

## SELF-TRANSLATION AND EXILE: A STUDY OF THE CASES OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O AND ARIEL DORFMAN

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**Abstract:** In this article, we focus on the trajectories of exiled writers who act as self-translators and as “individuals who act purposefully in a social context” (Palumo 2009, 9). We discuss the extent to which exile has paved the way for self-translation and also transformed those exiled writers into individuals who act as self-translators, “ambassadors, agents” (Grutman and Van Bolderen 2014, 325) in the USA, “constantly fighting [...] to restore [their] significance” (Brodsky 1994, 5). For the purposes of this study, we focus on the cases of the Kenyan novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and of the Argentine-Chilean-American novelist and playwright, Ariel Dorfman. Both Ngugi and Dorfman have, in different ways, been forced out of their home countries, they have sought exile in the USA, and they have written and translated into (and out of) English throughout their lives. Our analysis of these two cases will use an adapted version of John Glad’s multidimensional model of the process of literary creation of exiled writers. By analyzing both these cases through an adapted version of Glad’s model, we hope to contribute to the discussion on self-translation and on exile as a fact that affects this activity directly and in different ways.

**Keywords:** Exiled writers. Self-translators. Self-translation. Agents.

## AUTOTRADUÇÃO E EXÍLIO: UM ESTUDO DOS CASOS DE NGUGI WA THIONG'O E ARIEL DORFMAN

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, concentramo-nos nas trajetórias de escritores exilados que atuam como autotradutores e como “indivíduos que atuam



propositadamente em um contexto social” (Palumo 2009, 9). Discutimos até que ponto o exílio abriu o caminho para a autotradução e também transformou os escritores exilados em indivíduos que atuam como autotradutores, “embaixadores e agentes” (Grutman e Van Bolderen 2014, 325) nos EUA “em luta constante [...] para restaurar [sua] importância” (Brodsky 1994, 5). Para os propósitos deste estudo, concentramo-nos nos casos do escritor queniano, Ngugi wa Thiong’o e do romancista e dramaturgo argentino-chileno-americano, Ariel Dorfman. Ambos, Ngugi e Dorfman, de maneiras diferentes, foram forçados a sair de seus países de origem, buscaram o exílio nos EUA, escreveram e traduziram ao longo de suas vidas. Nossa análise desses dois casos usará uma versão adaptada do modelo multidimensional de John Glad para a análise do processo de criação literária de escritores exilados. Ao analisar esses dois casos através de uma versão adaptada do modelo de Glad, esperamos contribuir para a discussão sobre a autotradução e sobre o exílio como um fator que afeta essa atividade diretamente e de diferentes maneiras.

**Palavras-chave:** Escritores exilados. Autotradutores. Autotradução. Agentes.

## 1. Introduction

Self-translation, or “the process of transferring one’s own writings into another language” (Grutman and Van Bolderen 2014, 323), is regarded by scholars in the field of Translation Studies as an activity undertaken by many writers with different language backgrounds (Hokenson and Munson 2006, 1). It has also, for a long time, been regarded as “one of the blank spaces in the history of translation” (Santoyo 2006, 22). An issue that has deserved little attention in the history of self-translation is ‘exile’ as a factor that leads writers to the activity of translating their own work at least once in their careers. In this article, we will discuss the trajectories of exiled writers who act as self-translators, “individuals who act purposefully in a social context” (Palumo 2009, 9). We will discuss the extent to which exile has led them to self-translation and transformed them into individuals who act as self-translators, “ambassadors, agents” (Grutman and Van Bolderen 2014, 325) in the USA, the country they have chosen to live.

For the purpose of this study, we will present the cases of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and of Ariel Dorfman. Ngugi is a Kenyan novelist, theorist of post-colonial literature and Distinguished Professor of the University of California, Irvine. Dorfman is an Argentine-Chilean-American novelist, playwright, essayist, academic, human rights activist and professor of literature and Latin American Studies at Duke University. Both writers share characteristics which motivated this research: they have, in different ways, been forced out of their home countries, they have written and translated into English throughout their lives and they have made of self-translation a political instrument. Our analysis of these cases will be based on our adaptation of the multidimensional model suggested by John Glad in his *Literature in Exile* (1990). By analyzing these cases through our version of Glad's model, we hope to contribute to the discussion on self-translation and on exile as a decisive factor in the writers' careers.

