Returning Plaatje's *Mhudi* to Setswana: An Exploration of Repatriation in Literary Translation

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This study focuses on the translation of Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* from English into Setswana. Studies have suggested that though written in English, *Mhudi* is heavily influenced by the author's Setswana culture. It is for this reason that the translation of such a novel into Setswana has been seen as a form of cultural back-translation or repatriation. The concept of repatriation refers to a situation in which a source text written about a particular community in a language which is foreign to that community gets translated into the language of that community. This concept has recently become an area of interest in translation studies, but there is still a dearth of literature on the subject. It is in this regard that this study seeks to analyze the context in which *Mhudi* was translated into Setswana and the actions of the translator during the translation process. Using agency as a theoretical framework, the study investigates the translator's strategies in translating culture-specific terms as well as the social factors that might have influenced his actions. The study is qualitative in nature, and data was collected through a comparative analysis of the source and target texts. The study is significant in shedding light on the concept of repatriation and its application in translation studies.
Keywords: Sol Plaatje; *Mhudi*; repatriation; literary translation; agency

1. Introduction

It has been argued that African literature produced in European languages is a form of translation due to the assumption that African writers first conceive their creativity in their native languages before recreating it in European languages (Gyasi 2003). What gives credence to this argument is the cultural world view of African writers, which stands out in the orality with which they write in European languages. This writing approach is necessitated by the writers' quest to reconcile the imperative of writing in global languages and the need to preserve their cultural identities (Bandia 2008). The creative adaptation of European languages to channel African thoughts in literature usually produces texts which reflect the dynamic use of different languages by the same speaker in contemporary African communities. Translating this

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type of literature therefore requires a unique approach as its form is different from the usual homogenous forms of literature written by European authors in European languages. Paul F. Bandia (2008) has argued that such translations should adopt a reparatory approach in which the cultural world view of the source text author is recreated or preserved in the target language.

Bandia's (2008) argument applies to the translation of African literature between two European languages, which also seems to be the focus of most scholars who have studied the translation of African writings with less attention on the translation of literary texts from and into African languages. This could be because the emergence of literature in African languages as an object of scholarship is a recent phenomenon, which is, however, evolving as the development and intellectualization of African languages in recent years has led to the emergence of a significant body of literary works published in these languages. There has also been an increase in the translation of literary works into African languages, which has led to a growing interest in studies focusing on literary translations into African languages. This is the situation with literature in Setswana, a language spoken in Southern Africa and the target language of the translation of *Mhudi* (Plaatje 1930) that this paper focuses on. Setswana literature is a nascent field even though the first literary publication in the language dates to the 1950s. An absence of a reading culture in the language due to years of marginalization and general attitudes of inferiority towards African languages as opposed to European languages has not provided much encouragement for creative writers to write in the language. This absence of a readership has also led to a difficulty for writers in the language to access publishing houses as publishers do not see such writings as being able to generate economic gains in the same way as texts in English do. It could therefore be argued that the publication of the Setswana version of *Mhudi* was a milestone in the development of Setswana literature.

Mhudi was written in 1919 when Sol Plaatje was in the UK, but he could not find a publisher for the novel until he returned to South Africa. The novel was published in 1930 by the Lovedale Press toward the end of Plaatje's life. The novel tells the story of the wars between the Matebele and the Barolong and also the first encounter of the Batswana community and White settlers. It is also a love story between Mhudi and Ra-thaga and how their love grows and is tested by the broader context of warfare and land dispossession. The novel was translated into Setswana as *Mohudi* by Thipe Malebye and published in 1999 by the Mamela Afrika Series.

