

Moffat's seTlhaping translation as invasion: Re-translation resources for decolonisation

**Author:**Gerald O. West¹ **Affiliation:**

¹School of Religion,
Philosophy, and Classics
and Ujamaa Centre,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg,
South Africa

Corresponding author:

Gerald West,
west@ukzn.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 13 Apr. 2023

Accepted: 06 July 2023

Published: 19 Dec. 2023

How to cite this article:

West, G.O., 2023, 'Moffat's
seTlhaping translation as
invasion: Re-translation
resources for decolonisation',
*HTS Teologiese Studies/
Theological Studies* 79(4),
a8895. [https://doi.
org/10.4102/hts.v79i4.8895](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i4.8895)

Copyright:

© 2023. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work
is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

In the book *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (2016) the author provided a detailed analysis of Robert Moffat's translation practice. In this article the author takes that analysis further, using the theoretical framework provided by Nathan Esala in this PhD thesis and forthcoming book, namely 'translation as invasion'. Esala traces the colonial history of Africa-based translation practice, theorising the practice as 'translation as invasion'. This article draws on Esala's theorising in re-analysing Moffat's translation practice among the BaTlhaping. The article then goes on to argue for forms of decolonial 're-translation', focussing on two forms of decolonial translation, Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as translation (as advocated by Esala) and Julius Nyerere's use of indigenous Tanzanian poetics for translating the gospels. The article uses Michel Foucault's notion of 'heterotopic space' and Sithembiso Zwane's notions of 'invigorated space' and 'invented space' to theorise CBS and Nyerere's poetics as forms of decolonial space for African-led re-translation, with potential implications for African community-based participatory development.

Contribution: The article demonstrates how translation as a form of colonial invasion is practised by the missionary Robert Moffat, and how such forms of translation are being resisted through indigenous African reception of the Bible through re-translation practices.

Keywords: Robert Moffat; BaTlhaping; re-translation; decolonial; heterotopia; Contextual Bible Study.

Introduction

The imperial conquest and colonisation of Southern Africa begins with a shift in focus from trade in indigenous cattle to the stealing of indigenous cattle (West 2016:35, 48). Cattle in this formulation stand for both themselves and for the land they inhabit. This African understanding of cattle is in accordance with V.Y. Mudimbe's view that colonial formation employs 'procedures of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting lands [and cattle] in [southern African] colonies' (Mudimbe 1988:4). Trade, the primary purpose of the De Vereenichde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) (Dutch East India Company), shifts towards conquest and colonisation when Africans demonstrate their reluctance to barter cattle (Thom 1952:112). Trade is the precursor to colonisation.

Similarly, with the Bible. The first Bible among the BaTlhaping, the southernmost clan of what would become the 'Tswana', came from missionary-traders, and was understood as an item of trade by Kgosi Molehabangwe and his son Kgosi Mothibi (J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D]); (West 2016:86–87). As with cattle, the Bible as trade makes way, as a precursor, for the Bible as a colonising instrument. The BaTlhaping quickly recognise that the Bible, and the instruction associated with it, will invade and restructure their world (West 2016:106).

This article reflects more thoroughly on the invasive theological and ideological framing that accompany biblical interpretation and Bible translation among the BaTlhaping, using cattle as a trope to guide the analysis.

Translation as invasion

Nathan Esala offers us an incisive understanding of 'translation as invasion', locating his understanding in socio-historical rather than metaphorical notions of 'invasion'. Esala's concept

Note: Special Collection: Reception of Biblical Discourse, sub-edited by Itumeleng Mothoagae (University of South Africa).

of translation as invasion, grounded in the context of Ghana, 'is drawn from the lasting impact of the colonial practice of translation on the practices of translation that preceded it and followed it.' 'Colonial translation as invasion', he continues, 'has reinterpreted pre-colonial translation and continues to shape postcolonial practices of translation' (Esala 2021:20). As indicated, Esala (2021) does not avoid the realities of actual colonial invasion:

Any analysis of the present or the past must deal with the colonial translation of invasion, and colonial translation practice as cultural invasion. The purpose of colonial translation was to support the logic of invasion (p. 21, emphasis in original).

The argument in this article takes up Esala's concept of translation as invasion, but recognises that for the BaTlhaping actual colonisation has not yet taken place when Bible translation begins. When the first Bibles make their way into BaTlhaping territory in the early 1800s – whether in the hands of traders, explorers, or missionaries – the emerging British colonial colony has not yet reached the BaTlhaping (West 2016:85). While the BaTlhaping themselves have ventured forth into the colony for purposes of trade and reconnaissance, yet they remain firmly in control of their cattle and lands and culture. In this case, Bible translation precedes what Esala refers to as the translation of colonialism. My use, therefore, of the concept of translation as invasion is focussed on biblical-theological Bible translation.

