From "Sisters" to "Comadres": Translating and Transculturating Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*[1]

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Tomson Highway's Polylingual, Transcultural and Native Identities

The name Espanola (a town in the north of Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada) is an English adaptation of the French world "Espagnole," which means "Spanish woman." The name of the town mentioned in Tomson Highway's play *The Rez Sisters* derives from the story about a First Nations Ojibway tribe of the area who sent a raiding party far to the south and brought back a white woman who spoke Spanish. This woman married a local member of the Annishnabeg Nation who lived near the mouth of the river and taught her children to speak Spanish. When French voyageurs came upon the settlement and heard fragments of Spanish spoken by the local natives, they referred to the woman in their own language ("Espagnole"), later anglicized to "Espanola," and the river of the area was named the Spanish River.[2] Because "Española" (in Spanish, this time) is also the name given to the Caribbean island Christopher Columbus arrived at on his first voyage to America in 1492, the story of the Annishnabeg who married a Spanish woman provides an excellent metaphor to introduce the topic of translation and transculturation.

This essay studies the transference of Tomson Highway's play *The Rez Sisters* (1998) into Spanish, through my translation of his dramatic text entitled *Las Comadres*

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[2] See http://www.touristlink.com/canada/espanola/overview.html.

de la Rez, published by the Canadian press Fitzhenry & Whiteside in their imprint Fifth House in May 2014. I will focus on the processes of translation – which inevitably implies a mediation – and transculturation that take place in this transference. By "transculturation," I mean the notion coined by the anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to refer to the way in which external cultural influences in a target culture are assumed, recreated and reactivated (*Diccionario* 352). Transculturation can only occur if different cultures come into contact with each other and undergo some "disadjustment and readjustment" in the process (Ortiz 98). Ortiz uses this concept in the context of Cuban culture to designate the way in which immigrants as diverse as Spaniards, Asians, and Africans faced the problem of *deculturation* and or *exculturation*, as well as *acculturation* or *inculturation*, and at the end of the synthesis, *transculturation* (89).

Translation, as its etymology suggests ("translated," being the past participle of the verb *transferre*, to carry across), implies relocation (Bassnett, "Postcolonial" 78). In translation, a starting point and a destination always exist or, as contemporary translation theorists put it, a source and a target which make translation a textual journey from one context to another. In addition, as André Lefevere points out, translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting and potentially the most influential because it can project the image of an author and or his or her works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin (9). Therefore, in the words of the translator and translation critic Dora Sales, the translator has the power to construct the image of a literature and a culture for readers from another culture to consume.

Traditionally despised as a derivative activity, the emergence of translation studies has revealed that translation is multidimensional, involving violence and empathy at the same time. As Nieves Pascual suggests, many critics (Lawrence Venuti, Jacques Derrida, Carol Maier) have noted that the process of translation exerts violence

against the other (56). Anuradha Dingwaney agrees that translation can be a form of violence and recognizes that power, time and the vagaries of different cultural needs often taint translations (6). But translation also entails, according to Hugh Hazelton (237), reaching out to the Other in search of foreign experience and bringing it back into the source language (238). Margaret Atwood qualifies a translation as "a critical reading of text" and thus terms it as "approximate," like all reading (154).

Having briefly mentioned the theoretical tenets from transculturation and translation studies underlying the analysis of my version of *The Rez Sisters*, a few considerations about the multilingual and transcultural character of Tomson Highway and his play are in order. Highway exemplifies what Hugh Hazelton calls a writer with a "polylingual identity" (225). Highway's native language is Cree but he also speaks Ojibway and Canada's two official and metropolitan languages, English and French. French names and accents permeate the play, since French is Highway's third language and that in which he communicates with his Franco-Ontarian partner Raymond. No one speaks French in the play but it does mention some French Canadian characters, like Raymond, the partner of Annie Cook's daughter, Ellen. The coexistence of French and English accents in the play is illustrated by a scene in which Annie corrects Philomena's English pronunciation of her lover's name: "His name is Raymond. Not Raymond. But Raymond. Like in Bon Bon" (12).[3]

Highway imagines his plays in Cree, his mother tongue, before translating them into English.[4] But even when he writes in English it is marked with the rhythm of the Cree language: "I am actually using English filtered through the mind, the tongue and the body of a person who is speaking in Cree" ("Why Cree" 33); "I'll take the English

[3] Page numbers of Highways's play *The Rez Sisters* will be inserted in brackets in the text of the article. Page numbers from my translation of the play will also be quoted in the same way, followed by "Somacarrera."

