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The Beauty of Co-Translation

José Bañuelos Montes¹ & Sally Perret²

Translating poetry can be an unnerving and lonely process. There are infinite ways to navigate from one language to the next, causing the sole translator much doubt, insecurity, and general indecisiveness. Working as a team, however, we—José Bañuelos Montes and Sally Perret, who always write each other’s name first—have discovered the joy of sharing responsibilities and the excitement that dialogue brings to the process of translation. Every bilingual person knows that no two languages are the same; from the ways ideas are conceived to the ways they are expressed across different cultural contexts, there is always some sort of *differance*, both in the Derridian sense that all meaning is produced through the “structured and differing origin of differences” (*Speech and Phenomena*, 141), and also quite literally, given the incongruences that naturally exist between languages. It is the translator’s task to render visible not just the words, but also the poetic experience; the impact of the metaphors, the flow of words and the importance of any cultural,

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2 Sally Perret is an Associate Professor at Salisbury University in Maryland, where she also serves as the Program Director of Spanish and French Education Specialties. Her research interests include the literatures and cultures of Spain, issues related to nationalism and translation as well as alternative publication techniques of transatlantic poetry.

philosophical, historical or political implications. The mission becomes: how can we come closer to the ideas and emotions expressed in the text?

The following selection of poetry from María Teresa Ramírez Nieva and Mirian Díaz Pérez forms part of an anthology, *Voices of Resistance: An Anthology of Afro-Colombian Poetry Written by Women*, that we will be publishing later this spring with *Editorial Ultramarina*, whose series of titles published in a bilingual format, echoes *ESLA's* goal to offer spaces for different readings of culture and art in English. What makes these two poets particularly unique is that both Ramírez Nieva and Díaz Pérez write their poetry first in Palenquero, a creole language that is spoken in San Basilio de Palenque and other parts in Colombia, and then the poets translate themselves to Spanish.

The choice of language is telling and adds a level of meaning to their verses. The very existence of Palenquero is intimately tied to slavery. There are several debates, however, it is generally accepted that Palenquero is a mixture of Kikongo, which derives from central Africa (modern-day Congo, DRC and Angola), and of Spanish brought by the conquistadors during the years of conquest. The language was primarily spoken by *negros cimarrones*, or Maroons, descendants of Africans in the Americas, and is currently spoken by around 6,600 *palenqueros*. Though our forthcoming anthology will include only the Spanish and English versions of Ramírez Nieva and Díaz Pérez's poems, we wanted to include the originals in Palenquero here so the reader can explore its unique beauty. For instance, we notice that the letters: C, H, Q, V, W, X and Z are absent. The Spanish pronoun I, or "yo" is "i," and "él/ella" or he/she is simply one word "ele." There is also double negation, similar to Spanish, which is indicated at the end of sentences with the word "nú" or no. Also noticeable are the many differences in vocabulary and spelling; however, the pronunciation is similar to the rules of Spanish with only five vowel sounds. Thus, the reader can take a turn at reading Palenquero out loud to hear the original flow while also comparing the words to the Spanish and English, according to one's linguistic background.

We have spent many hours to make visible the beauty we felt when hearing the verses read in Palenquero and when reading them in Spanish. We are fortunate that Bañuelos Montes is a native speaker of Spanish and Perret of English; together, we are able to dive deeper into the meaning

of words, the diverging cultural contexts, and the multiple readings any given text can suggest. We firmly believe that translation has the ability to insert ideas into dominant culture and to highlight the varied beauty of the world. We have had the privilege to publish in *ESLA* twice as a team, bringing to the English-speaking world the works of Narlan Matos, who writes in Portuguese and Feliciano Sánchez Chan, who writes in Maya Yucatec and in Spanish. When working together, we have a very deliberate process: Bañuelos Montes creates the first draft of the translation to English, then Perret revises the translation individually. Then, we meet virtually to discuss the revisions. Through this approach, we establish that translation is based on clear communication. As translators, we decode the writer's messages individually, then, as a pair, we compare and contrast our decoded understanding of the texts to encode new messages into the English language. As we make comparisons, we are thinking about how the writers might want to be read or understood by an English readership. In so doing, our collaborative approach draws from the theories of Jiří Levý and his thoughts regarding the communication chain in translation. According to Levý, there are three stages to the process of translation that link the author, the translator and the reader: "1. Apprehension of the source; 2. Interpretation of the source; and 3. Re-stylisation of the source" (*The Art of Translation*, 31). When the work is done as a pair, however, there are multiple apprehensions and interpretations that end up informing our re-stylised translations.

This type of collaborative approach has been an extremely rewarding process; through our dialogues we are able to more confidently determine which words will best translate the beauty we see in the original. We believe there is a need for poetry in the world at this time as well as a need to listen to each other more. Both Ramírez Nieva and Díaz Pérez share a similar view, one that acknowledges the beauty and pain of their shared African heritage, their experiences as women in a male-dominated society and as poets searching for meaning in our modern, and very complicated world.