Bible translation is generally a slow process, particularly among the BaTlhaping. The missionary translation process here is located within systems of religio-cultural and socio-political invasion.

Moffat's biblical-theological translation practice

Bible translation, although regularly imagined by various missionaries who sojourn with the BaTlhaping, begins in earnest when Robert Moffat takes charge of the missionary project among (or, more accurately, alongside) the BaTlhaping in May 1821.

In the missionary imagination, the Bible would speak for itself once translated. Expressed in various ways by different missionaries, Moffat quotes from a letter he received from Mr Hughes, 'writing to the author [Moffat] from an out-station' in response to the reception of the newly translated (1829) and printed (1830) Gospel of Luke and 'the first edition of Scripture lessons' in seTlhaping (Moffat 1842:617–618). Hughes refers to the Bible, '[t]he sword of the Spirit' (Moffat 1842), as follows:

Its success here is evidently not owing to the hand that wields it, but to its own native power and destination from above. Jesus and the apostles teach here without any human infirmity intruding between them and the hearts of the hearers. The great principles of the Bible Society are exemplified here, the simple reading and study of the Bible alone will convert the world. The missionary's work is to gain for it admission and attention, and then let it speak for itself. The simplicity of means of connexion

with the greatness of the effect, is quite in character with its Divine Author. To Him be all the praise. (p. 618)

Moffat goes on to elaborate, having already referred to the notion of Bible translation as 'the simple distribution of scriptural truth' (Moffat 1842:617):

The vast importance of having the Scriptures in the language of the natives, will be seen when we look on the scattered towns and hamlets which stud the interior, over which one language, with slight variations, is spoken as far as the Equator. When taught to read they have in their hands the means not only of recovering them from their natural darkness, but of keeping the lamp of life burning even amidst comparatively desert gloom. (p. 618)

The ideo-theological logic is clear. The Bible speaks on its own behalf. What is elided is the necessity of the indigenous language itself as a vehicle and the necessity of indigenous embodied speakers of the language as the only source for the language. The missionary's invasive role is minimised, as is the role of the theological apparatus that accompanies Bible translation. There is an overt presumption of indigenous deficit, expressed in both cultural and economic terms.

In his detailed work on the presence and perception of the Bible among the BaTlhaping, the author has already dealt with these dimensions of Moffat's ideo-theological Bible translation practice (Moffat 1842:164–231). The focus here in this article is on a particular example of Moffat's practice, his biblical-theological translation of cattle.

Translating cattle

Cattle had featured in earlier missionary biblical-theological engagements with the BaTlhaping. There could be no doubt, even to the colonial visitors among the BaTlhaping, that the BaTlhaping were a cattle people, embedded within a cattle culture (Schapera & Comaroff 1991:Part 1). Moffat's predecessor, James Read, attempted to understand and to connect with this local indigenous reality in his biblical-theological preaching. For example, as recorded by the artisan missionary Robert Hamilton, on the occasion of the completion of the church in July–August 1818, Kgosi Mothibi slaughtered an ox and Read preached on Isaiah 56:7 (R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, pp. 4–5). The base translation was probably the King James Version of 1611/1769, which reads as follows:

'Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people'.

Read, it would seem, adopts an inclusive biblical-theological position, connecting his sermon overtly to the cattle culture of his hosts (West 2016:141–142).

Similarly, Hamilton records, during the evening service on that same day, Read preached on 1 Chronicles 29 (R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 4–5). Hamilton does not

record precise verses so we can assume that the whole chapter or parts of it were read and reflected on. Again, the choice of text resonates with the host culture, with references to kingly succession (1), the building of a house for God (2–9), with each part of the community being acknowledged for their contribution (6–9), the slaughtering of cattle and communal feasting (21–22), and the recitation of praise to the king (26–30) (West 2016:143–144). Unfortunately, in these instances Hamilton makes no attempt to document either the reading-preaching process or their African reception. The translation process is elided, but there are clear attempts to translate cattle, for 1 Chronicles 29:21 reads as follows:

And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings unto the LORD, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs.

Another form of translation takes place a year later, when Read informs Kgosi Mothibi, based on a letter he had received from another missionary, Mr Anderson, that a 'Bushmen' and Griqua raiding party was planning to steal cattle from the BaTlhaping (R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 10). Kgosi Mothibi, Hamilton records, 'was highly pleased with Mr Anderson for letting him know' (R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 10). Text, whether the Bible or the letter (West 2016:148), could be useful to the BaTlhaping, provided it resonated with their cattle culture perspective.