[4] In 2008 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the play, Fitzhenry & Whiteside published *The Rez Sisters* in its original Cree version: *Iskooniguni Iskweewuk: The Rez Sisters in its Original Version: Cree.*

language and play with the rhythm and squish it and pull it and tug it to give a funny, jiggly kind of rhythm, like Cree" ("A Magician" 147). Along the lines suggested by Highway, my project of translation, to use Antoine Berman's phrase, is influenced by that play already functioning as a translation of a translation.

Furthermore, the play should be read in the light of its rich network of cross-cultural influences and dramatic techniques. It presents a variety of influences from Greek Drama[5] and Christian morality plays to innovative theatrical techniques such as the Brechtian alienation effect, used in the spotlight inner monologues in Act One. As for the literary influences on the play, they range from European to Canadian drama. Pelajia's initial sentence in the play – "Philomena, I wanna go to Toronto" (2) – echoes the beginning of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* about three women who want to go to Moscow to escape from their pessimistic small-town life. As for the Canadian influences, Penny Petrone has mentioned James Reaney as a major influence on Highway's work, especially his *Donnelly Trilogy*, "because of its use of poetic language, imagery and its mythological overtones" (173). Michel Tremblay and his play *Les Belles-Soeurs* (1968) have also inspired Highway. As Renate Usimani points out, both plays focus on female characters who are closely related and struggling against poverty, patriarchy and the oppression of the Christian religion, in their respective settings, East Montreal and the Wasaychingan Hill Reserve (126). The two plays have the Bingo as the symbol and illustration of women's consumerism and the spiritual emptiness of their lives. The main difference between the plays lies in their opposite views of life. Whereas *Les Belles-Soeurs* projects a pessimistic view of existence, *The Rez Sisters* reflects the essential humanism, life-affirming and hopeful world of Native peoples. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, Highway's native

[5] Highway speaks about the influence of European drama from Greek drama to Chekhov in his essay "On Native Mythology."

characters gain greater control over their lives and destinies with the help of Nanabush, the central figure in Cree and Ojibway religions (48). A further point of comparison between the Quebecois dramatic text and the Native one lies in the marginal-variety of French (Joual) spoken by the Montreal women of Tremblay’s play paralleled by the use of the native languages in Highway’s.

As a result, numerous cultural and linguistic challenges are involved in translating a play deeply embedded in Native and Western theatrical traditions but, at the same time, written in a very informal and slangy variety of English, where French is also included, permeated by the author’s mother tongue, Cree. These challenges can be classified in two groups: those related to the source languages of the play and those connected with the target language of the translation, Spanish. I will now present these challenges and discuss the strategies I found to solve them. I will compare some of my solutions with those of the Japanese translation of *The Rez Sisters* discussed by Beverly Curran in her article “Invisible Indigeneity: First Nations and Aboriginal Theatre in Japanese Translation and Performance.”

Spanish, with its 106 million speakers, has a global status as the official language of more than twenty countries in Europe, Central and Latin America, and the Spanish territories in Africa. Since my translation was published in Canada,[6] it will probably reach more Latin American than Spanish readers. Consequently, I had to decide which variety of Spanish to use in my version. In my introduction to the play I refer to my initial attempt to create “una version pan-hispánica” (a “pan-hispanic” version) (Somacarrera IX). However, as I initially aimed to write in global Spanish, I immediately faced the reality that there exist almost as many varieties of Spanish as

[6] The reasons why the play could not be published in Spain remain out of the scope of this essay but, to put it in a nutshell, they are related to the difficulties of publishing dramatic texts in Spain, especially of foreign authors like Highway who, despite their international reputation, are unknown to Spanish critics and directors and, therefore, undesired by publishers of drama.

