "calque" à mon tour ma phrase française sur cette phrase anglaise "igboisée".

Indeed, if the author has decided to use a foreign language in his/her text, that choice must be respected in the translation. That goes for Adichie's use of igbo within her novels, written in English. Adichie deliberately uses igbo, well aware that, even in Nigeria, some readers may not know igbo - but will understand from the context. This use of igbo words in her texts conveys a meaning. “ Je trouverais cela absurde et choquant de les traduire!”, Pracontal added. Some examples of Igbo words remaining in the translation appear in the table below:

Table 1

| <i>AMS</i>   | <i>HYS</i>   |
|--|--|
| “Bon voyage, <i>ije oma</i> ” dit-il. (51)   | “Safe journey, <i>ije oma</i> ,” he said. (33)   |
| “ <i>Egbukwala ! Ne le tuez pas !</i> ” (84)   | “ <i>Egbukwala ! Don't kill it!</i> ” (60)   |
| “ <i>Gini me? Qu'est-ce qu'elle a sa mère?</i> ” (146)   | “ <i>Gini me? What is wrong with his mother?</i> ” (111)   |
| “Mummy Ola, pleure pas, <i>ebezi-na</i> ” dit Baby. (631)  | “Mummy Ola, don't cry; <i>ebezi-na</i> ” Baby said. (517)  |
| “Grandpa disait que ça empire toujours avant de s'arranger. <i>O dikata njo o dikwa mma</i> ,” dit Kainene (597) | “Grandpa used to say that it gets worse and then it gets better. <i>O dikata njo o dikwa mma</i> ” Kainene said. (489) |
| “Nous sommes tous biafrais! <i>Anyincha bu Biafra!</i> ” dit Kainene, (492)                                      | “We are all Biafrans! <i>Anyincha bu Biafra!</i> ” Kainene said. (402)   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| “Ne mens pas Olanna Ozobia, <i>i sikwana asi</i> !” cria Mama Dozie... (301)                                      | “Do not lie Olanna Ozobia, <i>i sikwana asi!</i> ” Mama Dozie shouted. (240)                          |
| “Pourquoi tu te sers de réchaud à kérosène? Cria-t-elle. “ <i>I na ezuzu ezuzu?</i> Tu es stupide ou quoi?” (471) | “Why are you using the kerosene stove? she shouted. “ <i>I na ezuzu ezuzu?</i> Are you stupid?” (375) |

The first table contains instances in which the meanings of the vernaculars are understandable from preceding or superseding sentences, or from the context. By explaining the foreign words or sentences or incorporating their meaning indirectly into the novel, Adichie voluntarily closes the information gap, as does Pracontal in her translation.

Table 2

| <i>AMS</i>  | <i>HYS</i>  |
|---|---|
| Sa mère lui frictionnait le corps avec de <i>l'okwuma</i> ... (33)                    | His mother would rub his body with <i>okwuma</i> ... (17)                               |
| “ <i>Ezi okwu</i> ? Tu as emménagé pour de bon, hein?” Odenigbo riait. (85)           | “ <i>Ezi okwu</i> ? You have really moved in, haven’t you?” Odenigbo was laughing. (60) |
| “Baby <i>ezigbo nwa</i> , comment te sens tu ?” (412)                                 | “Baby <i>ezigbo nwa</i> , how are you?” (334)   |
| “Tu imagines dans quelle situation tu seras maintenant ? <i>O di egwu!</i> ” (297)    | “Can you imagine what situation you would have been in now? <i>O di egwu!</i> ” (237)   |
| “Un jour je vais blesser gravement Harrison, <i>maka chukwu</i> ,” dit Jomo. (154-55) | “One day, I will wound Harrison seriously, <i>maka chukwu</i> ,” Jomo said. (118)       |
| Mama Dozie herself had been away harvesting cocoyams in the <i>agu</i> . (240)        | Mama Dozie quant à elle, ceuillait des cocoyams dans l’ <i>agu</i> . (301)              |

The second category contains cases without visible or hidden meanings in the sentences and without footnotes or explanations. Although the lack of explanation of these words does not impede meaning completely, the cultural references suggested in the original could be lost to the

readers of the French translation. For example, in the sentence “One day, I will wound Harrison seriously, *maka chukwu*,” “Maka chukwu” is a swear word that means “in the name of God.” The lack of a direct explanation deprives French readers of the knowledge that the speaker is swearing about hurting Harrison. These examples show that the problem when translating other linguistic codes is not necessarily one of understanding the language used, but of the social roles of the codes in the text and how those roles may be maintained, or not, in a translation. It is generally accepted that the use of different languages in a text serve different discourse functions such as quotation, repetition, interjection, emphasis, or clarification (Gumperz 75-83). For example, in the sentence “Yes, but these are better, *fa makali*,” the phrase *fa makali* is used for emphasis as the speaker foregrounds her choice of clothing, though this may not be obvious to a French reader. Similarly, in the following passage, a song appears in the vernacular:

Back in the kitchen, Ugwu was surprised to hear Master’s mother singing a gently melodious church song: *Nya nya oya mu ga-ana. Na m metu onu uwe ya aka.... (HYS 160)*

Du retour à la cuisine, Ugwu fut surpris d’entendre la mère de Master qui chantait un chant église doux et mélodieux : *Nya nya oya mu ga-ana. Na m metu onu uwe ya aka.... (AMS 160)*

Adichie does not give explicit or implicit information about the song, and it does not disrupt the meaning of the text. However, it does produce a greater reaction from a native speaker, who knows not only the meaning but the context, than it would from one who is not and does not. In Adichie’s story, Odenigbo’s mother hates Olanna, her son’s fiancée, and suspects some evil spirit or sorcery is the reason why her son still has no child. The song in question is from the biblical story of the bleeding woman who hoped that she would be healed by touching the hem

of Jesus' garments. The song therefore, typically for an average Nigerian reader, indicates Odenigbo's mother's belief that her son would have a child despite Olanna's supposed sorcery. In Igbo society, childlessness is frowned upon, and a married woman without a child may be mistreated and dismissed. Consequently, Odenigbo's mother found another young woman for him. The song therefore refers to contextual information that is not as obvious in the French translation. On the one hand, this example could be a means of preserving a foreign element in the text; on the other, it can also be explained as a lack of familiarity with the differences between Igbo and French or a lack of previous translations of the song itself.

In a similar case, Adichie uses an extract from Robert Browning's poem *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HYS 106). Though Adichie may have removed or reworked parts of the poem and does not acknowledge Browning as the poet, Pracontal uses the French translation of the song by Marianne Costa and Astrid Caudère, which is glossed in a footnote. Unlike the Igbo vernacular song, Browning's poem is well known, was written in a major world language, and has been translated into French. These two examples demonstrate the risk of translations replacing or rewriting words of poetry in "varying degrees of divergence" (Davies and Bentahila 247). Kitula Kingei identified several instances of 'mistranslation' of African songs and poems in the example of the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*. P'Bitek translated the poem himself from the original Acholi, but the difficulties he faced in doing so, such as variation, rhythm, tempo, stress, intonation, syllables, and other prosodic rules, demonstrate that not translating it may have been a simpler choice. The objective here is not to delve into details of translating songs or poems, but to highlight the challenges of translating vernacular languages in both verse and prose. In general, untranslated linguistic codes keep the music and prosody of the original text and do not domesticate the text; however, they may not

carry the same sociocultural functions over to the target reader as they would to the native reader.

In what seems to be an attempt to balance this situation, the translator of *Half of a Yellow Sun* uses footnotes to explain Igbo/Nigerian-context words, especially those that are culturally peculiar to the Igbo African setting, as the following examples demonstrate:

He smelled something sweet, heady, as they walked into a  
**compound**... (*HYS* 4).

Il sentit une odeur sucrée, entêtante, lorsqu'ils s'avancèrent dans la  
**concession**... (*AMS* 16)

**Footnote:** Concession: désigne un système de logement organisé autour d'une cour centrale, avec cuisine et salle de bains communes à toutes les familles, chaque unité donnant également sur une arrière-cour, Les familles aisées disposent d'une concession entière. (Toutes les notes sont de la traductrice.)

...her **wrapper** hanging low enough .... (*HYS* 9)

... le **lappa** nouée assez bas .... (*AMS* 23)

**Footnote:** Lappa: sorte de pagne qui se porte nouée autour de la taille avec un corsage, ou autour de la poitrine. Les hommes, aussi bien les femmes, en portent.

Chioke, the junior wife would be tending the pot of watery **soup**.  
(*HYS* 8)

Chioke la plus jeune épouse devait surveiller la marmite de **sauce** trop claire (*AMS 22*)

**Footnote:** Soup : Le repas type se compose d'une sorte de soupe ou ragout qu'on appelle en général sauce, accompagné d'un féculent (garri, fufou) : on roule ce dernier en boulettes qu'on trempe dans la sauce.

