

Can Indigenous contemporary literature of Australia sustain itself by becoming international?

Teresa Podemska-Abt,
University of South Australia

Nourishing and sustaining cultural diversity in today's constantly changing world, with all its complexities and socio-cultural peculiarities of people and their creations, and at times of an aggressive economic Anglophone globalisation of cultures and literatures, is a task of an imperative formation that needs to be cared for at many levels of the social life and organisation. In Australia, to maintain one's own culture is to be persistently aware of personal heritage and to be able to elaborate traditions. As time passes quickly and we live in a world that praises swiftness and efficiency, money and mass culture, losing the mother tongue and become estranged from our cultural environments occurs frequently. Everyday mainstream cultural reality pushes us to concentrate on our own area of work. An immediate result is that our own cultures fall down into the ghostly area of our life and mind. Our favourite mother tongue expressions, heroes, legends and customs stay in the backdrop of our Anglophone everyday realm. The same way as phantoms are distant and faceless, our own cultures become secluded and even confusing. Most people simply do not have the time or opportunity to explore the cultural riches with which our ancestors entrusted us. In consequence, on the socio-political scene, a balance and development of small cultures¹ become indistinct. Communities under the dominance of majority cannot foresee the future of their culture, which becomes a mere folklore, throughout which a person's unique cultural identity is further scattered and eventually distributed through the main cultural stream.

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Although all of the above is factual, each day in Australia is a celebration of dissimilar cultural identities. This is why literary translation (Zazula 2004) should occupy an important place in our socioliterary life. Well understood and implemented—as a medium of full communication and exchange—the need for translation of literature should be unquestionable. Essentially, it could not only teach the society to identify with different local community cultures but it could also help to sustain these cultures in our omnipotent Anglophone cultural settings and climates. As much as so-called Australian Culture is to form our country's cultural identity, our small cultures and literatures should be appreciated for their similarities and differences. For this to happen, mutual foreign language translation is proposed by this paper as the tool, which would benefit and serve all communities and all individuals who, in order to live a peaceful life, must understand one another's cultures to form a multicultural society as a whole.

Literature expresses freedom, widens people's horizons, adds to global consciousness, promotes rights and links, educates and—if not quite endorsed this way—always makes readers astute, more sensitive to beauty, difference and to the original. At the very least, it awards readers with entertainment and a will to share it with others. This is precisely the spot of social interaction where the translation can provide a common base for all minority cultures, especially their representations. Australian minority literatures (Indigenous, migrant or community languages) are best documented by the existence of their Australian cultural periodicals available to audiences of languages other-than-English. This phenomenon demonstrates that all cultures (Geertz 2005) define themselves in a similar way; they cast cultural tastes and imagination when written down and read by people. The societies and cultures that are written about are better known in the world, especially by Western cultures associated with economic and cultural powers. Societies that have not had written literature traditions seem to be disregarded. This is why some of these 'anonymous' cultures fight for their sovereignty (Brisbane 1992). This was the case with Indigenous



Australian literature which only recently has started to attract a readership in the academy and other institutions. Translation opens a global cultural exchange for small literatures in a much defined way, that is, a sustainable position within other cultures, which may or may not be in the same economic and political situation.

Both writers and critics of Indigenous Australian literature have been elaborating on the status (Davis & Hodge 1985) of Indigenous literature as different from the mainstream. (Baker 1986; 1987; 1989); dissimilar from English literary inheritance and tradition, as well as opposed to the settler and national literary trends and types (Ariss 1988). Indigenous literature makes the reality of Indigenous life current and evident. Main and episodic characters are full of spirit and they struggle to adjust to socially accredited positions and battle fabrications about Indigenous tribes and contemporary communities. Readers get a clear picture that all realities, not necessarily only fantasies, can be biased and manipulated by politics and people. By introducing new images, scenarios and plots, Indigenous authors recover their heroes to the spirit of place and Land. By inscribing values and cultural realities, they uphold and prolong details, ways of representation and principles of Indigenous community cultures. In this way, the Australian Indigenous societies inscribed in works are sustained. Translation takes this sustainability further. It captures and reconstructs the imperceptible and the unique in the text.