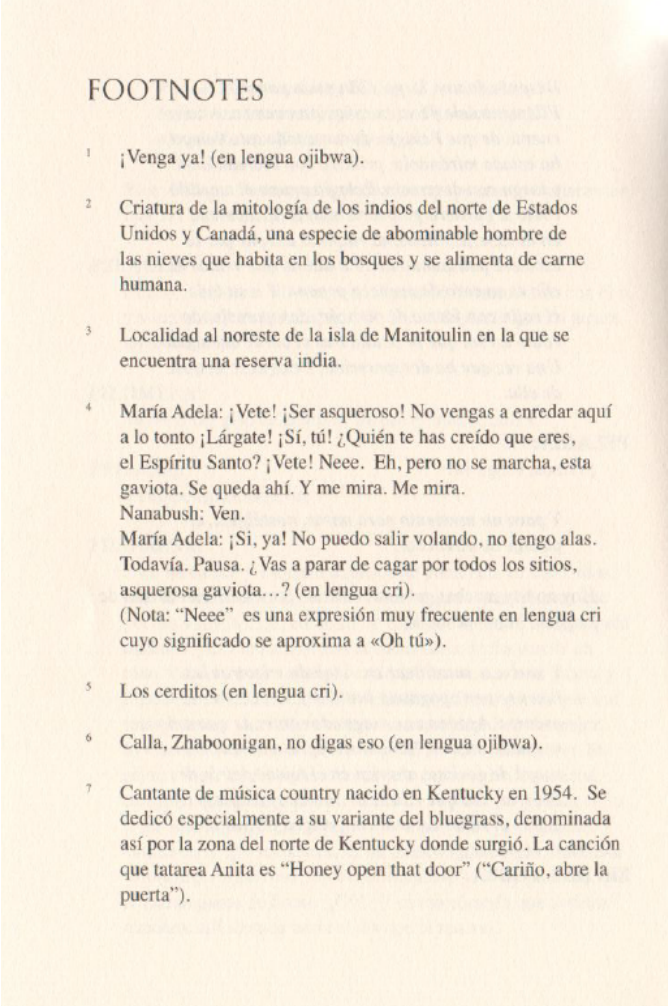
countries where the language is spoken, not to mention the coexistence of Spanish varieties or dialects in any one. Therefore, the potential target cultures into which to transfer the play abounded.

In order to make the presence of Native languages visible in the play, Highway introduces words and phrases in two languages which belong to the Algonquian family (Cree and Ojibway), providing English translations for them in footnotes, as I intended to do in my version:

> MARÍA ADELA: Awus! Wee-chee-gis. Ka-tha pu g'wun-ta oo-ta pee wee-sta-ta-gu-mik-si. Awus! Neee. U-wi-muk oo-ma kee-tha ee-tee-mi-thi-soo-yin espíritu santo chee? Awus! Hey, maw ma-a oop mee tay si-thow u-wu gaviota. I-goo-ta poo-goo ta- poo. Nu-gu-na-wa-pa-mik.
>
> NANABUSH: As-tum.
>
> MARÍA ADELA: Neee. Moo-tha nig us-kee-tan tu-pi-mi-tha-an. Moo-tha oo-ta-ta-gwu-na n'tay-yan. Chees-kwa. ***(Pausa.)*** Ma-ti poo ni-mee-seee i-goo-ta wee-chi-gi- gaviota, si vienes a cagarte otra vez en mi valla, voy a hacer un estofado contigo y las demás en mi cocina. Awus![1]
>
> **María Adela:** ¡Vete! ¡Ser asqueroso! No vengas a enredar aquí a lo tonto ¡Lárgate! ¡Sí, tú! ¿Quién te has creído que eres, el Espíritu Santo? ¡Vete! Neee. Eh, pero no se marcha, esta gaviota. Se queda ahí. Y me mira. Me mira.
>
> **Nanabush:** Ven.
>
> **María Adela:** ¡Si, ya! No puedo salir volando, no tengo alas. Todavía. ***Pausa***. ¿Vas a parar de cagar por todos los sitios, asquerosa gaviota…? (en lengua cri) (from the final draft of the translation).

The Japanese translation of *The Rez Sisters* produced by the Tokyo-based Rakutendan theatre analysed by Curran suppressed any recognition of the original text's use of First Nations languages and translated the English translations into Japanese (456) instead of maintaining the multilingual terrain of the original, a strategy which Ortiz would call a case of deculturation. Although I provided Spanish translations in footnotes for the excerpts in Cree and Ojibway in my version, the production of the translation inadvertently took away footnotes with the Spanish translation of the Cree

and Ojibway fragments. Although I noticed the mistake in time to make a correction, the publishers ended up turning the footnotes into endnotes. They placed them at the end of the translation, mixing them up with my own translator’s notes, which resulted in a domestication effect greatly distorting the effect of the original, as illustrated below (Somacarrera 112):



FOOTNOTES

1 ¡Venga ya! (en lengua ojibwa).

2 Criatura de la mitología de los indios del norte de Estados Unidos y Canadá, una especie de abominable hombre de las nieves que habita en los bosques y se alimenta de carne humana.

3 Localidad al noreste de la isla de Manitoulin en la que se encuentra una reserva india.

4 María Adela: ¡Vete! ¡Ser asqueroso! No vengas a enredar aquí a lo tonto ¡Lárgate! ¡Sí, tú! ¿Quién te has creído que eres, el Espíritu Santo? ¡Vete! Neee. Eh, pero no se marcha, esta gaviota. Se queda ahí. Y me mira. Me mira.
Nanabush: Ven.
María Adela: ¡Si, ya! No puedo salir volando, no tengo alas. Todavía. Pausa. ¿Vas a parar de cagar por todos los sitios, asquerosa gaviota…? (en lengua cri).
(Nota: “Neee” es una expresión muy frecuente en lengua cri cuyo significado se aproxima a «Oh tú»).