2. Translation as Repatriation

The application of the concept of cultural repatriation to the study of translation phenomena is a recent development. Cultural repatriation is often associated with the return of cultural artifacts that were uprooted from the communities by European colonialists. The concept has been used in translation studies to refer to situations in which texts originating from a particular culture but produced in a language foreign to the said culture get translated back into the language of the originating culture (Liao 2021). Other terms have also been used to refer to this phenomenon. In this regard, Wei Cai (2021) has used the term 'textless backtranslation,' arguing that the original or source text in such a translation is not a real original because it is already embedded in the culture of the proposed target language even though it is written in another language. He therefore contends that this type of translation is more of 'returning' the culture expressed in the original text to the language from which the culture originates. Kinga Klaudy and Pál Heltai (2020) have described this phenomenon as cultural back-translation. They argue that while most translations involve a source text written in a source language embedded in the source language culture, cultural back-translation involves a source text language that reflects a foreign culture while the target text language actually reflects the source text (Klaudy and Heltai 2020). This implies that the cultural components of the source text are, in a sense, being returned to the language system from which they originated before being expressed in another language. Eileen E. Pooe and Shole J. Shole (2021) have studied the same phenomenon, which they describe as 'repatriative transcreation.' With reference to the works of African writers in European languages, they opine that the translation of such works into the native languages of the said authors is equivalent to the cultural repatriation of the works, since they initially originated from the authors' language cultures.

What is similar in the views of the above-mentioned scholars is the idea of a cultural return or cultural repatriation of works exiled in foreign languages. The significance of this is that the works to be translated exist in a language which is originally not theirs, and just like cultural artifacts in foreign lands, they need to be returned to their native lands, or in this case, native languages. This argument applies to *Mhudi*, which is a novel set in the cultural world of the Batswana but written in English. Its translation into Setswana could therefore be considered as cultural repatriation and has indeed been described as such by Pooe and Shole (2021). Cultural repatriation is an act of agency. This is because it usually involves the rectification of

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past injustices, as in the case of anthropological studies, by returning artifacts that were forcefully removed from dominated communities. It is therefore our view that the repatriative translation of literary works is also an act of agency as it involves a process of returning texts exiled in foreign languages to the languages of their original cultural contexts. It is for this reason that agency has been adopted as the theoretical lens with which to understand the strategies used in translating *Mhudi* into Setswana and the extent to which this translation could be considered a form of cultural repatriation. The attainment of this objective is guided by two questions: To what extent is the novel a Setswana novel written in English? What qualifies the Setswana translation as a cultural repatriation of the English original?

3. Agency in Translating African Literature

This study is guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of agency. Agency refers to the ability and willingness of an individual to act in a given situation (Koskinen and Kinnunen 2010, 6). This approach has been used in translation studies to study the role of translators as agents who make independent choices during the translation process, rather than just being neutral transmitters of source text messages (Wolf 2012). The sociological turn in translation studies emerged in the 1980s because of the limitations of text-oriented approaches to address the social factors influencing translation activities (Liang 2010). Influenced by the system-oriented approaches of Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, which led to interdisciplinary approaches to translation studies, the sociological turn shifted attention to the social role of agents involved in translation activities (Hanna 2016). Sociological theories perceive translation as a social activity which is carried out by agents who are influenced by their social contexts. Translators do not therefore work in a vacuum, but in a specific social context whose factors influence the decisions they make during the translation process (Awung 2021). It is in this regard that Bourdieu's social theory is relevant as it offers appropriate tools for the understanding of the social factors that influenced the choices of the translator of *Mhudi* into Setswana. This study therefore examines the literary field into which the novel was translated and the relationship between the said field and the translator.

It is undeniable that the very nature of African literature in a European language implies that agency is involved, because the form and function of the said literature are highly influenced by the social context of the writer. It is in this regard that Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1986,

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4) has argued that African literature in European languages can only be understood if the social forces that condition its production are understood. This implies that for one to understand Plaatje's *Mhudi*, one has to first understand the social factors that influenced the writing and publication of the novel. It is our view that if African literature has agency implications, these implications are even more significant when such literary works have to be translated into an African language. This is because the development of literacies in African languages is foregrounded in an ideology of resistance against the hegemony of Western linguistic and cultural systems. African language translators therefore become agents of cultural resistance who seek to protect their linguistic and cultural identities from the domination of European languages and cultures. These translators also become social agents whose translation choices have a significant influence in shaping the literary system into which they translate, which in this case is the field of literature in African languages. This again highlights the relevance of Bourdieu's theory in this study as it is an appropriate tool with which to understand how social context could have influenced the decisions of the Setswana translator of *Mhudi* and how those decisions in turn contributed to shaping the field of Setswana literature.