I have to attend an **umuada** meeting. (*HYS 300*)

Je dois participer à une réunion des **umuada**. (*AMS 370*)

**Footnote:** umuada: Femmes de la communauté.

...perform rituals with her fellow **ogbanje** (*HYS 300*)

...accomplir des rituels avec ces camarades **ogbanje** (*AMS 371*)

**Footnote:** ogbanje: Fantômes des enfants mort-nés qui reviennent torturer leurs mères.

According to Jean Delisle, footnotes “apporte[nt] des éclaircissements au moyen d’un développement plus ou moins long et dans le but général de communiquer l’information présumée inconnue des lecteurs” (285). De Pracontal’s footnotes provide readers with information that would previously have been unknown to them, though she does use them sparingly, mainly for words that she considered unfamiliar. For example, previous translations of *Things Fall Apart* have featured questionable interpretations of words such as “compound,” “soup,” or “umuada” (see Rao and Madueke; Ugochukwu, “Recension”). De Pracontal uses only

twelve footnotes in the entirety of the novel, and four of these are intertextual references, as she explains her reticence for footnotes in an interview:

Je suis traductrice, je ne suis pas ethnologue. [...] Je ne suis pas là pour dire au lecteur de s'intéresser à tel ou tel pays. Je suis là pour traduire une écriture, faire œuvre littéraire. Pour ce qui est des difficultés de compréhension, j'ai la même réaction face à un roman nigérian que face à un roman anglais, américain, australien... de n'importe quelle anglophonie, en somme. Faut-il proposer une note de bas de page ? Je ne suis pas une grande adepte des notes de bas de page, qui peuvent être intrusives : le traducteur intervient dans la lecture. J'essaie donc de les limiter à ce qui me paraît strictement nécessaire. Le lecteur peut toujours faire des recherches supplémentaires s'il le souhaite. La présence d'un glossaire est une décision qui appartient à l'éditeur. Le glossaire, bien qu'utile, tire l'ouvrage vers le document, ce qui peut être gênant pour un roman, mais il est souvent adopté pour rendre des littératures encore peu connues du public français plus accessibles.

#### **6.3.4. Pidgins**

The shifting between languages in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is intentional, suggesting a shift in culture and foregrounding the attempts to negotiate social and class positions through the character's dialogue. Throughout the novel, Adichie uses pidgin, a distinctive feature of her

work, to distinguish between different groups of people, which could pose a particular challenge for the translator. In response, these pidgins were translated with various versions of French such as ‘street French’ and ‘creole French’:

j’ai recouru au français parlé de la lagune d’Abidjan, un créole français qui s’est répandu dans l’Afrique de l’ouest francophone à partir de la Cote d’Ivoire. Pour les dialogues en « broken English », j’ai reproduit un français boiteux tel qu’on peut le parler dans les pays francophones proches du Nigéria quand on maîtrise mal le français – que ce soit au Burkina Faso, au Benin voisin, en Côte d’Ivoire ou au Cameroun, mais sans employer le créole d’Abidjan précité, car ce dernier est une langue ou du moins un dialecte à part entière au même titre que le pidgin. (“Notes sur la traduction” 664)

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, Ugwu, introduces the reader to Master, or Odenigbo, a Western-educated Nigerian, as “a little crazy- he had spent too many years reading books overseas” (*HYS* 3). Ugwu speaks in pidgin English, such as responding to Odenigbo with “Yes sah!” rather than “Yes sir!”, as a marker of class difference, which Pracontal retains in the translation. Ngozi Ozulu notes that because different codes serve different social functions, a translator must “differentiate between the standard and the non-standard languages” (371). In this case, Pracontal translates “sah” as “patron,” which conveys the aesthetics and social codes of the original, as a French reader would thus easily recognize that Ugwu is not speaking a ‘standard’ form of the language.



In *Code-switching and Code-mixing in African Creative Writing*, Paul Bandia points out that codeswitching in African writings has pragmalinguistic functions such as foregrounding, identity, focusing, distancing, and neutralization, (144)<sup>143</sup> which, ideally, must be retained in translations. The following example displays a somewhat different translation dynamic than those discussed above:

My brother get problem before because the first wife is not pregnant and the second wife is not pregnant. There is one leaf that the dibia give him and he begin to chew. Now he has pregnant the wives. (*HYS* 93)

Avant mon frère est dans le problème parce que la première femme n'est pas enceinte et la deuxième femme n'est pas enceinte. Il y a une feuille que le dibia lui donne et il commence à mâcher.

Maintenant, il a enceinté les deux femmes. (*AMS* 124)

Pracontal explained her translation of Adichie's use of various linguistic codes as follows: "Il m'a paru capital de faire entendre ces différences [linguistiques] dans la traduction française chaque fois qu'elles étaient signifiées dans l'original" ("Notes sur la traduction" 663). Her translation differentiates between pidgin and "broken" English, as in this example, the dialogue is that of a speaker who is making an effort to speak "correct" English. It must be noted that Pracontal's choice of "français boiteux" or 'street French' instead of the creole of Abidjan, which she generally uses to translate pidgins, captures the differences in the language used and

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<sup>143</sup> Identity is the use of language as a means of solidarity; focusing is the use of language to isolate the addressee; distancing is the use of language to exclude; foregrounding is the use of a code that appeals to a particular person, while its opposite, neutralization, is the use of code switching to neutralize the effect that the message would have if carried in another code (Bandia, "Code-Switching" 144-45).

retains the various functions of pidgin and grammatically incorrect sentences. The lack of a correct past tense in the sentence “Now he has pregnant the wives” shows that the speaker has little knowledge of or exposure to English, while even though the phrase “enceinter une femme” is common in Francophone Africa, the translation uses the correct past tense, “il a enceinté les deux femmes.” In this case, it is the use of an informal phrase, rather than incorrect grammar, that represents the linguistic peculiarity of the original. The translation of “my brother get problem” as “mon frère est dans le problème” is also an example of non-standard usage, as the ‘correct’ translation would be “Avant, mon frère avait un problème,” using the verb *avoir* (to have) rather than *être* (to be). Pracontal uses familiar expressions in these examples to reflect the informality of the original, though elsewhere she modifies or “standardizes” phrases in the target language. The examples here suggest that the translation is not systematic, with neither total adherence to the source forms nor complete disregard for those forms. In other words, the translation has managed to transfer the same sociocultural message of class differences as the original.

### 6.3.5. Direct Translations from Igbo to English

In *Writing and Translating Francophone Discourse*, Paul Bandia observes that African writers often directly translate oral narrative forms into colonial languages (14), and Adichie’s text contains many such examples:

Thank, sah, Thank, sah. May another person do for you. (*HYS* 112)

Merci patron, merci patron. Puisse une autre personne faire autant pour vous. (*AMS* 147)

“May another person do for you” is a literal translation of *Ka onye ozo melu gi* (may another do same favor for you), which is an Igbo way of showing gratitude to a benefactor: *ka* means

“may,” *onye ozo* means “another person,” and *melu gi* means “do for you.” The word “same” is implicit in the sentence. However, in an effort to standardize or make the sentence more understandable, Pracontal adds the adverb “autant,” which means “same,” thus replacing the unique oral linguistic pattern of the original text with a more “standard” form in the target language, as also occurs in the following example:

Kainene should leave Port Harcourt until we know whether the war  
is coming or going. (*HYS* 235)

Kainene devrait quitter Port Harcourt tant qu'on ne sait pas si cette  
guerre s'installe ou se termine. (*AMS* 295)

The phrase “coming or going” is based on the Igbo words *ibia* and *ina*. Although the translation does retain the meaning, it does not reflect the oral rhetoric of “coming or going” or *ibia* and *ina*, which could be literally translated into French as *va ou vient*. The translation enhances the source sentence with the use of a more standard style, the result of which, according to Berman, is “an annihilation of the oral rhetoric and formless polylogic of the source text” (Munday 222). The French version can be retranslated into English as “if the war is taking place or is coming to an end.”

Although the translator had insisted that “Je ne vais pas chercher en français une formulation naturelle... Je garde la maladresse et le calque parce que c'est le choix de l'auteure. Ce n'est pas du tout compliqué ”, and that she does preserve the so-called “maladresse” of the original, it is important to note that Adichie’s use of multiple variations of language is not necessarily “maladresse,” but is actually a function of the social context from which she writes, and it fulfills various sociocultural purposes. In a similar example, Pracontal translates the sentence “Master was a little bit crazy, he has spent too many years reading books overseas” (*HYS* 3) as “Master

était un peu fou; il avait passé trop d'années à lire des livres à l'étranger" (AMS 18). The Igbo phrase *Igu akwukwo* means "to study" and comes from the words *igu* (to read) and *akwukwo* (book). Though Adichie does know the English word *study*, she uses a direct translation from Igbo to English, while de Pracontal maintains it by also using the French verb *lire* (to read). Pracontal's translations show visible attempts at maintaining the source culture through the preservation of all elements of hybridity. Venuti has acknowledged that a translator eliminates, disarranges and replaces the source language text (14) and that this form of adherence to target language is inevitable, but Pracontal's general attitude to translation reflects an obligation to the target reader but mostly to the original text as a form of intercultural communication.

#### **6.4. Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*: Paratextual Analysis: Translator**

Serge Chauvin, the translator of *Les pêcheurs*, is a cinema critic and professor of English Literature at the Université Paris-X Nanterre who co-hosts the CICLAHO (groupe de recherche sur le cinéma classique hollywoodien et ses évolutions cinématographiques et télévisuelles). He collaborated with the magazine *Les inrockuptibles*, a weekly cultural magazine in France, and *Nouvelles Revue française*, a literary magazine, as a critic. As a professional translator, he has translated for major publishers such as Gallimard and Albin Michel, and later for Editions de l'Olivier, publisher of *Les pêcheurs*. Although he has been a longtime reader<sup>144</sup> for various publishers such as Gallimard and has translated works by different American and British authors, *Les pêcheurs* marked the first time he has translated an African novel or worked in African literature. Chauvin considers the work of translation as

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<sup>144</sup> As a reader, Chauvin would read English novels and recommend novels to French editors for translation.

un travail très intuitif, une question de rythme, d'impact immédiat des mots. Le parti pris de la traduction c'est, pour moi, de restituer dans un autre langage les émotions qu'on a ressenties soi-même à la lecture dans la langue première. (*Les traducteurs interprètes virtuoses*, interview with Nathalie Crom for *La Croix*)

Chauvin's engagement in translation is as creative as it is subjective. He seeks to re-create the feelings, impressions, and effects of reading the original. Since a text tells a thousand stories when mirrored against different readers, their sentiments, and worldviews, Chauvin's personal engagement with reading and translation suggests a commitment to create, through translation, a network of meanings that may sometimes be disassociated from the original: "Quitte, s'il le faut, à passer par « un léger éloignement avec l'original », voire même à « tordre le texte. On est amené, au fil d'une traduction, à faire une série de choix très empiriques" (*Crom*).