As specialists in literature, we hope the reader will appreciate our efforts to translate these important voices to English. We hope that their words will offer new perspectives on universal themes such as the influence of traumatic histories on modern identity, like slavery, ("Africa, Are you

Leaving?), the significance of art, represented frequently through music in these verses (“The Dunú Drum”), and the sometimes cruel and harsh nature of mankind (“Ghosts of the Full Moon”). As the world continues to grasp the full implications of the current pandemic and as we work towards a new world order, one that is based on intercultural cooperation and understanding, we need more poetry, more art, in as many languages as possible to better understand the urgency of our historical moment. Though language itself is imperfect, it also has the power to challenge how we perceive the world, from discovering the beauty of Palenquero through English or Spanish to feeling the beat of the drums and imaging the brightness of the Caribbean moon. It is through the poetry of these Afro-Colombian writers that we contemplate the historical legacies we have inherited, the stories we tell ourselves about the world, and the way we might work more intentionally to continue to create spaces for us to see the beauty in all.

MARÍA TERESA RAMÍREZ NIEVA³

¿Áfrika bo a bae?

¿Áfrika bo a bae? Arió i a bae mi,

¿África bo a bae? Arió i a bae mi.

Arió ma ome, ma mujé,

ma mojanasito, ma chilumba,

ma agüelo mí.

Arió ma Yoruba, Mandinga, Lukúmi,

Ma Kongo, Kafre, Karabalí.

¿I ke bó tré mí, angini?

¿I ke bó tré mi, kapuchichirimanga?

Indoló, muette, apattá suto

Makká ri fobo, lariba ri peyejo mi.

¡Añuuuu...elelo, Añuuuu...elelolai!

Pocke etando malemba ri África mi,

Akanforá i a ta ñamá.

Mujé tímbo, amosa ku kutú.

¿Áfrika bo a bae? Arió i a bae mi.

¿Áfrika bo a bae? Arió i a bae mi.

³ María Teresa Ramírez Nieva (1944-) earned her degree in History and Philosophy from the University del Valle in Colombia. She is a member of the Academia de Historia de Palmira; she has won various honors and awards, including the Lira Dorada. She is the author of such books as *Abalenga, Mabungú, Cosmogonía Africana- Kumo kumensá ri Nsulú i tiela*, and *Universo Colombo Ecuatoriano*.

¿África te vas?

¿África te vas? Adiós ya me voy.

¿África te vas? Adiós ya me voy.

Adiós mis hombres, mis mujeres

mis niños, mis jóvenes,

mis abuelos.

Adios Yorubas, Mandingas, Lucumíes,

Congos, Cafres, Carabalíes...

¿Y qué me diste a mí extranjero?

¿Y qué me diste a mí europeo?

Dolor, muerte, separación, látigo,

marcas de fuego sobre mi piel.

¡Añuuuu...elelelo, añuuuu elelolai!

Porque estando lejos del África mía,

¡Extraña aquí! me llamo yo.

Negra, hermosa, fuerte, altiva.

¿África te vas? Adiós ya me voy.

¿África te vas? Adiós ya me voy.

Africa, Are You Leaving?

Africa, are you leaving? Farewell, I am leaving too.

Africa, are you leaving? Farewell, I am leaving too.

Farewell, my men, my women

my children, my young ones,

my grandparents.

Farewell to *Yorubas, Mandingas, Lucumíes,*

Congos, Cafres, Carabalíes...

What did you give me, foreigner?

What did you give me, European?

Pain, death, separation, whipping,

burn marks on my skin.

Añuuuu...elelelo, añuuuu elelolai!

Since being away from you, my Africa,

I'm a stranger here! I'll name myself.

Black, beautiful, strong, proud.

Africa, are you leaving? Farewell, I am leaving too.

Africa, are you leaving? Farewell, I am leaving too.

Itoria ri tambó dunú

Aa arenjeba tiembo
aa ri tiela ri ma iena
Rresoná el Dunú
¡Ku meloría i mui kutú!
¡Tam tam tum! ¡Tum tum tam!
Ri ánima ri tambó
lendrú a ri nfinda i yimalaya.

Un ría un ome ri paraje ri ma ome
kuchá ri son ri Dunú
chonchao po un meloría
kaminá i kolé a ta tené rekanso nú no.
Miní a ri paraje ri ma hiena...
Kumbamba, kueppo i kabea
ané soyao ri músika asé morikueta.
Aa merio ri batuke, ané amalá ri ome
A ri Baobac joito Sando ri África.

Se ri kusa ke ta güena i sakrificá pa Dunú
Loango ri un músika
Ri ome tetemblá i asé chamukina ku ma junko
Mblasa a ri tambó , ri pola elé se jundá
Ku ri peyejo ri tambó.
Se moná ri Dunú

Agüe ma niguini kucha
ri ¡Tam tam tum!
i pola se enkabritá
ma kaera a ta soyao,
sarangia labajo ri ma ñapalú
ri entagó i un abalenga...
¡Tam tam tum!
¡Tum tum tam! ¡Tum tum tam!