Talent, art, thoughts and creativity are transferable commodities in recent economically-driven times, and they can be of service to communities and societies only if they are shared, transparent and freely transported. This paper stresses that for Australian Indigenous literature to become celebrated throughout the world it must not only have something new to say and make use of serious styles of writing, but it must also have proper governmental support for its translation, otherwise the perspective is isolated and scattered. Globalisation of Indigenous literature through translations proper is a vital



strategy for cultural transformation (Tomaszkiewicz 2002). It is also a device for cultural preservation, continuation and perpetuation of descriptions of environment, poetic images of landscapes and spiritual creativity of Indigenous prosaic and poetic expressions and forms.

Some Australian Indigenous writers when asked about audiences express hesitation at Standard English being used as a medium for Indigenous expression (Turcotte 1991). English is employed as a decolonising tool (Casario 1992). It tells complex stories and embraces intricate identities of protagonists in order to re-interpret them and bring cultural sustainability to them. In this task, foreign language translation can assist Indigenous authors in supporting this universal Indigenous need for cultural understanding, proper representation (Gale 2000) and for maturing into a well-maintained literocultural discipline which is able to stand within the fields of literary history and theory, as well as within the fields of literary and translational criticism. Every culture has different internal, idiomatic, spoken and emotional structures, which inevitably resist translation (Kubińska & Kubiński 2004). More to the point, for all its variety and creativity, Aboriginal English, which is used by some Indigenous writers, seems to be only a half-measure in the cross-cultural communication between author and reader.² So far, Indigenous issues and cultures are interpreted and taught in Australian Indigenous Cultural Studies, which is a valuable and functional institutional means for cultural sustainability. It helps local and international English-speaking audiences to be more knowledgeable about the lives and creativity of Indigenous people. For a society—through various cultural activities, translation and criticism, as well as publishing—these types of studies still constitute an endless chain of human imaginings and possibilities that sooner or later will materialise in creativity and artistic works. Foreign language translation of Indigenous literature is yet to become a reality: however, some German, Polish, French, Italian translations for international readers are already available, thanks to individual translational initiatives.



Until now only a few Indigenous writers and poets have been translated into other languages or have been the subject of international literary critique; it is time to challenge this scenario and make sure that Australian Indigenous literature will challenge the world (Castro 2005). For this to happen, Australia needs to cut down its pro-nationalistic (Anderson 2000; Moran 2005; Gibson 1984) vision of Australian culture and literature and must place its mainstream Anglophone culture in the wider context of the multicultural nature of its society. Australia does not have one culture, literature and language. Therefore, in order to sustain them all, we need translations that are properly and widely supported by the State. Indigenous literature should be promoted as unique and distinctive. With globalisation, literature has become a commodity, a product for sale. As a result, Indigenous writers could enjoy attract large numbers of readers; literary translations open up endless international readerships. This is yet another advantage of translation. Through language and cultural conversion, perhaps using foreignisation (Venuti 2000) for this particular reason, translation can offer a sustainable position for Indigenous literature within the global trends of the literary market, thus sharing its Indigenous cultural content with other cultures, while still maintaining its distinctive difference nationally and internationally (Hongwei 1999).

Literary translation, in fact any translation, cultural or linguistic, in its wise pragmatic form, is a complex and difficult process (Baluk-Ulewiczowa 2004). It demands detailed knowledge and education in several subjects. One of the most crucial tasks is to have as broad a knowledge as possible of issues addressed in Indigenous culture and literature, so to be able to interpret elements that are historically, socially and linguistically underpinned. Translators who are not familiar with multiple sociopolitical and socioliterary Indigenous contexts are unlikely to deal effectively with complex Indigenous content, unless they cooperate with authors and other professionals from the Indigenous subject fields; with



time a foreign translator acquires a thorough knowledge of the source and the target culture and its languages but it would be unrealistic to ignore the local human resources.