5 Los cerditos (en lengua cri).

6 Calla, Zhaboonigan, no digas eso (en lengua ojibwa).

7 Cantante de música country nacido en Kentucky en 1954. Se dedicó especialmente a su variante del bluegrass, denominada así por la zona del norte de Kentucky donde surgió. La canción que tatarea Anita es “Honey open that door” (“Cariño, abre la puerta”).

Translation and Transculturation in *Las comadres de la rez*

The process of translation and transculturation of *The Rez Sisters* into Spanish involves four aspects: the presence of the trickster or Nanabush; the translation of the title; the translation of names; and, finally, the translation of sexual language and puns and wordplay. These aspects are relevant because, as Dingwaney observes, the

interesting aspects of translations take place at the *between*, where the self of one culture encounters and, more importantly, *interacts* with the other (8; italics in original).

As Maria Tymoczko observes, a minority-culture writer has to pick up aspects of the home culture to convey and to emphasize, particularly if the intended audience includes a significant component of international or dominant-culture readers (24). In *The Rez Sisters* Tomson Highway has chosen the Trickster as just such a representative element of Native Canadian culture. Lisa Perkins explains that the trickster (Weesagechak in Cree, Nanabush in Ojibway) is a character in the play, as well as a cultural figure, thus not identical to the trickster figure in Cree and Ojibway mythologies; and, second, that he functions as part of the ensemble of other characters and must be assessed in relation to them (259-60). Potential Spanish speaking audiences of the play are likely to perceive only his second function due to lack of exposure to indigenous mythology. In the published version of the play, Highway supplies this information by introducing a "Note on Nanabush," reproduced in my translation as "Nota sobre Nanabush," explaining the central role of the Trickster figure in North American Indian mythology, similar to Christ in the realm of Christian mythology (XII). Spanish language does not even have a translation for the word "Trickster" so I have imported the word untranslated to my version since no positive equivalent exists in the target culture.

The next challenge faced in translating the play was the translation of its title, *The Rez Sisters,* whose words "rez" and "sisters" do not have obvious equivalents in Spanish. According to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, the word "reserve" (as opposed to the US variant "reservation") is used in Canada to refer to an area of land set aside for a specific group of American Native people, including "rez" as an informal variant of the former (1314). As stated in the biographical notes from the English version of the

play, the author wanted “to make ‘the rez’ cool, to show and celebrate what funky folk Canada’s Indian people really are” (IX). Even if “*reserva*” is the accepted Spanish equivalent for “territory where some indigenous communities are confined” (RAE), the word inevitably simplifies and domesticates Highway’s notion of the “rez.” In her article about the Rakutendan production of *The Rez Sisters*, Curran explains how the Japanese translator, with a priority on clarity of definition, rendered the title in Japanese as “*kyoryûchi shimai”* or “the reservation sisters” (455). But such a translation replaces the familiarity of a local “rez” with the official constraints of reservations, and thus undermines Highway’s project. The domesticating decision taken by the Japanese translator clearly exemplifies what postcolonial theorist and translator Gayatri Spivak has called “an absence of intimacy” (372). Again, in giving priority to audience understanding, the Japanese translator of *The Rez Sisters* shows that she “cannot engage with, or cares insufficiently for, the rhetoricity of the original” and loses the gaps and “rhetorical silences” that the audience needs to experience (370). Following Spivak’s tenets, without that sense of linguistic–rhetoricity a neo-colonialist construction of the non-western scene takes place (371). Leaving the word “rez” untranslated in the Spanish title allowed me to respect what Tymoczko calls the features of the source culture encoded in this specific lexical item (25).

Continuing with the process of recreating the title of Highway’s play in Spanish, my first choice was “*Las chicas de la reserva*” (“The Reservation Girls”) because a literal translation of “sisters” into “*hermanas*” would suggest “nuns” to the Spanish reader or spectator or even any female Catholic congregation, often with comical overtones. Having disregarded “*hermanas*,” I considered the possibility of “*chica*s” (girls). However, *chicas* lacks the connotation of “next of kin” in a text in which all the women are all related by blood, marriage or adoption. Furthermore, “Las chicas de la

reserva" would trigger connotations extraneous to Highway's play in Spanish audiences. At the time of writing the first version of this article (2011), the Spanish public television was broadcasting a version of the famous NBC television series "The Golden Girls" entitled "Las chicas de oro." Further, older Spanish audiences would probably evoke "Las chicas de la Cruz Roja." ("The Red Cross Girls"), a classic Spanish film released in 1958, about four young women who go around Madrid gathering funds for the Red Cross. One final point in relation to the word "*sisters*" in the title is that it has a polysemic dimension: "Rez Sisters" does not only refer to the seven women from the Wasaychigan Hill reserve, but it also evokes the biker gang of native women to which Emily Dictionary, the returnee to the "rez," used to belong. Furthermore, "*sister*" in English means "female associate" and this sense provides the title with a feminist connotation not featured by the Spanish equivalent "*hermana*."

