

PUJOLRÀS NOGUER, Esther (ed.). *El océano Índico traducido (Antología)*. Disbabelia: Universidad de Valladolid, 2022, 383 pp.

The region that encompasses the Indian Ocean forms a complex universe about which much remains to be discovered and analysed. Therefore, *El océano Índico traducido*: published in the Collection Disbabelia, can only be a reason for joy. In this anthology –the last number of the collection–, a series of valuable literary works that belong to an aquatic cartography that has been traditionally forgotten is gathered; so much so that all the pieces are unpublished in the Iberian languages (7 fragments are translated into Spanish, 4 into Catalan and 3 into Galician and Basque). This mission fits perfectly in with the objectives of the said collection, characterized by the publication of pieces written in minority languages or by authors that have been scarcely translated even when using a dominant language, in the present case, English. Likewise, if we take into account the translations made into the minority languages of the Spanish state, we can notice how they outnumber those made into proper Spanish, which indicates to what extent *Disbabelia* values those considered as «the others». Thus, the Indoceanic space is brought into light through literature; assembled from the prologue of the work written by Kumari Issur, professor at the University of

Mauritania, and consolidated with the editing work of Esther Pujolràs Noguer, in charge, also, of shaping the introduction.

The different translators offer their contribution to the richness of an ocean that is organized, in this particular book, around its different regions. In this way, it spans from South Africa to India, including Tanzania, Zanzibar, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. English is the epitome of colonization, but in the anthology, it becomes a cohesive element, since the chosen works, except for those from Bangladesh, were originally written in this language. Although the translators admit that their task was not easy, their work stands out for its rigour and coherence. That is to say, they all follow the same principles. For example, they decided to keep in all the fragments those words that contributed to shaping the Indocean tradition, such as the names of foods (*daal, vitumbua*), elements of a particular culture (*oophlung, lakoklis*), etc. It is important to highlight that they incorporate explanations about their meaning, thus facilitating the process of reading and creating links between the culture of departure and the culture of arrival. Moreover, each translation includes introductory notes about the author and the translation *per se*. The latter is particularly interesting because it usually includes a summary of the plot of the story (which, in the case

of novels is particularly useful) and clarifications on the decisions made by the translators. Notwithstanding this, the literary works are undoubtedly the heart of the collection.

Kumari Issur's prologue acts as a first contact with the Indoceanic world and defines, to a certain extent, the book itself, characterized by its novelty and by allowing readers to unite imaginaries and build bridges between the familiar and the unknown. Therefore, it will be those languages, people and cultures of the translated works the ones that will open a new horizon; a new sunset on the Indian Ocean navigable for an audience that was previously in the «dark». In her introduction, Esther Pujolràs Noguer, co-founder of the Ratnakara research group, perfectly summed up this diversity that transcends boundaries. Pujolràs Noguer establishes a comparison with *The Thousand and One Nights*, not only because the anthology itself includes the rich Indoceanic imagery by presenting its true complexity and complementarity, but also because the translations, carried out with care and sensitivity, lead, on the one hand, to harmony and, on the other, to the understanding of, a priori, divergent cultures. We could say, then, that the book becomes a collage in which beauty lies in the coherence of fragmentation.

As has been previously advanced, the anthology is organized around different regions of the Indian Ocean.

Thus, Chapter 1, South Africa, is the largest and the one with the greatest plurality of authors: Farida Karodia, Shamim Sarif, Ronnie Govender, Ashwin Singh and Imraan Coovadia. The Indo-African connection is the common denominator of the works included and the heart-breaking reality of the apartheid, in which people were divided and kept apart into racial groups, becomes the historical context of the fragments. In this way, the chapters of Karodia's novel *Other Secrets*— translated by M.^a Dolores Raventós Conill deal with the eviction of an Indian after the entry into force of the law known as the Group Areas Act. The grandmother of the family, voice of wisdom, reflected on the terrible results and the nonsense of the aforesaid law by stating «cuando llegue el día del juicio final [...] lo que contará será quiénes somos como seres humanos. Ni el color ni la raza tendrán entonces importancia» (p. 56). With regard to the protagonists of Sarif's *The World Unseen* (translated by María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia into Galician), they wish they did not have to wait for the final judgment so that their relationship would not be under the control of a racist and sexist society¹. The story *1949* written by Govender and translated by Óscar Ortega is also situated in this suffocating context, in which «no

1. This vision connects directly with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory on intersectionality.

había lugar para la pena o la compasión» (p. 114). As for the scenes of the play *To House*, by Singh –translated into Catalan by Núria Casado–, they reflect the post-apartheid South African society; a society in which, paradoxically, diversity was used as a weapon of repression. Finally, Coovadia, in his novels *The Wedding* and *High, Low, In-Between* (translated into Basque by Arrate Ojinaga and into Spanish by Erika González, respectively) discovers the ins and outs of the married life of two couples who suffer the consequences of the historical period in which the action takes place. The inner world of the characters is described in detail and their humanity contributes to demystifying the Indoceanic imaginary and to presenting the reality of a space in which literature acquires an essential role in the construction and reflection of identity.