The textual analysis of *Les pêcheurs* includes several examples of the translator's personal voice showing through in the translation, perhaps in keeping with Chauvin's view of translation as a personal activity that does not necessarily require the participation of the author of the original. For him, the collusion or complicity that a translator has with the author is "une vision du monde à laquelle on est sensible ou pas." A translator is not compelled to work in collaboration with the writer but instead follows "toujours, au départ, un bonheur de lecture" (*Crom*). Even though Chauvin recognizes that a collaborative work is discretionary and that translation depicts more of the personal choices and preferences of the translator than it does of the original author, Chigozie Obioma, the author of *Les pêcheurs*, explained that Chauvin did send him a questionnaire. The content of the questionnaire is not known; however, this singular act undermined the translator's

afore-stated consideration of translation as a solitary act, thereby inviting the authorial voice into the work of translation.<sup>145</sup>

#### 6.4.1. Title and Front Cover

Set in the city of Akure in northern Nigeria, Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen* tells the story of four boys who take advantage of their father's absence to go fish in the forbidden Omi-Ala river. During one of these escapades, they meet a mad man named Abulu who prophesies that one of them would kill their elder brother.

The front cover of the translation, *Les pêcheurs*, includes only the title and the name of the author, with the name of the publisher in small letters. Later editions of *The Fishermen*,<sup>146</sup> by contrast, feature a list of awards the book has won and reviews from critics, scholars, and other writers, such as Eleanor Catton, winner of the 2013 Man Booker Prize. The first and second pages of the English version features selections of "Praise for Chigozie Obioma's book," while the front cover of the French version is followed by the title page, and then the name of the translator on the third page. By comparison, one of the covers of fellow Nigerian author Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Bêtes sans patrie*, published by Editions de l'Olivier, has the name of the translator, Alain Mabanckou, on the cover page.<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that the edition used in this study is not the original publication by ONE, a division of Pushkin Press, and French books do not typically display reviews as English language publications do. However, the French translation does feature Catton's review on its back cover, though the general absence of reviews and praises in the French edition is primarily a publishing decision. Olivier Cohen, founder of

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<sup>145</sup> The purpose of the questionnaire could be linked to his unfamiliarity with African literature and novels. It could be specific to the cultural elements in the original and may not be a constraint to the translator's decisions.

<sup>146</sup> The English edition used for this study was published by Back Bay Books in 2015, and the first publication does not include the list of awards.

<sup>147</sup> This decision probably stems from Mabanckou's reputation as an award-winning author.

Éditions de l'Olivier, justifies his company's decision to include as little text or as few images as possible as follows: «Un livre n'est pas un tableau qu'on met au mur. Il ne doit pas être esthétisant. Lorsque c'est trop chargé, trop compliqué, je trouve ça de mauvais goût, comme quelqu'un d'endimanché » (Pudlowski).



**Figure 21: Front covers of other novels by Editions de l'Olivier**

The cover illustration of *Les pêcheurs* shows a frontal view of a shirtless young African boy with hands spread wide, one foot on the ground, the other leg bent at the knee, and head tilted. The background consists of a round golden shape, which is assumed to be the sun since we can see the boy's shadow. The front cover of the source text shows four tangled fishing hooks, which ultimately represent the four brothers in the book and their twisted and entwined destinies. Although the cover image of the English text does relate to the title and the story, that of the French text seems detached. Publishers choose cover images that will make positive impressions on potential readers, regardless of the content of the work; in this case, the sparse text and imagery on the cover of *Les pêcheurs* were chosen for their visual clarity.

A more critical examination of the front cover image reveals the symbolism within these images in relation to the content of the novel as a whole. The original illustration chosen by Éditions de l'Olivier for the cover, Andy Bridge's "Carefree Man in Swimming Trunks With Arms Outstretched," does not include the sun in the background as the final cover image does, but merely shows the man with his arms stretched out and his facial features blurred:



Original Image by Bridge Front cover of the translation

English version

**Figure 22: Front covers of *The Fishermen* in original and translation**

Some of the keywords associated with Bridge's image include *dancing, shadow, adult, African ethnicity, celebration, enjoyment, exhilaration, one leg, one man, one person, standing, shirtless, chest, cheerful, young adult leisure activity, vacation, fun, and getting away from it all*. All of these can be associated with fishing, and thus with the novel's title, *The Fishermen*. The summary that appears on the back cover of the English text describes the death of Ikenna at the hands of his brothers, an event prophesied by the madman Abulu, as both tragic and redemptive. The cover image of the French text, however, seems to hide the tragedy of the text itself, substituting the tangled lines of the hooks on the English cover for a leisurely and exhilarating



image enhanced by the sun in the background. The cover design and title seem to contradict the tragic nature of the story, but at the same time inspire curiosity, as the back cover summary indicates:

Un jour de janvier 1996, dans un village du Nigeria, quatre frères profitent de l'absence de leur père pour pêcher au bord du fleuve interdit Omi-Ala. Le fou Abulu, qui les a vus, lance sur eux une terrible malédiction : L'ainé, Ikenna, mourra assassiné par l'un de ses frères. La prophétie bouleverse les esprits, et hante la famille jusqu'au dénouement tragique.

The boy in the image cannot be identified by facial features, which also prevents readers from defining emotion or personality, while the dark image creates a sense of hollowness that transcends the experience of fishing. Apart from the skin color of the boy in the image, there is nothing that associates the novel with African literature and culture. Instead, the image conforms to the publisher's standards as well as to the general norm in French publishing of simple cover designs, as Jean-Yves Mollier, a historian of publishing in France and author of *Edition, presse et pouvoir en France au XXe siècle* and *Où va le livre?* notes: "Cette sobriété des couvertures est en effet une marque de fabrique française. Il y a toujours eu une grande réticence de la part des auteurs français à voir leurs livres illustrés, déjà au XIXe siècle" (Pudlowski). Charlotte Pudlowski makes a similar observation in her article "Pourquoi en France les couvertures sont si sobres?" Where American publishers choose cover designs largely for commercial purposes, French publishers prioritize their image and associate certain colours with certain publishers, such as yellow for Grasset, blue for Stock, or white for Gallimard. The sparsity of images is connected to the French idea of literature as sacred text:

La sobriété des couvertures, en France, est encore le signe de l'importance donnée à la littérature. Les mots n'ont pas encore cédé aux images. Mais les illustrations amoindrissent les lettres sur les couvertures. Et l'importance de la littérature, dans l'espace public, s'amoindrit avec elles. (Pudlowski)

It is uncertain whether the minimalism of French book design was the reason why the map of Akure, the town in which Obioma's novel is set, was omitted from the French edition. There are neither glossaries nor footnotes to explain words in the many languages used in the novel, and the only note from the translator is an acknowledgement thanking a particular individual for his rereading of the translation, an illustration that the translator and translation do not necessarily and completely adhere to the original.

#### **6.4.2. Textual Analysis**

Like those of Achebe and Adichie, Obioma's style evidences Igbo oral and literary aesthetics. The novel's main theme of the destruction of family bonds serves as a metaphor for the effects of colonialism (see Sumner), with the madman Abulu, who is unrelated to the brothers but who sows discord with his prophecy, as a personification of the influence of colonialism on the native population. Rachael Sumner argues that Abulu personifies the self-destruction that is the result of the imposed personality of the "Nigerian" people, which the writer himself had acknowledged.<sup>148</sup> Abulu's intrusion and the subsequent fear and insecurity that seize the once close-knit family represent the destabilization and long years of disenchantment after colonization. Sumner argues that a

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<sup>148</sup> See Obioma, "Chigozie Obioma – Longlist Author Interview."

more overtly politicized reading of the character, [...] might also reveal their potential for destabilizing the linguistic and textual surface of the novel itself. For while written in English, *The Fishermen* is constantly subjected to interruptions from other languages or dialects – Igbo, Yoruba and pidgin – and from songs, curses, proverbs and prophecies, ensuring that it functions as a hybridized and generically porous text. (124)

Sumner notes that on the message or content level, Abulu “divides” and “destabilizes with his enraged outbursts,” while on the linguistic and textual levels, the interpolation of hybrid elements disrupts the accepted norms of the English-language novel. Obioma’s use of different languages within a single text and the seeming disruptions in the flow of the story draw the reader’s attention to the context from which the novel originates. Like other African novels that bring their native literary aesthetics to European languages, *The Fishermen* personalizes the language in which it is written so that it can express African linguistic and cultural experiences. Other features of Obioma’s text include unconventional English forms, calque or direct translations from oral discourse, repetitions, proverbs, and cultural references, all elements of hybridity that help to create a third space and a local identity in a novel written in English.