Moffat's ideo-theological approach is quite different. His translation practice begins not with the Bible but with catechism. Moffat records in a letter dated August 1822 that he has translated John Brown's *A Short Catechism for Young Children: Containing, I. A Catechism, II. Passages of Scripture, III. Hymns* (Moffat and Moffat 1951: 53, see also footnote 91; Brown 1820). His orientation to translation is theological. The Bible has a definitive theological message, and it is this that must be translated (West 2016:187). This is why for Moffat local African translators are inadequate (Moffat & Moffat 1951:53); they do not yet know the message. Not only is their language barely adequate (Moffat & Moffat 1951:185) but their religio-cultural perspectives are also entirely inadequate (Moffat & Moffat 1951:185). They must, therefore, be treated as ideo-theological 'children' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:200).

With respect to the BaTlhaping's cattle culture, Moffat refuses to accept that the BaTlhaping choose habitation sites that privilege their cattle (West 2016:187). In siting his mission station, Moffat states in a letter dated January 1824, that 'it has been our object to impress on the minds of the Batclapees [BaTlhaping] the importance of removing to a station contiguous to the Kuruman fountain, out of which issues a stream of excellent water' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:112). This decision is made despite Moffat knowing 'that the Bechuanas [Batswana] are not generally willing to fix their towns near rivers or fountains, but always seek for a spot where thorn bushes are abundant' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:112). Yet persists, even though he acknowledges that there are 'no thickets of thorn bushes in the immediate vicinity of the

[mission] place to which we were directing their attention' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:112). Moffat does not understand that for the BaTlhaping care for their cattle is care for themselves. He has no understanding, to use Michel Foucault's incisive concept, of the BaTlhaping's 'order of things' (Foucault 1970:xv–xxiv). Put differently, his own missionary-colonial order of things is quite different from the order of things among the BaTlhaping.

Indeed, not only does Moffat not understand the centrality of cattle to the BaTlhaping order of things, he strives to drive a wedge between the BaTlhaping and their cattle. A particular day, Saturday the 21st April 1827, is an example worth careful exegesis. Moffat begins his entry with a comment that he finds 'pleasure' in his translation 'studies' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:247). But he then immediately laments the absence of 'a good interpreter', for, he admits, 'in the course of conversation I hear very many words which completely baffle my understanding, and often render the whole sentence unintelligible' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:247).

Ironically, Moffat then recounts how in that afternoon he 'entered into conversation with a young widow', judging her, however, to be 'more sprightly than wise' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:247). This summative judgement derives from how the 'conversation' proceeded, which Moffat then recounts, with no sense of the translation opportunity this conversation offers him. 'My first question was', Moffat continues, using a catechetical mode of discourse, 'what would become of her after death?' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:247). The woman is clearly puzzled by this interrogative-didactic mode, as Moffat acknowledges, for '[s]he stared at me with the utmost astonishment' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). Undeterred, Moffat persists in this mode of discourse, 'assuring her that death would spare neither of us' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). When the woman 'answered, that she knew not', Moffat explains how he 'gave her a plain scriptural answer, namely that she should go to hell if she died in her present state', adding 'that the wicked would be turned into hell, etc., etc., and pointed out that she was really of the number that forgot God' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). The use of 'etc., etc.' indicates Moffat probably embarked on a lengthy catechetical ritual theological response. Remarkably the woman tries to engage Moffat in actual conversation. 'She looked at me', Moffat records, 'and added, "You are a man of wisdom, how can you talk in that way?"' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248).

Moffat both literally and textually turns away from this invitation to conversation. He continues, immediately in his journal entry, stating:

'I put the same question to an old man who stood by, who replied that he thought he should not die, because he would not think of it'. (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248)

Again, refusing conversation as to how this old man understood Moffat's question, Moffat imposes his own ideo-theological perspective, insisting instead 'on the certainty of

death' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). The old man, recognising that this was not a conversation, 'walked off' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248).

Not deterred, Moffat continues, for '[b]y this time about a dozen women, principally the wives of chiefs, had come to the waggon' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). 'I continued the subject', Moffat says (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248), presumably interrogating these women about their understanding of death. The pattern is the same. He recognises a moment of potential engagement, but chooses to intimidate theologically rather than to nurture the opportunity for real conversation (West 2016:216). Moffat does not record his catechetical questions, but does provide a glimpse of the kind of 'conversation' that took place.