My involvement with Indigenous texts and writer-colleagues teaches me that in order to launch contemporary Indigenous literature to the world, we, as the Australian society, are required to broadly translate its works by using translators who are living within our culture, have access to sociopolitical and literocultural sceneries and are bi- or multilingual, and who understand the contexts in which this literature is situated. Only then, Indigenous literocultural representation will not be at risk. Local knowledgeable translators who understand sociocultural contexts (Puzynina 1997), facilitated by cultural studies, can satisfy the requirements for translating Indigenous literary works. At present, the creativity of Indigenous (and immigrant) writers of Australia seems to be at its most excellent stipulation; providing strong translational enforcement of Indigenous literature, to successfully reach the global markets, seems to be a cause of reasonable persuasion. Clearly, translating a literary work is an exercise involving two cultures and the creation of a translation can ensure the Indigenous original's longevity and sustainability. Appropriate funding for locally-based language translations, publication, and distribution of works from Indigenous authors should be supported. Such initiatives will bring together authors, translators, publishers and distributors, and will promote and sustain what is exclusively Australian—its different cultures and pluralistic ways of living and creativity.

As argued in this paper, in order to promote Indigenous literature's trends, themes and styles, and to sustain achievements of Indigenous writers such as Alexis Wright, Anita Heiss, Sam Watson, Herb Wharton and Kim Scott, Indigenous culture needs to be known globally. It demands a cooperation of different individuals, writers and translators. As mentioned earlier, it needs institutions to work out methods for cultural production of language



translation and its distribution. This can be structured in governmental and private sectors simultaneously, with a stress on Australian embassies' input in launching Indigenous books and researching markets in countries in which they are operating. To promote Indigenous literature internationally, embassies could stage diverse cultural events—conferences, readings in translations, story tales combined with traditional and contemporary music, as aspects of living cultural experience. The title selection practices should be carefully designed to strike a balance between genres. Juxtaposing the works of classic authors with more contemporary writers and inclusion of academic, educational and critical material should simplify international and local channels of distribution. Such an approach would assure constant progress and sustainability of Indigenous cultures, so immensely Australian. Through such translational policy Australia would give non-English speaking readers the opportunity to enjoy a breadth of quality writing from Indigenous writers.

Indigenous literature, with its artistic originality and invention, and its cultural morals, richness and ethics is in a constant struggle to place itself on the local and global scene. Without sacrificing their difference and freshness, Indigenous authors, as they already do, must continue with their strategies to sell and promote their work. In particular, consistent with contemporary written Indigenous literature are Indigenous writers' endeavours in inscribing Indigenous culture-bound elements into texts that bring in characters and lyrical subjects who stand for their cultural identity (During 2001). Indigenous narratives create literary realities of plots to engage readers in translational landscapes that encourage proper representations.

The history of literary translation and interpretation (Fish 2002) in Australia is relatively new. In early days it was rooted in political possibilities and milieu. The vision of the globalisation of English inflects contemporary conversations; re-imagining the role of translation in the world of arts and letters energises interest in translation among



translators in the academy and beyond. Redefining the role of translation as a functional paradigm for broad-based problem-solving and cross-cultural communication medium provides new avenues for local literatures to become truly global. Furthermore, translation promotes knowledge of literature in the current trans-national age. Given that translation influences cultural practices and their representations through language, folklore and cultural products, it can be said that the ways in which readers, writers and theoreticians develop their reception techniques and appropriate translations bring historical residue of personal understanding of different cultures. Cross-cultural translation explores diverse ways of literary and critical communication within varied contexts.

Literary translations for local and international usage are important. A local awareness of literary translation's significance in sustaining Indigenous culture and literature is an imperative objective. As this paper advocates, the literary institutions and agencies must see Indigenous cultures, in fact any community culture, as ones that represent Australian cultures as diverse and multifarious. In such a scenario, all minority literatures 'get the fair' go and are able to sustain their values. Anglophone mainstream culture is not the sociocultural reality in Australia (Throsby 2006).

A standard observation in small communities, especially postcolonial and postcommunist, is that in a world where minority languages and cultures are dying out, the survival of Indigenous cultures depends on literary translation. It contributes greatly to the development of languages and literatures. Through translating and printing of translated texts, translation enriches and transforms various kinds of knowledge, ethics and cultures. Instrumental in helping to introduce cultures into the local readerships, translation reforms the written languages of different cultures. Within the target cultures, translation acts as a means of beginning a larger movement against the hegemony of the main culture. Translation leads to cosmopolitanism, thus pilots a pluralistic existence of numerous cultures.