The solution I found for the word "*sisters*" in Highway's title is to use the Spanish word "*comadres*." This word fits in with the polysemic nature of the title. *Comadre*, from Latin *commater*, literally means "the other mother,"[7] referring to the godmother of a child with respect to the biological mother. The theme of motherhood is crucial in Highway's play and in the Cree culture.[8] In the variant of peninsular Spanish (bable) spoken in Asturias the word *comadre* means "neighbour or friend." This usage of the word was transferred to Latin America (it is very common in Mexico) and even the Philippines. [9] *Comadres*, in addition to its pertaining to a global variety of Spanish, also contains the feminist connotations present in the English term sisters. "Les

[7] See the online version of the RAE (*Diccionario de la Real Academica Española*) <<http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=comadre>.

[8] *The Rez Sisters* features various examples of mothers and failed mothers who become "co-mothers." Veronique, for instance, assumes the role of second mother to Zhaboonigan and, by the end of the play, also to Marie-Adele's children. The play is dedicated to Highway's mother and he has spoken about the importance of motherhood as a kind of universal energy: "the universe and its contents came into being as the results of a female force of energy known as O-ma-ma, a miraculous entity known, in the English language, as Mother Earth" (*Comparing* 39).

[9] I am indebted to Professor Eleanor Ty from Wilfrid Laurier University who provided me with this information during the Canada and Beyond 3 conference in Huelva.

Comadres” is the name of a small feminist group located in Gijón, Asturias, which recently became well-known because of its march “Yo decido. El tren de la libertad” (“I decide. The freedom train). This march moved thousands of women to Madrid to protest against the new Spanish abortion law, one of the most restrictive in Europe, which the Spanish Conservative Party intended to enact. The Asturian feminist group “Les Comadres” has also instituted the feast of “Jueves de comadres” (Women’s Thursday), consisting in a festive gathering of women before Mardi Gras, a celebration traditionally reserved for men. This sense of women celebrating together is also present in *The Rez Sisters*.

Beyond its pan-hispanic and feminist overtones, the word *comadres*, which sounds slightly strange in contemporary peninsular Spanish, also complies with one of my objectives when translating Highway’s play which is, following Friedrich Scheleiermaier’s views, to adopt an “alienating” method of translation, orienting myself through the language and context of the source text. By choosing the word *comadres*, I have managed to find a balance in the relationship of tension between the *koiné* and the vernacular as defined by Berman (1997). The use of this word connects with Berman’s notion that translation is “the trial of the foreign” by aiming to open up the foreign work to us in its foreignness (276). It also ties in with Venuti’s suggestion that translation should be foreignized as both a strategy of aperture towards the Other and *métissage* (178).

The issue of strangeness is also relevant for the translation of names in the play. As Peter Vermes points out, the translation of proper names in a literary text is anything but a trivial decision and is closely related to the meaning of the proper name (95). When translating a play, an additional and crucial requirement is its *speakability*, as the actors need to be able to pronounce words without difficulty in the performance. The

common practice in contemporary translation is not to translate proper names but rather to reproduce them as they appear in the source text. However, and at the risk of contradicting my earlier maxim of trying to draw the reader toward the otherness of Highway's texts, I decided to translate all the protagonists' names into their Spanish equivalents because if I left them untranslated, the Spanish audience would miss much of Highway's humour encoded in the meanings of these names. The only exception is the Franco-Ontarian Veronique St. Pierre, whose first name I kept in French to maintain the presence of French culture typical of Northern Ontario in Highway's text.[10] That the seven characters of the play are all known by their Christian names reflects the replacement of their native identity by the Christian one imposed by Europeans. Pelajia and Philomena – two Christian martyrs – were the given names of Tomson Highway's mother, as explained in the dedication of the play: "For my mother, Pelagie Philomene Highway, a Rez Sister from way back" (V). Philomena, itself a translation from French, has a direct Spanish equivalent in Spanish, Filomena, now better known because of the title of the Stephen Frears film released in 2013. With Pelajia I used transliteration and changed it to Pelagia, adapting the name to the phonic and graphic rules of Spanish.