This article is divided into six sections. In the next section, Glad's multidimensional model is described. In the categories of his model, Glad explores different features of exile such as the characteristics exiles have in common and the effects of changing languages, for example. We have chosen to adapt it so as to include essential questions for our analysis, as well as an important aspect of the publication of the work of exiled writers and self-translators: the presentation of their production to readers made explicit in paratexts (Genette 2009). In the third section, we describe Ngugi wa Thiong'o's case and in the following one, we go on to describe Dorfman's. In the fifth section, we analyze both writers' cases in the light of our adapted version of Glad's model. We conclude the article with our own considerations on self-translation and exile in general and as experienced by the writers and self-translators presented in this study.

To us, exile describes both the person who is expelled from his native country by the authorities and the person who is voluntarily absent for a variety of reasons, political and economic being the most common ones. This article will discuss both types.

## 2. An Adaptation of John Glad's Multidimensional Model

John Glad's Multidimensional Model is the result of a conference organized by John Glad and the Wheatland Foundation, founded in 1984 by Ann Getty, a philanthropist, and Lord Weidenfeld, a British publisher (Molotsky 1987). The Foundation aimed "to break down the barriers of cultural chauvinism and to stimulate interest in the literatures of both large and small countries" (Trueheart 1987). To achieve these aims, it sponsored conferences on topics related to arts, in general. However, as from 1987 on the founders chose to concentrate on literature and, in the same year, there were conferences on Literature (in Washington, U.S.A.) and on writers in exile (Vienna, Austria) (Molotsky 1987). In Vienna, a group of novelists, poets, and journalists from Central Europe, South Africa, Israel, Cuba, Chile, Somalia, and Turkey presented papers addressing the experience of exile, published in a book entitled *Literature in Exile* (Glad 1990). In the papers, writers explored facets of the condition of exile, providing answers to questions such as: what do exiled writers have in common? What is the exile's obligation to colleagues and readers in the country of origin? Is the effect of changing languages one of enrichment or impoverishment? How does the new society treat the émigré? Based on testimonies, Glad presents some interesting views. Firstly, he refers to the lack of homogeneity among exile experiences. Secondly, Glad describes the obstacles writers face when experiencing exile, such as linguistic and economic problems. Literature ceases to be a source of income when the writer is forced to leave his home country. However, Glad also states that "exiles [...] refuse to acknowledge a decline in their profession and have even made exile literature into a growth industry" (1990, 175). He goes on to argue that these writers do not limit their effort to "testimony", but "the very trauma of exile is an artistic stimulus" and "people who might never have taken up the pen under normal circumstances react to exile with a burst of creativity" (1990, 186). As we shall see, many writers react to exile by producing prolifically, writing novels, autobiographies

and self-translating them. Ariel Dorfman, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Vladimir Nabokov and Arturo Barea are some examples.

John Glad suggests a multidimensional model of the process of literary creation of exiled writers. We intend to enrich Glad's model by analyzing the work of writers who have translated (or who translate) their own work. Also, we will add a new category that brings information on the presentation of writers' works to readers. In this category, questions about how paratexts introduce exiled writers' works to readers are dealt with.

First of all, Glad classifies authors according to the circumstances under which they find themselves abroad: do they return home from time to time? Did they take the decision to leave their home countries under coercion? As examples, we can mention the cases of the Cuban writer Gustavo Pérez Firmat and of the Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar. Pérez Firmat immigrated to the United States in 1960 with his family (Pérez Firmat 2006, 108) and he has "never gone back to Cuba, and perhaps [he] never will" (2006, 118). The Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar, on the other hand, spent seven years in exile but came back to Brazil when he thought it was safe to do so (Nogueira Jr 2016).

The second feature proposed by Glad clusters writers according to the place of publication of their work, most of the times in translation done by the author him/herself or by professional translators. Many exiled writers had their work banished in their home countries and the only possible way to survive as a writer and have a literary career was to have their work published abroad. Other authors had their literary work published both at home and abroad. Milan Kundera is a good example of a writer who had his work published in a number of places: in his native country, in France (the country of exile) and in other countries around the world. Exiled in France, for the majority of Kundera's writing career, "he wrote in Czech, though soon after he published his first prose work, his writing was banned in the only country in the world where the language is spoken" (Woods 2006, 1).

Therefore, for Kundera, “translation is everything” (Kundera 1988, 121), especially if we consider that “for 20 years Kundera wrote in a language that few people could read” (Woods 2006, 1). His only chance of being read around the world was to have his work translated first into French and then into many different languages. As Michelle Woods points out, “until 1989 nearly all of his readership read his novels in translation” (2006, 104).