The despair, anguish and confusion that haunt the characters in South Africa spread to Tanzania. Chapter 2 focuses on a territory that we discover with the help of M. G. Vassanji. Both in the fragments of his novels, *The Book of Secrets* (translated into Catalan by Clara Ballart) and *And Home Was Kariakoo. A Memoir of East Africa* (translated into Basque by Elizabete Manterola), and in his short story «Breaking Loose» (translated into Basque by Naroa Zubilaga) the search for identity of the protagonists and the complexity of the post-colonial era are perfectly reflected.

For its part, Chapter 3, Zanzibar, presents the work of Abdulrazak Gurnah, Nobel Prize in Literature 2021. With a complex and elegant style, the author, sublimely translated into Catalan and Galician by Núria Mina and Xavier Díaz-Pérez (*Desertion* and *Gravel Heart*, respectively) details the effects of colonialism; on the one hand, through the romantic relationship between an Englishman and a Zanzibari woman and, on the other, through the alienation, so closely related to the Galician word *morriña*, suffered by a Zanzibari immigrant while living in the United Kingdom.

Chapter 4 moves us to Mauricio at the hand of Lindsey Collen and her translators, Juan Miguel Zarandona (*Mutiny*) and María Jesús Cabarcos (*The Rape of Sita*, translated into Galician). In these works, the focus is on women and the structural flaws of the post-colonial world that were especially violent and cruel toward them. *Mutiny's* fragments reproduce the harsh reality of a woman in prison while Sita, the protagonist of *The Rape of Sita*, reconstructs the rape she suffered by an acquaintance. Thus, these novels about women reflect the systemic violence of a world that was and is predominantly patriarchal; so much so that the author received death threats for her publications and *The Rape of Sita* was forbidden in her country.

In the same vein, the author Parvathi Arasanayagam, originally from Sri Lanka, creates an

autobiographical poem (translated by Isabel Alonso Breto) in which the poetic voice pays tribute to her mother –«My Mother»–. Likewise, the translator collects in this section, Chapter 5, a fragment of «The Bamboo Fronds»; a short story that describes life in a refugee camp after the bloody civil conflict known as Black July –the Tamil population was mercilessly attacked, and the consequences were transferred to their identity: «me pongo a pensar en mi vida, pero no en mi futuro» (p. 325).

Bangladesh constitutes the sixth chapter of the Indoceanic tour and the short stories collected have as a common denominator the period of the Partition. As has been previously advanced, it should be noted that this is the only case in which the translations are not made from the originals, but from English language versions. Thus, Maurice O'Connor is in charge of translating «Two More Deaths», written by Hasan Hafizur Rahman, and Dolores Ortega translates «Embrace», by Ramapada Chaudhury, into Catalan. In both fragments, the focus is on the traumatic outcomes that this historical process had on women.

Finally, Chapter 7 represents the most poetic part of the anthology. Juan Ignacio Oliva translates some of Tishani Doshi's poems: «Girls Are Coming out of the Woods», «Every Unbearable Thing», «Find the Poets», «Ode to Patrick Swayze» and «Buffaloes». This ending invites the reader

to go beyond the quotidian and the material and gives evidence of the strength of literature in the construction of the Indoceanic cartography.

In conclusion, with this anthology, a traditionally neglected region begins to be built in Iberian languages and its collective history is intertwined with the most personal aspects of human life. Therefore, translation serves to bring different cultures closer, but, at the same time, it also allows us to build the Indoceanic imaginary as a «site of resistance and nation building» (Maria Tymoczko, 1998, 21). Although one of the problems of the book responds to the fact that the linguistic diversity of the territory escapes this volume, it is also true that it opens the way to future collections. Likewise, one of the remarkable factors is how this reading helps to deconstruct a Eurocentric vision and analyse issues that can be extrapolated to the context of the target languages, such as racism and sexism. In short, dealing with a translation of these characteristics requires dialogue, empathy and effort; in other words, applying what, according to Michael Byram, would be the intercultural communicative competence. It seems to me that, in this task, the translators have managed to transfer all the emotion that underlies the works with total meticulousness; in fact, the value of this book can be found both in the selection of the works and in the quality of the translations, which

transmit the richness of this world and its characters. In this sense, we hope that *El océano Índico traducido* will be the first of many future anthologies dealing with the Indian Ocean literature.

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