3.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Agency

Bourdieu's theory of agency was conceptualized to reconcile the debate as to whether it is the structure or social context that determines the actions of agents or the other way around. Bourdieu argues that both have a dialectic relationship in which they mutually influence each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 11). This implies that while the social context in which agents operate has an influence on the actions of the said agents, the same social context is in itself shaped by the actions of its agents. Bourdieu explains this theory by using the concept of the field, which he considers to be a social space in which all social action takes place (97). He contends that the field is made up of objective positions, and these positions are occupied by different agents whose positions depend on the resources they possess (Wacquant 1989, 40). He calls these resources 'capital,' which are assets that agents use to leverage control of the activities of the field (Hilgers and Mangez 2014, 10). The positions in the field are therefore structured in a hierarchical manner in which agents compete to accumulate more resources and move to higher positions so as to be able to preserve or transform the structure of the field (Bourdieu 1985, 734).

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Bourdieu illustrates his theory by using the formula [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984, 101). The agents who operate in a particular field of practice possess certain resources or capital, which could be economic, cultural, social, or symbolic, and which determine the positions of the agents as well as their ability to influence the activities of the field. Economic capital refers to material or financial resources, cultural capital refers to cultural acquisitions such as academic qualifications and cultural outputs, social capital refers to the network of relationships that an agent has, and symbolic capital refers to the prestige or recognition that an agent enjoys amongst their peers (Bourdieu 1984). In addition to capital, Bourdieu contends that agents also possess a habitus, which is a set of historically acquired dispositions that determine the way the agent perceives and relates to reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This means that when an individual spends time in a particular social space, they unconsciously acquire the norms of behavior of the said social space, and these become the mechanism that shapes the way they behave in the same social space or another. Bourdieu therefore believes that while the context influences agents' acquisition of capital and habitus, the actions of the same agents contribute to shaping the social context. This dialectical relationship between agency and structure constitutes the hallmark of his theory of agency, and it is the reason for which we believe that it is appropriate for this study, as we believe that Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital are effective tools for understanding the translator's agency in repatriative translation. It is worth indicating that the Setswana translation of *Mhudi* was produced when there was a surge in policies, programmes, and projects that aimed to right the wrongs of apartheid in various spheres including the promotion of previously marginalized African languages such as Setswana (Khanyile and Awung 2023). Translating a literary text like *Mhudi* from English into Setswana therefore becomes an act of cultural agency as the goal is to valorize the said African language and culture. Bourdieu's theory is therefore relevant in shedding light on the contextual and individual factors that influenced the actions of the translator of the novel.

4. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, and the research design we adopted was phenomenology. A qualitative approach focuses on describing the nature, manner, or reason underpinning a phenomenon rather than on the quantity (Tuffour 2017). We therefore adopted

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it for this study because our aim was to explore the causal factors behind the actions of the translator of Plaatje's *Mhudi* into Setswana. We adopted phenomenology as a research design because it aims to study and describe phenomena such as an event, an experience, a situation, or a concept. It was therefore thought to be appropriate for this study because we sought to analyze the translator's role as an agent of cultural repatriation in his Setswana translation of *Mhudi*.

The data for the study was collected by desktop method, in which culture-specific terms and their translations were collected from the source and target texts respectively. The data was then analyzed using comparative content analysis. The analysis focused on culture-specific terms. These are terms that are embedded in the culture of a language community whose translation into another language has been known to be problematic because of the absence of direct equivalents (Baker 2011). For this study, we considered culture-specific terms to be names, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, fauna and flora, songs and praise words, invectives, and the use of words from other languages, but the analysis focused on names, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and invectives. In this regard, each selected source text term from the four categories was compared to its target text translation in order to understand the strategy used by the translator and its effect on the form and meaning of the target text. The findings were then interpreted using Bourdieu's theory of agency.