The third feature classifies writers according to their intended primary readers. These are writers who, in spite of living and working outside the boundaries of their home countries, still write for those readers left in the country of origin or for those who, like themselves, live outside the country of origin – other émigrés or foreigners. When writers translate their own work, they are considered “recreators producing a new original on the model of the old” (Hokenson and Munson 2007, 199). If they are producing a new original, a new group of “intended primary readers” is also produced. This is the case of Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote *Luzhin Defense* in Russian while living in France, since his audience was made of Russian émigrés. After the enthusiastic reception of French critics Nabokov himself translated it into French (Casanova 2004, 175) producing a new original, and creating thus a new group of “intended primary readers”.

The fourth and fifth features of our version of Glad’s model can be presented together since they refer to language and culture. In the fourth feature, exiled writers are classified according to the extent of the differences between their mother and foreign languages and cultures. The fifth feature refers to the language of the host country: if it is the same as or different from that of the country of origin. If it is different, does the writer react or switch? Considering self-translation, we would ask, do writers react by writing originals in their first language and self-translating them into their foreign language? Or do they switch languages? In other words, do they write their original work in a foreign language first and self-translate them into their mother tongues then? Vladimir Nabokov is an example of a writer who would have faced

many difficulties due to differences between native and foreign languages had he not been born in a trilingual family and studied in Cambridge. While living in France, he chose to react and he translated *Luzhin Defense* (originally written in Russian – his first language) into French – a foreign language. After moving to the USA, he started writing his originals in English and self-translating his Russian originals into English. We would argue that Nabokov chose to switch especially after the great success achieved by his novel *Lolita* (Antunes 2009, 112).

In the sixth feature, Glad groups writers according to their attitude towards repatriation: do writers accept it or do they reject it? If they cannot return to their home country, do they even want to? Looking back at the writers whose experiences of exile we have briefly described, attitude towards repatriation varies. While Gustavo Pérez Firmat has never gone back to Cuba (2006, 118), Ferreira Gullar, as we have mentioned before, has moved back to Brazil and has lived there ever since he came back to Rio de Janeiro in 1977 (Nogueira Jr 2016).

Our adaptation of Glad's model includes the seventh feature. It groups exiled writers and self-translators according to the presentation of their work to readers: do paratexts of exiled writers' works mention their condition of exiles? Are the works of exiled writers and self-translators presented to readers as self-translations? Or, in the words of Xosé Manuel Dasilva (2011, 46), are self-translations transparent or opaque? If self-translations are transparent, they are presented as works translated by the author in the paratexts. If, on the other hand, there is no information in the paratexts about the nature of the text, the self-translation is opaque (*ibid.*). This is an important feature especially if we consider the cases of Ariel Dorfman and Ngugi wa Thiong'o since for both writers self-translation is a political act, as we shall see in the next section. It is important to highlight, however, that acting politically as a self-translator means showing that the authors themselves are the translators of their works in the paratexts.

Having presented our adaptation of Glad's model, we will now turn to the cases of the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Argentine-Chilean-American writer Ariel Dorfman.

### 3. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's case

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born in Kenya in 1938 into a large Kikuyu peasant family. He learned to read and write in Kikuyu, his mother tongue, and learned English during his school years. Ngugi wrote his first four novels in English: *Weep Not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). After some time, he felt compelled to explain why he had chosen to write in English and not in Kikuyu. He stated that up to a certain moment African writers did not feel there was anything wrong with writing African literature in English or in other European languages (Ngugi 2009, 17).

In 1976, Ngugi was invited to participate in the cultural projects of the Kamiriithu Community Education and Culture Centre as an educator and playwright (Rodrigues 2011, 13). His play, "I Will Marry When I Want" was performed in Limuru, with actors from the workers and peasants of the village. Because the play was "harshly critical of the injustices of Kenyan society" (Serpell 2017) and because of the writer's work with the villagers, Ngugi was arrested and imprisoned without charge in a maximum security prison. In prison, he decided to abandon English and adopt Kikuyu as his primary language of creative writing (Ngugi 2009, 19). He wrote *Caitani Mutharabaini* (1980), which he later translated into English as *Devil on the Cross* (1982). His decision was due to his wish to see his work move beyond the limits Kikuyu naturally imposed upon it. *Caitani Mutharabaini* (1980) is the first modern novel to be written originally in Kikuyu.