For Australian Indigenous literature, translation brings unlimited imaginative challenges. One of these challenges is a new apolitical readership (Kropiwiec et al. 2005), unaware of local mainstream tensions and judgmental attitudes. Embarking on a translated work (which by the nature of the foreign language decolonises English of the original and the text itself), these new audiences may eventually be tempted to reach for the direct representation, that of the original text. Such a situation would promote an independent status of Indigenous literature (Mudrooroo 1997), thus, the translation will facilitate sustainability of both, Indigenous cultural heritage and Indigenous literature. Another advantage of translation lies in the fact that it spreads new and unknown images to other cultures, thus providing an educational component. Therefore, it educates these cultures. Reversed adequate images and representations are sustained. In such way translation shines ample light on the Indigenous past inscribed in Indigenous literary texts and conveys present day reality and sociocultural authenticity.

One of the primary roles of translation is to promote literature that is original, different and has gained remarkable popularity or reached the national or international canon. As a result, translations of the same work are undertaken in different periods and by different translators. They constitute a body of work that is subject to criticism both in terms of translation and methodology. Translated versions of works are different representations of the same literary reality of the text. In consequence, each translation deepens audiences and critics' understanding of the reality inscribed in texts; this is possible due to employed translational strategies, as well as to translators' individualistic tastes, sensitivity and artistic skill. Through such fusion of translations, the original work is sustained in its various translational forms. The more representations of the original, the more adequate and sustainable is the picture of the translated culture within reader responses of other cultures' audiences. This is how issues of Indigenous representation can be justified.



Literature and translation challenges historical succession; it is always a starting point for further growth and advancement of a particular culture. Theoreticians and critics of the translation search for the best possible portrayals of the original work, a model which will be able to sustain the original's cultural truths and realities. I assigned myself in similar endeavours years ago when I first started writing about and translating Indigenous literature. Myths, legends, realities of the texts are all bodies of knowledge about Indigenous cultures, thus, once translated they are a knowledge source for international and local readers who can only read works in translation. This is how translations embrace and sustain social, cultural, literary and critical bodies of knowledge and serve different purposes: destroying negative images and stereotypes and creating new ones. As an insight into the intellectual capacity of other cultures, their customs, celebrations, lifestyles, ways of timing and working out the real world, translations connect local contexts to other parts of the world and to other literatures. Thus, translation channels cultural information from one geographical place to another, from one social group to a different social group, from the original text to the translated text; this transfer of information and values forecasts recreation of the original and its literocultural facets. Also, it promises inclusion of smaller cultures (O'Connor 1988) in an international, globally acknowledged, literary world. The international and cross-cultural role of the original is sustained by participation in a global culture and civilisation through translation. Reading Indigenous literature from a translation perspective offers new insight into de-provincialising Australian literature and sustaining (Ville 2002) the Indigenoussness in it.

So far, literary foreign and community translation is not a privileged domain in Australia; level five accreditation in most foreign and community languages is hardly obtainable. Yet, in a country with so many different languages and cultures, the possibilities for literary translation studies, criticism and research, as well as practical exemplification of it could be limitless.



Some of the issues I would like to finish with are concerned with different aspects of literary translation and its role in the sustainability of cultures, literatures and languages in Australia. Here are some of the questions that could be asked:

- Is the reception of translated works experienced in similar ways in different countries?
- Is the teaching of literary translation allowing similar responses to translated works?
- How do we teach literary translation to increase students' understandings of different cultures?
- What are the politics of translation practices across cultures and how do we respond to them as states seeking international and global communication between countries?
- How is the international lexicon being formed to change the way people perceive each other through translation?
- How do translation resources differ among cultures?
- How does Australia monitor statistics of translation proper, if at all?
- Should we have cross-cultural international literary translation centres?
- How important is a set of translator's beliefs about the world s/he translates?
- To what extent do conventional meanings of words determine translating processes and the translational product?

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Endnotes

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1. I use this term to describe cultures less visible and translated internationally; cultures of given countries communities and countries that do not participate in global cultural exchange.
 2. It certainly needs explanation notes when aimed at audiences. Perhaps, the best scenario for Indigenous literature would be to have many more books written in the original Indigenous languages and to provide their different foreign languages translations that would put a definite stamp of authenticity and proper representation on Indigenous artworks. This, under the present sociocultural and political circumstance, is not yet a fully developed alternative.