The women 'smiled at first, but when I spoke on the immortality of the soul, the coming of Christ, the events of that day, and the burning of the world and all things therein, they seemed really alarmed' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). Moffat clearly remains within a catechetical mode, demonstrating the ideo-theological web that is his biblical-theology. He goes through the motions of 'conversation', stating, 'At intervals I made a pause, to allow them to make remarks or ask questions', but continues immediately to assert contemptuously 'and some of these showed the degradation of their minds' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248).

Fortunately, Moffat does give us an indication of what these women might have said, allegedly citing their words:

One seemed much concerned to hear that the oxen, etc., would be destroyed with all other earthly things, and particularly that there would be none in heaven. 'What would become of beads, ornaments, etc., when the world was on fire?', asked another, and one asked (as if in some degree acquainted with scriptural language), 'And we who remain alive at his coming, what shall become of us?' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248)

What is clear from this summary report is that Moffat must have included in his biblical-theological admonitions an account of what would happen to their cattle on judgement day. Moffat understands enough about the BaTlhaping to recognise that fear for the fate of their cattle might prompt them to 'accept' his gospel.

The use of the term biblical-theology here is deliberate, for having recounted the women's responses, Moffat states, 'Paul's words were a ready answer' (Moffat & Moffat 1951:248). Moffat has a fixed understanding of the biblical-theology of the Bible and so is unwilling to enable actual conversation about the Bible and so biblical translation (West 2016:216–218). Cattle have no place in his missionary message.

Returning to Mudimbe's analysis with which this article began, we should pause to consider, having reflected on Moffat's translation practice, Mudimbe's analysis of colonial logic more fully. With respect to the colonial process, Mudimbe (1988) argues:

it is possible to use three main keys to account for the modulations and methods representative of colonial organization: the procedures of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting lands in colonies; the policies of domesticating natives; and the manner of managing ancient organizations and implementing new modes of production. Thus, three complementary hypotheses and actions emerge: the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective. These complementary projects constitute what might be called the colonizing structure, which completely embraces the physical, human, and spiritual aspects of the colonizing experience. (p. 4)

Moffat's mission in general (see J. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; J.L. Comaroff & Comaroff 1997), and his missionary translation practice in particular, participate in each of the three intersecting colonial invasive actions. He is determined to control the physical and religio-cultural space within which Bible translation takes place; he is committed to the biblical-theological re-formation of African bodies, minds, and souls; he attempts to use his translation products to draw the BaTlhaping away from their cattle economy into an emerging settler-colonial agriculture-based capitalism. Moffat's missionary translation practice is translation as invasion.

Decolonial re-translation

While unwilling to engage with the religious, cultural, political, and economic connection between the BaTlhaping and their cattle, Moffat inadvertently provides potential references to the cattle culture of the BaTlhaping in his translation, *Bibela ea Boitsépho*, 1890 (Sechuana Tlhaping – Moffat Bible) (for a history of this translation see Lubbe 2009). Unwilling to follow the BaTlhaping, Moffat carefully follows the King James Version (1611/1769). For example, where the King James Version (KJV) translates ποιμαίνω using [cattle] in Luke 17:7, Moffat follows, in this the first of his biblical book translations (Lubbe 2009:22), using 'likhomu', the *seTlhaping* term. The Greek ποιμαίνω is usually translated as 'herd' or even 'sheep', but the KJV translates it as 'cattle', and so Moffat follows with the *seTlhaping* 'likhomu'. Similarly, where the KJV translates the Hebrew הנהגה as 'cattle', Moffat follows with 'likhomu' (Gn 1:24, 25, 26, 2:20, etc.). Yet Moffat can only have identified this term from among the BaTlhaping! The very cattle culture he attempts to denigrate, he inadvertently affirms through these translations. Each of these, particularly in the Genesis references cited, is theologically significant, yet Moffat is unable or unwilling to use this translation to really engage with the cattle-based reality of the BaTlhaping. Similarly, in the remarkable ending to the book of Jonah, where God acknowledges the cattle culture of Nineveh (4:11) (West 2014), even here Moffat follows the KJV 'cattle' with 'likhomu'. But Moffat, unlike God, does not acknowledge the cattle culture of the BaTlhaping.