While Ngugi was in Britain for the launch and promotion of *Devil on the Cross* (1982), he learned about the Moi regime's plot to eliminate him on his return. This forced him into exile, first in

Britain, and then the U.S. His next Kikuyu novel, *Matigari* (1987), was published in 1986 and banned in Kenya. Between 1986 and 1996, it could not be sold in Kenyan bookshops. In fact, all books written by Ngugi were removed from educational institutions (2009, 20) since most of them are highly critical of the inequalities and injustices in Kenyan society. In other words, exile meant for Ngugi, “the end of his educational and literary projects” in his native country (Rodrigues 2011, 18).

Ngugi remained in exile for the duration of the Moi dictatorship, between 1978 and 2002. When he and his wife returned to Kenya after twenty-two years in exile, they were attacked by four hired gunmen and managed to escape.

Ngugi has continued to write and translate prolifically, publishing, in 2006, *Wizard of the Crow*, an English translation – by the author – of the Kikuyu language novel *Murogiwa Kagogo*. The author states that the expression “translated by the author” should be printed in the first pages of the novel so that readers know there is an original in a language other than English (Ngugi 2009, 21). If the author is Ngugi wa Thiong'o, an African author, readers are expected to know that the original language is an African language, which consequently, can be a literary language, a language in which original literature can be written. Self-translation is thus part of Ngugi's political project to turn Kikuyu a literary language.

Ngugi is currently Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. As we can see, he holds a position from which he can speak with symbolic “authority” and which enables him to spread his ideas among his peers in the many seminars, conferences, projects and among researchers interested in Comparative Literature and in African Literatures. In addition, Ngugi was until recently one of the directors of the *Centre for the Advancement of African Languages and Literatures*, an organization located in Africa. Holding this position shows, apparently, Ngugi's attempt to promote African languages and literatures (Rodrigues 2011, 20). Furthermore, Abdi Latif Dahir, in the March 26, 2016 issue of the British newspaper

*The Guardian*, points out that Ngugi's short story "The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright" has been translated into more than thirty languages, "making it the single most translated short story in the history of African writing".

In the interview reported in *The Guardian* article, Ngugi expresses his view that writing literature in Kikuyu and in African languages would "empower Africa by making Africans own their resources from languages". As we have seen before, Ngugi carried on his political project of making African languages become literary languages, strong and visible both inside and outside the limits of the African continent. We also see here the self-translator, an individual acting politically, with clear purposes, in a social context. He self-translates his own short story from Kikuyu into English and has a group of Africans, who use different African languages, translate the same story into their own languages. In other words, Ngugi acts politically when he has other people working so as to show the existence of other languages in the African continent. Or, as Rodrigues puts it, Ngugi's trajectory "has been taken [...] as an attempt to empower the people" (2011, 15).

#### **4. Ariel Dorfman's case**

Ariel Dorfman has been a Professor of Literature and Latin American Studies at Duke University since 1985. In an interview with Danny Postel, published in *The Progressive* in 1998, Dorfman describes his life as "a trajectory of exiles" (4).

When he was two, his father had to flee Argentina for political reasons. He went to the USA, where Dorfman followed him and had a traumatic experience in a hospital, which led him to renouncing the Spanish language (2002, 55). He did not speak Spanish for ten years and became a speaker of English. When he was twelve, the family had to flee the USA and Dorfman went back with his family to "a Chile [he] did not want to live in and whose language [he] could not speak or write" (Dorfman 2003, 32). But

eventually, he fell in love with the language and with the movement that would become the Chilean revolution, and he finally came to renounce the English language because it was the language of the gringos, oppressors of Latin America. In Chile, he participated in the democratic revolution of Salvador Allende and “swore that henceforth [he] would write only in Spanish” (Dorfman 2005, 53).

In 1973, the year Dorfman published his first novel, *Moros en la Costa*, a military coup led by General Pinochet left Allende dead. Dorfman survived seeking asylum in the Argentine Embassy and declaring himself an exile. In the interview to Postel, Dorfman describes 11 September, 1973 – considered by many the first day of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile –, as “the moment in [his] life when everything changed, how [he] became this person who’s bilingual, who’s multicultural, who’s hybrid”. And about his production in the same interview, he says “[he] has spent the last twenty-five years telling the story, in many different ways, of Chile”. Or in Joseph Brodsky’s words, “he will stick in his writing to the familiar material of his past” (1994, 6).

