



Towards a Translation of Emmanuel Dongala's **Jazz et vin de palme**



My project is predicated upon imperfection. Translation, in itself, is a task that promises to fail ever-changing language trends and incomprehensible linguistic sentiments. As Benjamin puts it, "Even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to perish with its renewal. Translation is ... charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own." But even with the anxieties of translating (words, emotion, feeling, atmosphere), my thesis proposes a stimulating challenge that works intimately with both the introduced text and the politics within.

My first encounter with Emmanuel Dongala's *Jazz et vin de palme* (1982), a collection of short stories written on the heels of several remarkable party/regime changes in the Republic of the Congo, was in the first French class I took at Simon's Rock. It was fitting that I was reunited with it at a Parisian bookstore during my semester abroad, during which I took different literature and translation courses that inspired new ideas about language and its transformations.

Dongala's work is vast and varied, bravely working through a number of themes: French/Congolese nationhood, cultural identity, and comprehension/creation of art and language, among some. The particular Frenchness of this work poses its own challenge, and English can only go so far to describe the atmosphere of the streets of post-colonial Brazzaville. And even if there were the proper words, the syntax must be focused on the right subject; and even if the syntax and the phrase were exact, there's the trouble of French's particular gendered pronouns and adjectives... Amongst these thoughts, I am going to let this opportunity allow me to play with the two languages, and let them inform one another. I will be confronted with the process of revision, over and over. Broadening its accessibility to English readers is only half of the battle.

Instead of the conventional translator's note, the second component of my thesis is an analysis of both his text and the translation process that integrates my work in political theory to broaden an understanding of Dongala's stories. Since I am not a linguist, I cannot possibly do justice to a thorough reflection on the technical aspects of translation,



and instead I let these difficulties inform my thinking about the text's content and ideas. The remarks on translation will be shifted from a personal "journey" narrative – although the one-on-one work with the text is a critical part of its development – into a conversation with the text, its history, and its language. Both parts of this thesis are influential to each other, and I hope that they come together organically to form a complete shape as the stories merge into a collection.

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