5. Findings and Discussion

It has already been indicated earlier in this paper that African writers who write in European tend to use a writing-as-translation style which enables them to export their cultural world view to the European language of their writing (Bandia 2008). This approach is most evident in the way these writers handle culture-specific terms in their writings, as these terms reflect the cultural idioms of the writers' native languages. This seems to be the approach adopted by Plaatje in *Mhudi* as many instances in the novel reflect his Setswana world view, which explains why the novel has been described as a Setswana story exiled in English (Pooe and Shole 2021). Focusing on the translation of culture-specific terms, we therefore sought to examine the strategies used by the translator of the Setswana version of the novel and how his habitus and cultural capital, as well as the literary field in which he produced the translation, could have influenced his choices. The culture-specific terms analyzed were names, proverbs,

idiomatic expressions, and invectives. The findings of the analysis are presented below, with the source text (ST) terms followed by the target text (TT) translations, which are then back-translated (BT) into English to provide a clear understanding of the translator's choices during the transfer process.

5.1 Translating Names

The first category of culture-specific terms that we looked at were names. Lincoln Fernandes (2006) asserts that names have cultural implications which make their translation challenging. In the same vein, Maria Tymoczko (2016) contends that names cannot just be carried across from one language to another without considering their semantic, semiotic, and phonological implications. This means that in translating names, translators should consider the cultural context in which the names are used so as to recreate their semantic, semiotic, or phonological value in the target language. For the purpose of this paper, we focused on how the translator rendered proper names and descriptive names in the Setswana version of the novel. Proper names are names used to refer to individuals, places, institutions, or events, while descriptive names refer to the same entities mentioned above but are formulated as a description of their nature or function (Nord 2003).

In the Setswana translation of *Mhudi*, it is observed that the translator maintained most names as used in the original without any adverse effect on the target text. There are, however, a few instances in which the translator opted for different spellings of some names, such as 'Mhudi' translated as *Mohudi*, 'Kunana' translated as *Khunwana*, and 'Matabele' translated as *Matebele*. For these three examples, it could be argued that the translator was influenced by his habitus as a native speaker of Setswana to make the pronunciation of the names more natural in Setswana because the way they are spelled in the original is a deviation from the natural pronunciation of the names in Setswana.

The most noticeable shift in the translation of names in the novel is in the way the translator dealt with descriptive names. This is highlighted in the examples below:

Example (1)
ST: Court Jesters (Plaatje 1930, 29)
TT: *Badirametlae* (Plaatje 1999, 24)
BT: Comedians

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In the above example, the translation of 'court jester' as *Badirametlae*, which literally means 'comedians,' results in a shift in the meaning of the original. This is because a court jester in the English culture is someone who entertains a king at the palace, while a comedian is someone who entertains the general public. While both are comedians, their target audience and context of performance are different, and the translation does not capture this difference. It could be argued that because of the absence of a direct equivalence of the term in Setswana, the translator opted for the closest natural equivalence (Nida and Taber [1969] 2003) of the term in the target language.

Example (2)

ST: **The bone-throwers** having gone through their incantations, their spokesman said: (Plaatje 1930, 87)

TT: *Morago ga gore **dingaka** di latlhe marapo, mmueledi wa bona a re:* (Plaatje 1999, 75)

BT: After **the healers** had thrown their bones, their spokesperson said:

In the above example, Plaatje uses the word 'bone-throwers' to refer to diviners or soothsayers who perform rituals to predict the future. The translator opted to translate this term as *dingaka*, which literally means 'healers' in Setswana. It is worth mentioning that *dingaka* (singular: *ngaka*) also refers to doctors, be they traditional or Western doctors. One could therefore argue that the original term (bone-thrower) is pejorative as it demeans the indigenous belief system of the Batswana. The translator therefore seems to have sought to correct this distortion by using the respectable word *dingaka*, so as to safeguard the image of the cultural practices of the target culture, and this underscores his role as a cultural agent.

Example (3)

ST: They are **the Kaal-kaffers**. (Plaatje 1930, 72)

TT: *Ke **Basotho ba mošampana***. (Plaatje 1999, 64)

BT: They are **the naked Basotho**.