#### **6.4.3. Multilingualism and Local Colors**

*The Fishermen*, like many other Nigerian novels, incorporates various languages, such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, into its text, and Chauvin’s strategy as translator was to preserve the use of these local languages:

S. T.: Mother cried: “*Elu n’ala*-Heaven-and-earth, look at my hands and see that they are clean.” (*The Fishermen* 177)

T. T.: Notre mère s'écria : "*Elu n'ala*-Ciel-et-terre, regardez mes mains et voyez qu'elles sont pures" (*Les pêcheurs* 181)

S. T.: Ana eme ye eme - it isn't the norm, anywhere... (*The Fishermen* 179)

T. T.: Ana eme ye eme - ce n'est pas normal, nulle part... (*Les pêcheurs* 183)

The above examples are cases in which the meanings of vernacular phrases are explained or can be inferred from the surrounding sentences, a strategy known as "overt cushioning" (Zabus 351).

In the following examples, however, the meanings of vernacular phrases are not explained:

S. T.: "Ngwa, close your eyes and let us pray for Mama-Quickly!"  
(185)

T. T.: "Ngwa, fermez les yeux, on va prier pour maman, vite!"  
(188)

S. T.: The nurse returned and said, "Okay, you may all go in, Mr Agwu; ward thirty-two. *Chukwu chebe unu.*"

T. T.: L'infirmière revint et dit: "D'accord, monsieur Agwu, vous pouvez tous y aller ; aile 32. *Chukwu chebe unu.*"

Although French readers will most likely not know the meaning of the phrase *Chukwu chebe unu* (May God protect you all), this omission does not obstruct or hinder understanding in either French or English. However, translation may also involve the introduction of new meaning, as the example below demonstrates:

S. T.: She complained about them: *Ndi ajo ife* - These beastly, scaly, terrifying creatures. (176)

T. T.: Elle se plaignait de ces *Ndi Ajo ife*, ces créatures immondes, écailleuses, horribles. (180)

The French text could be retranslated into English as “She complained about these *Ndi ajo ife*,” with the demonstrative article “these” substituted for the pronoun “them.” *Ndi ajo ife* literally means “things or people that are bad,” and does not necessarily refer to the names of those creatures, as the translation may suggest.

In contrast to the preservation of vernacular language in the above examples, Chauvin’s translation of certain cultural concepts like “wrappa” (*The Fishermen* 15) as “châle” is very different from what is known as *wrappa*. The word *châle* does not denote a specifically Nigerian or African item of women’s clothing, but is a more general term for a shawl or any kind of wrap. Other French translators of Nigerian novels have translated the recurrent term *wrappa* with different words, such as *lappa*, while *châle* generalizes a particular cultural item and thus does not convey the exact intended meaning.

#### 6.4.4. Repetition and Additions

Repetition, a basic principle of oral tradition, is a linguistic marker of Igbo, and scholars such as McCarthy have noted that repetitions in African novels serve as rhythmic markers of origins in oral tradition (243). In *The Fishermen*, repetition represents oral discourse rooted in the linguistic culture of the author and the nine-year-old narrator, Benjamin, the third child of the family, who uses metaphor frequently. The story is narrated in the form of a folktale, bridging oral tradition and written language, and each chapter title is the name of an animal: “The Locust,” “The Falconer,” “The Sparrow,” “The Spiders,” “The Searchdog,” “The Leech,” “The Leviathan,”

“The Tadpole,” “The Roosters,” “The Moth,” and “The Egrets.” A review of the novel in the *African Review of Books* characterizes the narrative strategy as follows: “Ce roman rassemble l’art de la narration, le goût et la structure du récit oral, ce qui présente un texte où la poésie se déteint sur le réel, où le magique se faufile dans la psychologie des personnages et dans l’interprétation des événements de la vie publique.” (21). The use of repetitions is not only a cultural signifier of the novel as a postcolonial African text, but also re-creates the rhythmic structure of a folktale, as Mario Cloutier points out in his review of *Les pêcheurs*: “Non seulement il s’agit d’une répétition qui donne le rythme au récit qui se fait dans une manière de conte, le romancier emprunte aux codes du conte et son récit est empreint de l’innocence du narrateur, Ben, le troisième de la famille.” Some of the repetitions present in *The Fishermen* are “exact repetitions,” which refer to “the same words uttered in the same rhythmic pattern” (Tannen 54) while other are “paraphrases,” which refer to “similar ideas in different words” (Tannen 54), and both may also occur in quick succession in the same passage. The examples below demonstrate exact repetition:

S. T.: Obembe suggested that we throw stones into the woman’s compound *and* pray that they hit either her or one of her sons, *and* then take to our heels... (*The Fishermen* 43)

T. T.: Obembe proposa alors de lancer des pierres par-dessus la clôture en priant pour qu’elles frappent cette femme ou l’un de ses films, et de filer à toutes jambes... (*Les pêcheurs* 51)

S. T.: *And* they constantly taunted us *and* flogged us daily with verbal whip. (*The Fishermen* 8)

T. T. : Et ils ne cessaient de nous provoquer railleusement, de nous flageller chaque jour du fouet de leurs moqueries. (*Les pêcheurs* 14)

In these examples, the translation generally maintains the idiomatic diction of French by substituting the repeated words with different verb forms, such as present participle (“en priant”), or by completely reconstructing the syntactic structure. Instead of using the coordinating conjunction *and* to introduce the repetitions in the original, Chauvin uses the verb *de flageller* in order to provide a smoother flow in the target language. However, in other cases, such as the following example, repetition is completely omitted:

S. T.: ... stand up from that bed up from that bed of yours or else, you and I will *fit into the same trousers*. Ikenna was cowed by the threat; for mother used that expression “*fit into the same trousers*” only when her anger had reached its peak. (111)

T. T.: ... sors du lit tout de suite, sinon, toi et moi, on va *rentrer dans le même pantalon*. Ikenna fut ébranlé par la menace ; car notre mère n’employait cette expression que lorsque sa colère avait atteint son paroxysme. (117)

S. T.: Ikenna once said that he was not a foolish man for his *meekness*, but that he was *humble* because he was born again. (*The Fishermen* 253)

T. T.: Ikenna avait dit un jour que cette humble douceur n’était pas un signe de bêtise mais la marque d’un ‘évangéliste.’ (*Les pêcheurs* 254)

S. T.: *In the first week after their deaths*, I went about with the feeling that a fabric awning or an umbrella under which we’d sheltered all along was torn apart... (175)

T. T.: *La première semaine*, j'avais l'impression permanente que l'auvent ou le parapluie qui nous avaient toujours abrités s'étaient déchirés... (179)

The first example includes repetition of the phrase “fit into the same trousers,” though the French translation not only omits the repetitions but offers a more “rationalizing contraction” (Berman, “Translation Trials” 244): a restructuring of “sentences and the sequence of sentences, rearranging them according to a certain idea of discursive order” (Berman, “Translation Trials” 244). This of course, confirms the project of the translator who agrees on the need to twist or change the original in order to maintain the target language style and rhythm. Although this reconstruction is generally readable in French and even remains idiomatic in some places, the first example above eliminates the phrase “fit into the same trousers” and “humble” in the second example in order to minimize repetition. Likewise, in the last example, Chauvin’s translation removes the reference to the brothers’ deaths, since the context of the sentence already mentions this. Apart from the rewriting of the original in this manner, the translation of “born again” in the second example is highly questionable, as this biblical expression is Jesus’s response to Nicodemus in John 3: 2-7. Many French translations of the Bible use the phrase “nouveau-né” or “naître de nouveau,” while in most Francophone African countries, the phrase “born again” is usually translated as “être né de nouveau.”<sup>149</sup> Oddly, however, Chauvin’s translation does not use any of these, as translators of Anglophone African novels usually do, but instead translated “born again” as “évangéliste.”

The above examples demonstrate that Chauvin’s translation reads well in the target language thanks to the use of various stylistic features such as reordering of sentence structures, omission of repetitions, and sophisticated language and expressions. Chauvin reiterated in an interview

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<sup>149</sup> This comes from my discussions with Francophone Africans.



with Nathalie Crom that his “interventions se font essentiellement sur la langue d'arrivée, [la langue française] la raffermir, la resserrer, en renforcer le rythme.” For the translator, it is important to maintain the rhythm and idiomatic elements of the French language. The examples discussed below are neither culturally specific nor repeated, but illustrate the linguistic, syntactic, and lexical richness that Chauvin endorsed in his translation. Out of a desire to maintain linguistic and idiomatic correctness, Chauvin sometimes adds words or rewrites sentences in order to make the meanings clearer:

S. T.: Father and Mother held whispering consultations like shrine priests. (*The Fishermen* 3)

T. T.: Père et mère conférèrent à voix basse comme des grands prêtres *devant l'autel*. (*Les pêcheurs* 11)

S. T.: Neither of them said a word to my brothers and me, and we did not ask. (*The Fishermen* 3)

T. T.: Ni elle ni lui n'adressa un mot à mes frères ou à moi, et nous n'*osions* pas demander. (*Les pêcheurs* 11)

The first example includes a prepositional phrase, “devant l'autel” (in front of the altar), which is absent in the original. The consultation with the shrine priest is a cultural reference: in a ritual consultation, the priest confers with an oracle in whispering tones, normally before the altar. The addition of the phrase “before the altar” makes this reference more understandable to readers who are not familiar with the practice. In the second example, “we did not ask” is translated as “we did not *dare* to ask,” which clarifies the intended meaning, that the children were afraid of

their parents and did not (dare to) ask them questions out of fear. Even so, the message is clear with or without the addition of the word *oser* (to dare).