Bible translation could have been a site of significant ideo-theological engagement for Moffat. Indeed, the argument of

this article is that Bible translation (or more accurately, re-translation) ought to be a site of community-based engagement and even community-based development. Esala makes this argument in resisting translation as invasion. The vehicle he uses is the 'Contextual Bible Study' praxis of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, located within the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Esala uses Contextual Bible Study (CBS) 'as a form of emancipatory re-translation' (Esala 2021:272). Esala (2021) explains:

I describe CBS as a process of re-translating for community-led transformation. By dialogically re-translating a biblical text from a marginalized group's social location, and collectively 'enacting' a biblical text for the purpose of building a better social life in their context, CBS participants participate in reworking ideo-theological interpretative pathways at the grassroots and they begin experimenting with prophetic critiques of economic, religious, cultural, and political social systems. (p. 272)

Esala is specific about how CBS praxis might be appropriated for community-based re-translation, arguing that 'as a methodology CBS avoids being invasive and neo-colonial by grounding itself in local praxis and by affirming local epistemologies' (Esala 2021:286). He (2021) elaborates:

The overt intention of CBS is to serve specific groups engaged in specific struggles for liberation. And while there is a temptation for scholars, leaders, and intellectuals to be directive in emancipatory projects, CBS works towards an emancipatory process as well as an emancipatory purpose. The process is collaborative (p. 286).

Esala aligns translation praxis with the Ujamaa Centre's understanding of community-based participatory development (see Zwane 2020). In his PhD thesis and the book based on the thesis, Esala gives a number of examples of actual CBS work in Ghana among local communities where CBS is a form of decolonial praxis (as understood, for example, by Ramantswana 2016), although he does not use this term, preferring 'post(-)colonial' (Esala 2021:20, 26, 250, 259, 262), following the work of biblical scholars such as Musa Dube (Dube 1997). This article prefers the concept of 'decolonising', emphasising as it does, firstly, an overt 'dual process' in which there is an epistemic delinking from colonial knowledge systems and epistemic relinking with the indigenous knowledge systems (Ramantswana 2016:189–190) and, secondly, an overt economic connection between postcolonial and the indigenous contexts (West 2021).

Esala's careful theoretical and community-based CBS work offers an array of ways in which Moffat might have engaged with the cattle culture realities of the BaTlhaping. Moffat might have used, for example, Genesis 1 and 2, pivotal texts in missionary theology (Campbell 1815:191–192; West 2016:103–104), in a dialogical form of 'Bible study' with the BaTlhaping. Similarly, Moffat might have used the book of Jonah, dialogically, to emphasise God's empathy with cattle-based cultures, even if such cultures are 'foreign'. Such engagements would not only have generated a more culturally attentive translation, perhaps with notes (as envisaged in Wendland 2000), but would have enabled

Moffat and his mission, through collaborative translation practices, to be ideologically and theologically decolonised.

Moffat has not done this work, but the work should now be done as a form of decolonial 're-translation' (for a similar argument see Makutoane & Naudé 2009). As Gerald West has argued, superbly summarised and extensively elaborated by Nathan Esala (2021:259–266, who has also offered insightful comments on this article), re-translation as a form of community-based participatory liberatory development requires a return to and re-translation of missionary-colonial translations. A superb example of how this might be done, in addition to Esala's CBS approach, is Julius Nyerere's decolonial translation practice.

Nyerere, the leader of Tanzania's liberation movement, in his retirement, turned to Bible translation as a site of ideo-theological transformation. Nyerere had a deep commitment to Kiswahili, the lingua franca of the Ujamaa revolution and a substantive unifying factor across the approximately 120 ethnic and language groups within Tanzania (and beyond):

The Arusha Declaration in 1967 established Kiswahili as the national and official language of Tanzania, and the government subsequently applied its full authority to ensure that Kiswahili occupied the preeminent language role in the building of the nation (Noss & Renju 2007:42, note 5).

Translation was an enduring interest of Nyerere's, particularly into Kiswahili, as Nyerere sought to demonstrate the capacity of local African languages, often denigrated by missionary-colonialism (Nyerere 1969).

Nyerere's translation is 're-translation', using primarily the Swahili Union Bible, with reference to the two English language translations most commonly used in East African Catholicism, the Revised Standard Version and the Jerusalem Bible (personal communication with Aloo Osotsi Mojola, see also Mojola 2000, 2018). Nyerere resists translation as invasion by using an indigenous Tanzanian poetic form as the frame for his re-translation. As Bible translators Phil Noss and Peter Renju (2007) proceed to explain:

Instead of the usual prose of the Gospels and Acts, he adopted the ancient but still popular poetic form of the *tenzi* as the most effective means of conveying his message. He used vocabulary that was familiar to his audience from the Arabic Islamic culture in which they live and political terminology that they associated with him while he was their national leader. (p. 41).