El tambor dunú

En tiempos remotos...
en el país de las hienas,
resonaba el Dunú
¡Melodioso, fuerte!
¡Tam tam tum! ¡Tum tam tam!
El alma del tambor
cruza selva y montaña.

Un día un hombre, del país de los hombres
oyó el son del Dunú...
hechizado por la melodía
caminó... corrió, sin descanso.
Llegó al país de las hienas:
mandíbula, cuerpo y cabeza, locas de ritmo
cabriolas hacen las fieras
en medio del batuque, amarran al hombre
al tronco del Baobac, árbol sagrado de África

Era la ofrenda perfecta, sacrificado en honor
del Dunú Rey de la música.
El hombre luchó, jadeó con los juncos...
Tomó el tambor, lo abrazó,
su sangre se mezcló
con el cuero del tambor.

Hoy los negros escuchamos
el ¡Tam tam túm!
Y la sangre se encabrita
las caderas se enloquecen,
bailamos bajo los rayos
del sol y de la luna
herederos del Dunú.
¡Tam tam tum!
¡Tum tum tam! ¡Tum tum tam!

The Dunú Drum

In ancient times...
In the land of hyenas,
the Donú echoed,
melodically, strong!
Tam tam tum! Tum tam tam!
The drum's soul
crosses the jungle and the mountain.

One day, a man, from the country of men
heard the sound of Dunú...
enchanted by the melody
He walked...he ran, without repose.
He arrived to the land of hyenas:
Jaw, body and head, craving rhythm
spinning like wild animals
In the middle of the uproar they tie the man
to the trunk of a Baobac, the sacred tree of Africa.

It was the perfect offering, a sacrifice to honor
the Dunú king of music.
The man struggled, gasped with the reeds...
he took the drum, he embraced it,
his blood mixing
with the skin of the drum.

Today Black people listen
to the tam tam túm!
And our blood boils
our hips begin to move,
we dance under the rays
of the sun and the moon
heirs of Dunú.
Tam tam tum!
Tum tum tam! Tum tum tam!

MIRIAN DÍAZ PÉREZ⁴

Nblisa ri losendo nduse

Ma losendo luchingá ten mi alibiao

ría pa aguandá nu

guapiriao ejpagda sin bití

Mbuenbué ri sibalunga mi andi monde

epanta ma ueye jirguetiao

Un kusa numá ta ngutá mi

e nblisa nduse ri kaña

sangariá lungao lembrano

ngoso a ta numá aí uto lao

Pirindo pa kajambá

Kugé mi pu piko ele lungumbe

I a ta aké

4 Mirian Díaz Pérez is an ethno-educator and poet who works to safeguard the oral tradition and the Palenquera language. She is on the editorial committee of the magazine *Maria Mulata*, and she belongs to the Association of Afro-Colombian Researchers (ACIA-FROS). She has participated in important cultural and academic events, such as the International Festival of Caribbean Poets and The International Meetings of Colombo-Argentine Poets. She is the author of *Binda ndunblua ku bindanga*.

Vientos de colores dulces

Me alivia el color de la noche

un día menos para resistir

el llanto de la espalda desnuda

La sombra de mi espíritu en la plantación

Sofoca las huellas serpentina del amo

Solo excita mi existencia

el viento dulce que irradia la caña

Baila la muerte temprana

la felicidad está en la otra orilla

anhelando que el pájaro eterno

Me eleve en su pico negro

Pero sigo aquí

Soft-Colored Winds

The color of the night soothes me

one day less to resist

the cries of my bare back

My spirit's shadow plantation bound

suffocates the serpentine footprints of my master

The only thing that shakes my existence

is the sweet wind that radiates from the cane

Early death dances about

happiness is on the other shore

longing for that eternal bird

to lift me on its black beak

but I'm still here

Iyaiya ri luchingá ngolo

Ma luchingá ta posá luso aí kuepo ri cha Sore
guarapá ele a seba kosé ma losendo ri sí
ma ñapalú ri ñugue, a taba katriá kuepo Pablo ku tritesa nu
ma iyaiya ri bomboimbó ngalaban barika ri changaína
a sendaba kombilesa ri dilangá okiniaio ri kankamaján Juan Kassarola
ke ndruku ngalucha ma apú nduse
ri balika cha Sore, ñakunga ri Pablo

Fantasmas de luna llena

La luna escupía su luz sobre el cuerpo de Soraida
su desnudez enhebraba los colores de su existencia
los rayos del sol, tallaban la espalda de Pablo sin compasión
y los fantasmas de los árboles sostenían el vientre de la mujer
eran cómplices del instinto insaciable de don Juan Cassazola “el patrón”
quien bebía de prisa las aguas dulces
contenidas en el ombligo de Soraida, esposa de Pablo.

Ghosts of the Full Moon

The moon spit its light over Soraida’s body
Her nakedness threading the shades of her existence
The sunbeams carving Pablo’s back without pity
while the ghosts of trees were holding the women’s womb
as accomplices of don Juan Cassazola, “the master” and his insatiable instinct
who was busy drinking the sweet water
that was gathering in the belly of Soraida, Pablo’s wife