S. T.: ... I don't want you *boys* to give your mother any troubles. (*The Fishermen* 5)

T. T.: ... je ne veux pas, *mes fils*, que vous causiez du souci à votre mère. (*Les pêcheurs* 13)

S. T.: I know him, I know *Eme*. (*The Fishermen* 24)

T. T. : Oh je le connais, je connais *mon Eme*. (*Les pêcheurs* 33)

The first example includes an addition of the possessive “my,” so that the sentence would be retranslated as “My sons, I don't want you to give your mother any troubles.” The affectionate tone introduced in the translation is absent in the original, and the phrase “you boys” could also have been translated as “vous les garçons,” though here the father is speaking to his sons. The original passage is more of a warning to the boys than the tender paternal counsel suggested in the translation. In another example below, there is an addition of “my” to the name “Eme,” suggesting fondness and affection. The additions can also be in the form of clarification for the purposes of giving meaning or explicating the original, as seen in the examples below.

S. T.: For soon, after the spiders left, Mother began to hear voices from the edge. (*The Fishermen* 176)

T. T.: En effet, après le départ des araignées, notre mère se mit à entendre des voix venues des limbes, *aux limites de la raison*. (*Les pêcheurs* 180)

S. T.: “How can a city woman be this superstitious?” ... “Just how, *my friend?*” (*The Fishermen* 179)

T. T.: “Mais comment une femme de la ville peut être aussi superstitieuse ? ...  
Comment? *Tu peux me le dire, mon amie?*” (*Les pêcheurs* 183)

S. T.: “Leave me, leave me, let me watch the shiny white cows,” she shouted as they struggled. (*The Fishermen* 179)

T. T. : « Laisse-moi, laisse-moi tranquille, laisse-moi regarder *les vaches blanches comme le jour*, criait –elle en se débattant. » (*Les pêcheurs* 185)

These examples contain manipulations of the source text in order to adhere to the linguistic and contextual choices outside the source text. The original text in the second example reads: “just how my friend?” A back translation of the French version would read, “how, could you tell me how, my friend?” Translations normally tend to read well and be longer than the original, but these significant supplementations and elucidations seem to appropriate or adopt the source text. The use of simile or comparison in the last example, which is not present in the original, reinforces Chauvin’s desire for clarity in the translation. The phrase “shiny as a day” introduces a foreign element, as “shiny” in Igbo usually refers to the sun or the stars, as in the expression ‘*imuke di ka anyawu*, which means “shiny as the stars.” Chauvin’s comparison to ‘day’ may be decontextualized in consideration of the source culture. Not only did the translation enrich the source text with additional information, but this new information may be detached from its source context. These choices confirm Chauvin’s admission that he would “alter or twist the original” if need be, but also indicate a systematism in this approach. These choices present the

translator as a critic of the text in that he acts *analytically* to interpret the source text.<sup>150</sup> He reads the text and makes efforts to rationalize and “reexplain” the text to the target audience in order to ensure comprehension and clarity.

### **6.5. Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*: Paratextual Analysis: Title and Front Page**

*I Do Not Come to You by Chance* was translated by Séverine Quelet as *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard*. The title of this novel comes from the scam emails of 419ers<sup>151</sup> who pretend to be someone else in order to dupe foreigners out of their money. The expression “I do not come to you by chance” convinces the potential victims that being contacted is not an accident, and suggests “to their readers that they are specially selected to take advantage of a rare opportunity” (Armstrong Coffey 100). It thus acts as an initiator in the complex process of exchanges between the scammers and their victims, until the person finally falls prey to the scammers and delivers their money to them. Nwaubani’s novel is the story of Kingsley, a first-class graduate in Chemical Engineering who is pushed into the world of 419 scams as a result of his unemployment and his family’s financial problems.

In the source text, the typographic design adopts a slanting shape that resembles italics. Although this format is not used in the French version, the title is translated literally, which is important because it is a reference to the opening sentence of the scam email. In the French version, the

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<sup>150</sup> Kathy Mezei has also argued that a translation is an act of criticism.

<sup>151</sup> The name 419 comes from the penal code of the antifraud section of Nigeria’s criminal code. It is based on the idea that the scam artist has come across a large amount of money that they need your help (Western bank accounts and citizenship) to access. In return, the bankers or deposed Nigerian royalty will reward you for your assistance with much more than your fair share. See <http://fictionwritersreview.com/review/i-do-not-come-to-you-by-chance-by-adaobi-tricia-nwaubani/>

same sentence, “*Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard,*” is printed on the back cover as an introduction to an email to a potential reader of the novel. The last paragraph of the email reads: “Mon ami/e, je vous le demande, prenez le temps de me lire et de découvrir mon histoire. Je suis sûr qu’elle ne manquera pas de vous amuser, et peut être même, parfois, de vous émouvoir....” This addition on the back cover provides additional information about the title but does not divulge the entire story. This was the choice of the French publisher Presses de la cité, as the English edition does not include the message on the back cover.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike the covers of other four novels studied above, the covers of the English and French versions of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* include the same image of shoes of different colours. As I had been unable to reach the publisher or the translator, I have no information on the reasons for this choice of image.



**Figure 23: Front covers of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* and its translation**

<sup>152</sup> An unidentified edition of the English novel has a (supposed) email on the back cover, but the content is different, and the message does not start with “I do not come to you by chance.”

As part of the text, the front cover image is conceived as a provider of visual information about the text. Its aesthetic attraction lies in its capability to incite the attention of a reader. The French publisher's decision to keep the source text's front cover image may be understood as a way of maintaining the originality of the text. Even though there is some variation in terms of the background image, the French publisher retained the image of shoes of different colours that appeared on the original cover. The shoes symbolize the many aspects of the personality and wealth exhibited by Boniface, alias Cash Daddy, who is the master and chief 419er in the novel. Through Cash Daddy, who is also the cousin of the protagonist Kingsley, Nwaubani reflects stigmatic views on affluence and materialism in opposition to education and poverty. Shoes represent life, perspective, and experience, as typified in the expression "to step into the shoes of others," and designer shoes are symbols of wealth and success. According to Jacob Nacht, shoes symbolize earthliness, power, and possession. Among the appearance of shoes in the novel are the Gucci shoes that symbolize the betrayal of Kingsley by his girlfriend Ola when the designer shoes she wears confirm that she has been having an affair with a rich man. Because their families were poor and they were both students, it was unlikely that Kingsley or Ola could afford such shoes. Ola's Gucci shoes signify a delineator and a divider of economic and social class. The meeting between Kingsley and Cash Daddy is another portrayal of the symbolic importance of shoes. When Kingsley went for the first time to meet Cash Daddy, the 419-mogul reacted rather strangely and a little too serious on seeing him. Even before receiving him and asking for the purpose of his visit, Cash Daddy demanded that his body guards get rid of the tattered shoes that Kingsley was wearing:

Aaaaargh! [...] What is that on your legs? [...]. What's that you're wearing on your legs?  
[...] Are those shoes? I hope you didn't tell any of the people outside that you're my

brother? [...] I just hope you didn't [...] Protocol Officer! Get this man out of here! [...] Take this man away. Make sure he's wearing new shoes before bringing him back. Go! (113-114)

It was only after the bodyguard, Protocol Officer, took Kingsley to the shop and bought him a new pair of designer shoes, which he puts on before going back to Cash Daddy's house, that the latter received him well. The symbolism of the shoe accentuates the gap between poverty and wealth, which is a main theme of the novel. Nwabuni herself acknowledged this theme when she explained, "in Nigeria you're either somebody or nobody" (Nwabuni, "In Nigeria"). The literal translation of the title of the novel into French, "*Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard*" and the maintenance of the original image in French make both the title and front cover "attractive, allusive, suggestive ... and [...] bear significant relation to the original" (Newmark 56).<sup>153</sup> They conform to the imagery of the original and evoke the same intended message. Despite the lack of direct information as to why the translator and publisher decided to keep the same title and cover image, this choice does ensure continuity between the title and the content. As noted above in the discussion of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, translators suggest titles to the publishers, who may then accept, modify, or reject them. In this case, the title of Nwabuni's novel suggests a manifestation of the position, project, and horizon of its French translator which sought to maintain the original.

### 6.5.1. Translator

The translator of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, Séverine Quelet, studied English and obtained a Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées (D.E.S.S.) in "traduction editoriale." She

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<sup>153</sup> Though Newmark referred only to titles, here I am using his comment with regard to both titles and cover images.

was an intern in publishing houses and translates works from many genres including feminist, historical, or detective novels. She has translated works by the British author Ruth Ware and the American authors Yeonmi Park and Linda Castillo, and has worked with various publishers such as Archipel, Fleuve noir, Les Escales, Pocket, Éditions Kéro, Rivages, and Pion, however, Nwaubani novel is the only African text she has translated. In an interview with Morgane Labrousse, she explained that translation is “un métier solitaire, incertain, exigeant, fantasmé mais dénigré. Et tellement enrichissant. Chaque style est différent ; chaque texte est différent et présente des complexités propres à son genre.” Even though she recognizes the uniqueness of a given text and the challenges and difficulties that it presents, she admitted like the translator of *Obioma*, that she rarely contacts her authors during the translation process, and had only done so once prior to her interview with Larousse; the writer happily answered her questions. This reinforces her point of view that translation is a solitary profession in which the translator makes choices that are open to criticism. She explains her sense of responsibility and ownership as a translator as follows: “Le traducteur est un auteur qui passe les mots d'un autre auteur. J'envisage souvent le traducteur comme un auteur frustré, un amoureux des mots qui se plaît à raconter des histoires sans pour autant qu'il sache les inventer.” Because she is not the creator of the stories she translates, she acknowledges the importance of limiting her manipulation of the text in order to respect the author’s rights as its creator. At the same time, while the writer of the original thinks about the audience for whom he/she writes, the translator should also bear in mind the target reader and the target language during the translation process:

De respecter l'auteur, oui, mais de ne pas oublier son lecteur. S'il faut saisir les nuances et subtilités de la langue source, en suivre les évolutions, en comprendre l'environnement, pour bien traduire il faut surtout une maîtrise parfaite de la langue cible - du français. Une



bonne traduction, c'est une traduction qui ne se sent pas. A celui ou celle qui veut traduire en français, je conseillerai de lire. Beaucoup. En français. De tout.