'*Kiswahili*', they note, 'has been a written language for half a millennium' and the earliest *Kiswahili* manuscripts 'consisted almost exclusively of poetry' (Noss & Renju 2007:42). Among the various poetic forms, the *tenzi* (pl) 'are narrative and didactic poems that were traditionally composed for singing or declaiming by men and women', with poetic themes which are 'predominantly religious and historical'. 'Ever popular in Swahili culture today', they continue, *tenzi* poetic forms 'are generally serious and informative poems that proclaim religious teachings, recount events of historical

import, offer praise of famous people, and pronounce warnings and exhortations' (Noss & Renju 2007:43).

The traditional form of *tenzi* usually consisted of syllabic verse with line final rhyme within four lines (Noss & Renju 2007:43). However, as Ross and Renju demonstrate, Nyerere adapts the form, stretching 'the limits both of poetic form and of translation accuracy':

He maintained the biblical format of verses and chapters and sections. Therefore, instead of strictly adhering to the four-line stanza of the classical *tenzi*, he allowed himself the freedom to create stanzas of as few as two lines and as many as twelve lines, depending on the content and length of the verses that he was rendering in Kiswahili. He also abandoned the traditional rhyming scheme in favor of rhyming couplets. (Noss & Renju 2007:43)

Furthermore, while making his translation decisions, Nyerere utilised the full capacity of Kiswahili's extensive lexicon, both archaic and contemporary, as he sought to engage his audience, his people (Noss & Renju 2007:45). He invokes, for example, the *tenzi* form in the title of each of his biblical books: *Utenzi wa Enjili Kadiri ya Utongo wa Yohanna*, which may be translated, Noss and Renju suggest, as 'The Epic of the Gospel according to the Composition of John' (Noss & Renju 2007:45). Similarly, with respect to the names and expressions for God in Nyerere's translation, Nyerere uses a range of options, including 'the ancient Kiswahili word *Mungu*, a word that is common in this form or in variant form in many Bantu languages of east and central Africa' (Noss & Renju 2007:45), as well as other Kiswahili terms 'such as *Bwana* "Lord", *Mweza/Muwez* [the Powerful One], *Mwenyezi/Mwinyezi/Mwenyezi* [Almighty], *Muumba/Mwumba* [Creator], and *Mkwasi* [Rich One, Beneficent], as well as 'terms of Arabic origin that are well-known in contemporary Swahili religious life and rhetoric', including '*Latifa/Latifu* [Benevolent One]' (Noss & Renju 2007:46). Such African-led translation is in clear contrast to Moffat's practice (Mothoagae 2021).

Significantly, terms for God:

[A]re often used in combination as in Luke 4:34 where the man possessed with an evil spirit cries out, *Ni wewe Mtakatifu wa Bwana Mungu Latifu*, 'You are (lit. it is you) the Holy One of the Lord God the Benevolent One' (Noss & Renju 2007:46)

Similarly, 'In Mark 10:18 Jesus reminds the rich young ruler that there is only One who is Good and that is *Mwinyezi Mungu Karima* [the Almighty God the Gracious One]' (Noss & Renju 2007:46).

Noss and Renju do not elaborate on the import of these combinations in these particular examples, but it is surely not incidental that in each case Nyerere is invoking as wide a recognition as possible among his people of a God who in Luke liberates the afflicted in the synagogue, a home, and the community (Lk 4:33–41) and a God who in Mark confronts a rich man about how he has accumulated his wealth

(Mk 10:17–23). Here is a God who takes sides with the African afflicted and against the rich coloniser. Here is the God who participated with the Tanzanian peoples in their liberation struggle. Such resonances are completely lacking in Moffat's renderings of these texts (Mothoagae 2021; see also Mothoagae 2014; and Dube 1999).

Furthermore, in his re-translation renderings of the Gospels and Acts, Nyerere not only 'exploits the cultural lexicon of Kiswahili for poetic purposes, he is frequently obliged to create extra lines in order to fulfil the requirements of Swahili poetic form' (Noss & Renju 2007:47). In other words, he supplements the biblical text:

He does so by expanding his translated text in a variety of ways such as through explanatory appositions, by rendering implicit information explicit, and by constructing parallel constructions based on information taken from the near context or from the wider context of the New Testament. (Noss & Renju 2007:47)

Moffat regularly refuses opportunities for such community-based participatory translation praxis. Yet Esala through his use of community-based CBS and Nyerere through his use of community-based *tenzi* demonstrate how both translation and re-translation might be performed differently (see also the participatory approach advocated in Chemorion 2009).