The word *Kaffir* (*kaffers*) that is used in the example above is a derogatory word that was used by Dutch settlers and later on by Afrikaners in Southern Africa to refer to Africans. In this example, the word is used by a white man in the story to refer to the Matabele as the naked or nude 'kaffirs.' The translator translated it as *Basotho ba mošampana*, which literally means 'the naked Basotho.' This is a complete shift from the meaning of the source text word and

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raises the question as to why the translator would use the name of a neighboring community to translate a derogatory term that has nothing to do with the said community in the source text. It is even more interesting that when the same word (kaffir) is used in other situations in the source text, the translator used different terms to translate it in the target text. For example, for 'nude Kaffirs' (Plaatje 1930, 107), he used *Boralefetlho ba mošampa* (Plaatje 1999, 13), which means 'naked troublemakers'; for 'The Kaffir and his wife' (Plaatje 1930, 189), he used *Moaferika* (Plaatje 1999, 169), which means 'an African'; and for 'Kaffir' (Plaatje 1930, 190), he used *montsho* (Plaatje 1999, 169), which means 'a black person.' Such inconsistency in the strategy of the same translator within the same text is not easy to account for, but it does highlight the fact that translators may not always stick to the same strategy when translating the same term (Awung 2018).

5.2 Translating Proverbs

Proverbs are succinct expressions used to convey universal truths in a specific culture. Their use is thus culture-bound, and they may not be understood without the cultural context. It is for this reason that they could be challenging to translate, as the world views of the source and target text cultures may not be the same (Shehab and Daragmeh 2014). Proverbs are an integral part of African orality, and this has influenced the way African writers use language. Plaatje, for example, makes extensive use of proverbs in *Mhudi*, most of which are drawn from his Setswana culture. Below are examples from the novel and their translations in the Setswana version:

Example (1)

ST: Never be led by a female lest thou fall over a precipice. (Plaatje 1930, 57)

TT: *O se etelelwe ke mosadi pele, e se re gongwe wa wela ka lengope*. (Plaatje 1999, 49)

BT: Do not let a woman to lead you, for you may fall into a pit.

In the above proverb, Ra-thaga is ruminating on the advice of his wife while reminding himself of the cultural view of his patriarchal society, which cautions men to never follow the guidance of women because women are incapable of making the right judgement. The translation of the proverb shows that the proverb in the source text originated from the author's

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Setswana oral culture. This is because the Setswana translation says exactly the same thing as the English original, as can be observed in the back translation.

> Example (2)
>
> ST: A man has two hands to hold his spear in the one and his shield in the other. (Plaatje 1930, 39)
>
> TT: *Monna o na le mabogo a mabedi go tshola lerumo ka lengwe le thebe ka le lengwe*. (Plaatje 1999, 32)
>
> BT: A man has two hands so as to hold a spear in one and a shield in another.

Mzilikazi uses the above proverb in the novel to justify the importance of not listening only to one opinion on an issue, which in this case has to do with the conflict with the Barolong. He asserts that listening to different opinions provides him with comprehensive information to make the right decision. The Setswana translation has a similar form and meaning as the original, which again is an indication that the source text proverb originated from Setswana. The only noticeable difference in the proverb is the use of the possessive in the target text, which is absent from the source text. This could mean that Plaatje included the possessive to make the proverb more fluent in English, while the translator omitted the possessive because the original Setswana proverb does not contain a possessive. This highlights the translator's use of his cultural capital in returning the proverb to its original Setswana.

> Example (3)
>
> ST: Lightning fire is quenched by other fire. (Plaatje 1930, 102)
>
> TT: *Molelo wa tladi o tingwa ka o mongwe*. (Plaatje 1999, 87)
>
> BT: The fire from lightning is extinguished by another.

The above proverb is used by someone suggesting that women should be used to defeat the Matabele, since the latter are always keen to kill women. The idea is therefore that you need the same kind of force to defeat an opposing force. The translator again preserved the proverb in the target text. While one could notice a slight difference in the use of the pronoun '*o mongwe*' (another) in the target text in place of 'other fire,' this does not affect the meaning or the cultural world view expressed in the proverb.

> Example (4)
>
> ST: The foolish dam suckles her young while lying down, but the wise dam suckles hers standing up and looking out for approaching hunters. (Plaatje 1930, 104)

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TT: *Ya lesilo e anyisa e robetse, fa e e botlhale e anyisa e eme go bona fa dira di tla.* (Plaatje 1999, 89)

BT: The fool suckles her young while lying down, but the wise suckles her young while standing up to see when an enemy is approaching.