Quelet's worldview as a translator may explain in part her translation of Nwaubani's novel's title into French. Though *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard* does not include either a preface or a postface, Quelet's comments demonstrate her respect for the original author of the text and her desire to maintain that respect in translation, especially the author's style and use of multilingualism.

### 6.5.3. Textual Analysis : Instances of Multilingualism

Like the three Nigerian novels discussed above, *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard* uses elements of hybridity such as multilingualism, cultural references, transliterations, and a few proverbs. Some of the characters in the novel, such as Cash Daddy, Protocol Officer, World Bank, and the servants, have little or no education and speak pidgin English which the writer illustrated in the novel as well. This does not suggest, however, that Nigerian pidgin is specifically spoken by the uneducated. Nigerian pidgin is almost a lingua franca that is used by both the literate and illiterate population (Bamiro 8) and in various contexts of communication, such as among university students, as exemplified in the conversation between Kingsley and his friends:

S.T.: Make una comme see o, Graveyard don begin dey use perfume. (*I Do Not Come* 29)

T. T.: Hee, venez voi', tous o! Tombeau s'met du pa'fum, maintenant! (*Je ne viens pas* 41)

S. T.: Oga abeg no kill am, abeg no kill am! (*I Do Not Come* 377)

T. T.: Oga, prière pas tuer lui ! prière pas tuer lui ! (*Je ne viens pas* 433)

This example includes an obvious attempt to use “français petit nègre” or “français tirailleur” to replace the pidgin. Français petit nègre is a pidgin French that was a common language between West African soldiers who fought for France and their White colonial officers during the two world wars. Some of the characteristics of the language is the use of infinitive for the present and future tenses and for all verbs; negation is characterized by the word “pas” generally placed after the verb (lui partir pas); no genders and numbers. Other instances of language shift in Nwaubani’s novel which depict an incorrect use of English can be observed in the following examples:

S. T.: Mama Kingsley, sorry, Ma. I am put off the fire for the kerosene stove by the time you call and I doesn’t heard you. (*I Do Not Come* 17)

T. T.: Mama Kingsley, désolée, Ma, Moi, J’êteins le feu de la cuisinière kérosène quand toi appeler, Moi j’ai pas entendu toi. (*Je ne viens pas* 27)

S. T.: Bro. Kingsley, are you went far away or should we kept your breakfast for you by the time you came back? (*I Do Not Come* 24)

T. T.: Frère Kingsley, avais-tu sortir loin où nous gardons petit déjeuner pour toi quand tu es revenue ? (*Je ne viens pas* 35)

In the above examples, Quelet’s translation retains Nwaubani’s ‘incorrect’ English used by Kingsley’s servant, illustrating the social functions of the language.

#### **6.5.4. Vernaculars and Cultural References**

Most of the cases of vernacular words and phrases in the novel remain unchanged in the translation. Some examples include “opara” (25); “mugu” (230); “isiagu” (132); “gwongworos”

(168); and “tokunbo” (373). Cultural items mentioned in both the original and the translation include “ukazi leaves” translated as “feuilles d’ukazi” or “koboko whip” (18) translated as “koboko-un fouet” (29). Longer sentences in Igbo such as “O dighi onye dika nna anyi Cash daddy, onye chineke nyere anyi gozie anyi” (428) were left intact in the translation. In general, Quelet does not use footnotes, except for an explanation of the acronym NEPA, which stands for National Electric Power Authority, but which has also been jokingly redefined as “Never Expect Power Always” (78) due to the erratic distribution of electricity in Nigeria. Though Quelet does not use the humorous redefinition directly in the text, she does include a footnote to explain it in French.

*Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard* includes several examples of cultural references that have been questionably translated, such as “egusi soup” translated as “soupe d’egusi” when, as previously noted, Nigerian soup is more of a sauce and therefore is probably more accurately translated as “ragout.” Similarly, Quelet translates “Maggi cubes” (*I Do Not Come* 17) as “cubes de bouillon” (*Je ne viens pas* 25). Though this is technically correct because it is a “bouillon,” it does leave out the brand name “Maggi,” a commonly used brand in Nigeria. Quelet acknowledges the importance of understanding the sociocultural environment of the source text in a translation, but it is also important to consider the target audience, and this may explain why she uses the generic name “cubes de bouillon” without the brand name. A similar translation choice that may be explained by the translator’s worldview occurs in the figurative example below:

S. T.: Hello, the man whose lenses were as thick as the bottom of a Coke bottle would say. (*I Do Not Come* 19)

T. T.: Bonjour, disait le garçon aux lunettes en cul de bouteille. (*Je ne viens pas* 40)

As in the previous example, the translation omits the reference to a particular type of bottle, since it names a specific product. Though the French translation does not specifically mention Coke bottles, it does use the more generic “garçon aux lunettes en cul de bouteille,” which not only conveys the same meaning but also takes the same tone as the original. The translation also uses a different figure of speech than the original: rather than a simile, it uses a French language idiomatic expression that encompasses the “extended or associative meanings [as in the case of figurative language] i.e. the use of language in an imaginative manner, to elaborate a thesis or proposition and also to appeal to the emotions of the reader or listener” (Yeibo 181).

Other cases of additions or substitutions include the translation of “self-employed evangelists” (*I Do Not Come* 26) as “ces empêcheurs de dormir en rond” (*Je ne viens pas* 37), which uses a humorous French expression in place of the English word “evangelists.” Other examples are listed below:

S. T.: ...smiling like a portrait (*I Do Not Come* 30)

T. T.: ...un sourire plaqué sur mon visage comme pour *une photo de famille* (*Je ne viens pas* 42).

S. T.: ... I hardly ever spoke whenever I was reading ... (*I Do Not Come* 29)

T. T : ...Je prononce à *peine trois mots* chaque fois que j’étais plongé dans un livre...( *Je ne viens pas* 40)

### 6.5.6. Transliterations

Both Nwaubani’s original and Quelet’s translation include several examples of direct translations from Igbo, such as “know too much book” (*I Do Not Come* 2), which is translated as “trop connaître les livres” (*Je ne viens pas* 10), and others listed below:

S. T.: This boy, your head is not correct. (323)

T. T.: Mon garçon, ta tête ne fonctionne pas bien. (372)

S. T.: Let another one not happen. (8)

T. T.: qu'un autre ne survienne pas. (17)

Other cases can be seen in names:

S. T.: death please (*I Do Not Come 8*)

T. T.: mort, fais-moi grâce. (*Je ne viens pas 17*)

S. T.: my own should not lack from me (*I Do Not Come 9*)

T. T. : “je ne ferai défaut aux miens” (*Je ne viens pas 17*)

S. T.: My name should not get lost (*I Do Not Come 8*)

T. T.: Mon nom ne sera pas perdu (*Je ne viens pas 17*)

According to Louisa Egbunike, “within Igbo culture, an individual’s name serves as a form of incantation or prayer which is repeated each time that person is called. The importance of naming is entwined with the belief in the power of the spoken word, as to repeatedly enunciate an intention is to conceivably usher it into being” (16). These examples show that Quelet sometimes literally translates the Igbo names into French, and sometimes also includes additional information. Some cases seem more like explanations than proper names, such as “death please” translated into French as “mort, fais-moi grâce” rather than Nwaubani’s literal

translation from the Igbo *Onwu* (death) *biko* (please), which would literally translate into French as “mort s’il te plaît.” Likewise, Quelet translates “your head is not correct” as “ta tête ne fonctionne pas” rather than a possible “ta tête n’est pas bonne” or “ta tête n’est pas correcte.” Despite the changes in phrasing, the translations do convey the meaning of the originals. *Je ne viens pas à vous par hasard* attempts to respect Nwaubani’s original choices, but at the same time is also conscious of its target readers, especially with regard to rewriting or ‘correcting’ transliterations or using idioms from the target language to express meanings from the source culture.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

This chapter examines instances of hybridity in translations of Nigerian novels in order to discern patterns in those translations. Hybridity is rooted in both language and culture, and in these cases is based on or inspired by the cultures and languages of Nigeria and embedded in each author’s style. Through an identification of how these elements manifest themselves in a given author’s style, this chapter explores how translators deal with the instances of hybridity identified in their translations.

This discussion primarily shows that French translators do not treat Nigerian texts as particular cases despite the significant presence of these polarizing elements. They translate these texts according to their worldviews, the principles and norms that guide the translation, and the production of literature in the target culture. As a result, and as is the case with all translations, something is preserved and lost in translation: elements of hybridity are frequently preserved, especially examples of multilingualism. Even though each translator resorts to different strategies to express the variations in the languages used in a given work, and each translation is distinct from the others, the translators do, for the most part, retain the linguistic variations of the

original, particularly in translating vernacular expressions, pidgin and incorrect English. The translators often reproduced pidgin or “broken” English with “français petit nègre” or “français de rue” (de Pracontal) (street French), or used grammatically unconventional French in order to distinguish between standard French and poorly spoken or written English. Although the translators do make conscious efforts to be as faithful as possible to the original, there are some cases in which cultural references and oral styles are lost or minimized in the translations due to standardization, such as in the use of more ‘sophisticated’ language rather than the repetitions originating in oral tradition, which are influenced by the worldview and choices of the translators.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This project examined the processes of selection of Nigerian texts for French translation, the agents involved in the translation and publishing, such as translators, publishers, and writers, and the reception of translations.