Other re-translation spaces

In Africa most Bible translations have been shaped ideologically by missionary-colonial translation projects (Mojola 2002), and this is the case too in South Africa (for a history see Hermanson 2002; for specific examples see Dube 1999; Mothoagae 2021). While translation projects such as CBS and Nyerere's indigenous poetics could be used as a resource in beginning a new translation in an African language, these decolonial practices are particularly useful when working with re-translation projects. Already existing African Bible translations have established communities of Bible reader-hearers and both CBS and Nyerere's indigenous poetics offer resources with which ordinary, non-specialist, reader-hearers of the Bible can come alongside biblical text and make a re-translation contribution within what Michel Foucault refers to as 'heterotopic' space and what Sithembiso refers to as 'invigorated' space.

Foucault identifies a heterotopia as a 'counter-site', 'real places' rather than the imagined 'unreal' places of 'utopias' (Foucault 1967:4; 1970:xviii). Moffat imagines an ideal, utopian translation site and is frustrated when he cannot find such a site (Moffat 1842:293–294), yet he is regularly surrounded by potential real translation sites. In one respect in particular, for the purposes of this article, is Foucault's notion of heterotopia particularly apt. He writes:

'[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'. (Foucault 1967:8)

Both CBS as re-translation and Nyerere's indigenous poetic re-translation are just such sites. An already translated Bible, albeit a translation shaped by missionary-colonial ideology, nevertheless constructs a sacred space, which potentially links several spatially distinct sites, specifically the cultural pasts of the text's production and the cultural presents of the text's reception. Both CBS as re-translation and Nyerere's indigenous poetic re-translation are forms of heterotopic space and so participate in this capacity of sacred texts to forge lines of religio-cultural connection between ancient cultural source sites and contemporary African cultural receptor sites.

As both CBS and Nyerere recognise, with Nyerere drawing on a dialogic trajectory in *Ujamaa* political poetry (Arenberg 2019:12), such re-translation projects are corporate and collaborative, drawing on local contextual resources and local groups of Bible reader-hearers. Zwane theorises heterotopic space with an emphasis on knowledge and power as forces which inhabit such space (see also Foucault 1980). Zwane distinguishes between 'invited space', the space controlled, for example, by missionary-colonial forces, 'invigorated space', the space reconfigured partially by the presence of African others within the invited space of missionary translation, for example, and 'invented space', the African controlled space that African agency forges through processes such as CBS and Nyerere's indigenous poetics for re-translation (Zwane 2020:215–217).

The reality of translation as invasion – invited space, utopian space – summons other space, heterotopic space, invigorated space, and invented space. Both the Ujamaa Centre's CBS (see West 2015; Zwane 2020:220–223) and Nyerere's indigenous poetic re-translation offer significant resources for African-led re-translation projects, resisting translation as invasion. Many extant African language Bible translations remain missionary-colonial translations. They remain utopian invited space. Re-translation using resources such as CBS and Nyerere's indigenous poetics have the potential not only for decolonial (emphasising both the epistemic and the economic) re-translations but also for the capacity of such translations to reconfigure and reinvent the ideological and social space of African post-colonies, offering biblical re-translated resources for community-based participatory development (Zwane 2020:223–230).

Conclusion

Robert Moffat's translation practice, it is argued, can be characterised as translation as invasion. Both a general analysis of Moffat's missionary-colonial translation practice and a particular exegesis of a day within Moffat's biblical-theological translation interaction with local BaTlhaping demonstrate the contours of his colonial model of translation as invasion. Two African-led translation models, it is argued, the Ujamaa Centre's Contextual Bible Study and Julius Nyerere's indigenous *tenzi* poetics, provide contemporary African communities with decolonial forms of re-translation as resistance to missionary-colonial translation, offering

other – heterotopic and invigorated – translation spaces within which ordinary, non-specialist, African Bible reader-hearers are enabled to participate in the re-translation of their Bibles. Furthermore, such forms of re-translation have the potential to provide ideological resources with which to engage in decolonial forms of community-based participatory development.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

G.O.W., is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

- Arenberg, M., 2019, 'Tanzanian Ujamaa and the shifting politics of Swahili poetic form', *Research in African Literatures* 50(3), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafriite.50.3.04>
- Brown, W., 1820, *Christian instructions for children from three to seven years of age: Containing, I. a catechism, II. Passages of Scripture, III. Hymns*, 2nd edn., James Robertson, Edinburgh.
- Campbell, J., 1815, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the request of the Missionary Society*, Black, Parry, & Co, London.
- Chemeron, DC., 2009, 'Towards a participatory approach to Bible translation (PABTY)', *Acta Theologica* 29(suppl 12), 157–171.
- Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J.L., 1991, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Comaroff, J.L. & Comaroff, J., 1997, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*, vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Dube, M.W., 1997, 'Toward a postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible', *Semeia* 78, 11–26.
- Dube, M.W., 1999, 'Consuming a colonial time bomb: Translating *badimo* into "demons" in the Setswana Bible (Matthew 8:28–34; 15:2; 10:8)', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73, 33–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9902107303>
- Esala, N.A., 2021, *Translation as invasion in post-colonial northern Ghana*, PhD, School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