Dorfman has written and translated, alone or in collaboration with translators, several works. He wrote the play *Death and the Maiden* in Spanish and translated it into English a short time after he had finished writing it. According to Dorfman, he decided to translate it himself because the Chilean audience did not like the play and rejected it altogether (Dorfman 2002, 56). He wrote the novel *Konfidenz* in Spanish and translated it into English. Then he corrected the Spanish version using what he learned when translating it into English (Dorfman 2004, 207). The author wrote his autobiography *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey* in English and then translated it into Spanish, following the original structure, as he says. However, as he states, “[he] managed to keep only part of [his] promise and produced a slightly different version” (Dorfman 2004, 208). As we can see, Dorfman’s literary career in exile is filled with translations of his own work. Besides, the work he produced while in exile is filled with stories about Pinochet, Chile, and Chilean dictatorship.

## 5. Ngugi and Dorfman and the adaptation of Glad's multidimensional model

Let us now consider the cases that have just been described in the light of the seven features of our version of Glad's multidimensional model. We will examine the model so as to observe how it applies to these writers' experiences of exile. Before we do so, however, let us highlight the view of self-translation as literary creation, as argued by both Ngugi and Dorfman.

Ngugi writes about the process of translating his writing into another language, stating that "the muse would possess [him] again" (2009, 20). Or, as Susan Bassnett puts it, the process of self-translation can be "read as a stage of creative development" (2013, 288), a process, therefore, significantly different from the process that a professional translator goes through while translating. Dorfman has a different name for the process of self-translation: "rewriting" (2004, 208). However, he does not describe the process of self-translation. He states that the process of self-translating the novel *Konfidenz* into English is "complex" but names "rewriting" the process of correction that took place when he corrected the (original) Spanish version as a result of the (apparently) simultaneous process of self-translating *Konfidenz* into English (2004, 207). Ngugi and Dorfman describe a complex process of self-translation that interferes with (the so-called) original writing. Let us now see how our version of John Glad's model applies to the cases that have just been described.

For both Ngugi and Dorfman, the USA have become their home country. However, while for Ngugi and his wife, going back to Kenya for the first time – as adults – was a traumatic experience that made them leave their native country, Dorfman experienced such trauma during childhood in a hospital and remained in the USA after going through that experience in the country the family searched for exile. Later, both writers had successful academic careers in America.

The conditions that made Ngugi and Dorfman leave their native countries differ somewhat. Ngugi left Kenya so as to promote his new book at the time. While in Britain, he found out he could not go back home because there were plans to eliminate him. While in Chile, Dorfman escaped death since he was not at the presidential palace on the day of the coup. He sought asylum in the Argentine Embassy, declared himself an exile, and subsequently lived in Paris, Amsterdam, and Washington D.C.

As for the writers' intended primary readers, it is not easy to say. However, both Ngugi and Dorfman try to reach distinct readers – the ones back home and the readers of English in the USA and around the world – at the same time. We must consider that Ngugi's books were banished in Kenya between 1986 and 1996. Since he started writing in Kikuyu and translating his books into English, several groups of primary readers were aimed at, both in Africa and around the world. As for Dorfman, most of his materials are published both in English and in Spanish. Therefore, his primary readers are the readers of English and Spanish. Or, “how to deny the possibility of transmitting twice over to an increasingly deaf and indifferent world the story of my ravaged land – which would, presumably, lead to my being able to convince twice as many people” (Dorfman 2004, 206). In other words, original writing (in Spanish) alone would not make the story of Chile known to a sufficient number of readers. If we take into consideration that 700 million people speak English as a second language, which makes it occupy “a hypercentral position in the galaxy of languages” (Grutman 2009, 123), both Ngugi's and Dorfman's choices can be understood since the publication of their works in English makes it accessible to a greater number of potential readers.

As for the differences between the languages, both Ngugi and Dorfman grew up between the languages they write and translate into, which means they would be familiar with at least some of the differences. When in exile, both writers chose to write in and translate into both languages. But again they made different choices. While Ngugi chose to write his novels in Kikuyu and to

translate them into English so as to show that an African language can be a language of literature, Dorfman chose to write both in English and in Spanish, to translate from and into English and Spanish, about the same topic: the story of Chile. So, while Ngugi acts politically writing novels in Kikuyu to make it a language of literature, Dorfman acts politically to make the story of Chile known to as many people as possible.

As for repatriation, Dorfman and his wife divide their time between Santiago and the United States, as the biography in the writer's website informs. Ngugi, on the other hand, has lived in the USA since he moved there in 1989.