The study of the Nigerian literary polysystem in the first part of this study shows the influence of various linguistic and ethnic factors on Nigerian literature. The unequal position of subsystems of literature existing within the country affects and shapes the visibility and non-visibility of certain works in French translation. In the field of Nigerian literature, works written in English exist at the centre of the polysystem, with those in indigenous languages on the periphery; this power relationship is demonstrated by the fact that most Nigerian literature translated into French was originally written in English. In general, Nigerian writers tend to over-rely on Western modes of literary legitimization as the criteria for local and international visibility, because there is little or no federal or institutional support for literature or translation in Nigeria. Literature and translation are not prioritized as cultural products or as part of cultural diplomacy, which accounts for the lack of federal policies to guide the translation or exportation of literature as a product of image building and soft power. This observation becomes more pertinent when one considers that while the translation of Nigerian literary texts into French is evolving and progressing, there are no Nigerian agents or institutions involved in this process. As a consequence, despite the rich facets of its literature and the potential opportunity of using literature as a tool for soft power, the selection of Nigerian literary texts to be translated is based on criteria that are determined by the French publishers. Publishers select texts for translation



according to their (the texts') position in the Anglophone literary world. In other words, the appreciation of Nigerian literature, which has yet to be completely legitimized and canonized in its local literary space, by publishers in a major literary space such as France is based on its presence in other literary spaces such as America and Britain. Some of the phenomena observed from the data and interviews in this project include:

- Translation of works that have received literary awards;
- The dominance of works written by “Afropolitains” in translation;
- Translation of works published by international publishers in the US or the UK;
- Recent translations of women writers as they are recognized internationally;
- The relative invisibility of writers who write, publish, and reside in Nigeria.

Accordingly, if most of the recognized works of Nigerian literature in English are published abroad, they are easily discovered, translated, and published by French agents and publishers.

This phenomenon is also observed in other Anglophone African literatures, such as that of South Africa, which is dominated by “the white quartet” (Richard, *Translation*) or by white authors in general. Although Nigeria does not have a corresponding “white quartet,” it does select works to be translated according to Western standards.

The second part of this thesis focused on the case studies of four authors, their publishers and translators, and their reception in France. In addition to cataloguing the involvement of both major and minor French publishers in the publication of Nigerian texts, this study shows that their commitments depend on the objectives, ideologies, and norms within and outside the publishing house. For example, prestigious publishers such as Gallimard tend to publish only well-known authors such as Adichie. Gallimard's standards attest not only to its reputation as a publisher of popular authors, but also to its reinforcement of the selection criteria based on target

culture goals. Nonetheless, French publishers such as Actes Sud are important participants in the translation and publication of Nigerian literature in France. Actes Sud's collection of African literature, "Lettres Africaines," includes sixteen Nigerian novels, most notably the retranslation of a Nigerian novel into French, Pierre Girard's translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as *Tout s'effondre*. Bernard Magnier, editor of "Lettres Africains," pointed out in an interview that his company seeks to introduce more African writers in general into the once-insular French literary system regardless of those writers' status. In addition to increasing the range and diversity of Nigerian literature available in the target culture, Magnier has "attempted to innovate" (Milton and Bandia 2) by hiring African translators to translate a Nigerian novel in order to ensure that the source text's distinctive linguistic style is preserved. This choice goes against the typical norm of French publication, which generally sees African novels translated by French translators. These developments are important and significant when we consider the marginal nature of Nigerian literature within a major literary system in which writers from cultural peripheries struggle for visibility. Some of the writers studied in this thesis, such as Adichie and Obioma, have visited France to promote their works. They have been featured in French literary journals and events, reviewed in print and online journals, and even included in *agrégation d'anglais*. Regardless of these advancements, Nigerian literature cannot yet be said to exist as a system on its own in the French cultural system, as it is still currently accorded the same status as African Francophone literature in some bookstores. Similar to the relative absence of Francophone works in their reviews, two of literary magazines examined in this study rarely feature African literary texts in French translation. With a few exceptions, the selection, publication, and dissemination of Nigerian literature in French are subject to policies and politics existing in the target cultural system. Paratextual analysis demonstrates this; for example,

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* was translated as *L'autre moitié du soleil*, which omits the original's references to Biafra. Covers images tend to adhere to publishers' policies. This choice is governed by the target culture commercial tastes.

In its textual analysis of the selected novels, this study draws attention to the various methods translators use to convey an individual author's styles and idiosyncrasies as they are exemplified in hybridity. Explaining the challenges of translating elements of hybridity in postcolonial African novel, Maria Tymoczko notes that the translator "translates them from his understanding of the surface meaning, omits them completely, picks some equivalent in the target culture, adds an explanatory note or an explicit explanation, leaves the word untranslated, etc." (25). Similarly, the translators of the Nigerian novels import untranslated vernaculars, preserve or suppress oral stylistic elements in the original, and occasionally use explanatory notes. These choices are eclectic because they alternate between maintaining "naturalness" (Low 192) with the target culture and "externalizing" (Adejumobi 179) the translation, concepts that are commonly known as "domestication" or "foreignization." The act of translating cultural elements while respecting the source culture in general is what Lawrence Venuti calls foreignization and a domesticated text overlooks the elements of the source culture. A "naturalized" or domesticated text adopts the norms and conventions of the target language/culture and uses them to replace any trace of foreignness in a text. African writers such as Achebe, Adichie, Obioma, and Nwabunni maintain African culture by using the European language in a unique way so as to enhance local colour. A domestication of such work entails the loss of devices and styles that make the language unique. Specific traces of Igbo oral culture are assimilated into the linguistic system of the French target language, thus giving a different representation of the source language and culture. According to Antoine Berman, such a translation "winds up ridiculing the

original” (294) and runs the risks of not being a means or a product of intercultural communication. However, one of the most obvious way to foreignize a translation is to leave in or add a few phrases in the source language (Apter and Herman 34). Therefore, the translators’ preservation of the vernacular in the novels studied here is a significant acknowledgement of the postcolonial authors’ affirmation of identity and preservation of culture. The combination of domestication and foreignization in these translations shows the translators’ efforts at producing texts that are readable, understandable, and familiar without completely eradicating the source culture. Such an endeavour foregrounds Bandia’s suggestions that a translated text should neither be completely domesticated nor completely foreignized, since “the target culture is supposed to be receptive of the source culture and the receiving culture is supposed to mark its presence in the text” (*Translation as Reparation* 147).

The publication of Nigerian literature in general may have been determined in some ways by the target culture norms, especially in terms of selection of works to be translated, however, the eclectic choices of the translated texts are neither entirely repressive nor stifling.

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**Appendix 1: Translated Nigerian literature from 2010-2016**

| Author<br>Novel title   | French<br>translation  | Translator              | Year of pub-<br>original<br>Publisher-<br>original   | Publisher -<br>FRENCH  | Year<br>of<br>pub.<br>Frenc<br>h |
|---|--|-------------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Christopher<br>Abani<br>Becoming<br>Abigail.                      | Le corps<br>rebelle<br>d'Abigail<br>Tansi                        | Anne Wicke              | 2006: New<br>York :<br>Akashic                       | Paris : Albin<br>Michel ; series<br>; les grandes<br>traductions | 2010                             |
| Ben Okri  | Tales of<br>Freedom  | Contes de<br>Liberte    | London,<br>Rider, 2009                               | Pari: Bourgois   | 2010                             |
| Adaobi Tricia<br>Nwabuani<br>I Do not<br>Come to You<br>by Chance | Je ne viens<br>pas à vous<br>par hazard.                         | Séverine<br>Quelet      | 2009 UK:<br>Weidenfeld<br>and Nicolson               | Paris: Presses<br>de la Cité                                     | 2011                             |
| Christopher<br>Abani<br>Song for<br>Night                         | Comptine<br>pour<br>l'enfant-<br>soldat                          | Anne Wicke              | 2007<br>New York :<br>Akashic                        | Paris : Albin<br>Michel  | 2011                             |
| Helen<br>Oyeyemi<br>White is for<br>Witching                      | Le Blanc va<br>aux<br>sorcières                                  | Guillaume<br>Villeneuve | 2009<br>New York :<br>Nan A.<br>Talese/Doubl<br>eday | Paris: Galaade<br>Editions                                       | 2011                             |
| Sefi Atta<br>Swallow  | Avale  | Charlotte<br>Wuillez    | 2010<br>Massachusett<br>s: USA.<br>Interlink         | Arles: Actes<br>Sud,   | 2011                             |
| Pita Nwana<br>Omenuko   | Omenuko,<br>ou, Le<br>repentir<br>d'un<br>marchand<br>d'esclaves | Francoise<br>Ugochukwu  | 1933<br>London:<br>Faber &<br>Faber                  | Karthala :<br>Series : Lettres<br>du sud                         | 2011                             |
| Sefi Atta<br>News From<br>Home                                    | Nouvelles<br>du pays   | Charlotte<br>Wuillez    | 2010<br>Massachusett<br>s: USA.<br>Interlink         | Arles : Actes<br>Sud : Series :<br>Lettres<br>Africaine s        | 2012                             |