The last names of these two women (Patchnose and Moosetail) refer to their physical characteristics. "Patchnose" has an obvious translation as "Narizegada" which preserves the original sonority of the name. "Moosetail" has the double effect of alluding to the Canadianness of Highway's text and to the size of Philomena's bottom. Apart from its unpronounceability, most Spanish readers would miss the Canadian allusion. Therefore, instead of using a literal translation ("Coladelalce"), I decided to change her name to "Coladecabra," a transcultural adaptation of Philomena's last name, preserving part of the meaning of the source text because *cola* means "bottom" in some

[10] The Spanish equivalent of Veronique is very similar to the original (Verónica). The connotations of this Catholic name of the woman who felt pity when she saw Jesus carrying his cross to Golgotha and gave him her veil to wipe his forehead, are in accord with Veronique's compassionate nature.

Latin American countries. It also encompasses other connotations of the source text because *cabra* ("goat") evokes an animal with crazy or erratic behaviour, as in the colloquial phrase "*Estás como una cabra* ("You are behaving like a goat").[11] My translation thus sticks to the principle stated by Albert Braz that if one transfers a cultural artefact from one language to another, one must somehow find the means to transform it, not create a new one (25).

In addition to the names of the seven central characters, the play challenges the translator with its bizarre names for secondary characters. It is crucial to find suitable translations for these names because some of these secondary characters, only mentioned in passing in *The Rez Sisters*, will appear prominently in the other plays of the *Rez* trilogy and the versions of their names should be consistent in the subsequent translations. One of the characters absent from the stage but often mentioned in *The Rez Sisters* is Gazelle Nataways. She is present as an important character in the other two plays of the Rez Trilogy, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* and *Rose*. In *Dry Lips* she appears as the incarnation of Nanabush the Trickster. Gazelle Nataways – said to have won "the big pot" the night before the beginning of the play (10) – is Big Joey's current partner, a jealous woman of erratic and violent behaviour who, unlike the Rez sisters, is more concerned with her sexual encounters with Big Joey (the local stud) than with caring for her children. Given that her last name (Nataways) has a phonemic resemblance with the adjective "nuts" meaning "mad, eccentric," I have rendered her name in Spanish as Gacela Locuela ("Mad Gazelle"). The humorous connotations of the nickname suffix *"ela*" contribute to create a comical effect suitable to the meaning of the play as a whole. Black Lady Halked, another fanatic bingo player and the mother of Dickie Bird Halked, one of the main characters in *Dry Lips*, is literally rendered as

[11] Philomena, whose mind is rather erratic –she often makes mistakes with names– is often presented sitting on her toilet bowl. The phrase "*estás como una cabra*" appears twice in my translation, one in my version of the song "I'm a little Indian who loves fry bread" (Somacarrera 77).

"Dama Negra Halked." I gave Fire Minklater[12] a meaningful name as "Pasión[13] Visón" ("Passion Mink"). As for the recurrently mentioned Big Joey, the local stud who has slept with almost all the women in the play, I decided not to translate the name or use the equivalent Spanish diminutive in spite of the Spanish equivalent (Pepe or Pepito). The name was rendered as "el Gran Joe" (the Great Joe) because, unlike what happens in North American English-speaking cultures, in Spanish-speaking cultures the use of a diminutive would be at odds with the alleged sexual power, reflected in the size of his penis, of this character.

As Beverly Curran points out, issues of gender and sexuality are prominent in Highway's play (456) and consequently should also feature prominently in the translation. The excessive sexuality of some characters in the play can be attributed to the promiscuity prevalent in the "rez," mentioned by Pelajia at the beginning of the play: "Nothing to do but drink and screw each other's wives and husbands and forget about our Nanabush" (6). As Gary Kinsman observes, sexuality and erotism in Aboriginal cultures have traditionally been repressed by European colonizers (91). Highway, however, is quite open about sexuality as he explains that "talking about such things as lips and beaver [the female genitals in Canadian English] and ass and tits is a terrifying experience in English, whereas in Cree it is the funniest, most hysterical and most spectacular thing in the world" ("Why Cree" 37-38). Sexuality in Aboriginal cultures is connected to language play and punning, which, furthermore, has a long tradition in literature written in English – going back to Chaucer and Shakespeare – but is also present in Native culture. Sexual language and punning is not extraneous to contemporary Spanish usage, especially in its colloquial and informal variants. In

[12] "Minklater" could have been inspired by the last name of Doris Linklater a native actress who first workshopped *The Rez Sisters* and a member of the Native Earth Performing Acts collective.
[13] "Pasión" has become well-known as a first name in Spain because it is the artistic name of the famous singer Pasión Vega.

addition, sexual language appears frequently in Spanish television sitcoms and performed versions of foreign plays. One of my priorities as a translator was to reproduce the linguistic playfulness of Highway’s text as acknowledged by the author himself: “I love playing with words – the sound and the sensuality of syllables, the feeling and images and meaning” (Interview with Joe Kaplan).