As for the presentation of the self-translated work to audiences, editors' attitudes vary. Ngugi's novels carry the expression "translated by the author" in their first pages, which makes them transparent self-translations. Since Ngugi acts politically to make readers aware of the literary potential of Kikuyu, a transparent self-translation is the only possible strategy. As for Dorfman's self-translated works, most are opaque self-translations. Readers and researchers will only know the work is a self-translation if they read one of the many "reflections on acquisition of language and literacy" (Pavlenko 2001, 213) – the language memoirs – written by the author. His autobiography, translated by himself into Spanish, is the only transparent self-translation by Dorfman. There is however, another piece of information that is quite often present in the paratexts of the works published in the US: readers are informed that Dorfman is an exile. That seems to be an important piece of information that must be given to readers. If we take Dorfman's political project into consideration, the strategy can be understood.

Finally, there is a characteristic that is not treated by Glad as a feature of exiled writers but is relevant here: exile as a kind of input (not only "artistic stimulus"). Exile has acted upon both Ngugi and Dorfman as an input to make them become writers in their native languages and in their second languages; to make them become translators of their own works into their native and second

languages; and, also importantly, exile has acted upon Ngugi and Dorfman as an input to make them become ambassadors, agents, activists. Both writers have become university professors in the USA, they have written language memoirs which have been published in several collections that deal with bilingual writers/writing. Furthermore, Ngugi has published books on the politics of literature, of teaching literature and of writing such as *Decolonizing the Mind*, and *Writers in Politics*. Dorfman, on the other hand, has dedicated his professional life to telling his story of Chile, especially of the Coup that took Pinochet to power in 11 September, 1973. Besides writing novels and the language memoirs, which in a way or other deal with exile and dictatorship, or according to Brodsky, “the familiar material of his past” (1994, 6), Dorfman has written about the story of Chile and Pinochet in newspapers published around the world. Furthermore, both Ngugi and Dorfman have their own website where anyone can find their biographies, bibliographies, interviews, awards, essays, news, and contact details.

## **6. Final Considerations**

In this article we have presented some considerations on exile as a factor that leads writers into self-translation. For the purposes of the present study, we have chosen to concentrate on the lives and work of two writers who have chosen to write and translate their work into English, namely, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ariel Dorfman. These writers' choices were analyzed according to our adapted version of the multidimensional model of the process of literary creation of exiled authors, suggested by Glad (1990). Only recently has the link between exile, migration and (self)translation become a popular topic among scholars. At least three of the authors of the articles published in the last volume of the Italian periodical *Ticontre* (2017) dedicate their attention to this issue (Antunes 2017, 85-107; Duranti and Satriano 2017, 67-85). The articles show the powerful effects of exile and migration upon writers' lives and identities.

The analysis suggests that exile is not a uniform experience although it may look homogeneous at first. Both Ngugi and Dorfman live in the USA, and they work in North American universities. However, Ngugi was, until 2016, one of the directors of the *Centre for the Advancement of African Languages and Literatures*, an organization located in Africa, which shows the writer's project to promote African languages and literatures (Rodrigues 2011, 20). Dorfman, on the other hand, does not show such a desire. Both writers were forced to leave their native lands, but Ngugi was in prison while Dorfman was never imprisoned. Ngugi's time in prison provoked, to a certain extent, a major change in his literary career: he started writing his original work in Kikuyu.

About the writers' productions, two points must be made. First, we should state that it is somewhat easier for readers to discover that Ngugi is the translator of his work since the expression "translated by the author" is printed in the first pages of his novels. In other words, the expression is part of the peritext of his work, since it includes the elements inside the confines of the bound volume. Therefore, his self-translations are transparent (Dasilva 2011, 46). Dorfman's self-translations, on the other hand, differ. We can say they are somewhat opaque self-translations since peritexts do not mention the author as the translator. Therefore, readers who only have access to the novels do not know they are self-translations. They need to read epitexts, messages located outside the book, generally with the help of the media – the author's language memoirs and interviews, for example –, so as to find which texts Dorfman himself has translated. For Ngugi, transparent self-translations are the only possible choice since the author wishes to act politically to make Kikuyu a language of literature. Apparently, a transparent self-translation would not have the same impact in Dorfman's career.

Finally, exile has undoubtedly stimulated writers to act prolifically using different instruments in an effort to make their voices heard. The many instruments and the many acts – including self-translation – seem to be acts in the quest for significance lost

when they left their homelands. That significance is regained when their careers begin to take off, when the universities open up doors for these exiles to become members of the faculty, when the public in general listen to these voices sometimes unheard or rejected back home.

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