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Abstract

For this project I examined an annotated and glossed translation of Zhor Zerari’s book of poetry, Poèmes de prison (Prison Poems), composed during her period of torture and imprisonment (1957-1962) by the French government during the Algerian War for Independence. I also present and analyze the translation process including important political, cultural and linguistic context to understand the source language, providing a brief overview of French colonial history and Algeria and the place of women in the resistance movement. I highlight theoretical, cultural, and linguistic problems in translation and suggest possible solutions. I present these translations and analysis in order to further understand the importance of these translations to the larger context of contemporary literature and language studies, French colonialization, Algerian Independence, and the legacy of French censorship. This project is intended to elaborate Western understandings of French colonization in Algeria, women militants and their role in independence efforts, and the translation of francophone poetry.

Introduction

French colonial activity began in Algeria in 1830, and the country would not gain independence until 1962 after a long and violent occupation. With this project I will 1) raise awareness, promote knowledge and understanding, and provide working translations of Zhor Zerari’s prison poetry 2) interrogate and make tangible the translation process, engaging in self-reflection about my motives and choices and how they impact the text, via feminist and “postcolonial” translation theory and practice in women’s writing and showing the importance of these translations to the larger context of contemporary literature and language studies, French colonialization, Algerian Independence, and the legacy of French censorship. This project is intended to elaborate Western understandings of French colonization in Algeria, women militants and their role in independence efforts, and the translation of francophone poetry.

Conclusion

Spivak and Maier discuss the impossibility of true equivalence in translation in spite of the necessity to do the work, and I saw this demonstrated in my inability to find equivalences and struggle to offer adequate comments to create meaning about also disrupt the "species of neocolonialist construction of the non-Western texts" to which Spivak refers. Focusing on the "impossible equivalence" (5), and the English language's inability to function as a perfect equivalent, exposes this lack and contributes to recognizing and valuing differences in language and perspective. Access to these texts by way of thorough translation is instrumental for students contextualizing language and literature in a global frame. Language and literature both function to create and maintain ideology, perspective, and identity and the ability to access previously censored or repressed texts like Zerari’s Poèmes de prison works against imperialism and Western hegemony, but only when inquiry and intimacy with the language foreground representations of foreign frames through language translation. Break-up work could include translation of Zerari's collection into Arabic. Additionally, I have so far focused on one text and one translation. However, audio versions of the collection in translation would be an important extension of Spivak’s arguments regarding female solidarity and accessibility.

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Literature Cited