Another universal feature of the play, which eases the transference of Highway’s text into Spanish, is the pervasiveness of phallocentrism. But the great variety of words for the female and male sexual organs in the context of Spanish as a global language makes this task especially difficult. As I mentioned before, the superlative “*gran*” in “el Gran Joe” evokes the size of the character’s penis, described in the original text as “the biggest thing on Manitoulin Island” (27) or “bigger than a goddamn breadbox” (85). While the first of these two examples translates easily, finding a version for the second one required much thinking. A breadbox is not often found in Spanish homes, especially not in contemporary ones, but it was a fixture found in every North American kitchen in the 1960s, especially in rural environments like a Native reserve. I could not use the Spanish equivalent *panera*, because everything connected with bread in Spanish is related to goodness (as in the phrase “*es más bueno que un pedazo de pan*” which means “*he is better than a piece of bread*”). I thus had to find a version which kept the domestic connotations of the simile while leaving its virile connotations untouched. I finally opted for the Spanish set phrase, common in peninsular Spanish, as “*que es más grande que una maldita olla*” (80) / (“bigger than a goddamn kitchen pot”) in which “*polla*” (peninsular slang for penis) and “*olla*” (kitchen pot) are rhyming words, while being aware that it would not work for Latin American countries. It has the advantages that the tenor and the vehicle of the simile (*polla/olla*) are short words, easy to pronounce and have a consonant and feminine rhyme. In addition, it is contextually

coherent with the rest of the play because the other meaning of the word *pot* in this play is "prize obtained from the bingo" but it also subliminally refers to Big Joey's enormous male organ, as in the following dialogue between Philomena and Annie about their march to Espanola:

> PHILOMENA: Annie Cook, I want that big pot.
> ANNIE: We all want big pots.
> [...]
> PHILOMENA: We'll hold big placards!
> ANNIE: They'll say Wasy women want bigger bingos
> PELAJIA: And one will say: "Annie Cook Wants Big Pot"
> PHILOMENA: ...and the numbers of those bingos in Espanola go faster and the pots get bigger every week. Oh, Pelajia Patchnose, I'm getting excited just thinking about it! (14-15)

Whether Philomena's excitement is sexual or is provoked by the amount of money she is going to win at the bingo remains unclear. In my Spanish version, I have translated the last part of Philomena's speech as "¡Ay Filomena, cómo me estoy poniendo solo de pensarlo!" (11), taking advantage of the ambiguity in contemporary colloquial peninsular Spanish use of the verb "*poner*" as "to make someone nervous" or "to get excited."

As Dirk Delabastita observes, wordplay and ambiguity usually present "special" problems to both the translator and the translation scholar because the semantic and pragmatic effects of source text wordplay find their origin in particular structural characteristics of the source language for which the target language fails to produce a counterpart, such as the existence of certain homophones, near-homophenes, polysemic clusters and idioms (223). Almost all the sexual puns in the play are related to Big Joey and his promiscuous sexual relations with the women on the reserve who come "streaming out of [his] house at all hours of the day and night" (29). The pun contained in the verb "streaming" as "exude liquid in a continuous stream" (of sexual fluids, in

this case) and “to move together continuously in a mass, to flock” transfers easily into Spanish as “de esa casa salen chorreando todo tipo de mujeres a cualquier hora del día y de la noche” (Somacarrera 27). The Spanish verb *chorreando* does not only have the meanings of *streaming* in the source text, but an additional one (in Venezuela), namely, to be dazzled by a member of the opposite sex[14] which also suits the context of the play.

Because of its polysemic nature, one of the Spanish words which offers numerous creative possibilities when translating sexual activity is “polvo.” *Polvo* means “dust, dirt” but is also coarse slang for “to have sex” as in “echar un polvo.” When Veronique describes Gazelle Nataways as a “woman who wrestles around with dirt like Big Joey all night leaving her poor babies to starve to death in her empty kitchen” (28), the phrase “revolcándose en el polvo” (“rolling around in the dirt”) includes the meanings of rolling on the dirty floor having sex with Big Joey. The same word provides a solution for another pun in the dialogue prior to the scene in which the women frantically insult each other:

The Rez Sisters	*Las comadres de la rez*
ANNIE: Hit her. Go on. Hit the bitch. One good bang is all she needs. EMILY: Yeah, right. A Gang-bang is more like it. (43)	ANITA: Pégala, anda. Pega a esa perra. Lo que necesita es morder el polvo. EMILIA: Sí, ya. Más bien que le echen unos cuantos polvos (Trans. Somacarrera 40)

The clue for translating this dialogue lies in keeping Highway’s rhythm through the repetition of words and sounds and in the ambiguity of “bang” in English and “polvo” in Spanish. “Bang” in Annie’s speech means both “strike” and “copulate.” The Spanish

[14] See online version of the RAE <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=chorrear>

expression "Hacer a alguien morder el polvo" means to beat someone in a fight, so the presence of the word "polvo" in the dialogue allows the reproduction of Highway's wordplay. To keep the effect of the pun in the dialogue, it is essential to keep the same word in Emily's reply: "A gang-bang is more like it," (in my version: "que le echen unos cuantos polvos").

Conclusions

As Viktoria Tchernikova observes, in a world characterized by contact, interaction of, and exposure to, different peoples, regions, ways of life, traditions, languages and cultures, cross-boundary communication comes in various shapes: as mutual exchange, open dialogue, enforced process, misunderstanding or even violent conflict (211), all of which are present in Tomson Highway's drama. In this context, translation becomes an essential tool for cultural transfer. As defined by Bassnett, translation is a textual journey from one place into another place (78). But the journey complicates itself when translating Highway because he is a polylingual, transcultural subject, a "translated man," to use Salman Rushdie's phrase (17). The places of destination are multiple, as many as countries or cultures where Spanish is spoken, read or performed. In this respect, my initial aim of producing a "pan-hispanic" or "global" Spanish translation reveals itself as impossible, since the translation of certain words and phrases, especially those related to sexual language, will inevitably change depending on the variety of Spanish related to a specific Spanish-speaking culture. As a translator, I intended to mediate between cultures but, in accordance with Venuti's views, I did not want to renounce my own visibility. Therefore, since I speak peninsular Spanish I opted for the peninsular Castilian variant to reproduce Highway's wordplay about sex.

The cultures involved in the translation, despite their differences, present a number of affinities like the use of swearing and sexual language, the presence of strong women who try to survive in a sexist and phallocentric culture, and the trope of exaggeration, which facilitate the translator’s work. In fact, even a superficial reading of the play evinces that everything in the universe of the Rez Sisters is superlative (“the biggest thing in Manitoulin island”; “the Biggest Bingo in the World”). This penchant for exaggeration is common –or at least stereotypical– of certain autonomous communities in Spain, like Andalusia. The extremely feminine universe of Highway’s play can also be found in some films by Pedro Almodóvar, like *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *All About My Mother*.

My project of translation is grounded on these affinities and on Edward Said’s definition of culture as “never a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors but, rather, of appropriations, common experiences and interdependences of all kinds” (217). Said uses the word “appropriation” in a positive sense: appropriation is the possibility of culture (127). In my translation of *The Rez Sisters*, I surrendered to the text, to use Spivak’s terminology (372), and appropriated the rhythms and humour of the text. My approach to the translation was eclectic, combining foreignizing and domesticating strategies in the service of “faithfulness” to the text, but always keeping in mind the problem of what the relationship between the written and the performed may be (Bassnett, “Still Trapped” 96). To this end, I tried to reproduce the sound and sensuality of Highway’s language by playing with rhymes, alliterations, and different kinds of consonance and assonance. In doing so, I maintained the rhetoricity of the text (Spivak) and its aesthetic value through creative means. As Iren Kiss observes, it is impossible to do a good translation unless there is a creative intervention of the translator (in Braz 15).

The best example of how I attempted to reproduce the rhetoricity of Highway's text is my decision to translate the title as *Las comadres de la rez*. As I mentioned before, there is no equivalent in the receptor culture for the word "rez" with the connotations Highway attaches to it in his text. The advantages of "*comadres*" are that it avoids domestication, it rhymes with the word "rez," and appears to be consistent with Highway's aim of making the "rez" seem like a funny and "cool" place. The choice of the word "*comadres*" for the translation of sisters is also adequate in a translation informed by the principles of transculturation. As Norman Cheadle observes, just as the act of translation adds willy-nilly layers of meaning, so does the process of transculturation: A does not merely pass over and disappear into B; rather, the two interact in complex and unpredictable ways to produce something new (ix). In fact, the word *comadre* is a crossroads –using Patrice Pavis' sense of the term– of cultures and meanings, including that of mother, friend, female companion in the feminist sense and the cultures of Northern Spain as well as the Mexico.

The permanent travelling of the text involved in translation provides it with new existences in different cultures and contributes to its canonization. As Walter Benjamin points out, translation exists separately but in conjunction with the original, coming after it, emerging from its "afterlife," but also giving the original "continued life" (77). I hope that with this translation of *The Rez Sisters*, the play obtains the acknowledgment it deserves in the Spanish-speaking world and that its characters will have new lives and voices as it is read and performed and adapted in the countries it travels to.

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