|   |   |                                      |   |   |      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|------|
| Noo Saro-Wiwa<br>Looking for Transwonderland : Travels in Nigeria | Transwonderland.<br>Retour au Nigeria.            | Françoise Pertat                     | 2012<br>Berkeley, CA : Soft Skull Press | Paris: Hoëbeke                              | 2013 |
| Nnedi Okoroafor<br>Who fears Death                                | Qui a peur de la mort                             | Laurent PHILIBERT-CAILLAT            | 2011                                    | Paris : Panini Books, collectif :Eclipse    | 2013 |
| Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie<br>The Thing Around Your Neck            | Autour de ton cou : nouvelles                     | Mona de Pracontal                    | 2009<br>Lagos:Farafina                  | Paris: Gallimard                            | 2013 |
| Igoni Barrett<br>Love is power or something like that             | Love is power, ou quelque chose comme ça          | Sika Fakambi                         | 2013<br>London:Chatto et Windus         | Paris:Zulma                                 | 2013 |
| Chinua Achebe<br>Things Fall Apart                                | Le monde s'effondre<br>Tout s'effondre            | Michel Ligny<br>Pierre Girard        | 1958<br>London: Heinemann               | Paris, Présence Africaine. Arles: Actes Sud | 2013 |
| Sefi Atta<br>A Bit of a Difference                                | L'ombre d'une différence                          | Charlotte Woillez                    | 2013<br>Massachusetts: USA. Interlink   | Carouge: Zoé                                | 2014 |
| Helon Habila<br>Oil on Water                                      | Du pétrole sur l'eau: roman                       | Elise Argaud                         | 2011<br>New York: W.W. Norton & Co      | Arles: Actes Sud Seris Lettres africaines   | 2014 |
| Chinelo Okparanta<br>Happiness like water                         | le bonheur comme l'eau                            | Mathilde Fontanet                    | 2013<br>Boston: Mariner/Houghton        | Carouge Genève: Zoé                         | 2015 |
| Chimamanda Adichie  | Nous sommes des féministes suivi de Les marieuses | Mona de Pracontal & Sylvie Schneiter | 2015<br>New York: Anchor Books          | Paris: Gallimard                            | 2015 |
| Gabriel Gbadamosi<br>Vauxhall                                     | Vauxhall  | Elisabeth Gilles                     | 2013<br>Telegram Books                  | Carouge-Genève : Editions Zoé               | 2016 |



|  |                                       |                      |                                      |                              |      |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------|
| Chigozie Obioma<br>The Fishermen                       | Les pecheurs                          | Serge Chauvin        | 2015<br>New York: Litte Brown and Co | Paris: Editions de l'Olivier | 2016 |
| Helen Oyeyemi<br>Boy Snow Bird                         | Boy Snow Bird                         | Guillaume Villeneuve | 2014                                 | Paris: Galaade Editions      | 2016 |
| Lola Shoneyin<br>The Secret lives of Baba Segi's wives | Baba Segi, ses épouses, leurs secrets | Isabelle Roy         | London :The Serpent Tail             | Arles : Actes Sud            | 2016 |
| Leye Adenle<br>Lagos Lady                              | Lagos Lady                            | David Fauquemberg    |                                      | Éditions Métailié            | 2016 |

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions: Questions for French Editors

The general purpose of the interview is to understand how Nigerian texts are selected, translated, marketed and received:

- i. Comment avez-vous fait le choix de publier des romans nigériens en français ? Qui a fait ce choix et quelles sont les conditions qui régissent ce choix ? Si c'est par recommandation, qui fait ces recommandations ?
- ii. Prenez-vous en considération le statut de l'auteur et le contenu du livre avant de publier le roman nigérien ? Y a-t-il un comité de lecture ? Qu'est-ce qu'il considère ?
  - a. Spécifiquement, pourriez-vous me parler de... (nom du roman)
- iii. Qui sont les autres acteurs impliqués directement ou indirectement dans la publication de ce roman nigérien ? Acteurs nigériens et/ou français ?
- iv. Est-ce le processus de traduction et de publication de l'œuvre nigérienne différent ou spécifique de sa manière ?
  - a. Est-ce difficile d'obtenir le copyright ?
  - b. En quoi se différencie le processus de la publication des autres traductions ?
- v. Est-ce que vous travaillez en partenariat avec les maisons d'édition d'Afrique ?
  - a. Une sorte de coédition entre la France et le Nigeria ?
- vi. Est-ce que des subventions ou bourses existent pour cette traduction ?
  - a. Est-ce que vous avez obtenu de l'aide financière pour la traduction et la publication du livre ?
  - b. De la part de qui ? Gouvernement, individus, des aides françaises pour la publication des œuvres étrangères
- vii. Y a-t-il des considérations ou des critères à suivre afin de choisir un traducteur ? Est-ce que vous avez cherché par exemple un traducteur qui connaît la culture africaine ?
- viii. J'ai remarqué que... (nom du roman) par exemple, se vend au rayon de « littérature africaine francophone » dans certaines librairies en France, voyez-vous une sorte

d'interconnexion/imbrication entre la traduction française des textes nigériens et les autres textes d'Afrique francophone ?

- ix. À votre connaissance, est-ce qu'un livre nigérien a été rejeté par la maison d'édition ?
  - a. Pour quelle raison ?
  
- x. Seriez-vous prêt à publier par exemple plus de femmes ou les auteurs qui ne sont pas bien connus ?
  
- xi. Au niveau de la réception :
  - a. Comment décririez-vous la vente de ce livre ? Après la publication, quelle promotion avez-vous faite ? Avez-vous des audiences particulières par exemple, d'Afrique francophone ? Une exportation aux vendeurs dans les pays francophones ?
  
- xii. Au niveau paratextuel :
  - a. Je vois que la couverture du livre est vraiment unique. Qui a choisi la couverture de livre ? Suivez-vous une certaine règle avant de faire la couverture ? Comme il s'agit d'une œuvre étrangère, cherchez-vous à mettre une couverture qui suggère le contenu du livre ou la culture étrangère ?
  - b. Je sais qu'il y a des contraintes posées par exemple par la collection dans laquelle un livre est publié ou par la maison d'édition, est-ce que ces contraintes ont agi sur la couverture ?

### Appendix 3: Questions for French Translators

The general purpose of my research is to understand how Nigerian texts are selected, translated, marketed and received. One of my objectives is to know your experiences as a translator of a Nigerian text (*The Fishermen*). Possible questions are:

J'aimerais savoir les suivants :

- i. Quelle est votre expérience
- ii. Qui vous a proposé la traduction ? Connaissez-vous par chance qui a fait la première décision de traduire et publier ce livre et comment cette décision a été faite ?
- iii. Quel genre du livre traduisez-vous en général
- iv. Comment avez-vous choisi de traduire ce livre nigérian,
  - a. Qu'est-ce que vous avez considéré avant d'accepter la traduction ? la réputation de l'auteur, critique, genre, etc.
- v. Connaissez-vous de la culture nigériane ?
  - a. Connaissez-vous la littérature nigériane avant la traduction d'une œuvre nigériane ?
- vi. Quels sont les défis auxquels vous avez fait face pendant la traduction d'une œuvre nigériane ?
- vii. Quelles stratégies vous étaient utiles pour la traduction des termes Igbo, pidgin, proverbes et oralité dans le texte nigérian.
- viii. Comment décririez-vous votre traduction ?
  - a. Est-ce que vous cherchez à préserver les éléments culturels dans les livres ?
- ix. Existe-t-il une sorte de collaboration entre vous et l'auteur ?
- x. Connaissez-vous l'auteur ou son livre à priori ?
- xi. Seriez-vous prêt à traduire par exemple plus de femmes ou les auteur/es qui ne sont pas bien connu/es ?
- xii. À votre connaissance, est-ce que le texte traduit a eu une bourse de traduction ?

Ces questions ne sont pas exhaustives. Il peut arriver que je n'aie pas abordé quelques aspects importants de la traduction. Veuillez me faire savoir. N'importe quelle information pourrait être utile dans cette recherche.

#### **Appendix 4: Questions for Nigerian Authors**

- For the translation of your work into French, did you make the first step to get them translated?
- Who contacted you about the translation of your work?
- Who are the actors and institutions that intervene directly and indirectly in the process of translation of your texts? What can you tell me about the roles of these patrons in the publishing process?
- Is there a sort of co-publishing ventures between Nigerian publisher of your work and the French publisher?
- Did you have a communication or sort of meeting with these actors like the French publisher of your book, the translator, etc.
- Have you ever had to travel to France to promote your work to the (target) translation language audience—French audience, readers? Did you have any other kind of promotion for the book?
- What is the affiliation of the individual or groups (your English publisher?) that promote the translation and diffusion of your work in French: individuals, University, government, publishers, cultural institutions (e.g. Nigerian Mission in France), etc.?
- During the translation of your book, did the translator ever contact you for perhaps, questions relating to some specific cultural items or concepts (Nigerian concepts) in your book?

- In Nigeria, do you know of any institution that funds the translation of Nigerian texts? — Have you ever received any of such subvention from the Ministry of Culture and Foreign Affairs or from any other governmental office for the translation of your work?
- Do you know if your work was funded for translation in France? Perhaps, by a French cultural institution?
- Is there any other measure that you employ to ensure visibility and recognition of your work beyond the English language?
- Finally, how important is the issue of translation of your work into other languages for you?
- Is there any further information you would like to give?

**Appendix 5: Nigerian Artistic Village**