The above proverb is used by Chief Moroka to caution his people about remaining vigilant as they prepare for war against the Matabele. The proverb implies that one needs to always remain alert to defend themselves against a surprise attack by an enemy. The translator preserved the proverb in the target text. It can, however, be observed that while Plaatje uses the image of the dam, which is a mother animal, in the original, the translator left out the term referring to the animal and only used '*lesilo*' and '*botlhale*,' which mean 'the fool' and 'the wise' respectively. This implies that while Plaatje deviated a little from the Setswana proverb by adding the term 'dam' to it, the translator opted to return the proverb to its natural form in Setswana.

Example (5)

ST: A hasty dog always burns his mouth. (Plaatje 1930, 192)

TT: *Phuduhudu e e thamo telele, e batwa ke melamu e sa e lebagana.* (Plaatje 1999, 171)

BT: If a buck stretches out its long neck, it will receive arrows not meant for it.

The proverb above is used by Hannetjie to calm De Villiers down when the latter is impatient in waiting for the officialization of their marriage. The proverb is used to warn about the dangers of being impatient. The proverb is of Dutch origin and uses the image of a dog that burns its mouth because it is in a hurry to eat. To translate this proverb, the translator used a popular Setswana proverb in the target text. It is, however, interesting to note that the target text rendition does not only change the animal image used, but it also changes the focus of the message. This is because the Setswana proverb is used to advise people about the dangers of being too inquisitive, while the one in the source text focuses on patience. It is therefore difficult to see how the Setswana proverb is an equivalent of the source text proverb, and this could be because, unlike the other examples that have been examined, the source text proverb in this case originates from Dutch and not from Setswana like the others. It could therefore be argued that in his attempt to return the text to its original culture, the translator opted to use a close equivalent of the proverb in Setswana.

5.3 Translating Idiomatic Expressions

An idiomatic expression is a fixed statement whose meaning cannot be deciphered from its form (Baker 2011). Most African writers who write in European languages tend to translate idioms literally from their native languages in order to preserve their cultural world views. However, an analysis of *Mhudi* reveals that Plaatje used mostly English idioms instead of borrowing idioms from his native Setswana. Examples of these and their Setswana translations are presented below:

Example (1)

ST: Childless marriages were **as rare as freaks**. (Plaatje 1930, 1)

TT: *Manyalo a tlhokang thari a ne **a sa tlwaelega***. (Plaatje 1999, 1)

BT: Marriages without children were **very rare**.

The above idiomatic expression is used to explain the traditional lifestyle of the Barolong in which the primary role of women in society was to bear children and take care of domestic chores. Plaatje uses the English idiom 'rare as freaks,' which means 'extremely rare,' to express the fertility of Barolong women. The translator used the Setswana expression '*a sa tlwaelega*,' which literally means 'very rare,' to translate the idiom. The translator therefore opted to translate the word by providing its meaning rather than using an equivalent idiom, and this could be because of the absence of an equivalent idiom in Setswana.

Example (2)

ST: The Barolong hurled themselves against the enemy and fought **like fiends possessed**. (Plaatje 1930, 7)

TT: *Ba lwa jaaka **batho ba phekame ditlhaloganyo***. (Plaatje 1999, 6)

BT: They fought **like crazy people**.

The above English idiom is used by Plaatje to explain the fierceness with which the Barolong confronted the marauding Matabele in the story. The translator again opted for clarity of meaning in the target text instead of trying to recapture the form of the source text's idiomatic expression. This could again be because of the absence of a direct equivalent to the idiom in Setswana.

Example (3)

ST: Some were for letting the Boers **stew in their own juice**. (Plaatje 1930, 102)

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TT: Bangwe ba ne ba akanya fa maburu a **tshwanetse go itshireletsa ka nosi**. (Plaatje 1999, 87)

BT: Some thought that the Boers **should protect themselves on their own**.

The English idiom 'to stew in one's own juice' means to suffer the consequences of one's actions. Plaatje uses this idiom to explain the attitude of some members of the Barolong community towards the Boers after the latter have been attacked by the Matabele. The issue at stake is whether to help the Boers or not, and some feel that the Boers should be left to suffer because of the way they have been treating Africans. Just like in the two examples already discussed, the translator chose to omit the form of the idiom and instead recaptured its meaning in the Setswana translation.

Example (4)

ST: The victorious soldiers were in the habit of walking about in their **birthday garb**. (Plaatje 1930, 4)

TT: Batlhabani ba Matebele ba ne ba na le mokgwa wa go itsamaela gongwe le gongwe ba le **mošampana**. (Plaatje 1999, 3)

BT: The Matebele warriors had a tendency of just walking around **naked**.

In the above example, Plaatje uses the English idiom 'birthday garb,' which means to be naked, to describe how the Matabele soldiers walk around naked. 'Birthday garb' in this case refers to the clothing (garb) that someone is born with, which means no clothing at all. The translator used the Setswana word '*mošampana*,' which means 'naked,' to translate the idiom. The translator in this case seems to have adopted the same approach as with the other English idioms by leaving out the idiom and instead translating its meaning in Setswana.

5.4 Translating Invectives

An invective is an acerbic or hostile utterance that aims to insult or humiliate a person (Sevastiuk 2021). Invectives signify verbal hostility, and their use is context-bound because the meaning of an invective is hard to grasp if someone is not familiar with the cultural context of its usage. This implies that their translation could be challenging because there are not always direct equivalents in a target language for the translation of invectives. Plaatje makes use of invectives in *Mhudi* to portray verbal hostility in the context of conflict or tension between some characters. Below are examples of these invectives and their translations in the Setswana version of the novel:

Example (1)

ST: You dogs of a Western breed! (Plaatje 1930, 5)

TT: *Dintšwa ke lona" tsa lotso lwa Bophirima* (Plaatje 1999, 4)

BT: You dogs of the breed from the west!

The above invective is used by Bhoya, one of the Matabele soldiers who is murdered by the Barolong. Before he dies, he curses the Barolong and, in doing so, uses the above invective to insult them. The translator preserved the form and meaning of the invective in the Setswana translation, which could suggest that the original invective was taken from Setswana.

Example (2)

ST: Charge and kill these **beasts of prey**! (Plaatje 1930, 7)

TT: Bolayang **dilalome** tse! (Plaatje 1999, 6)

BT: Kill these **villains**!

The second example is used in *Mhudi* by Notto when he is ordering his men to attack the Matabele invaders. He calls them 'beasts of prey' because of their ferocious inhumanity. The translator used the Setswana word *dilalome*, which literally means 'villains,' to translate the word in the target text. The animal image of the original invective is lost in this translation, and this could be because there is no equivalent in Setswana. The translator could therefore have believed that using *dilalome* would convey the same level of insult that is contained in the original. This translation raises questions about the translator's choice because there is a plethora of animal-based or zoomorphic insults in African languages such as Setswana (Mangena and Ndlovu 2016), and one wonders why the translator would choose to use *dilalome* instead of using a zoomorphic insult which could serve as a close natural equivalent. Whatever could have motivated the translator's decision in this case, his action highlights his agency in making process-level choices that shape the form of the target text.

Example (3)

ST: May the spirits scorch your soul hereafter. (Plaatje 1930, 8)

TT: *E kete badimo ba ka go kokonela mo moweng ka ntlha ya ditiro tse di maswe tse.* (Plaatje 1999, 6)

BT: May the ancestors torture your soul because of your evil deeds.

The above example is used in the novel by Ra-Thaga to insult the Matabele soldier before killing him. Here, Plaatje is influenced by his Christian upbringing to use the image of

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the spirit or devil burning a sinner's soul in hell. The translator recreates the insult in Setswana in a way that preserves the meaning of the original, but he uses *badimo*, which means 'ancestors,' in the place of 'spirits.' He therefore uses a Setswana equivalent of the afterlife, which is controlled by ancestors, unlike that of Western cultures, which is controlled by spirits. It could therefore be argued that the translator's cultural capital and habitus influenced his actions in reclaiming the Setswana world view of the translated text.

Example (4)
ST: You **vampire** (Plaatje 1930, 8)
TT: ***Sefephe*** *ke wena* (Plaatje 1999, 6)
BT: You harlot!