- Foucault, M., 1967, *Of other spaces: Heterotopias*, viewed from 19 March 2008, from <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>.
- Foucault, M., 1970, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, Random House, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M., 1980, *Power/knowledge: Selected writings and other interviews 1972–1977*, C. Gordon (ed.), Pantheon, New York, NY.
- Hermanson, E.A., 2002, 'A brief overview of Bible translation in South Africa', *Acta Theologica* (Suppl 2), 6–17.
- Lubbe, J.J., 2009, 'By patience, labour and prayer. The voice of the unseen God in the language of Bechuana nation. A reflection on the history of Robert Moffat's Setswana Bible (1857)', *Acta Theologica* (Suppl 12), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.4314/acat.v12i1.67242>
- Makotoane, T.J. & Naudé, J.N., 2009, 'Colonial interference in the translations of the Bible into southern Sotho', *Acta Theologica* (Suppl 12), 79–94.
- Moffat, R., 1842, *Missionary labours and scenes in Southern Africa*, John Snow, London, Reprint, Reprinted 1969.
- Moffat, R. & Moffat, M., 1951, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: being the journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820–1828*, I. Schapera (ed.), Chatto & Windus, London.
- Mojola, A.O., 2000, 'The Swahili Bible in East Africa from 1844 to 1996: A brief survey with special reference to Tanzania', in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, trajectories and trends*, G.O. West and Musa Dube (eds.), pp. 511–523, E.J. Brill, Leiden.
- Mojola, A.O., 2002, 'Bible translation in Africa. What implications does the new UBS perspective have for Africa? An overview in the light of the emerging new UBS translation initiative', *Acta Theologica* 22(1), 202–213. <https://doi.org/10.4314/acat.v22i1.5460>
- Mojola, A.O., 2018, *God speaks in our own languages: The story of Bible translation in East Africa from 1844 to 2018*, Bible Society of Kenya, Nairobi.
- Mothoagae, I.D., 2014, 'The gendered God in the Setswana Bible and the captivity of Modimo: Moffat and the translating of the Bible into Setswana', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40(2), 149–168.
- Mothoagae, I.D., 2021, *A decolonial reflection on Moffat's 1840 translation of the gospel of Luke: The transmutation of modimo and badimo*, DLitt et Phil, Biblical Studies (New Testament), University of South Africa.
- Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The invention of Africa: gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Noss, P. & Renju, P., 2007, 'Mwalimu Nyerere Engages his People: Scripture Translation in Swahili Verse', *Journal of Translation* 3(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.54395/jot-28r5t>
- Nyerere, J.K., 1969, *Mabepari wa Venisi. Dar es Salaam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ramantswana, H., 2016, 'Decolonising biblical hermeneutics in the (South) African context', *Acta Theologica* (Suppl 24), 178–203.
- Schapera, I. & Comaroff, J.L., 1991, *The Tswana*, rev. edn., Kegan Paul International, London, 1953.
- Thom, H.B. ed., 1952, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, 1651–1655*, III vols, vol. I, A.A. Balkema, for The Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town.
- Wendland, E.R., 2000, 'Contextualising Bible reading in south-central Africa: The preparation of an annotated edition-with special reference to the gospel of Luke in Chichewa', *Neotestamentica* 34(1), 143–172.
- West, G.O., 2014, 'Juxtaposing "many cattle" in biblical narrative (Jonah 4:11), imperial narrative, neo-indigenous narrative', *Old Testament Essays* 27(2), 722–751.
- West, G.O., 2015, 'The biblical text as a heterotopic intercultural site: In search of redemptive masculinities', in *Bible and transformation: The promise of intercultural Bible reading*, Hans De Wit & Janet Dyk (eds.), In Semeia Studies, pp. 241–257, SBL Press, Atlanta, GA.
- West, G.O., 2016, *The stolen Bible: From tool of imperialism to African icon*, Brill, Leiden.
- West, G.O., 2021, 'A decolonial (re)turn to class in South African biblical scholarship', *Old Testament Essays* 34(2), 532–555. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2020/v34n2a13>
- Zwane, S.S., 2020, 'Invited, invigorated and invented spaces: A trans-development approach', in *Faith, class, and labor: intersectional approaches in a global context*, Jin Young Choi & Joerg Rieger (eds.), pp. 212–233, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR.