INTRODUCTION

“The Europeans are not good: A Fulbe Mbooku poem of protest” is a Fulani oral poem first transcribed and translated by Paul Kazuhisa Eguchi and published as a scholarly paper in 1992. The 164-line poem, recorded by Eguchi himself on 15th November 1976, was composed by the mbooku poet Siddi Yambaram. Mbooku is a form of oral poetry specific to the Fulani people, who live in the Far North of Cameroon. The poets sing in a group consisting of a few singers led a soloist with no instrumental accompaniment. The subject matter is often critical of misbehavior in society but may also praise good deeds and heroes. It is mainly characterized by the humorous use of figures of speech, parables, puns and repetition. Contrary to the griots and praise singers of most traditional African societies, Mbooku poets (or mboo’en) are members of the noble class and do not sing for money or gifts; they are proud and consider themselves entertainers. Today the genre has completely disappeared due to the lack of interest among the younger generations as well as the lack of modern means of conservation that may guarantee its survival.
Before studying the retranslation of an excerpt of Eguchi’s text, it may be worthwhile to reflect on retranslation itself. What is retranslation? A simple answer to this question would be “the act of translating a work that has previously been translated into the same language, or the result of such an act, i.e. the retranslated text itself” (Baker 2009: 233). This can be done in several ways: by “re-translat[ing] an original text which has already been translated in that foreign language, translat[ing] in a new language from a translation (as opposed to from the original text), or carry[ing] out a back-translation into the original language from a translation” (Elise 2014: n. p.). In our case, the retranslation is based on both the original text and its first translation into English. Of course, the decision to retranslate the text into a new English version gives rise to another question: Why? As Venuti (2013: 98) rightly stated, a retranslation is an added value in that it contributes to advancing both Translation Studies and Literature “through the inscription of a different interpretation”. I chose to retranslate this poem in order to make it more literary. This aspect was downplayed in Eguchi’s translation as his research centered on the musical, historical and anthropological aspects of the poem: “The aim of this paper is to present a Fulɓe Mbooku poem of protest against the foreign invasion and loss of Fulɓe sovereignty which occurred at the beginning of this century” (Eguchi 1992: 465). My intention is neither to evaluate nor to amend Eguchi’s work. I simply deem it necessary to make the poem more ‘poetic’ by incorporating certain patterns, such as the use of stanzas and verse meter as well as images and stylistic devices into the translation.

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1 Many thanks to Christine Pagnoulle for reading the poem and for her valuable comments and suggestions.
FULANI EXCERPT AND EGUCHI’S ENGLISH TRANSLATION

**Fulani poem transcription**

Ko mbi’iru-noo-mi ɓe mboodaayi.  
Ko ɓe mbanangi ɓe tefi balmi.  
Ko mbi’iru-noo-mi ɓe mboodaayi.  
Turooɓe yimɓe mbada bamsɗe,  
yimɓe ɓe’e mbalaak akiri.  
Raneeɓe baaba nya’irde,  
naa ɓe,borodɗe, ɓe borgooje,  
juulnitoɓe juulniɓe.  
Nde ɓe mbanangi ɓe tefi balmi.  
Zamanu keeke fakataake.  
Famarɓe mboya, ɓe mboyni en.  
’ɓe ngoodi toro, ɓe torri en.  
Ko mbi’iru-noo-mi, ɓe mboodaayi.  
Fii raneeɓe jaaliɓe,  
raneecɓe ɓure wullaandu.  
Ko mbi’iru-noo-mi ɓe jaaliɓe.  
Annditee lee ɓe mboodaayi.  
Ndé ɓe mbanangi, ɓe tefi balmi.  
Konu darnani ɓe, ɓe mbanangi.  
Kuma, ɓe kumi laammiɓe.  
’ɓe loslosnii ɓe nder maayo,  
ɓunndu Kahfu kon tagana.  
Bolidooɓe e seydanji,  
(…)  

Katuwal wadi jaalnaare,  
meemi leebura kafaɓaɗo,  
yaaɓi winnde saakiingo.  
Naati Caanaga konu somi,  
comko cifanii haɓre.  
Tayri duunde njaaeendi.  
’ɓunndu Baali ko mbaali.  
Habaru heewti nder Marwa,  
kiiri yeynugo haa jenngi:  
“Jawmu ɓaaru fuu tookna.”  
Marwa tookni kurol muufum.  
Tammo ban kaɓe kooseeje.  
Tugga koppi ɓe ngoorna kuri.  
Jaka Nasaraa haɓataako.  
ŋara galnodi labbon mum,  
tammo ban kaɓe fuunaangę,  
kaɓe Hayaatu wad-noo dum,  
camnna ngorgu, nguboo sewngo.  
Ibba Saŋe e canngin-no.

**English translation**

What I have been saying is that they are not good.  
Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.  
What I have been saying is that they are not good.  
It is they who made people bend down and made them donkeys.  
The people were forced to carry without payment.  
The white people are masters with spurs.  
They wore red fezzes, and carried blankets.  
It is they who torture the circumcised adults again.  
Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.  
In these days no one can stop the machines.  
When these young people shout, they made us cry.  
They have money, and they troubled us.  
What I have been saying is that they are not good.  
The story of the white people, the conquerors.  
The white men cannot be appealed to the court.  
What I have been saying is that they were conquerors.  
You should know that they are not good.  
Since they, came out into the world, they looked for arms.  
The war made them powerful as they are.  
They made fools of chiefs saying: “What?”  
They are those who came out of a river.  
They were created in the Kahfu cave.  
They can talk with Satans.  
(…)  

What happened in Katuwal makes me laugh.  
They insulted the laborer who was forced to carry things.  
The white men reached the market place.  
They went into the Chaanaga river and got tired.  
They were hindered by the river but thought how to fight.  
They crossed the sand hill.  
They stayed overnight at the Baali well.  
The news about them reached Maroua.  
The chief announced from the evening till late at night, saying:  
“Let every archer poison his arrows.”  
The Maroua people poisoned thgir arrows.  
They thought it was just like attacking the hill pagans.  
They knelt down and sent the arrows at the white men.  
Actually they were not able to fight the white men.  
Thenara men sharpened their spearheads.  
They thought it was just like attacking the people living in the east.  
They thought it just a fight of Hayaatu’s days.  
They tried to gallop on horses and throw spears.  
The white men camped at Ibba Sape.

The one who knelt down took position among the Sara soldiers. Soon they shot the guns. Hastily they shot the machine guns. They poured machine gun bullets over the Fulbe warriors. Siddi Geereme became a martyr on the spot, the victim of the confrontation against them. The Maroua warriors ran away toward Zayka. The नारा warriors ran up to the Makabay hill. On this day I was sleeping. shameful thing happened to my neighbor. He came to me running, and touched me. He told me: “My friend, let us run away. I found a cave. Let us go to find it, and go into it.” “As is my character, I do not feel ashamed. I will not go into a cave. The war is taking place in Miskin. I can run away from them even on foot.” (Eguchi, vv.1-24; 125-164, pp. 471-479)

**SOME COMMENTS ON EGUCHI’S TRANSLATION**

Several aspects, such as rhythm, structure, form and content, of this first English translation of the poem beg commentary. The rhythm of the source text (ST) is ignored in the target text (TT), the English verses being longer than those of the Fulani original. Also, neither the ST nor the TT is divided into stanzas. Both are presented side by side in running form. Eguchi does include a total of 11 footnotes (for the whole poem) to explain certain details. Taking these comments into consideration, let me now propose my retranslation of this excerpt, using Eguchi’s TT as a starting point, but relying too on my understanding of the original text.

**Eguchi’s Translation**

What I have been saying is that they are not good. Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms. What I have been saying is that they are not good. It is they who made people bend down and made them donkeys. The people were forced to carry without payment. The white people are masters with spurs. They wore red fezzes, and carried blankets. It is they who torture the circumcised adults again. Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms. In these days no one can stop the machines. When these young people shout, they made us cry. They have money, and they troubled us. What I have been saying is that they are not good.

**My Retranslation**

Why do I say they are not good? When they came they came fully armed. Why do I say they are not good? Those who bend people and make donkeys. People without salary. White men, masters of spurs. Not with fezzes but in their capes. Who circumcised adults another time. When they came they came fully armed In the age when machines Cannot be stopped. Children cry, we the adults do too. They have money and make us harried.
The story of the white people, the conquerors.
The white men cannot be appealed to the court.
What have been saying is that they were conquerors.
You should know that they are not good.
Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.
The war made them powerful as they are.
They made fools of chiefs saying: “What?”
They are those who came out of a river.
They were created in the Kahfu cave.
They can talk with Satans.

(...)

What happened in Katuwal makes me laugh.
They insulted the laborer who was forced to carry things.
The white men reached the market place.
They went into the Chaanaga river and got tired.
They were hindered by the river but thought how to fight.
They crossed the sand hill.
They stayed overnight at the Baali well.
The news about them reached Maroua.
The chief announced from the evening till late at night, saying:
“Let every archer poison his arrows.”
The Maroua people poisoned their arrows.
They thought it was just like attacking the hill pagans.
They knelt down and sent the arrows at the white men.
Actually they were not able to fight the white men.
Thenara men sharpened their spearheads.
They thought it was just like attacking the people living in the east.
They thought it just a fight of Hayaatu’s days.
They aimed and arrowed the White men,
But the White man is unbeatable.
Ngara people sharpened their spears.
Thinking it was like the battles of the East.
A ride on horse, a throw of spear.
But the White men had
Ibba Sannge besieged.
Who knelt fought on the other side
Very soon they shot the guns,
And then quick another shot,
And fired bullets on people.
There became Siddi of Guereme a martyr,
Attempting to fight them.
Maroua escaped through Zayka.
Ngara escaped on Makabay.
And that day I was on my bed.
A shameful thing happened to my neighbor,
Who ran, came to me and touched me:
“Dear friend come and let’s run.
There is a hole I saw around.

(Eguchi, v.1-24; 125-164, pp. 470-478)
CONCLUSION

Having translated and published five extensive poems as scholarly articles, Eguchi’s work is a very important source for the retranslation of Fulani (Cameroon) mbooku poems not only into English but also into many other languages. Two additional scholars, the German Viet Erlmann and the Cameroonian Abdoulaye Oumarou Dalil, have published two transcriptions and translations into German and French, respectively. Therefore, new retranslations will be a way of giving this endangered oral literature a second chance and will also be of great value for Translation Studies and world literature. The same may be said of other ‘minor’ literatures belonging to other oral traditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