In the example above, Ra-Thaga uses the word 'vampire,' which refers to a blood-sucking monster, to insult a Matabele soldier. The translator used the Setswana word '*sefephe*,' which means 'harlot,' to translate it into the target text. It can be observed that the meanings of the two words have nothing in common, and one wonders why the translator opted for '*sefephe*.' The word 'harlot' is used in a situation of sexual promiscuity or sex work, which has nothing to do with the meaning of 'vampire' that is used in the source text. This again suggests an inconsistency in the translator's choices during the translation process.

Example (5)
ST: Go to the hut of this **lickspittle** (Plaatje 1930, 81)
TT: *E ya kwa ntlong ya* ***mosadi*** *yo* (Plaatje 1999, 70)
BT: Go to this woman's house

The example above is used in the novel by Nomenti, one of Mzilikazi's wives, to describe Umnandi because she is jealous of the latter. When ordering the magician to go to Umnandi's hut, she calls the latter a 'lickspittle,' which means a stooge or a toady. In the Setswana version of the novel, the translator used the word '*mosadi*,' which means 'woman,' to translate the insult. This implies that the translator decided to omit the insult in his translation. Omission is a translation strategy used when a translator considers a part of the source text message irrelevant to the target text (Chesterman 2016). Could this then imply that the translator of *Mhudi* considered this invective as not important to the message? We contend that the invective is an important part of the source text message, and its omission deprives the Setswana reader of the image of hostility that the source text portrays through this insult. The translator's

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choice in this case is an indication of the complexity of factors that may influence decision-making during translation.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the Setswana translation of *Mhudi* reveals that the English novel contains several aspects of Setswana culture. This is evidenced in the storyline which is taken from the history of the conflict between the Batswana and the Matabele, and in the way Plaatje uses English to valorize the cultural world view of his native culture. This cultural valorization can be seen in the culture-specific terms that appear in the novel, which are a reflection of the oral culture of Setswana. Plaatje's linguistic style in the novel is in the same vein as that of other African writers who are said to mentally translate their conceived creativity from their native languages when writing in European languages (Bandia 2008). *Mhudi* could therefore rightly be described as a Setswana story told in English, and this implies that its translation would require strategies that would return the cultural world view of the source text to its original cultural context in the target text.

The analysis also reveals that the translator was not just a transferer of a source text into a target text, but a cultural agent with an interest in advancing the literary and linguistic norms of his Setswana culture. His position as a Setswana cultural and linguistic activist in the post-apartheid literary field, the cultural capital he had acquired in the field, as well as his habitus as a native Motswana linguist and literary figure, all enabled him to make choices that resulted in a target text that could be described as a repatriated novel.

Also, the translator adopted various strategies in transferring the culture-specific terms from English into Setswana. Some of the strategies used reflect what could rightfully be called cultural repatriation, such as in the translation of proper names and proverbs. Most of the proper names are transferred to the Setswana text without changes, except for a few whose spellings are modified with the aim of rendering them more natural in Setswana. The proverbs are also translated in a way that preserves their form and meaning, as most of the proverbs in the English novel are drawn from Setswana in the first place. The translator's strategies therefore highlight his agency in producing a target text that fits naturally in the Setswana literary system, and he could easily accomplish this because his social and cultural background in the Setswana culture had enabled him to acquire a habitus and cultural capital that foregrounded his agency.

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The translator also used a strategy of naturalization (Jing and He 2012) in the translation of some descriptive names, idiomatic expressions, and invectives. It is our view that this choice was necessitated by the fact that there were no equivalents in Setswana for the said culture-specific terms, and the translator's choice enabled him to make their meanings clear in the target text. The translator's actions in this case were thus influenced by the target text expectations of fluency, and this again underscores his role as an agent whose actions are influenced by his social context.

The translation of some culture-specific terms nonetheless reveals inconsistencies in the translator's actions. This is evidenced in his translation of the word 'Kaffir,' which is translated with different target text terms in different instances, as well as in some of the invectives, which are either omitted or translated with unrelated terms. These inconsistencies signify that factors that influence translation decisions are complex in nature.

In conclusion, the Setswana translation of *Mhudi* could be said to be a repatriation of a Setswana novel in English when one looks at the Setswana cultural world view that is embedded in the source text and the translator's strategies that seek to situate the target text in the Setswana literary field.

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